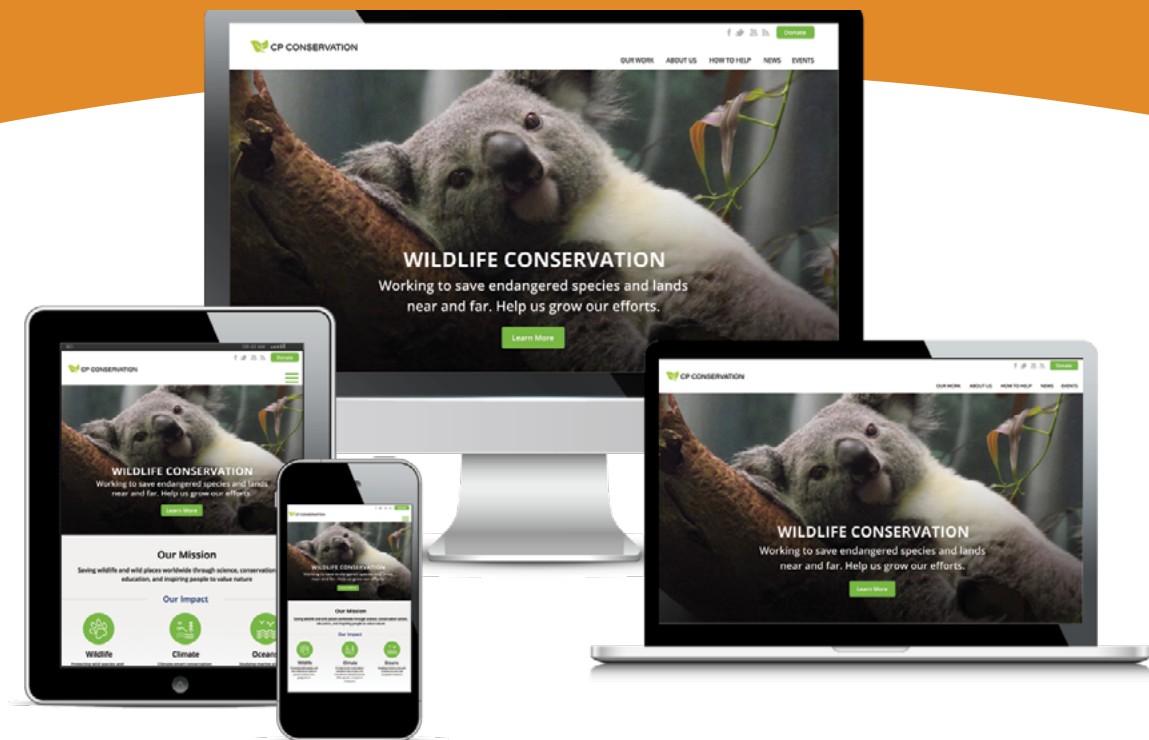# THE NONPROFIT'S GUIDE TO GETTING STARTED WITH WORDPRESS

How to decide if WordPress is right for your organization & how to choose the right type of theme to get started

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO WORDPRESS FOR NONPROFIT WEBSITES

When you're ready to re-design your nonprofit's website, it's an ideal time to re-think the content management system (CMS) you use to build your website and blog. You have multiple options.

A great choice for many organizations is WordPress. It has a lot to offer nonprofits:

- It requires no software licensing fees, so it keeps maintenance costs low.

- It's easy to learn and use compared with other CMSs.

- WordPress websites are relatively easy to update.

- You can start with any one of thousands of free or inexpensive WordPress themes or design your own theme from scratch.

- There are tens of thousands of WordPress Plugins available, so a site built on WordPress can grow with you over time.

> **According to WordPress.org,** WordPress **powers more than 38% of the web. Everything from simple websites and blogs to complex enterprise websites and applications are built with** WordPress.

But, how do you know if WordPress is right for your nonprofit? And, how do you know whether to use an off-the-shelf theme or develop your own?

This guide will help you answer these questions and more.

Let's get started.

HOW TO KNOW IF WORDPRESS IS RIGHT FOR YOUR NONPROFIT

WordPress is a great option to consider for your nonprofit's website. But it isn't necessarily right for every organization.

CONSIDERATIONS

Here are four considerations to help you decide if WordPress is right for your nonprofit:

- **Does "free" (or, "almost free") sound good?**
  If you're paying a lot of money for a CMS for your website, using WordPress could give some welcome relief to your budget. With WordPress, there are no software licensing fees because the software is open source, meaning that the source code is open for anyone to view and modify. The only things you spend money on are the design (using one of the inexpensive off-the-shelf WordPress themes or designing a custom theme from scratch) and hosting for your website.

- **Are you having a hard time finding people who can work on your current website?**
  Because WordPress is open source software, there is an entire community of people and agencies who know how to use WordPress. With such an extensive market of WordPress experts, you're almost certain to find someone who can meet your needs and budget.

