



Donor Pyramid Guide for Small Nonprofits

What is a Donor Pyramid?

A donor pyramid (also called a fundraising pyramid or gift range chart) is a tool that helps nonprofits plan how to raise money by organizing donors into levels based on giving amounts. It shows how many donors you need, at what giving levels, to reach your total fundraising goal.

Why It Matters for Small Nonprofits

For small or new organizations, fundraising can feel unpredictable.

A donor pyramid helps you:

- Set realistic fundraising goals
- Focus your efforts on the right donors
- Avoid relying on too many small gifts
- Build a sustainable funding strategy
- Plan for growth over time

The Basic Structure

A donor pyramid has 3 main levels:

Top Level – Major Gifts

- Small number of donors
- Large contributions
- Often individuals, sponsors, or key supporters

Middle Level – Mid-Level Donors

- Moderate number of donors
- Medium-sized gifts
- Often recurring or engaged supporters

Base Level – Broad Support

- Large number of donors
- Smaller gifts
- Events, campaigns, community giving

Step-by-Step: How to Create a Donor Pyramid

A step-by-step resource to build a sustainable fundraising strategy.

Step 1: Set Your Fundraising Goal

Start with a clear annual goal.

Example:

- Annual Goal = \$50,000

Step 2: Define Gift Levels

Break your goal into tiers.

Example:

Level	Gift	Amount# of Donors	Total
Major Gifts	\$5,000	2	\$10,000
Mid-Level	\$1,000	10	\$10,000
Lower-Level	\$250	40	\$10,000
Small Gifts	\$50	400	\$20,000

Step 3: Identify Donors

Ask:

- Who are your current donors?
- Who has given before?
- Who is most engaged?
- Who has capacity to give more?

Step 4: Build Your Pyramid and Create a Strategy for Each Level

Different donors require different approaches:

Level	Strategy
Major	Personal outreach, meetings
Mid	Email + relationship building
Base	Campaigns, events, social media

Step 5: Track Progress and Make Adjustments

Your pyramid is a living tool

- Review monthly or quarterly
- Adjust donor counts or gift levels
- Track progress toward goals

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Setting unrealistic gift expectations
- Ignoring major donor cultivation
- Treating all donors the same
- Not tracking progress
- Relying only on small gifts



Donor Pyramid Example

Fundraising Goal: \$25,000



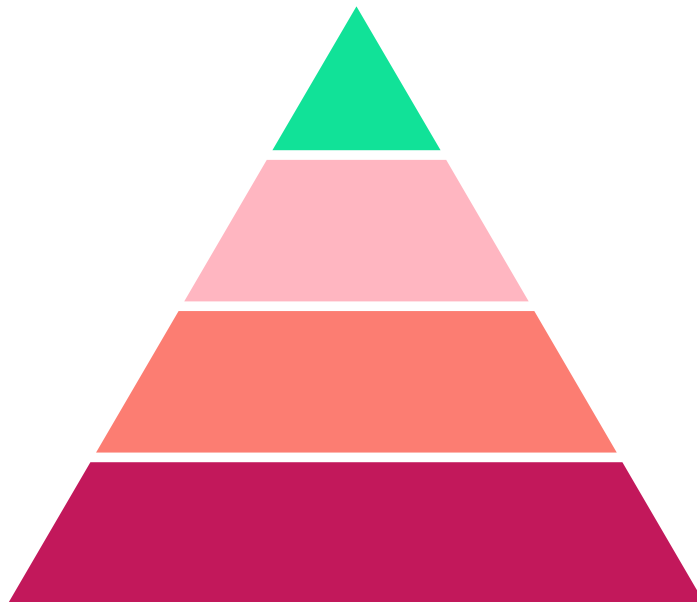
Action Steps:

1. Set goal
2. Identify donor prospects - Use the prospect tracking tool in the Resource Library
3. Track progress and adjust accordingly

Now, create your own!

Fundraising Goal:

Level	Gift Amount	# of Donors	Total
Major Gifts			
Mid-Level			
Lower-Level			
Small Gifts			



Reflection Questions

- Do you know your current donor mix?
- Are you relying too heavily on small gifts?
- Do you have a plan to grow major donors?
- Are your fundraising goals realistic?

Action Steps

- Set your fundraising goal
- Draft your donor pyramid
- Identify potential donors
- Create outreach plans
- Track progress monthly

How Does This Connect to Financial Planning?

Your donor pyramid should align with:

- Your annual budget
- Program funding needs
- Grant strategy
- Cash flow planning

This is where strong financial systems become critical

Need Help Connecting Fundraising & Financial Systems?

A strong donor strategy works best when paired with strong financial tracking and reporting.

We can help you:

- Track donor and grant revenue
- Align budgets with fundraising goals
- Create financial reports for funders and boards
- Build systems that support sustainable growth

Final Thoughts

A donor pyramid isn't just a fundraising tool—it's a strategy for building long-term sustainability.

Start simple. Stay consistent. Adjust as you grow.

Be sure to download the Donor Prospect Tracking Worksheet to turn this strategy into action. The pyramid shows you what you need; next the Prospect List will help you identify who will get you there.

