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The AI Discovery Audit Checklist for Nonprofits

Is your organization prepared for zero-click search?

Search has changed, and if your website traffic has been slipping, you're probably already feeling it.

AI-generated answers and zero-click search results mean fewer people are clicking through to websites—even when your content is showing up. For nonprofits working with lean teams and limited budgets, that puts real pressure on discovery, donations, event registrations and email list growth.

At the same time, AI systems are making decisions about which organizations are credible, which content gets cited and which voices get amplified. Most nonprofits haven't had a chance to evaluate where they stand in that landscape—and that's exactly what this audit is for.

You'll look at how dependent you are on organic search, whether your content is structured for AI visibility, how strong your brand demand is and whether you're growing an audience you own. You'll come away with a score out of 100 and a clearer sense of what to tackle first.

How the scoring works

This audit has five sections, each worth 20 points, for a maximum score of 100.

Each question is scored on a simple scale:

0 = Not in place

3 = In progress

5 = Strong and consistent

Add up your points within each section, then total all five sections for your final score.

Section 1:

Search dependence risk (0–20 points)

Most nonprofits rely on organic search more than they realize. This section helps you see how concentrated that risk is—and how exposed you'd be if AI continues to reduce click-through rates, which some estimates put at 30–50% and climbing.

1. **What percentage of your new users come from organic search?**
   - 5 = Less than 30%
   - 3 = 30–60%
   - 0 = More than 60%
2. **What percentage of your donations come from organic sessions?**
   - 5 = Less than 25%
   - 3 = 25–50%
   - 0 = More than 50%
3. **Are you actively driving traffic from multiple channels—email, social, direct mail, events or partnerships?**
   - 5 = 4+ channels
   - 3 = 2–3 channels
   - 0 = 0–1 channel
4. **If organic traffic dropped 40% tomorrow, would your revenue hold steady?**
   - 5 = Yes
   - 3 = Possibly
   - 0 = No

Section 1 score: ____ / 20

Section 2:

AI inclusion readiness (0–20 points)

AI systems don't reference every organization equally. They favor content that's clearly structured, credibly sourced and regularly updated. If your content is missing those markers, it's less likely to be cited—even if the information is good.

1. **Do your blog posts use a clear header hierarchy (H2s, H3s)?**
   5 / 3 / 0
2. **Do your key pages include FAQ sections?**
   5 / 3 / 0
3. **Do you cite and link to credible data sources?**
   5 / 3 / 0
4. **Has your content been updated within the past 12 months?**
   5 / 3 / 0
5. **Are subject matter experts identified by name in your content?**
   5 / 3 / 0

Score your top four responses. Maximum 20 points.

Section 2 score: ____ / 20

Section 3:

Brand demand strength (0–20 points)

AI favors organizations people already know and search for by name. The more your nonprofit is searched, mentioned and engaged with across channels, the more resilient you are to shifts in organic discovery.

1. **How is your branded search volume trending year over year?**
   - 5 = Strong increase
   - 3 = Flat
   - 0 = Declining or unknown
2. **How is your direct traffic trending?**
   - 5 = Growing
   - 3 = Stable
   - 0 = Declining
3. **How often is your organization mentioned across third-party sites—media, partners or directories?**
   - 5 = Frequently
   - 3 = Occasionally
   - 0 = Rarely
4. **Are you running awareness campaigns beyond search—social, email, direct mail, PR or events?**
   - 5 = Active and consistent
   - 3 = Occasional
   - 0 = None

Section 3 score: ____ / 20

Section 4:

Owned audience strategy (0–20 points)

Search platforms can change overnight. Your email list can't be taken away. Growing an audience you own and control is one of the most practical things your nonprofit can do to protect itself from shifts in organic discovery.

1. **What is your average monthly email list growth rate?**
   - 5 = Greater than 3%
   - 3 = 1–3%
   - 0 = Less than 1% or declining
2. **What is your average email open rate?**
   - 5 = 30%+
   - 3 = 20–29%
   - 0 = Below 20%
3. **Do you have automated nurture sequences in place?**
   - 5 = Multiple lifecycle automations
   - 3 = Basic welcome series only
   - 0 = None
4. **Are you actively using lead magnets to drive subscriptions?**
   - 5 = 3+ active offers
   - 3 = 1–2 offers
   - 0 = None

Section 4 score: ____ / 20

Section 5:

Cross-channel consistency (0–20 points)

Consistency builds recognition, and recognition builds trust—with both people and AI systems. When your messaging, visuals and calls-to-action align across your website, campaigns, email and print, your authority compounds over time.

