




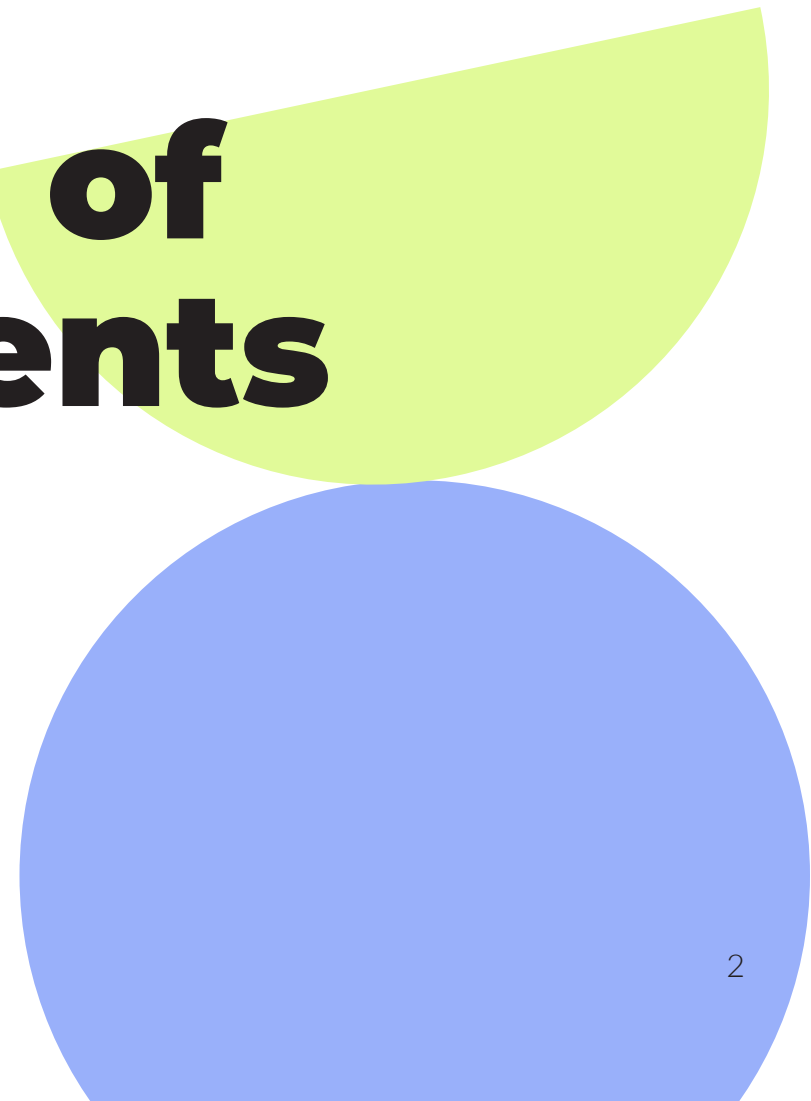
# The Comprehensive **Online Donor Retention** Benchmark Report

## Part 1: Value Proposition

Presented By  **NextAfter**



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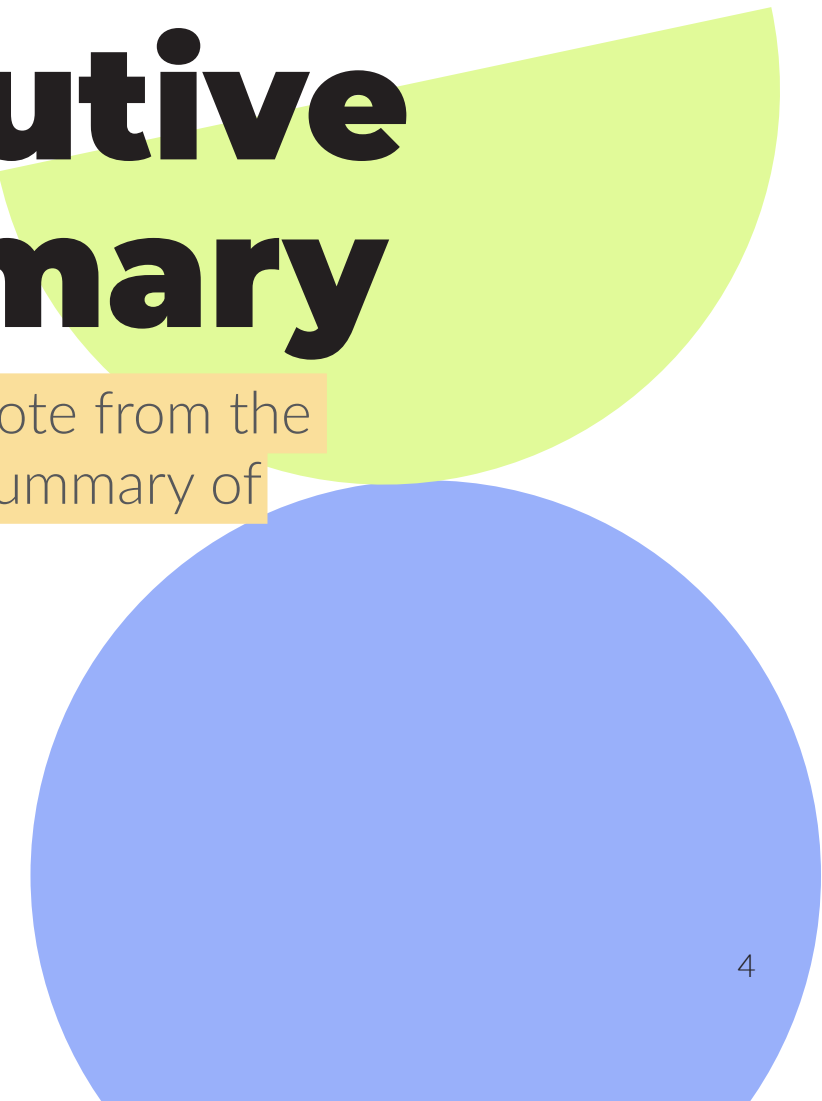


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# **Executive Summary**

An introductory note from the  
researchers and summary of  
key findings





# The Number One Problem in Nonprofit Fundraising

The number one issue that plagues the nonprofit sector is poor donor retention. Donor retention stats vary depending on which benchmark report you look at, but the high-level assessment is that the **majority of your donors will not donate to your organization again next year.**

*The Fundraising Effectiveness Project reports poor donor retention rates as far back as 2005 when nonprofits were losing 82 donors for every 100 new donors gained.<sup>1</sup>* With this kind of donor attrition, nonprofits have to relentlessly focus on new donor acquisition to offset their annual losses.

This type of **acquisition-first fundraising is not sustainable**, yet it's often the primary focus of most organizations we interact with at NextAfter. Our hypothesis is that it's easier to justify an investment in donor acquisition than it is to justify an investment in donor retention. There are many proven strategies for new donor acquisition, but the payoff for donor acquisition is much shorter-term and does not always lead to a sustained base of reliable donors.

Retention, on the other hand, is a long game. And the Return on Investment (ROI) for donor retention isn't as easily calculated as direct response donor acquisition. On top of that, despite all that's been written about tactics and strategies to improve retention, **no one has truly cracked the code** on what actually works.

Which is why we're pointing all of the tools at our disposal at this singular question: ***How do you meaningfully improve donor retention?***

## The Research Process & Key Findings

Over the past 10 years, our team at NextAfter has published 17+ iterations of what we call a *Mystery Donor Research Study*. These studies analyze the donation experience from the perspective of a motivated donor, looking at opportunities to improve the giving process based on our learnings from more than 5,000+ online fundraising a/b tests.

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<sup>1</sup> 2012 Fundraising Effectiveness Factsheet

# The Research Process & Key Findings

To isolate potential donor retention strategies that actually work, we've **joined forces with our friends at Virtuous to look at the overall retention rates for 211 nonprofit organizations.** By combining their donor retention data with our Mystery Donor Research process, our aim is to pinpoint the tactics and strategies that both help and harm donor retention.

In the first iteration of this report, you'll **discover how a nonprofit's value proposition can impact donor retention.** There's a lot of data to dive into, but I'll summarize the key findings for you here:

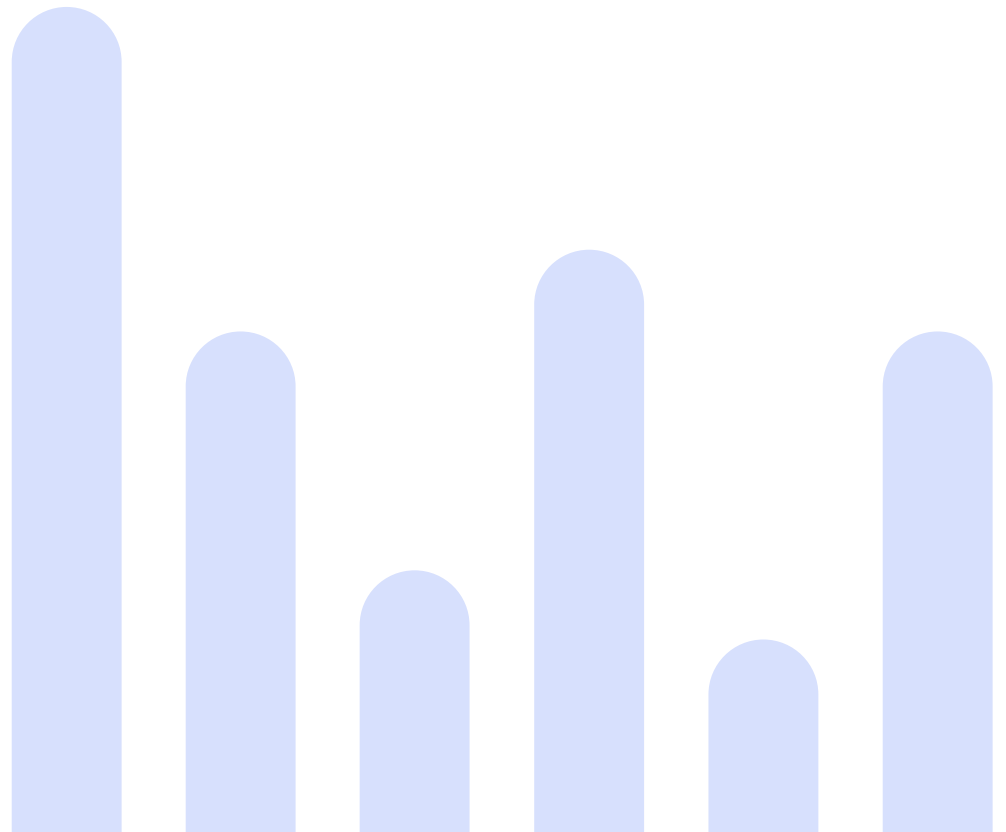
- 1 The **reason why your donors give** is one of the most significant organizational factors impacting donor retention.
- 2 Great donor retention rates are often a combination of **value-focused fundraising** and a strategic investment in building a **recurring giving program.**
- 3 Donor retention is not dependent upon the clarity of your website navigation. But **a lack of clarity can keep someone from giving** in the first place.
- 4 One-off tactics have minimal impact on long-term retention. But they can **greatly improve performance at the point of conversion.**
- 5 Every organization - regardless of size and vertical - has a **tremendous opportunity to improve the strength of its value proposition.**

It's my sincerest hope that this study and **these findings will encourage you to do one thing:** *test your hypotheses about how messaging and value proposition impact your donors both in the short and long terms.*

We're never going to solve donor retention by reading a single research report. But these findings can serve as **a great starting place for you to test and optimize your way to longer term donor relationships** — and more meaningful impact on your cause.



Nathan Hill  
Vice President, NextAfter Institute





# Overview

A summary of why and how we studied the value propositions of 211 nonprofit organizations



# What is a Value Proposition?

If you asked 10 marketers and fundraisers this question, you'd probably get 10 different answers. At NextAfter, we define it as the answer to one fundamental question that every donor asks when they're considering giving:

*If I am your ideal donor, why should I give to you rather than to some other organization, or even at all?*

Donors don't necessarily ask this question out loud or even consciously, but the question must be answered satisfactorily if they're going to donate. If you can't answer this question in their mind, they won't give.

Over the course of 5,000+ online fundraising experiments, we've found that the strength of the value proposition has the biggest impact on a potential

donor's likelihood to give. And our hypothesis is that the reasons used to influence someone to give shape their long-term view of an organization, which has a rippling impact on things like donor retention.

## **A value proposition is not your mission statement.**

Your mission statement is important, essential, and even vital for your nonprofit. But a mission statement is rarely written to be a clear, donor-centric message.

## **A value proposition is not an incentive.**

Getting a free book as a thank you for a donation is a reason that someone might give now rather than later, or maybe even give more rather than less. But it is not the fundamental reason for **why** someone would donate to your organization in the first place.



