

Google Ad Grants guide

October 2019





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Introduction

Search is a popular and powerful tool, and Google is the currently undisputed heavyweight champ.

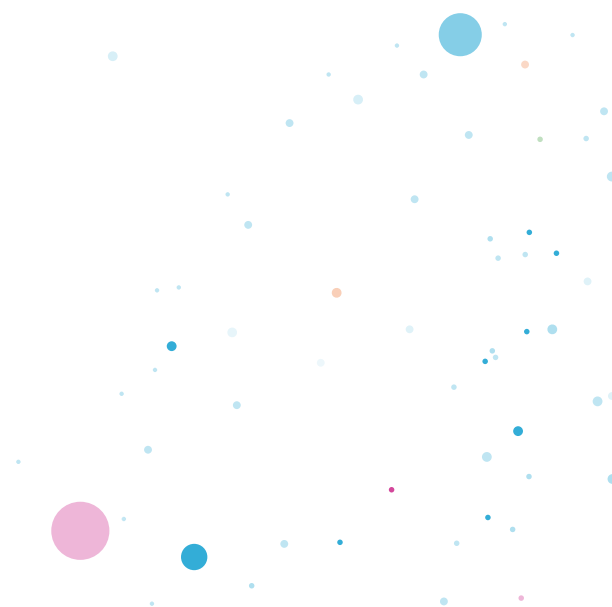
With an estimated 3.5 billion searches worldwide handled every day, Google has extensive reach. What makes that reach all the more impressive is that those searches are actively representing a user's intent to go somewhere, find, do, or buy something. Appearing at these key moments can yield great value for any charity that has a message or service relevant to those users' searches.

Leveraging search as a charity can be difficult. Spending time building authoritative content and keeping web architecture search engine friendly can be a substantial undertaking. This makes it difficult for charities to earn organic presence for key terms. At the same time, putting funds into paid search can be hard to prioritise. This is where Google Grants can help to bolster your search presence, extending your reach to relevant audiences in order to spread your message far and wide.

In putting together this guide, we have assumed that you have a good general awareness of Google's search engine and the fact that there are organic (free) and paid (advertising) aspects to it. We have assumed that you are generally aware of your charity's website and digital objectives. We have also assumed that you know how to fill in online forms and don't need step-by-step help with the application process.

If these assumptions aren't correct, don't panic, it just means that there are some steps you'll need to cover off before being able to use this guide. Search advertising will need to fit in with your overall marketing mix and you'll need to define what that looks like. If you need help, please give us a call to discuss your situation and the options available to you.

By reading this guide we hope to leave you with a solid understanding of what Google Grants are, how to get one, and then how to go about getting the most out of the budget that Google gives you.





1. What is a Google Ad Grant?

In 2003, Google made the conscious step of setting up the Google Ad Grants programme for non-profit organisations.

A lifeline to many charitable institutions across the world, the Google Ad Grants programme has enabled charities to communicate their work to anyone searching using relevant search terms.

A Google Ad Grant is a fund that Google makes available for use exclusively on its own web properties. Recipients set up a Google Advertising account and can spend the monthly allocation against search terms that they deem relevant to their cause or fundraising activity. As such, it becomes possible for even small charitable organisations

to occupy ad space that would otherwise be beyond their reach. By turning this exposure into donations and other funding by engagement with searchers, traffic generated by Google Ad Grants quickly becomes an important channel.

Google Grants are provided in US dollars only. This means UK recipients of Google Grants also use US dollars, though some UK charities may also spend their own funds through a separate account in UK pounds. It is therefore common to have two accounts – one solely for running the US dollar Google Grant and another for spending UK pounds.

Standard Google Ad Grant

The standard Google Ad Grant is a fund of \$10,000 per month (broken down into \$330 per day). There is no “payment” of the grant, Google simply allows you to run ads to the sum of \$330 per day. Once you’ve reached that daily spend amount, your ads will turn off. It is, therefore, important that your ads run to the right rates to ensure your grant is spent across the full range of search terms that you wish to target.

Google Ad Grants Pro

In 2010 Google launched the Google Ad Grants Pro programme. Ad Grants Pro offered an increased monthly sum of \$40,000 of search ad spend to grantees (divided into a \$1,320 daily spend limit). As of September 2016, the Google Ad Grants Pro programme is no longer accepting new applications, but existing grants are still being honoured at the \$40,000 per month rate.