1. **Is your messaging consistent across your website, campaigns and print?**
   5 / 3 / 0
2. **Does your visual identity reinforce recognition across channels?**
   5 / 3 / 0
3. **Are your calls-to-action aligned across campaigns?**
   5 / 3 / 0
4. **Is your value proposition clearly and consistently stated?**
   5 / 3 / 0

Section 5 score: ____ / 20

Your total score

Add up your five section scores for your final result.

Total score: ____ / 100

What your score means

0–40: High risk

If you scored here, you're not alone—and it doesn't mean you've been doing things wrong. Most nonprofits built their digital presence during an era when organic search felt like the safest long-term investment. It made sense at the time.

But AI doesn't reward rankings the way Google used to. It rewards authority, brand recognition and content that's clearly structured. If the majority of your traffic, donations and new user acquisition are flowing through a single channel you don't control. That's worth addressing.

The first priority isn't optimization—it's stability. Before reworking content or restructuring pages, focus on reducing your exposure:

- Develop one strong lead magnet aligned with donor interest
- Set up a welcome email series that nurtures new subscribers
- Launch awareness campaigns through paid social, direct mail or partnerships
- Make sure your organization's name appears consistently across everything you publish

A practical first milestone: get your organic search dependency below 50% of total acquisition. That's where the risk starts to ease.

If you're not sure where to start, that's exactly the kind of clarity we help nonprofits find. <Schedule a strategy session.>

41–60: Transitional

You've started doing the right things. Maybe your email list is growing, you've run some awareness campaigns or you've started building out thought leadership content.

The gap at this stage is usually the same: your visibility still depends more on people discovering you through search than on people actively looking for you by name. That's a meaningful difference.

Brand demand is what makes an organization resilient. When people search for you specifically, share your content and reference your work, algorithm shifts matter a lot less. Building that takes consistency more than budget—showing up with a clear message across every channel, investing in awareness campaigns not just conversion campaigns and pursuing partnerships that get your name in front of new audiences.

A practical milestone: year-over-year growth in branded search volume and direct traffic. When those numbers move, you'll know it's working.

61–80: Competitive

You're in good shape. Your email list is healthy, your traffic is diversified and you're not overly dependent on any single channel. The work you've put in is showing up in the numbers.

At this stage the opportunity shifts. You're not rebuilding anything—you're refining what's already working. And the area most worth your attention right now is making sure your content is structured in a way that AI systems can actually use.

Good content isn't enough on its own anymore. AI systems favor content with clear header hierarchies, FAQ sections, named subject matter experts and cited sources. If your content is missing those markers, your credibility may be going unrecognized even when you're showing up in search.

A practical place to start: audit your top 20 traffic-driving pages. Add FAQs where they make sense, identify experts by name, refresh anything outdated and standardize your formatting across the site.

Your milestone is visibility—more impressions, more AI-generated references to your organization over time. That's how you know your authority is being recognized, not just built.

81–100: AI-resilient

This is a strong result, and it reflects real work. Your brand demand is growing, your traffic is diversified, your content is structured and your messaging holds together across channels. You've built something that can absorb change without scrambling.

The focus at this stage is protecting and compounding what you've built. That means staying consistent—monitoring your channel diversification quarterly, tracking branded search growth, continuing to invest in owned audiences and looking for new awareness channels worth exploring.

AI will keep evolving. Organizations with strong brand foundations and audiences they own don't need to react to every shift. They adapt on their own terms.

That's where you're headed. Keep going.

What comes next

AI hasn't made it harder to be found. It's made it harder to be found accidentally. The nonprofits that navigate this well won't be the ones chasing algorithm updates—they'll be the ones that have built recognizable brands, grown audiences they own and shown up consistently across channels.

Your score is a starting point. What matters is what you do next.

If you'd like help figuring out the highest-impact next steps for your organization, we'd love to talk. <Schedule a strategy session.>

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