## 4 Elements of a Value Proposition

Throughout this report, you'll see several examples of how nonprofits articulate their value proposition on their donation pages. And when we evaluate the value proposition on a page, we look at 4 key elements.

To simplify how we analyze the strength of the value proposition, our researchers were asked to rank the strength of these 4 key elements on a 3 point scale for each organization's donation page.

**1 Low**

**2 Neutral**

**3 Strong**

**Appeal:**

How badly does your ideal donor want to make this impact?

**Exclusivity:**

Can your ideal donor make this kind of impact somewhere (or anywhere) else?

**Clarity:**

How quickly and easily does your ideal donor understand what you're communicating?

**Credibility:**

Does your ideal donor believe and trust you?

You'll see these findings for these scores in the next section.

## Research Methods

The aim of this report is not just to look at each organization's value proposition. Instead, it's to see what correlations we can find between the strength of a nonprofit's value proposition and its retention rates.

We partnered with Virtuous to develop a list of **211 nonprofit organizations** that we included in this research. For each organization, we've analyzed their online and offline retention rates. We then split the list of organizations into three equal tiers of donor retention performance (combining online and offline retention): high, middle, and low performing organizations.

We then made a \$20 donation to every organization,

answering a series of questions about key elements of the donation experience. The donation experience analysis included the homepage, the donation page, any pages in between as well as the confirmation page. We paid special attention to the value proposition on the donation page, grading it using the scoring model above.

All the data was then blended to look at how each donor retention tier performed as it relates to the value proposition.

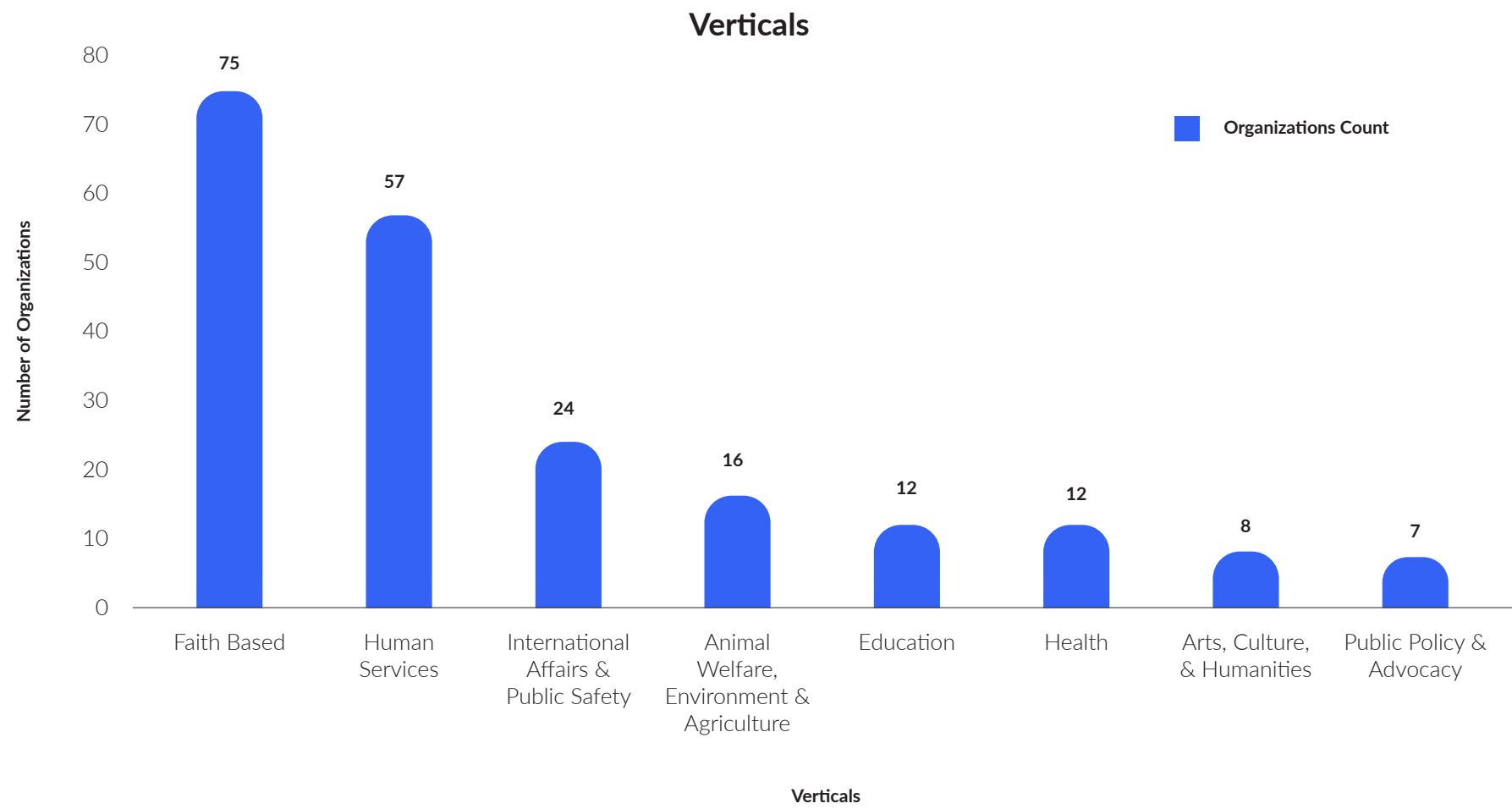
**High Performers:** 60.6% to 100%

**Mid Performers:** 44.6% to 60.6%

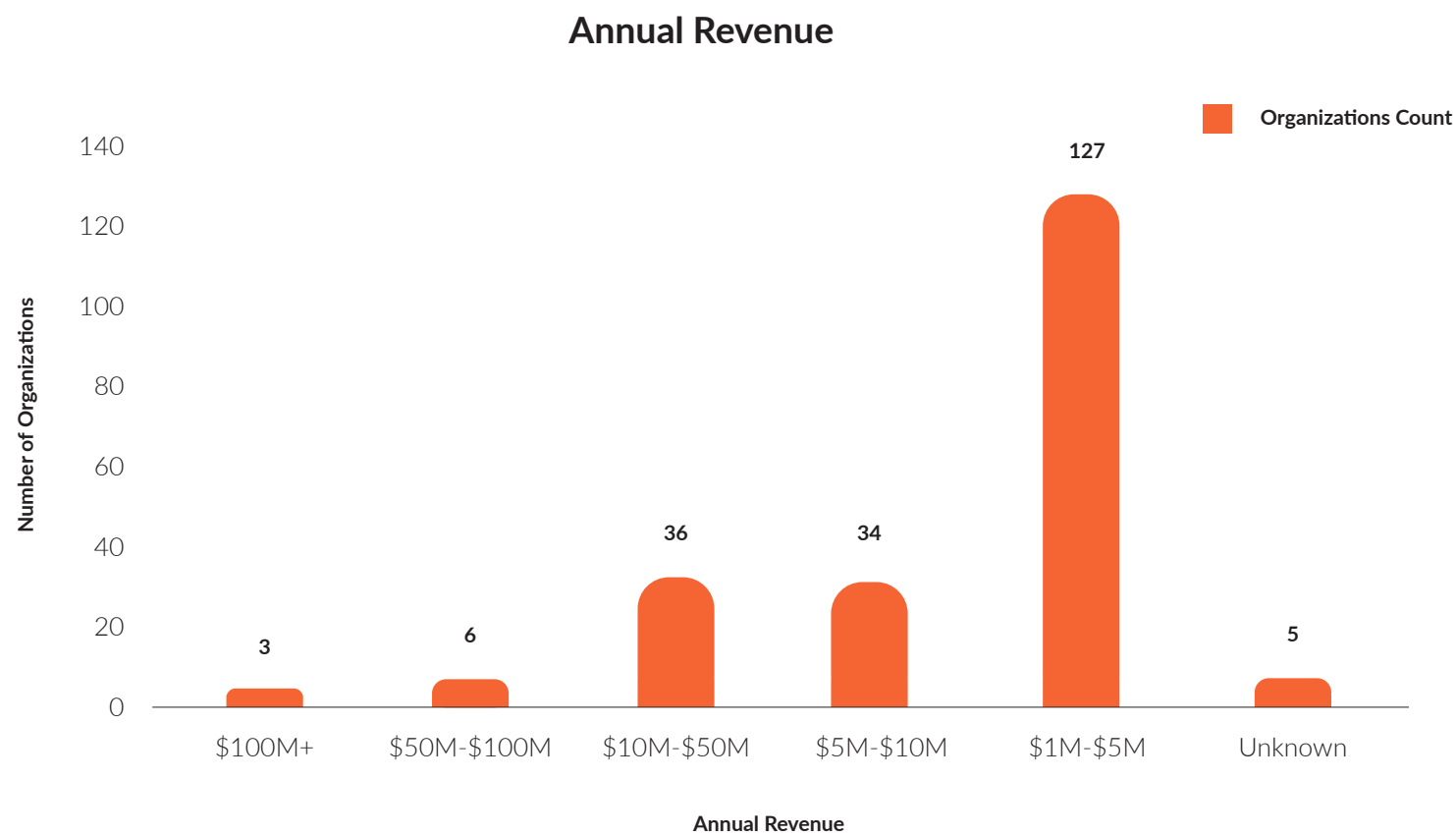
**Low Performers:** 0% to 44.6%

# Verticals & Revenue Size

The organizations included in this research span a wide variety that roughly represent the verticals of organizations across the nonprofit sector.



The size of the organizations was limited to those with \$1 Million or greater in annual donations. This was intentionally done to isolate organizations with a significant volume of donors so that we can find more conclusive trends in retention performance.