2. How do I get a Google Ad Grant?

So, you're interested in getting some free marketing budget? Who wouldn't be! But there are some application hoops that need jumping through and patience here is definitely a virtue.

The first step is to sign up for Google for Nonprofits. This is an umbrella program that contains additional charity benefits that we'll cover later. In order to be eligible for the different Google non-profits products you need to register as a non-profit first, and then register for the separate services.

Eligibility

The first box to check is eligibility. This has changed a little over the years, but right now the requirements are:

- o **You can't be a government entity or organisation** – this can sometimes be a bit tricky, as some charities have close ties to government departments. For example, The Imperial War Museums is a charity, but it doesn't have a charity number. It's written into law as a charity. This can make it more difficult to fill out the required forms.
- o **You can't be a hospital or healthcare organisation** – this relates to the physical provision of healthcare. We have many charity clients in receipt of an Ads Grant who are health-related charities.
- o **You can't be an educational institution, e.g. a school, university, etc.** – these are covered under a separate programme.
- o **You'll need to have a charity number** – this is Google's verification of your charitable status. If you don't have a charity number but have a legal charitable status like Imperial War Museums, then the application process is a bit more manual. You will have to contact Google, outline that you are a charity and give them proof of your charity status.

TechSoup

This part of the application process confuses some people. TechSoup helps charities with all things tech. In the UK the entity to sign-up with is called “Charity Digital” and can be found at charitydigital.org.uk. Charity Digital works in partnership with TechSoup.

Google for Nonprofits requires that you are registered here. You can either start the Google for Nonprofits application and be directed to TechSoup during that process, or you can process them separately.

The application process is relatively straightforward, but one of the initial requirements is to be registered with the [Charity Digital Exchange](https://charitydigital.org.uk). Remember those hoops and that patience? Stick with it, there’s \$120,000 per year up for grabs.

You can find the eligibility requirements for the Charity Digital Exchange [here](#), but it’s quite a broad brush and most charities should have no trouble being accepted.

If you’re already registered with TechSoup then head straight to the Google for Nonprofits application.

Google for Nonprofits application

Once you’re registered with TechSoup (Charity Digital) you’ll then need to hop back to [Google for Nonprofits](#) and start your application (if you didn’t already). Before you do, though, [set yourself up with a Google account](#). Google will assign your Google account to your application and use it for login purposes.

The Google for Nonprofits registration process

is relatively straightforward, and will request different pieces of information such as your charity number, registered charity address, etc.

You will be notified by email when Google has accepted you to the programme and, at that point, you’ll be eligible to apply for the individual products and services.

At this point spread the news that your application for a Google for Nonprofits has been accepted, and get your internal teams excited about what is happening. The Google for Nonprofits services extend beyond search, and others within your organisation may also find great benefits from the programme. Communicating this as early as possible will help them to take full advantage of what’s on offer.

Google Ad Grant application

Once you’ve been accepted into the Google for Nonprofits programme, you’re now ready to apply for your Ad Grant. Log into your Nonprofits account and head over to the Ad Grant application. You may need to have an activated Google Ads account in place already (on your Google account if possible). Once your application has been received, Google will want to verify your setup to ensure that you’re going to be spending the money correctly. The whole process can reportedly take up to 15 days from submission of application to having the capability to run ads.





3. Using a Google Ad Grant

Hopefully your application has been successful and you're now the proud recipient of a \$10,000 per month Google Ad Grant. Congratulations!

Getting the Ad Grant was the easy bit! Keeping it involves some additional hurdles. Google has a policy for just about everything, and the management of your Ad Grant is no exception. There are management standards that need to be adhered to for you to retain your Grant.

Management Policies

Google changes all the time. As Google evolves, it wants its advertisers to use its platform in different ways.

