

This article presents general guidelines for Georgia nonprofit organizations and should not be construed as legal advice. Always consult an attorney to address your particular situation.

10 Essential Steps to Protect Your Nonprofit's Intellectual Property

1. Identify your intellectual property (IP). Intellectual property includes copyrighted materials, trademarks, and proprietary knowledge. What IP does your nonprofit own, and how is it currently managed? Find and inventory your important creative materials (e.g. curriculums, videos), your active names and logos, and any unique “secret sauce” processes that help set your organization apart.

2. Add notices to your copyrighted materials. You may have seen a notice like, “Copyright © 2025 Organization” on documents or presentations. You can add this notice on content your nonprofit owns, too. When you include your organization’s name and the date you last modified the materials, you publicly confirm ownership of your physical or digital content. For your most valuable copyrighted materials, also consider [registering your copyright](#) or talk with your legal counsel about how to further protect them. For more information see [How to File a Copyright Registration](#).

3. Ask legal counsel to review any written agreements involving IP. Whether you are sharing your content or IP with a third-party, or a third-party is sharing their content or IP with you, a contract provides clarity on ownership rights and rules for use. Written assignments and licenses prevent later confusion or accidental loss of the owner’s rights. Sometimes agreements require specific language, and your legal counsel can ensure the right language is used. For more information see [What You Need to Know About Licensing Your Materials](#)

4. Protect Confidential Information. When working with volunteers, contractors, and other organizations or people, you may need to protect confidential information such as beneficiary information, financial details, or other materials. Non-disclosure agreements or confidentiality language in larger agreements can protect this information from being disclosed. If you share information you don’t want to be made public with others outside of your organization, talk with your legal counsel about confidentiality and NDAs. For more information, see [Non-Disclosure Agreements \(NDAs\) for Nonprofits](#).

5. Limit access to confidential information. Use robust technology to limit access on a “need to know” basis to protect confidential and sensitive intellectual property within and outside your organization. Technology controls such as password management software, multi-factor authentication, and file archiving can protect against unauthorized use. And for paper files, limiting access to file drawers and their keys will prevent theft.

6. Consider registering your trademarks. Your organization name, program names, and their related logos can be protected as trademarks. Trademarks can be registered for additional protection in Georgia, other states, and with the US Patent & Trademark Office. If you haven’t already registered them, consider talking with your legal counsel about options for protection and registration. For more information, see, [Trademarks: Nonprofit Brand Protection Options](#).

7. Secure your online presence. Create accounts in your organization's name in common social media platforms. Even if you don't plan to regularly use social media, creating the accounts will prevent others from taking and misusing your organization's identity online.

8. Get permission before using others' IP. Using content from the internet without permission can break the law and lead to costly legal problems. If you use photos, videos, or other materials created by someone else, make sure you either have their written permission, or the content comes with explicit permission to use it. For instance, there are websites that allow you to use images or music that are clearly labeled as public domain, open source, or free for commercial use. Also, if you want to use another organization's logo or trademark, always get their permission first, especially if your use of their logo makes it look like you're connected with them or that they support you.

9. Look out for misuse of your IP rights. Regularly check online and in your community for unauthorized use of your intellectual property, such as your trademarks or copyrighted materials. A simple search online for your organization's name and, if applicable, important written content often suffices. Contact your legal counsel if you find possible misuse.

10. Educate staff and volunteers on IP's importance. Let your employees know about your important intellectual property, why it's valuable to your organization, how they can help recognize and protect it, and the legal implications of misuse or accidental disclosure. Having the eyes and ears of your staff can greatly help with its protection. Additionally, let employees and volunteers who publish website or social media content on behalf of your organization know they should not misuse or copy others' intellectual property without permission.