# **Part I: Overall Findings On Retention**

A quick look at how verticals, revenue, and web traffic impact donor retention

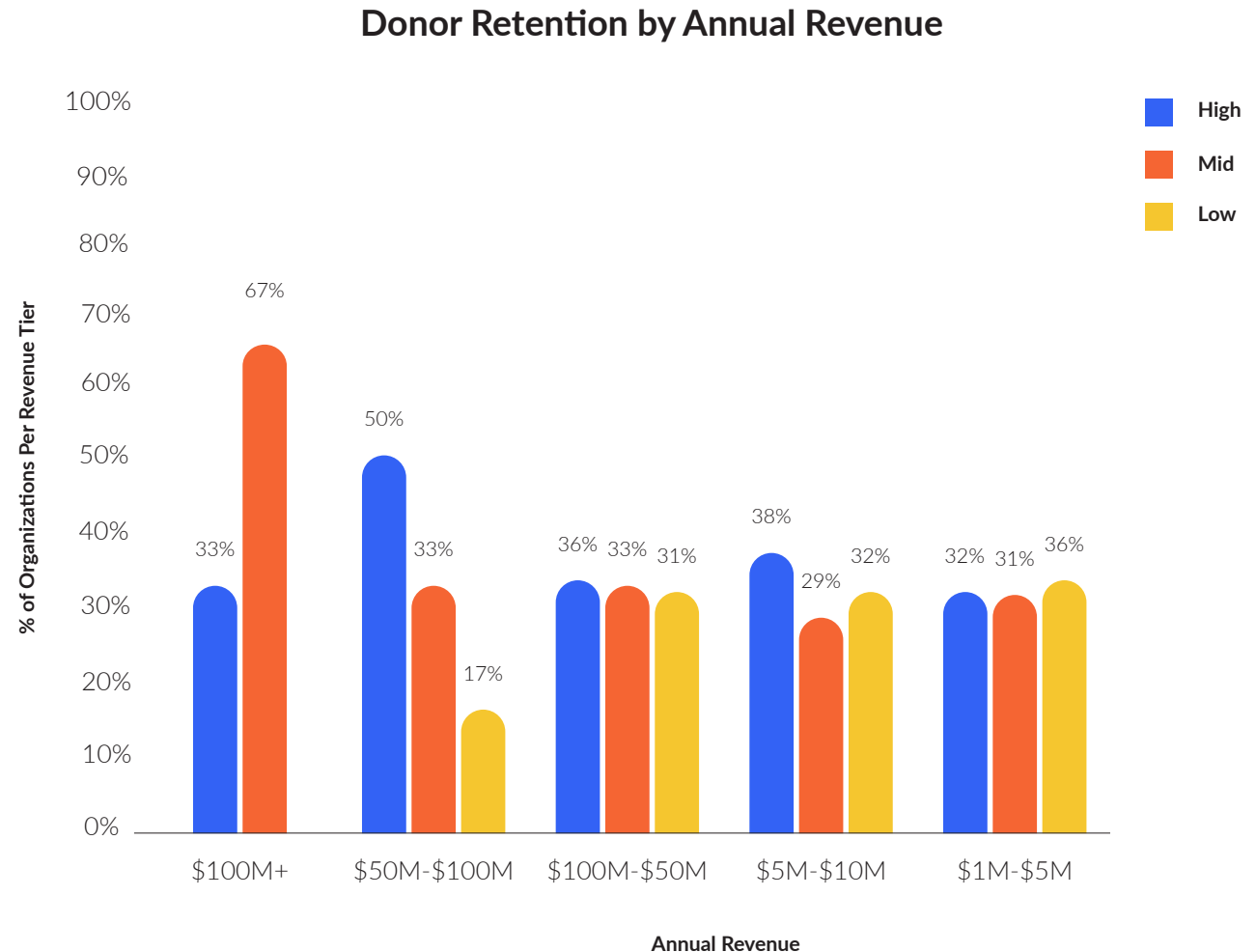


# Retention Rates by Revenue

## An analysis of retention rates based on an organization's revenue

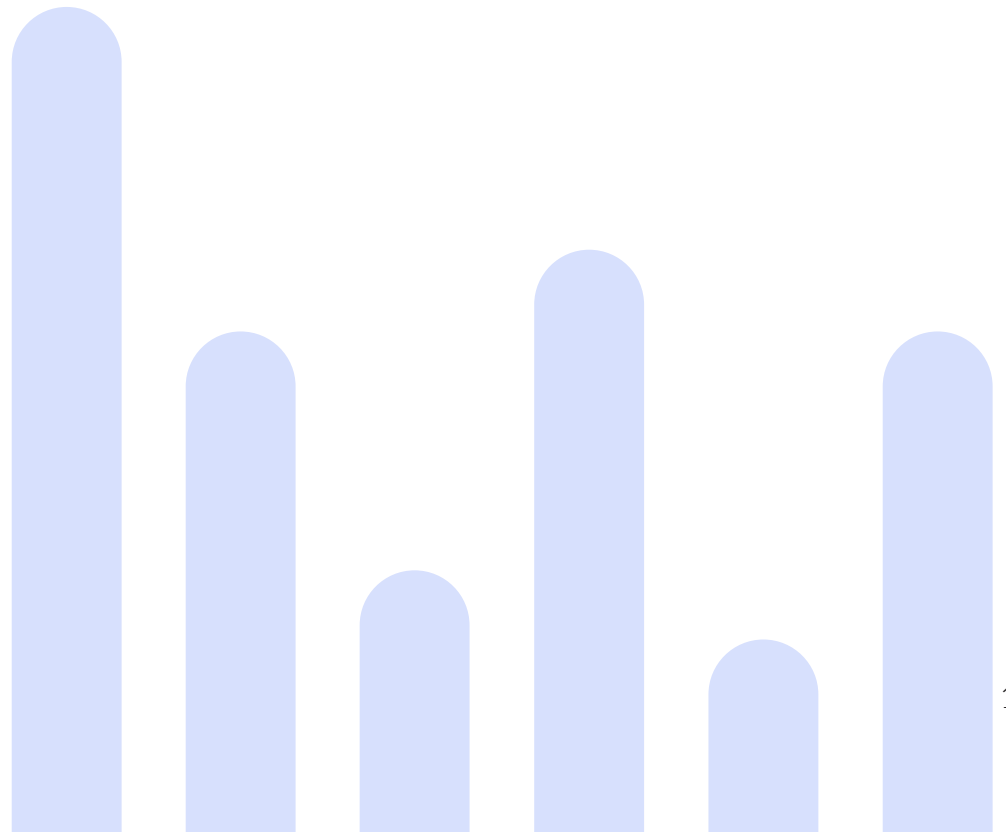
Does revenue make a difference in an organization's ability to retain donors? We overlaid the data on these organizations' retention performance and annual revenue to see if there were any correlations between the two. By and large, the results are mixed.

Many organizations with smaller budgets have high retention rates. Yet, **as revenue goes up, there were fewer organizations that have low retention rates.**



When looking at revenue and retention, you can get stuck with a “which came first” dilemma. Do larger revenues empower strategies that lead to an increase in donor retention? Or is it that better donor retention strategies are leading to higher overall revenues?

Depending on the organization and the maturity of their program, both could be true. More revenue and resources may allow an organization to invest in new technologies, bring in more strategic talent, and provide the donor volume to test innovative ideas. At the same time, there are **many smaller organizations manage to have high donor retention rates without access to big budgets.**

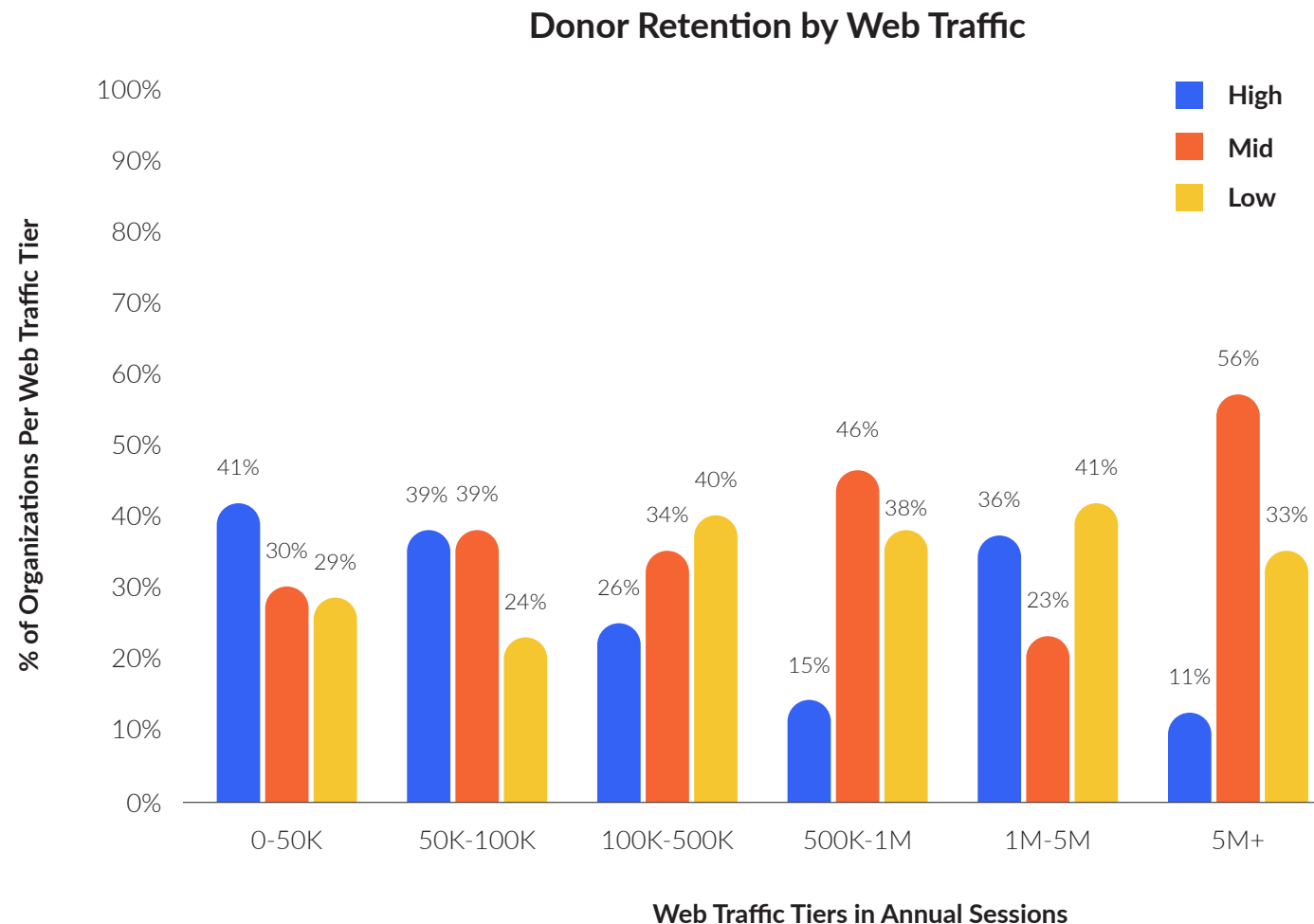


# Retention Rates by Web Traffic Volume

## An analysis of retention rates based on web traffic

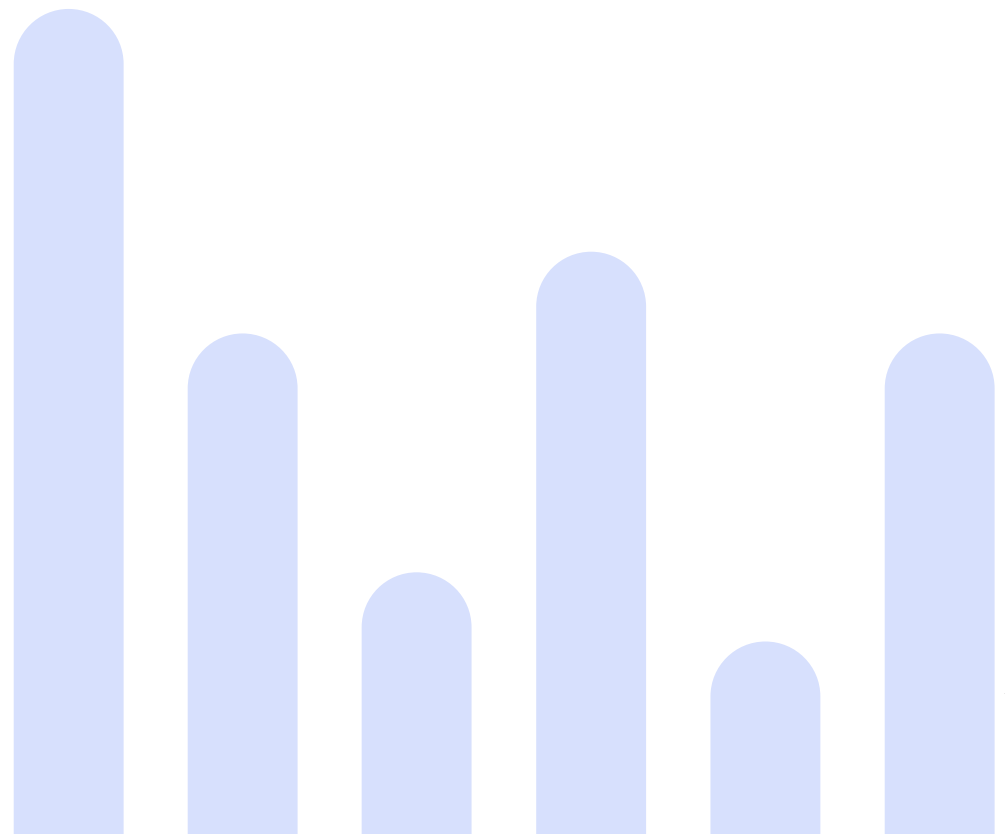
It's easy to assume that more website traffic might lead to lower retention rates. If you reach a very large audience with your web content, it can be difficult to pinpoint a user's motivation and convert them into a donor.

But comparing web traffic to donor retention performance tells a slightly different story.



There is a slight **downward trend in donor retention as web traffic increases**. When looking at organizations that receive 5 million or more website visits per year, the percentage of high-performing donor retention organizations appears to go down significantly. But the change in the overall retention rate is less drastic.

On average, the **low-traffic organization (0 to 50K visits per year)** has a **55% overall donor retention rate**. The average **high-traffic organization (over 5 million visits per year)** has a **45% donor retention rate**.



# Retention Rates by Vertical

## An analysis of retention rates based on the type of organization

It stands to reason that an organization's cause might impact the likelihood that donors will stick around for the long term. And in the chart below, you'll see that the vertical an organization works in truly does matter.

**The verticals with the highest percentage of high retention organizations are Faith-Based and International Organizations.** And most international organizations in our sample have a mission or relief focus. Faith-based and international missions organizations have intrinsic values that they share with their donors, and these values are often unchanged by current events & politics.