The full account management policy can be found [here](#). We'll take a look at key points within this one by one:

Account structure

- o **Geo-targeting** – this needs to be in place so that you aren't blasting your ads across the world when most charities have a specific geographical remit, e.g. the UK, the US, London, etc. Showing ads in irrelevant locations is a waste and can cause searcher frustration, impacting their search experience overall.
- o **Two active ad groups per campaign containing closely related keywords and two active, unique ads** – this is a minimum for best practice management. By putting this requirement in place, Google is insisting that a minimal standard of structural management is in place.
- o **Two unique sitelink ad extensions** – sitelinks improve the search experience by giving searchers access to deeper pages within your site straight from the ad. Data shows that ads with sitelinks get better click through rates and engagements than ads without them. Another best practice requirement.

Performance

o **Maintain a 5% click-through rate –**

this metric is used to gauge the relevance of your ads to the keywords that you're targeting. If searchers aren't clicking on your ads, then they're not finding you relevant to what they're searching for. This means you're taking up valuable ad space that could go to another charity or from which Google could make money. It's simple: be relevant and keep that account-wide click-through rate above 5%. In practice, many charities have click-through rates well in excess of 5%. If you miss the 5% threshold for two consecutive months, your account may be deactivated. You'll then have to work hard to remove the low click-through rate items and get the account looking healthier again before Google will reactivate it.

o **Maintain a quality score of 3 or higher –**

this is another relevancy metric really. Quality score deserves a guide of its own, but generally if a keyword has a quality score of 1 or 2, then pause it while you try to improve that. In most cases, reworking the ad copy to improve relevance and changing the landing page to a more relevant page are the actions required to get that score up. This rule is for each keyword individually, not an account average.

Conversions

- o **You must have conversion tracking set up –** this can be imported conversions from Google Analytics or the Google Ads native tracking. Either way, Google wants some accountability. What are you trying to achieve and how are you measuring that?

- o "Meaningful conversions" is an important term to note here. You cannot count someone landing on a page as a conversion. You also cannot use time on site as a conversion. Conversions must be meaningful, such as an information download, giving a donation, signing up for a fundraising event, email signups, etc.
- o You also need to have at least one conversion per month. Otherwise, it's likely that the conversion is not meaningful if it happens in such scarcity.
- o Bear in mind here that Google is continually looking at your conversion rate – too high and it's likely your conversions are not meaningful, too low and the same is true. There's no defined rate. The best thing is to be honest, create experiences that have conversion elements within them and work with that.

Bidding

- o **Automated bidding must be in place –** as of the 22nd April 2019 (something many of us remember as a particularly dark day for account deactivations) Google requires that smart bidding be used across all campaigns. This is Google's attempt to improve the performance of the budget that it makes available. Google wants to ensure that you are actively trying to get the charity value from the Grant, and automated bidding helps to ensure that the right people are targeted at the correct time with the right bid.



Third-party management

- o **You're permitted to work with third-party management** – Google understands that you might need to work with a seasoned partner (like Fresh Egg!) in order to run your account in accordance with these policies. However, you can also do this within your internal digital team if you have one.

Mission-based campaigns

- o **Single-word keywords** – these are not permitted generally. Your own brand, medical conditions (cancer, asthma, etc.), relevant acronyms and a [small list of terms](#) are exempt from this rule. This is a frequent cause for deactivation as managers add keywords without considering this policy item. You should note that hyphenated words are not considered to be single words.
- o **Overly generic words** – steer well clear of these. Google examples are “best videos”, “e-books”, “things to do”, or “London” and you really have no place trying to bid on them.

In some cases, generic phrases might be relevant, such as “museums in Brighton”, and these may be allowed. Overly generic terms will be disapproved. Consistent disapproval may trigger a manual deactivation. Aim to be as relevant to your charity as you can while balancing the need to appear for those terms with volume behind them.

- o **Place names, other organisations, historical events or people names** – these are deemed overly generic and should be avoided. If you must bid on them, if they are relevant to your charity, then be prepared for a bit of a battle to prove why.

Programme engagement

- o **Answer Google's surveys** – Google wants active feedback from you on how you're finding the programme, what your needs are, and how the programme may need to change to provide best support. This really is a small thing to ask in return for \$10,000 per month.

And that's it. Stay on the right side of the line with regard to these requirements and you'll be fine. Enjoy that traffic and those meaningful conversions. Produce a nice report for the board of trustees to showcase your amazing work. Ride the wave, you superstar you!

Deactivation

It happens. From time to time, with no ill-intention, charities fall foul of the policy requirements. Or, as happened in April 2019, Google will change their policies and not communicate that change until last minute.