- **Do you want to allow more people at your organization to update the website?**
  Since there are no software licensing fees with WordPress, there are no costs involved with giving more of your staffers access to the site. WordPress is also easier for non-technical people to use than many CMS tools, so more of your staff members are likely to be able to use it without extensive training or support. You can give different people different levels of access to the website depending on what changes you want them to be able to make. If you build your own theme, it can be custom-tailored to make updates even easier.

- **Do you want to add new features and make changes to your website?**
  There are tens of thousands of WordPress Plugins, so a site built on WordPress can grow with you as you decide to enhance your site with new functionality.

A NOTE ABOUT WORDPRESS PLUGINS

Plugins are sets of code that extend the functionality of WordPress. They can help you take your WordPress site in exciting new directions, but not all of them are created equal. Take the time to research and evaluate the Plugins that meet your specific needs. Once you've decided on a Plugin, be sure to update the WordPress software for your core website and any other Plugins on your site before you install the new Plugin. Also, be sure to install and test the Plugin in a test environment before going "live" to ensure the Plugin installation doesn't break anything in your site.

SELECTING A WORDPRESS THEME: OFF-THE-SHELF VS. CUSTOM OPTIONS

Once you've made the choice to use WordPress for your nonprofit's website, it's time to choose or build a WordPress theme. A theme controls the functionality and appearance of a WordPress-powered website.

SELECTING A WORDPRESS THEME

The first thing you'll need to decide is if you'll choose from available WordPress themes or build your own. Every nonprofit's needs are unique, so the answer is not the same for everyone.

Here are some things to consider as you make this decision:

- **Budget** — Starting with an off-the-shelf WordPress theme can be a good solution if your nonprofit has a very small budget, especially if you are willing to give up customization needs and rely solely on existing styles. But, read on. You may need more customization than you think.
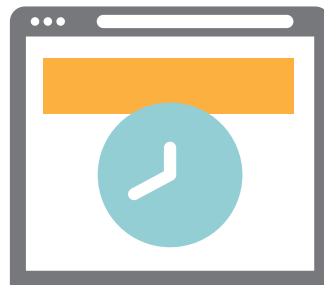
CHOOSING A THEME

A good way to choose the right **WordPress** theme approach is to base your decision on your budget and project complexity. For example, if your budget is less than $5,000, you might want to consider a free or low-cost off-the-shelf **WordPress** theme. If it's closer to the $5,000 to $30,000 range, you might want to build a custom theme.

- **Content** — An off-the-shelf WordPress theme can work well if your content fits the theme components exactly. However, you may find that the path to explain your nonprofit's message is more complex than the theme allows, and the theme may be too limited for your needs.

- **Visual design** — Off-the-shelf WordPress themes are built to convey information for a multitude of companies and organizations, and therefore can begin to feel ordinary. If you choose a theme that your site visitor has seen on hundreds of other websites, your site may not appear original or inspiring.

- **Responsiveness** — A responsive site (a site designed to be optimized for viewing on a broad range of mobile devices) can take multiple hours to design, whereas many available themes are responsive-ready. However, even if you start with an off-the-shelf responsive-ready theme, any changes — including those to menu styles or overall page design for mobile devices — need to be custom-created and coded for responsiveness. Depending on the extent of theme customization you need, it can often be cleaner and simpler to design from scratch.

- **Quality and flexibility of themes** — If you plan to use an off-the-shelf WordPress theme, it's important to research its quality and flexibility. Has it been tested and found compatible with all browsers and platforms? Does it allow you to use a variety of fonts, colors, and backgrounds? What technical support options are available? You can find out more about themes by reading reviews, which often will help you understand the benefits and drawbacks of using a particular theme.

- **New vs. old themes** — Always check to see when a theme you are considering was last updated. Older themes may have outmoded code or may no longer be supported by the developer. You don't necessarily know what you are dealing with in an off-the-shelf theme until you buy it and begin building your site. Once you do, you may realize that the theme is challenging to work with because of outdated code and methods.

7 REASONS A CUSTOM WORDPRESS THEME MIGHT BE RIGHT FOR YOUR NONPROFIT

Even if you're leaning toward a custom WordPress theme, you might hesitate since there are free and inexpensive WordPress themes available. But, don't rule out a custom WordPress theme just yet. A custom WordPress theme site can be a unique, efficient, flexible, and affordable alternative — even for smaller organizations and budgets.

WHY A CUSTOM THEME MIGHT BE RIGHT FOR YOU

1

YOU NEED MORE DESIGN FLEXIBILITY.

If you're okay with a very simple website design, an available WordPress theme might work. However, if your nonprofit's goal is to stand out from the crowd and leave a unique impression on site visitors, then a custom WordPress theme is more likely the right choice.

With a custom WordPress theme, you can create a unique, compelling website. A custom theme will help ensure your website is unique to your brand and mission — and doesn't end up looking like everyone else's.

> WordPress themes are built for use by multiple companies and organizations. If you choose a theme that your site visitor has seen on hundreds of corporate websites, your site might not appear original, inspiring, or mission-appropriate.

2

YOUR CONTENT IS (OR MIGHT SOON BECOME) COMPLEX.