By contrast, some of the lowest retention verticals include Public Policy and Health organizations. While these two verticals may seem significantly different on the surface, we see a major commonality. Public

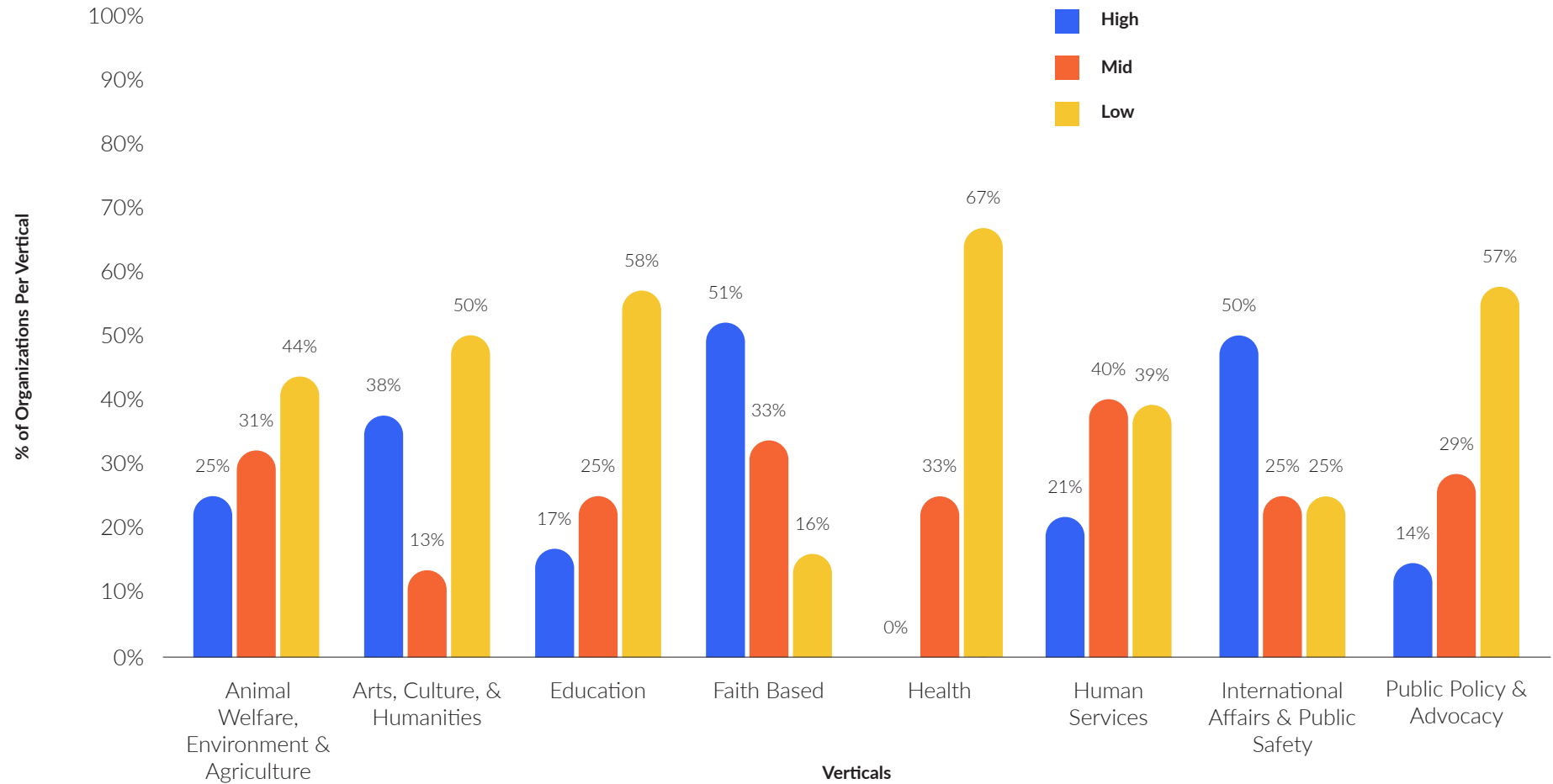
Policy organizations are often driven by current events, politics, and legislation. This potentially leads to many one-off donors who care about the policy, but have minimal attachment to the organization.

Health-related organizations may face a similar challenge. They may receive many one-off tribute donations in honor of a family member, friend, or loved one who has been impacted by a particular disease. But that may not lead to long-term affinity with the organization.

**Our Hypothesis** — Fundraising based on current events, news cycles, immediate disasters, and other short-term messages may lead to lower affinity and poor retention rates. But fundraising from a place of shared values and core beliefs may lead to higher affinity and better retention.



## Donor Retention by Vertical



## Key Finding

The *reason why your donors give* is one of the most significant organizational factors impacting donor retention.

# Retention Rates and Recurring Giving

## Retention rates based on the size of the recurring giving program

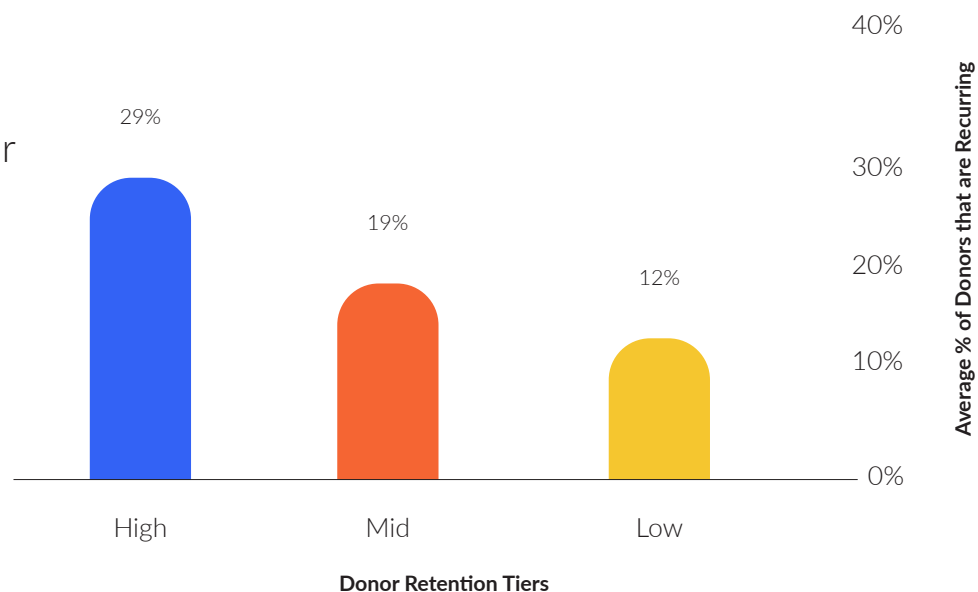
A common strategy to boost retention rates is to invest heavily in a recurring giving strategy. This means focusing on acquiring donors who give automatically on a monthly recurring basis. While there is ample data to show that recurring donors stick around longer, we wanted to look at how intentionality in recurring giving impacts overall retention rates for an organization.

The chart on this page shows the average percentage of active donors that are giving recurring donations for each of the donor retention performance tiers.

To no surprise, **the highest-performing organizations in terms of donor retention have the largest percentage of active donors that give recurring donations.**

But before you conclude that recurring giving is the *only* factor in high retention, let's compare recurring donations to retention performance by vertical.

**Average % of Recurring Donors by Retention Tier**



## Recurring Donors by Vertical

### Comparing verticals to the average size of the recurring giving program

Finally, we compared the average percentage of recurring donors to each key vertical. We wondered if the high-performing verticals in terms of donor retention were simply a result of having larger recurring giving programs.

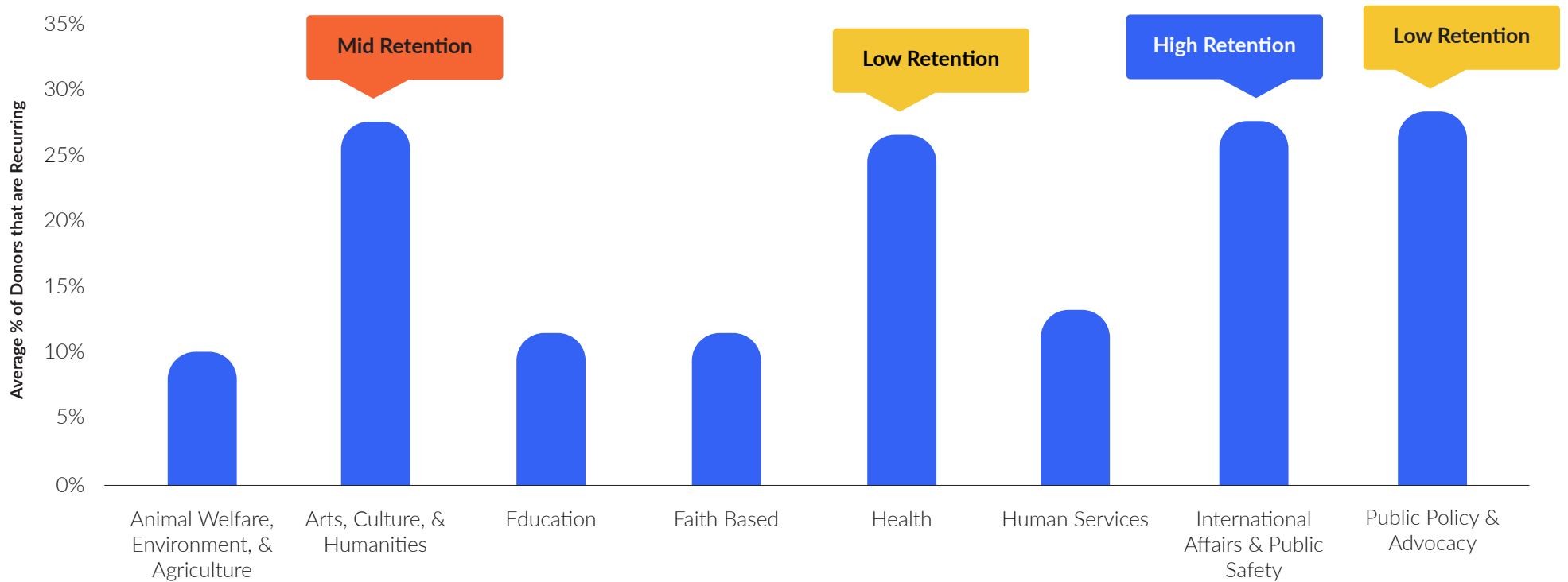
But **a high percentage of recurring donors does not appear to be the only ingredient in donor retention.**

*Arts, Culture, & Humanities* has high recurring donor rates but is a mid-performing retention vertical. *Public, Policy, & Advocacy* organizations have high recurring rates but are low-performing retention verticals. And

*Faith-Based & International Organizations* have high recurring donor rates and are both high retention performers.

These trends lead us to believe that, although an ingredient in donor retention, **recurring giving is not always the silver-bullet retention strategy that many expect.** However, coupled with what we observed about each vertical's retention performance, it may be that **a combination of value-centric fundraising and investment in recurring giving are essential to growing retention rates.**

Recurring Donor % by Vertical



The chart above shows that the verticals with the highest percentage of donors giving recurring donations are:

- Arts, Culture, & Humanities
- Public Policy & Advocacy
- Faith Based
- International Organizations



## Key Finding

Great donor retention rates are often a combination of *value-focused fundraising* and a strategic investment in building a *recurring giving* program.



# **Part II: Overall Findings On Value Proposition**

The high—level findings and data on how value proposition relates to donor retention performance

# Finding Where to Give

*How quickly and easily can I find where to give?*

If we look at donor retention as a product of the holistic experience that a donor has with an organization, the first chance we have to start on the right foot is when a potential donor first shows up. For this research, we're assuming the visitor has some level of intention of making a donation when they land on the homepage.