The deactivation process is automatic and periodic. An automated process checks your account each month for adherence to the management policies and then takes action when it finds you've fallen short. No ifs, no buts, no coconuts. One morning you log in to your account and boom, you're deactivated. Wipe out. Do not pass go, do not collect £200 (or in most cases, \$328 per day!)

Firstly, don't panic. Yes, the board of trustees were very excited about \$120,000 of advertising budget and no, they won't be best pleased if it's taken away, but panicking solves nothing.

Secondly, in any deactivation scenario, the email that Google sends you gives you a good idea of why it has taken action. Fix the problem, and then apply for reactivation [here](#). If the reasons are not clear, give Google a call. We have done this on several occasions – often there has been a combination of factors that have triggered the deactivation and calling

Google was most helpful in the resolution. The Google helplines can be a bit hit and miss in their accuracy and helpfulness, so have an experienced PPC professional in your back pocket for emergencies. Fresh Egg's number is at the end of this guide.

When you discuss the Ad Grants programme with your board of trustees do make sure to point out that deactivation will happen at some point. You'll work towards minimising it, but the world shifts and it's not always in your control. Deactivations are temporary, your account will come back once you've fixed the problems and applied for reactivation. It won't be immediate and, depending on how many other charities have been deactivated, could take some time. But it will come back, if you're persistent. That doesn't mean filling out the form every hour on the hour, but make sure that you keep in touch with Google on a weekly basis if your deactivation lasts that long.

This is not a revenue generating area for Google, so their commitment to outstanding turnaround is understandably not super high. It's good, but it can be slow on occasion, and frustrating if you have been denied crucial funding.

When your account has been reactivated, make sure that you've learned from the experience and keep an eye on those factors that caused the deactivation. Deactivation is part of the journey. If you never get one, then you're in a minority. All the best people have been deactivated at least once.

Limitations

Google Ad Grants come with certain limitations. That's just the nature of receiving something for free, you don't get everything. Below are some of the things that you cannot do with a Grant:

- Run ads on the Search Partner, Display or YouTube networks (see page 29 of this guide for Additional Non-Profit Perks).
- Run Google Sponsored Promotions (GSP) ads through Gmail.
- Use any sort of audiences (remarketing, in-market, customer list, custom affinity, etc).
- Use demographic bid adjustments – this is related to the audience usage limitation.
- Manually bid more than \$2. Ad Grants often have “relaxed” commercial performance criteria. The concept of “free money” reduces the burden of making a solid financial return. Google offset this by putting a bid cap in place. You can't just bid whatever you like.



Google

What can you do?

**Pretty much
everything else.**

Use ad extensions to your heart's content, run expanded or responsive ad copy or use complicated campaign architecture.

Whatever you like, really.

Things like device bid adjustments, location bid adjustments and ad schedules are, to some degree, taken care of by the automated bidding that you'll have in place.

Websites

Your Ads Grant will be granted to a pre-approved set of domains. Normally, this is only one, but in some cases other domains can be requested and granted permission to use the Ad Grants account.

This is particularly important to remember when using the account to assist with fundraising or lottery/gaming products. Often, a member of the fundraising team will have the very bright idea of putting the latest fundraising event on a microsite, and then ask for ads to be directed towards it. Or the lottery product that you're trying to get traffic to lives on the lottery provider's domain, e.g. yourcharity.lotteryprovider.co.uk.

Linking ads to domains not listed as part of the Grants programme is most definitely the 8:15 express train to deactivation.

As legitimate and well-intentioned as those ads might be, they will trigger a deactivation, without fail. Do not link to any domain that Google has not expressly granted permission for use within the Ad Grant programme.

So, communicate to the wider charity team this specific limitation and avoid the use of microsites or external domains if you want to use your Ad Grant to promote activities. Keep key content on your main domain wherever possible.



4. Top tips

Now that you know all about Google Ad Grants, what you can and can't do as well as what you should and shouldn't do, we thought we'd share some nuggets of our experience.

Because of their limitations, because charities are universally more lenient on the commercial performance of spending Google's money versus spending their own, and because the scale of the account is relatively small, standard Google Ad Grants accounts are quite straightforward to manage. Definitely easier than a multimillion e-commerce account.