An off-the-shelf WordPress theme can work well if your content fits the theme components exactly. However, you might find that the path to explain your nonprofit's message is more complex (or might soon become more complex over time) than the theme allows. Developing a custom WordPress theme allows you to tell the full story of your nonprofit and mission today and grow your website content in the future.
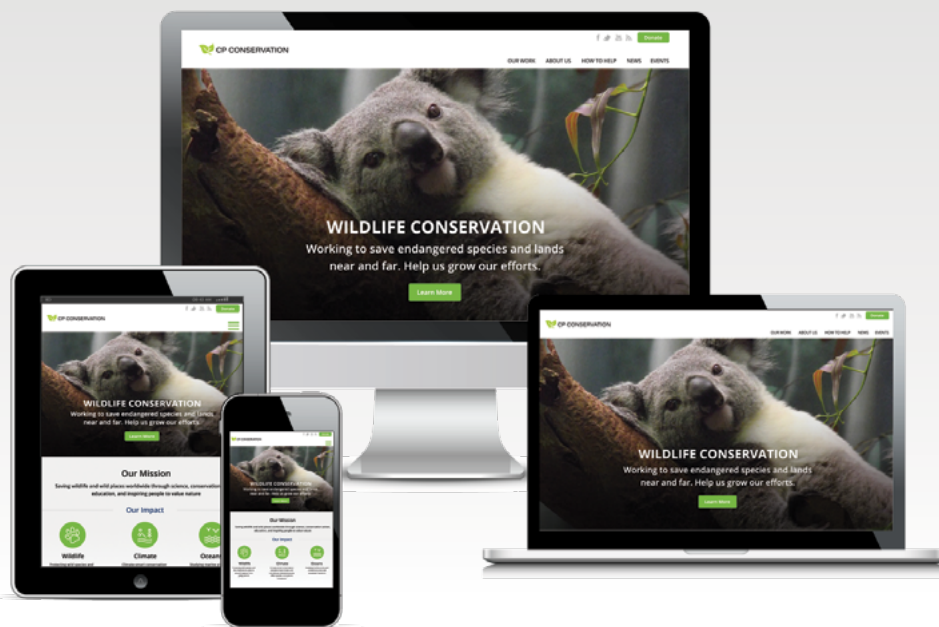
3

YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHANGE THEMES IN A COUPLE OF YEARS.

It's important to think about how easy or difficult it might be to migrate from one theme to another as your organization's web requirements change. Changing your website is not always as simple as buying a new WordPress theme and moving content over. Not all content will port from one WordPress theme to another, and future changes can be difficult to make without starting from scratch.

A custom WordPress theme can grow with you. You can make changes to the theme down the road as your organization evolves.

A custom WordPress theme, like this one designed by Cathexis Partners, offers a unique, attractive design that's tailored to the organization's needs.

4 YOU NEED A WEBSITE THAT PERFORMS WELL.

Some WordPress themes are full of extra code that your organization doesn't need. This creates slower page load times, which can negatively affect your search engine optimization and turn away prospective donors and other supporters. A custom WordPress theme is typically more efficient, including only the functionality you need.

5 YOU NEED A SITE THAT'S EASY TO EDIT.

The bloated code in some off-the-shelf WordPress themes might also require more extensive web development knowledge and skills to work with in the long run. In contrast, because it doesn't include a lot of extras that you don't need, content entry and updating can be much easier when a theme is custom-built for your needs.

6 YOU NEED TO BE ABLE TO MODIFY THE THEME.

What happens if your organization needs something a little different than what the out-of-the-box theme was designed to do? That might require changes to the theme's underlying code, which might require you to hire a developer. At this point, you need to make sure you choose a theme that's easy for a developer to modify. Otherwise, you could end up spending as much money (or more) than if you had a custom website theme design built in the first place.

7 **YOU DON'T HAVE THE RESOURCES TO DEAL WITH POTENTIAL ERRORS.**

WordPress updates can cause certain themes and Plugins to break. Using an off-the-shelf theme can increase the risk of incompatibility with future WordPress updates. This could result in an unexpected and unnecessary site failure, especially if the theme is full of complex bells and whistles your organization doesn't need. Because custom themes include only the functionality you need, they tend to avoid these types of site failures.

A custom WordPress theme can be more cost-effective in the long run. If you will be making a lot of customizations anyway, there might be a point at which you would spend so much time and money on customizations that you might as well start from scratch to get exactly the design and functionality you want and need.

Cathexis Partners can help you create an affordable custom WordPress theme with your nonprofit's unique needs in mind. LEARN MORE

Just remember: When building your nonprofit's website on WordPress, available WordPress themes aren't your only choice (and might not be your best choice!). You have the option to create your own custom design that meets your organization's specific requirements.

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

At Cathexis Partners, we help nonprofits like yours to select, configure, and use technology to raise funds and spread the word about their mission affordably and effectively.

Our experienced team can help you:

- Decide if WordPress is the right choice for your nonprofit's website

- Determine if an off-the-shelf or custom WordPress theme is right for your organization

- Create an affordable custom WordPress theme with your nonprofit's unique needs in mind. Learn more about this service.

- Design, develop, and launch your WordPress website

CONTACT US TODAY, AND LET'S GET STARTED

cathexispartners.com

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