While we may not typically think of the navigation path from the homepage to the donation page as a part of the primary value proposition, experimentation shows that this pathway has a significant impact on someone's likelihood to give. **The primary value proposition element at work in this step is "Clarity."**

Analyzing Clarity in the Donation Pathway	Overall	High	Mid	Low
The donate button is in the top-right corner of the navigation.	82%	79%	84%	84%
The donate button clearly stands out.	69%	65%	75%	66%
The donate button uses clear language.	92%	92%	97%	89%

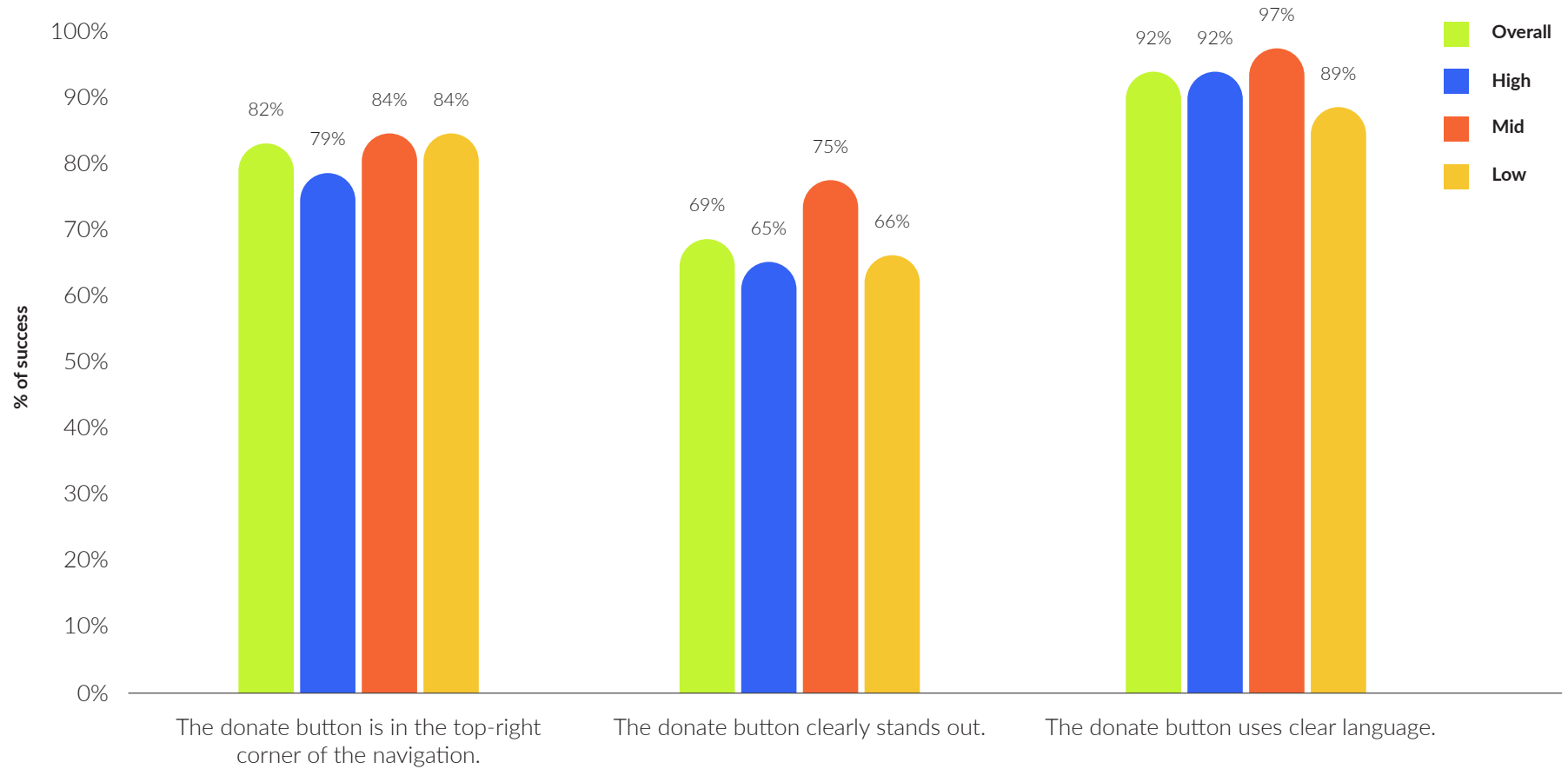
## Comparing the Donation Pathway to Donor Retention

Clarity in the donation pathway is critical to converting donors. In the experiment on the next page, you'll see **small improvements to the donation pathway can radically improve donor conversion**. For example, making your "Donate" button stand out in a high-contrast color can generate more traffic to your donation page, and sometimes leads to significant increases in overall giving.

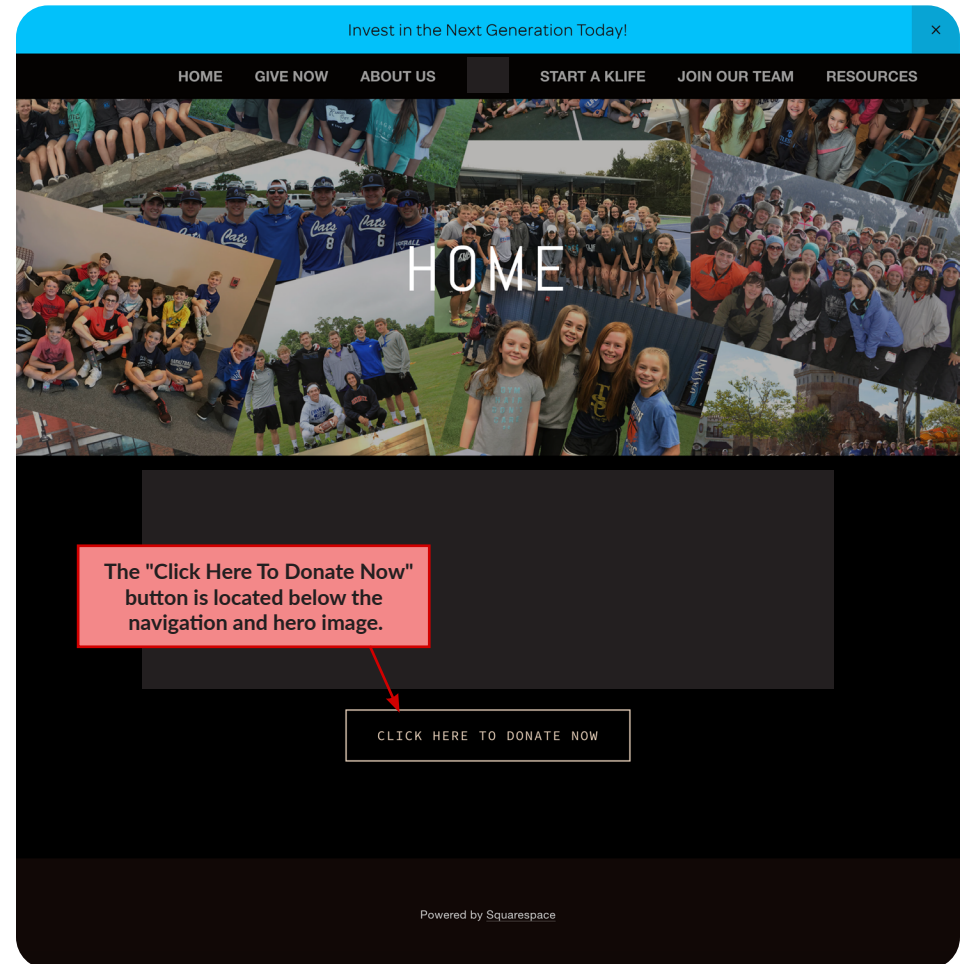
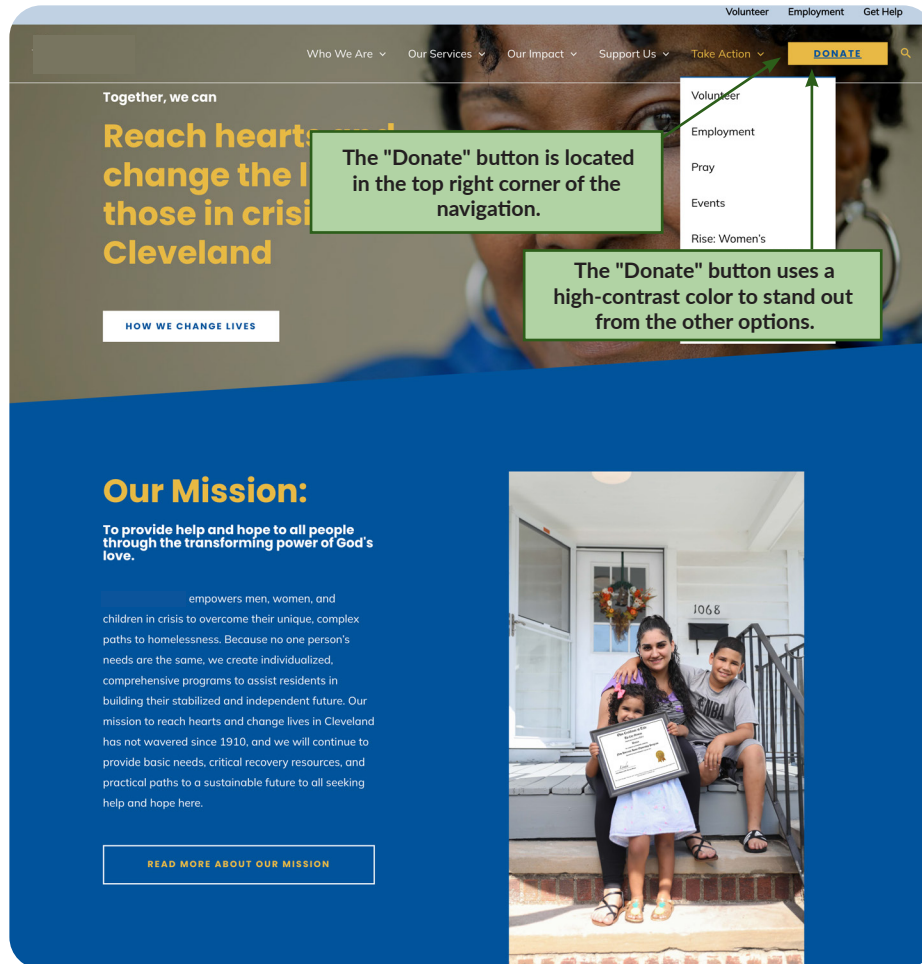
Analyzing clarity in the donation pathway revealed two key observations:

- 1 Nearly one-third of organizations have a "Donate" button that is difficult to find.** 31% of nonprofits did not use a high contrasting color or treatment on their "Donate" button to make it stand out to users on the website.
- 2 There is no direct correlation between clarity in the donation pathway and an organization's ability to retain donors.** The highest-performing organizations in terms of donation pathway clarity were the mid-performers in terms of donor retention.

## Donation Pathway Results



# Examples of Donation Pathways



In the example on the left, the homepage has the "Donate" button in the top right corner of the page for visibility. The organization also uses a high-contrast color to stand out from the other options. In the example on the right, the homepage uses a ghost "donate" button below the navigation bar and image – potentially reducing clarity.

## An Experiment on Clarity in the Donation Pathway

In this experiment, the control version of the website navigation had a "Give" button in the right corner. But the link used a "ghost button" design. This type of design treatment looks very clean on a website, but it doesn't stand out as clearly from the navigation as a button using a high-contrast color.

The treatment tweaked the copy to say "Donate to TGC", and the button was changed to use a bright green color — clearly setting it apart from the rest of the website navigation.

**The high-contrast button led to a 27.8% increase in traffic to the donation page.**

While this one tweak to clarity in the donation pathway does not radically change long-term donor retention, it can lead to more donors giving in the first place.



See the full experiment

[www.nextafter.com/experiments/how-a-visual-redesign-of-a-main-donate-button-on-the-website-impacted-clicks/](https://www.nextafter.com/experiments/how-a-visual-redesign-of-a-main-donate-button-on-the-website-impacted-clicks/)



## Ghost "Give" Button



## High contrasting "Donate To TGC" Button





## Key Finding

Donor retention is not dependent upon the clarity of your website navigation. But ***a lack of clarity can keep someone from giving*** in the first place.

# The Donation Page

*How do organizations use copy on their donation page?*

It's easy to assume that someone who has landed on your donation page is already motivated to give. After all, why would they have gone to the page if they weren't going to donate? But experimentation shows that the **messaging on your donation page plays a major role in helping someone decide to give**. And we hypothesize that the messaging used to acquire a donor may play a major role in that donor's retention as well.