Spending the budget

One of the first challenges is utilising the full budget. There is no minimum spend requirement for Ad Grants, even for Pro grants of \$40,000 per month.

The restrictions on keyword usage to focus on your charity mission have made it a bit more difficult to get the full budget spent. However, if you think about your charity and the needs of the people it can be relatively easy to create new opportunities. For example, are there informational assets and pages that you can create that you can promote? Health charities usually have very bountiful information sections about the conditions they represent, and this can all be mined to create relevant keyword sets for promotion.

Another reason for creating content, beyond opening up the ability to spend Grant budget

on promoting it, is that the more helpful a charity is the higher the chances of converting an information-seeking casual visitor into an advocate, and potentially a donor/fundraiser. Searchers are actively looking for information. Answering that call with expertise and authority positions the charity well and creates a good experience. Good experiences lead to advocacy and advocacy leads to donations.

Don't leave money on the table

Google will make \$10,000 available to you every month. Your job is to utilise this as much as possible to achieve your KPIs. Unspent budget does not roll over. Every unspent dollar could be more visitors to the site, more conversion actions, maybe even more donations. Be active in planning out how you can get the most from the grant.

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a green and white plaid jacket, is looking upwards and pointing her right index finger towards a white circle on a light-colored wall. The scene is partially obscured by a large green circle that serves as a background for the text. The overall background of the slide is light gray with scattered blue and white dots and a large, faint purple circle in the bottom right corner.

5. The 'secret sauce' to performance – conversions

Google pushes all advertisers hard to embrace automated bidding techniques, as it sees better conversion performance when automated bidding is used.

This is due to the many complex factors that fall into whether you should or shouldn't bid, and Google maintains that machines can do this better and more frequently than humans. In the majority of cases, they're right. For Ad Grants recipients, having automated bidding in place is a requirement. Ad Grants have a \$2 maximum bid cap if you bid manually, but using the algorithmic bidding models allows you to bid beyond that cap. This is really important when you're competing against other charities or commercial advertisers. Often the \$2 cap would be too limiting. Basically, Google have said that if you do it their preferred way, they're happy to remove the \$2 bid cap.

The algorithms that Google wants you to use learn from a multitude of signals including prior conversion performance to be able to bid the right amount for the right person to see and potentially click on your ad. The algorithms make these decisions with every single keyword auction, way more than a human could ever manage manually.

In order to do their job, the algorithms need conversion data. The more data they can get, the better. However, as previously stated the conversion data that you pass to Google needs to be based on meaningful conversions. This is where many charities fall short.

Beyond donations and fundraising or email signups, the number of meaningful conversion points within user journeys is small. You can use softer conversion actions, like an information pack download, a fact sheet, a medical diary or action plan, an informational video view – all of these are meaningful engagements with your charity, its purpose and its message.

The trick is to be creative, look for opportunities to produce an interaction point and then measure that interaction and send that data back to Google. Remember to make them meaningful; spending more than a minute or two on a page, scrolling down more than halfway through a page, simply visiting a page – these are not meaningful. You can measure them for your own use, but don't import them into Google Ads to be used as conversions.

All of these touchpoints only further your engagement with the visitor. We're trying to turn visitors into advocates and in turn into supporters. To do this you need to maintain contact, feeding the charity message, building the emotional connection and the empathy to a point where you build the motivation to support. These touchpoints should increase your value to the visitor, improve their experience, and increase their positive perceptions of your charity.



When the algorithms have all of that meaningful conversion data, they are able to bid more confidently, increasing beyond the \$2 cap when they sense a chance of a conversion. This boosts your presence in search and enables you to spend more of the Ad Grant budget on more traffic. That traffic will also be better qualified with a higher propensity to do what you'd like it to do.

Reporting

The Google Ads interface has some very nice reporting functionality that allows you to create custom reports and then have those reports emailed to you on a schedule. In order to make your management of the account easier, set-up the following reports to run at the start of the month for the preceding month:

- **Quality score by keyword** – you have a list of all keywords with a quality score of less than 3 sent to you. While it is good practice to also set up a rule to pause keywords with a quality score of less than 3, you'll want to work on these keywords and try to improve them. Having the list of what to look at is enormously useful.
- **Click-through rate by keyword** – the 5% minimum click-through rate threshold is an average, meaning that all keyword click-through rates contribute. If you have a keyword with a high impression volume and low click-through rate, it's going to pull that average down considerably. Setting up a report to identify keywords with a click-through below 5% will help to prioritise what you'll need to focus on for the coming month.