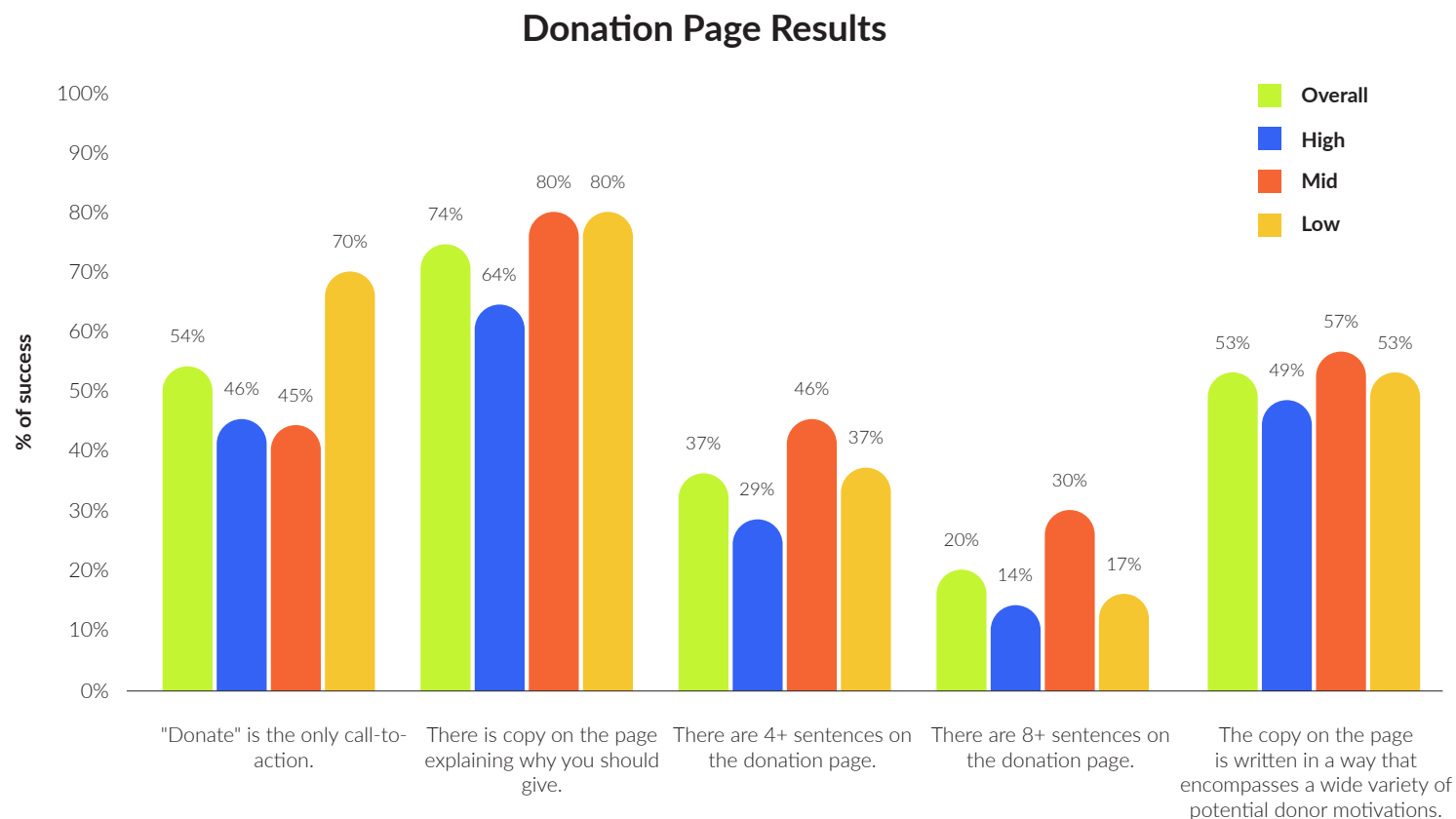
Let's look next to see if organizations are using copy at all on their donation pages to articulate why someone should give.

Analyzing the Donation Page for Copy	Overall	High	Mid	Low
"Donate" is the only call-to-action.	54%	46%	45%	70%
There is copy on the page explaining why you should give.	74%	64%	80%	80%
There are 4+ sentences on the donation page.	37%	29%	46%	37%
There are 8+ sentences on the donation page.	20%	14%	30%	17%
The copy on the page is written in a way that encompasses a wide variety of potential donor motivations.	53%	49%	57%	53%

# Comparing Donation Page Copy to Donor Retention

There is no strong correlation between these individual donation page copy tactics and donor retention. Interestingly enough, high-performing donor retention organizations tend to underperform in these donation page tactics. This implies that **strong donor retention rates have little to do with one-off tactics and have more to do with the holistic experience of the donor** with the cause and the organization.

That said, these donation page copy tactics make a dramatic impact on the likelihood of someone converting in the first place. In the experiment on the next page, you'll see that even **small tweaks to the donation page copy can make a dramatic impact on total donations.**



# Examples of Donation Page Copy

Our Work Your Impact Blog Give

## YOU ARE HELPING TO MAKE MORE COMMUNITIES LOOK LIKE THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Because of faithful supporters like you, [Organization] has been reaching unreached people groups for over 30 years. We partner with indigenously led organizations to plant churches, build schools, open clinics, and so much more.

When you support [Organization], you are partnering with the Global Church to invest in serving their communities' greatest needs.

Join us as we equip and train the Global Church to transform families, children, and communities in the hardest places.

- **\$100 a month supports entire communities in India to learn to read the Bible** in their own language.
- **\$50 a month can support a pastor in Togo** and their family while they engage in outreach and plant churches in both urban and rural areas.
- **\$35 a month can support a woman in Kenya** as she learns the trade of sewing to support her family and earn a dignified wage.

Your generous support has a tangible impact on individuals, but more than \$[Amount].

### YOU ARE HELPING TO MAKE MORE COMMUNITIES LOOK LIKE THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

To give by check mail to:

Donation Amount\*

\$35 \$50 \$75 \$100 Other

☐ Make Recurring Gift

First Name\* Last Name\*

Email Address\* Phone Number

Address Line 1 Address Line 2

City State/Province Postal\* Country\*

Use my funds for

Where Needed Most

Gift Notes

☐ Credit Card ☐ Bank Account

Credit Card Number\*

All transactions are secure and encrypted.

Card Expiration\* CVV\*

Gift array uses clear and tangible gift handles to highlight the impact of a donation.

The headline communicates the value of making a donation.

Body copy has value proposition expressing reasons why you should give.

HOME THE CRISIS WHAT WE DO ABOUT US

## Donate

is registered 501(c)3 charitable organization. We are independently audited and a member of the ECFA where we meet the highest standards of responsible stewardship.

SEND MAILED DONATIONS TO:

### Gift Information

Donation Amount\*

\$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 Other

☐ Make Recurring Gift

Title\*

Mr. Mrs. Ms. ...

First Name\* Last Name\*

Email Address\*

Phone Number

☒ It's okay to contact me at this number.

Address Line 1 Address Line 2

City State/Province Postal\* Country\*

Credit Card Number\*

1234 1234 1234 1234

Card Expiration\* CVC\*

MM/YY CVC

☐ Credit Card ☐ Bank Account

Is this donation in Honor of or in Memory of someone?

Select Tribute Gift

Gift Notes

The headline does not communicate the value of donating.

Body copy has no value proposition to express why you should give.

In the example on the left, the donation page copy utilized copy to express reasons why one should give. The organization also used clear, tangible gift handles to highlight the value of each donation amount.

## An Experiment on Donation Page Copy

In this experiment, the organization had little to no copy on its original donation page. It had a headline asking people to give, but no additional information as to why they should give, what the need was, or how the gift would be used.

In the treatment, this organization added significant copy articulating the organization's core value proposition. In other words, they answered this question: *"Why should an ideal donor give to you, rather than some other organization, or even at all?"*

**This additional copy led to a 116% increase in donations on the page.**



See the full experiment



## Minimal Donation Page Copy

EXPLORE TGC US EDITION

EDITORIAL PODCASTS EVENTS ABOUT US DONATE TO TGC

### Amplify the Gospel Online by Making a Gift Today!

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE?

\$10 \$20 \$50 \$100 Other

☐ MAKE THIS A MONTHLY GIFT

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

NAME

PHONE NUMBER

EMAIL

☐ I AM REPRESENTING AN ORGANIZATION

CARD NUMBER

EXPIRATION DATE

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE AND ZIP CODE

GIVE NOW

GivingFuel

**CHECK**  
The Gospel Coalition  
P.O. Box 170346  
Austin, Texas  
78717

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
2020 Annual Report  
2021 Annual Report

**QUESTIONS?**  
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Every dollar you give reaches 10 people around the globe with gospel-centered resources that encourage believers, strengthen the church, and provide hope to the searching.

TGC

The Gospel Coalition supports the church by providing resources that are trusted and timely, winsome and wise, and centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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## Donation Page Copy Articulating Value Proposition

INTERACTIVE MODE

EXPLORE TGC

### Thank you for your interest in making a gift today. It will help share gospel-centered resources with believers and churches around the globe!

We are committed to equipping the church to grow wise, faithful Christian disciples in a chaotic age.

But in order to do this, we rely on support from believers like you, who care about bringing gospel light to the internet and helping people think wisely and biblically.

When you make a gift to TGC today, you will help:

- Provide articles, podcasts, videos, and more that will encourage others to know the gospel and connect it to all areas of life
- Support believers in a culture growing increasingly hostile towards Christianity
- Provide gospel-centered resources to our 9 million+ readers outside the U.S. who access TGC through our Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Spanish, and other regional based websites
- Help believers think carefully and Christianly about the complexities and challenges of a rapidly changing culture

If you're willing to help us encourage believers, strengthen the church, and provide hope for the searching, please make your gift now using the secure form below:

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE?

\$10 \$20 \$50 \$100 Other

☐ MAKE THIS A MONTHLY GIFT

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

NAME

PHONE NUMBER

EMAIL

☐ I AM REPRESENTING AN ORGANIZATION

CARD NUMBER

EXPIRATION DATE

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE AND ZIP CODE

GIVE NOW

GivingFuel

Every dollar you give will reach 10 people around the globe with gospel-centered resources!



## Key Finding

One-off tactics have minimal impact on long-term retention. But *donation page copy can greatly improve performance at the point of conversion.*

# Value Proposition Scoring

*How strong is the value proposition on the donation page?*

While we often score the value proposition on 4 primary elements, **a value proposition is only as effective as the sum of its parts**. You might provide incredible clarity about what is going to happen with my donation, but if there's no appeal, no one will donate. The weighted overall score helps show the overall effectiveness of the value proposition messaging present on the donation page.

Let's look next to see how strong these donation page value propositions scored.

## Combined Value Proposition Scores

Overall	High	Mid	Low
1.7	1.6	1.8	1.7

Scores by Retention Performance Tier

Animal Welfare & Environment	Arts, Culture, & Humanities	Education	Faith-Based	Health	Human Services	Int'l Affairs & Public Safety	Public Policy & Advocacy
2	2.1	1.7	1.7	1.5	1.7	1.5	1.8

Scores by Vertical

\$100M	\$50M-\$100M	\$10M-\$50M	\$5M-\$10M	\$1M-\$5M
1.8	1.9	1.7	1.7	1.7

Scores by Annual Revenue

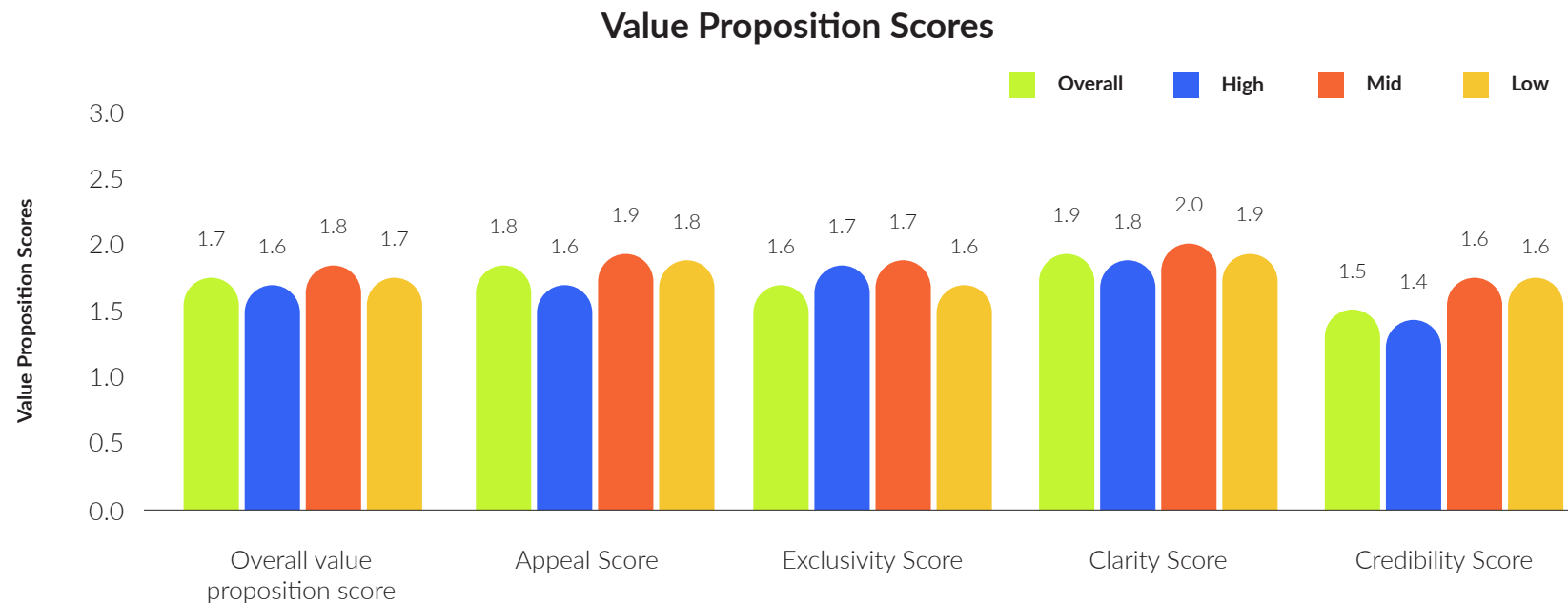


# Comparing Value Proposition to Donor Retention

The **average overall value proposition score for this sample of organizations was 1.7 out of 3**. While higher revenue organizations tended to perform slightly better, the difference was marginal. When looking at vertical performances, *Arts, Culture, & Humanities* organizations and *Animal Welfare, Environment & Agricultural* organizations tended to score the highest.

Overall, there is a tremendous amount of room for improvement when it comes to articulating the core reasons why a donor would give on the donation page.

Common reasons for low scores include little to no copy on the donation page, vague language, and no intentional efforts to increase credibility testimonials, stories, quotes, or other 3rd-party validation.



# An Experiment on Value Proposition

In this experiment, the organization had 3 different versions of copy on a dear reader appeal on their article pages.

**In version A**, the organization used statements expressing that the reader would not be bombarded with "negative views and agendas" but they would only receive messages about "truth and hope."

**In version B**, they used the approach of exclusivity by sharing how "it's reporting that you aren't likely to see anywhere else — information you've relied on for many years."

**In version C**, they used the same approach of exclusivity, but also included a statement "that only 1% of readers give to make the network available."

After running an a/b/c test, they saw a 77% increase in donations using the approach of exclusivity and including the 1% statistic. Donors were more inclined to donate when positioning it as something that can be taken away if funding is depleted and that they are the only news outlet that can provide the information in which the donor is interested.



**Dear Reader,**

Can you imagine facing the challenges and misinformation of last year without the faith-focused articles, stories, and reports you rely on from CBN News? Truth and the Christian Perspective would be missing.

We don't bombard you with negative views, secular agendas, skewed statistics, or reporters' political viewpoints. We're here to tell you the truth, and to give you hope. And every CBN News story that you read and watch relies on the generosity of readers like you.

Will you make a special gift right now to help ensure that CBN News will be here for you and your family? Your gift will make a huge difference to our team.

Thank you! Please click the secure link below to make your gift.

[Give Now](#)

*Comparison to other news outlets with language of negativity*

**Dear Reader,**

Can you imagine facing the challenges and misinformation of last year without the faith-focused articles, stories, and reports you rely on from CBN News? Truth and the Christian Perspective would be missing.

Our award-winning journalists give you 24/7 breaking news, U.S. and international news, health, and Christian entertainment news. It's reporting that you aren't likely to see anywhere else—information you've relied on for many years! And the CBN News stories you read and watch depend on the generosity of readers like you.

Will you make a special gift right now to help ensure that CBN News will be here for you and your family? Your gift will make a big difference to our team.

Thank you! Please click the secure link below to make your gift.

[Give Now](#)

*Comparison to other news outlets with exclusive language*

**Dear Reader,**

Can you imagine facing the challenges and misinformation of last year without the faith-focused articles, stories, and reports you rely on from CBN News? Truth and the Christian Perspective would be missing.

Our award-winning journalists give you 24/7 breaking news, U.S. and international news, health, and Christian entertainment news. It's reporting that you aren't likely to see anywhere else—information you've relied on for many years! And the CBN News stories you read and watch depend on the generosity of readers like you.

Will you make a special gift right now to help ensure that CBN News will be here for years to come? You might be surprised to discover that less than 1% of our readers give to keep CBN News available. Whatever you can afford, please give a gift today to keep this exclusive, award-winning Christian reporting available to you and your family!

Thank you. Please click the secure link below to make your gift.

[Give Now](#)

*Comparison to other news outlets with exclusive language and statistic*



See the full experiment




**77%**

In Donations

# Key Finding

Every organization — regardless of size and vertical — has *a tremendous opportunity to improve the strength of its value proposition.*



# **Part III: The 4 Elements of an Effective Value Proposition**

A deeper dive into the how 211 organizations scored across each key element

# Appeal

*How badly does your ideal donor want to make this impact?*

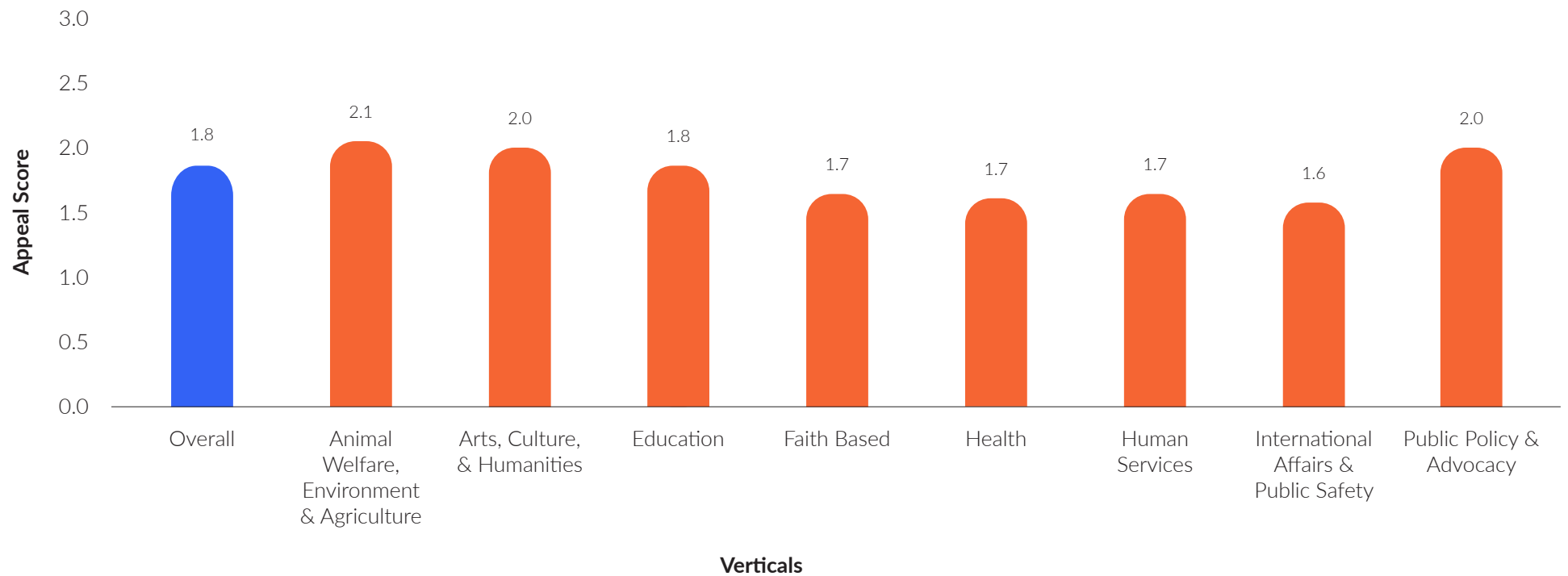
If your messaging around why someone should give to you doesn't align with their values, core beliefs, and motivations — then you're going to have a hard time getting them to give. **One of the biggest challenges to writing effective copy is getting the appeal of your value proposition right.**

The only people who can tell you if the appeal of your value proposition is effective are your donors. Which is why we always have to test our copy and messaging.

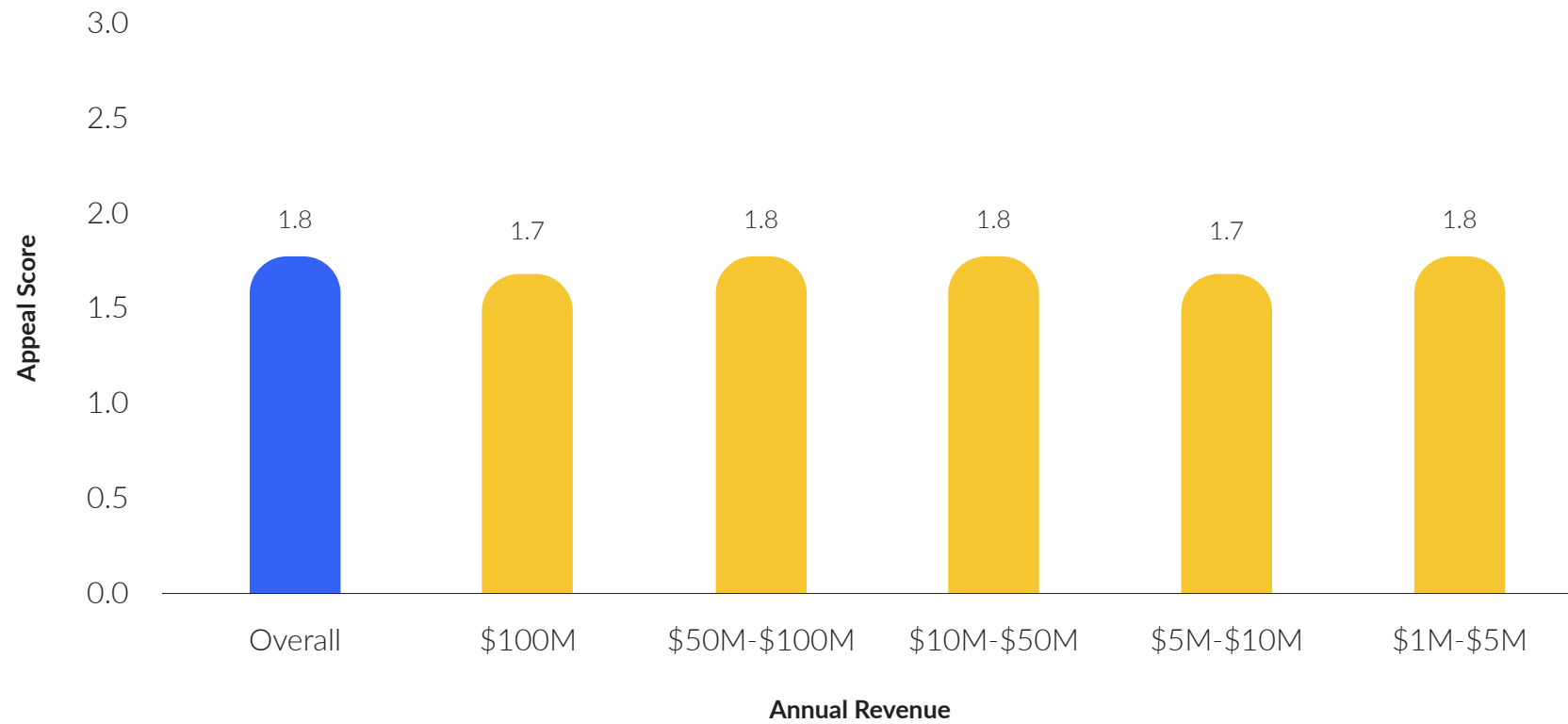
While our researchers can't determine the most effective appeal for every organization in this study - they did score the perceived strength of the appeal on a three-point scale. A 1 means there are little to no reasons why someone should give on the page. A 2 means there are some reasons to give, but they might be vague or generic. A 3 means that the reasons to give appear to be aligned around a unique set of shared values and missional focus.

## Benchmarking the Appeal

Appeal Score by Vertical



## Appeal Score by Annual Revenue





# An Experiment on Appeal

In this experiment, you see 4 different versions of copy on a giving widget. When someone clicks the "Donate" button, they're taken to a donation page to complete their gift.

This organization had 4 different ideas of what kind of messaging would be most appealing to their potential donors:

**The straight-forward version:** "Honor Kade and Kallan with a donation to CaringBridge. You make Kade and Kallan's website possible."

**The reverse order:** "Help Kade stay connected to family and friends. Make a donation to CaringBridge in honor of Kade."

**Impact Focused:** "Help Kade stay connected to family and friends. Make a donation to CaringBridge to keep Kade's site up and running."

**Emotional Appeal:** "Show your love and support for Kade. Make a donation to keep Kade's site up and running."

Each one of these messaging angles touches on a different potential motivation. They each answer the "How badly do I want to make this impact?" question differently.

After running an a/b/c/d test, they saw **a 67% increase in donations using the Emotional Appeal messaging angle.** Donors were more likely to give when the donation appeal was framed around the outcome of showing love and support for Kade — rather than focusing too much on the function of the website.





Honor Kade and Kallan with a donation to CaringBridge.  
You make Kade and Kallan's website possible.

Donate

*The Straight-Forward Version*



Kade's CaringBridge site is supported by generous donors like you.  
Make a donation to CaringBridge in honor of Kade

Donate

*The Reverse Order*



Help Kade stay connected to family and friends.  
Make a donation to CaringBridge to keep Kade's site up and running.

Donate

*The Impact Focused*



Show your love and support for Kade.  
Make a donation to CaringBridge to keep Kade's site up and running.