- **General performance** – sure, you can log into your account but for most of us the start of the month always seems to be really busy. Getting an emailed performance report for the preceding month showing impressions, clicks, cost, click-through rate, and conversion performance saves precious minutes that can be re-invested into making good coffee.

Contextual expansion

Your paid search account will normally contain a set of core keywords. In order to reach a wider audience, it's worth putting yourself in the shoes of the audience and trying to understand how they might find you relevant to their search.

Fresh Egg put this expansion of content in a contextual fashion to good use when working with Public Health England. The service being promoted was for a mental health awareness tool, but rather than focusing on keywords like "depression", "stress" or "mental health" we contextually expanded the concept.

People suffering from a mental health condition might start their journey by looking up the symptoms they have, e.g. "I can't sleep", "feeling worried", "how to get to sleep", "dealing with anxiety". By targeting these keywords we're moving up the funnel somewhat, positioning the service right when people are trying their best to work out what's going on.

Many charities are able to do the same, with just a little bit of planning and understanding the needs and behaviours of the target

audience a little better. This opens up the range of keywords that you can legitimately target, enabling you to use more of your Ad Grant and reach more people.

Competitor analysis

There are affordable tools on the market like [SEMRush](#) or [Spyfu](#) that will give you an indication of the keywords that some of your competitors are using in their paid campaigns. The important point to note here is that your competitors may be other charities or commercial entities. Other charities don't need to be operating under the same mission as you – you can learn something by looking at charities with other themes.

Measurement frameworks

A measurement framework is a document that outlines what your performance KPIs are and how you're going to measure them. It's all well and good saying that you want to raise brand or mission awareness, but if you're not actively measuring brand/mission penetration through recall or awareness surveys then it's not a good KPI. You'll not know if you've been successful against that metric. Good KPIs are measurable in some way.

A measurement framework is a prerequisite for any digital activity. Creating one is straightforward and you can find a free template [here](#). Filling out a measurement framework will also help you to define additional conversion actions that you can use within your audience journeys.

Integration

Your Google Ad Grant is going to enable you to take advantage of the Google search space, bringing visitors into the charity and exposing them to who you are and what you're trying to achieve. It's a powerful addition to your marketing mix. The best uses of this occur when the team responsible for overseeing or managing the paid search activity include the rest of the organisation, opening up the channel to help achieve goals in other teams.

Understanding where you spend your budget and where your Google Ad Grant might be able to pick up some of the work is essential. Understanding what the Ad Grant will enable you to do, which KPIs it will be effective in achieving and thereby where you can shift focus from other areas will give you an element of agility that will improve your overall performance. If you're spending charity funds doing something that the Ad Grant can also do, then you can use those funds elsewhere, diversifying activity or amplifying something else.



6. Additional non-profit perks

Once you've signed up to the Google for Nonprofits programme, there are a few more services that you'll be able to take advantage of that will help improve your ability to market yourselves.

G-Suite

The [Google Suite of applications](#) is free for non-profits.

Applications such as Google Mail, Google Sheets, Google Docs, Google Slides, Hangouts, Google Sites will become available to help you create, communicate, share and manage all manner of projects, documents and processes.

Earth & Maps

Google gives credits to non-profits to use on [Google Earth and Maps](#) to be able to demonstrate your geographical impact. Data visualisations and street-level imagery will bring your location impact stories to life while also showing your donors how their contributions make a difference.

7. Resources

Google for Nonprofits programme

www.google.com/intl/en-GB/nonprofits

Charity Digital

www.charitydigital.org.uk

Google Ad Grant management policy

support.google.com/grants/answer/117827?hl=en

Single keyword exemption terms

support.google.com/grants/answer/7587473

Google Ad Grant reactivation requests

support.google.com/grants/contact/Request_for_reactivation_cases_2

Free measurement framework template

www.freshegg.co.uk/resources/web-analytics-measurement-plan



**To find out more
about how you can
benefit better from
Google Ad Grants, call
us on 01903 334 249**

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