Donate

*The Emotional Appeal*



**67%**  
In Donations



See the full experiment

## Exclusivity

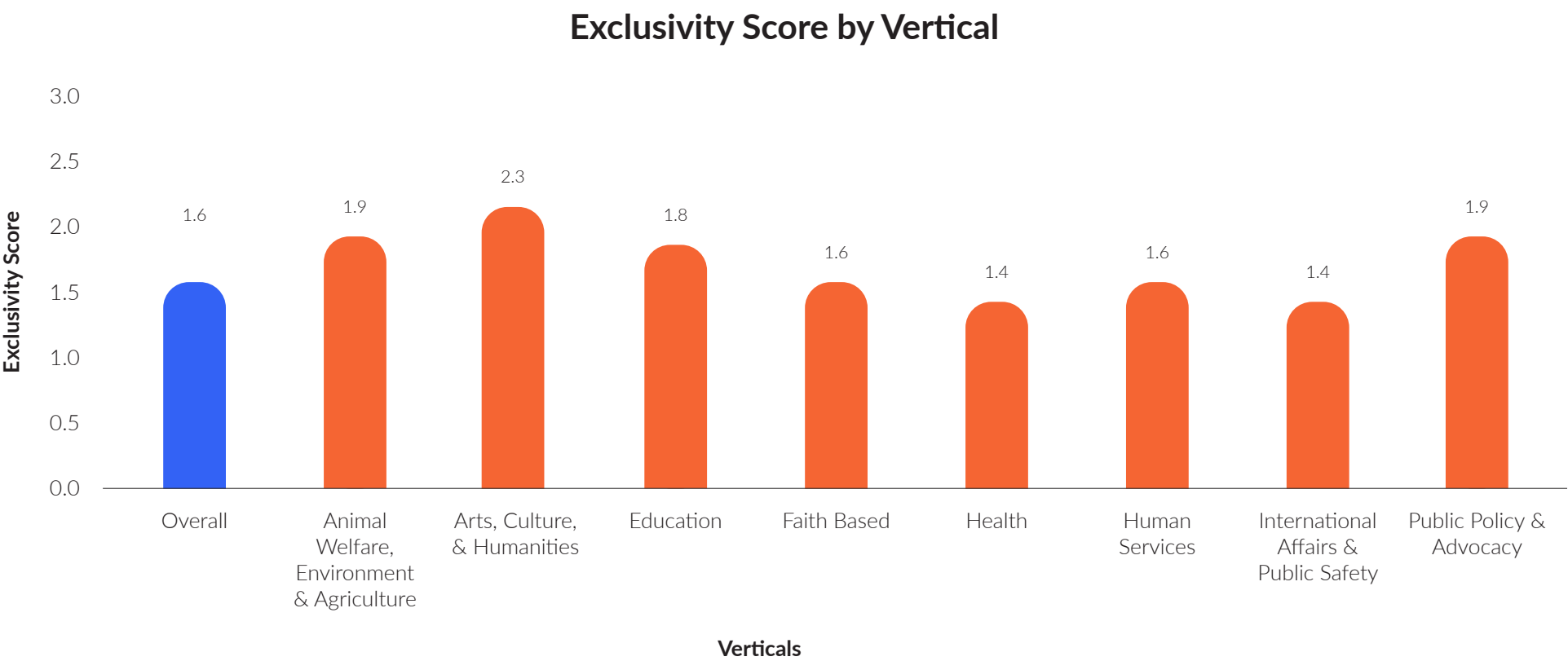
*Can your ideal donor make this kind of impact somewhere (or anywhere) else?*

Countless organizations are vying for support from donors. And like it or not, you're competing with them for your donors' attention. In addition to having a compelling appeal, **your value proposition also has to be unique and exclusive.**

What does it mean for your value proposition to be exclusive?

Our researchers scored each value proposition for its exclusivity on a three-point scale. A 1 means that a donor could potentially make this kind of impact at any other similar organization. A 2 means that a donor could make this impact at some other similar organizations. A 3 means that a donor can only make this impact at your organization.

# Benchmarking Exclusivity



## Exclusivity Score by Annual Revenue



# An Experiment on Exclusivity

When someone considers giving to you, they're not reading your donation page in isolation. In the back of their mind, donors know that other nonprofits do similar work to you. To earn their donation, you need to explain your unique approach to impacting your cause.

In the experiment below, you can see how CaringBridge used exclusivity to strengthen its value proposition.

**In version A**, this giving widget used generic language to make their donation ask:

- "Make a WonderFull Tribute Donation" — I can make a tribute donation to nearly any other organization.
- "Connect people with love and support" — Almost any other organization can say they connect people

with love and support.

**In version B**, however, they used more specific and exclusive language to make their donation ask:

- "Honor Deborah With Your Tribute Donation" — A website visitor who has been looking at Deborah's page is only able to honor Deborah with a donation here.
- "Make sure the website that brings them joy... stays up and running" — A donor can only make this specific impact by giving to CaringBridge.

By making their donation appeal more exclusive - focusing on an impact that can only make through CaringBridge — **they saw an 86% increase in donations.**

See the full experiment




[www.nextafter.com/experiments/how-clarifying-the-call-to-action-affects-donor-conversion/](http://www.nextafter.com/experiments/how-clarifying-the-call-to-action-affects-donor-conversion/)




*"Make a WonderFull Tribute Donation"*

**Make a WonderFull Tribute Donation**

Honor Deborah with a Tribute donation and help CaringBridge connect people with love and support when they need it most.



Add a message to your Tribute donation




255 characters remaining

**I'll Help Now**


*"Honor Deborah With Your Tribute Donation"*

**Honor Deborah with Your Tribute Donation**


Make a gift to CaringBridge in honor of Deborah to make sure that the website that brings them joy on a daily basis stays up and running this holiday season.



Add a message to your Tribute donation



255 characters remaining

**86%**  
In Donor Conversion

**Make a Tribute Donation Now**

# Clarity

*How quickly and easily does your ideal donor understand what you're communicating?*

You can have the most inspiring cause in the world and a unique way of approaching the issue. But **if you don't use clear language, potential donors won't understand.**

A few common questions that can help bolster clarity in your copy are:

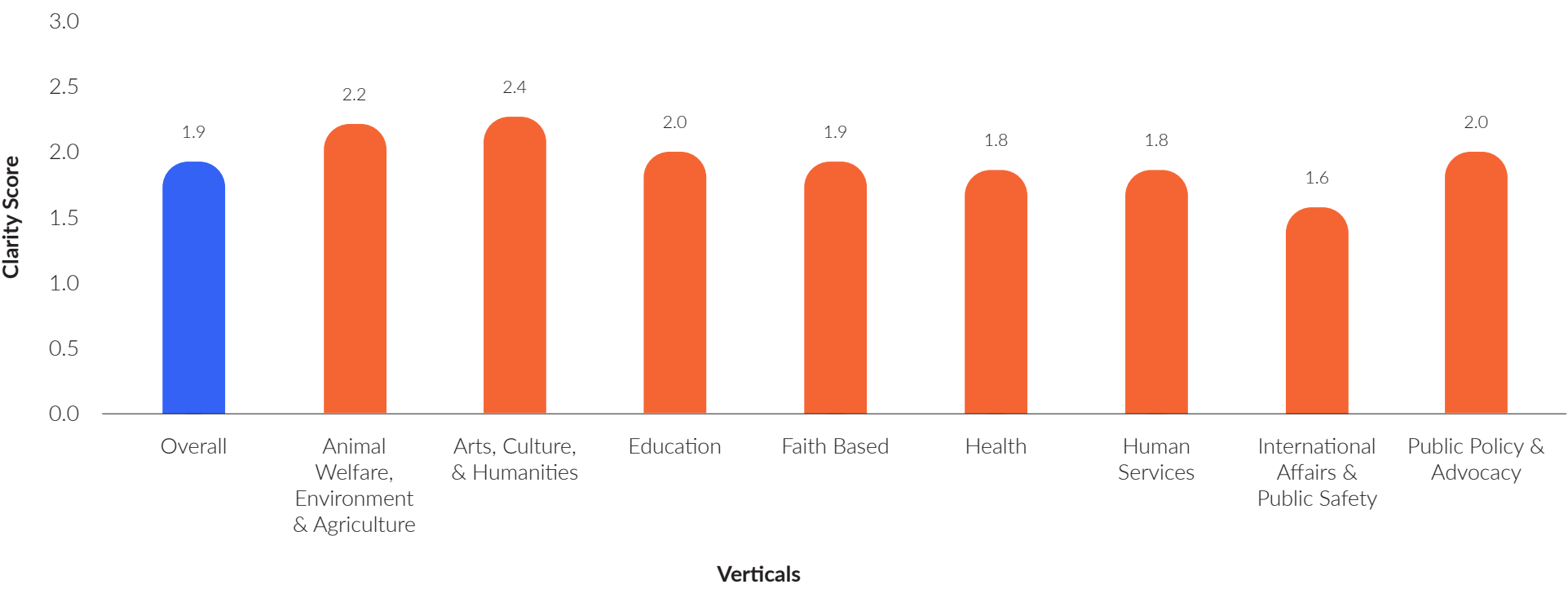
- How much time does it take to understand the message conveyed in the content?
- Is there a clear call-to-action clearly stated in the text?
- Does your copy show donors what their money will be used for?

Our researchers scored clarity on a three-point scale, focusing on one primary question: how well do you understand what you're giving to? A 1 is little to no understanding. A 2 is some understanding. A 3 is an abundance of clarity.

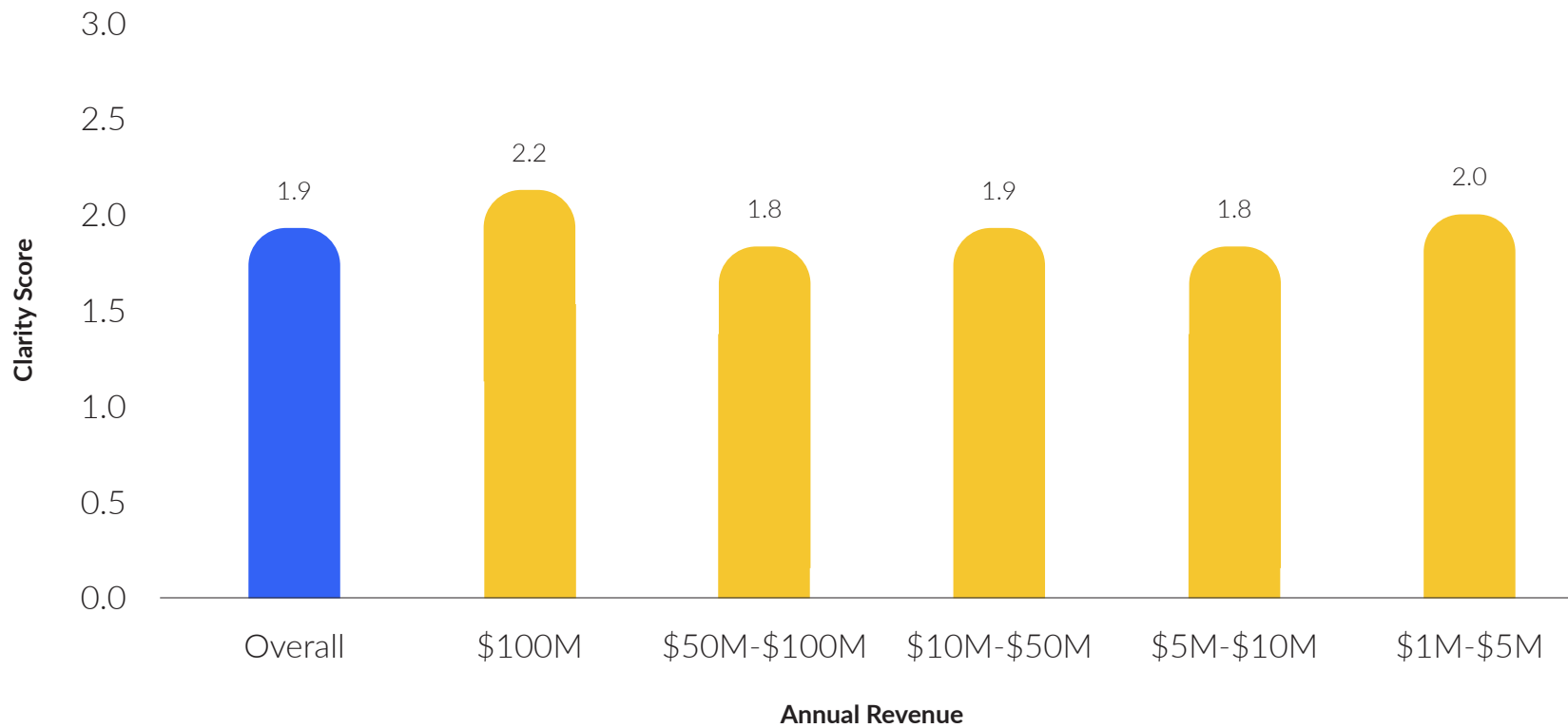


# Benchmarking Clarity

Clarity Score by Vertical



## Clarity Score by Annual Revenue



## An Experiment on Clarity

You can see in the experiment that there are 3 different versions of the call-to-action button on this ad. Each one of them has the same appeal, promising a free CD of the most recent broadcast from this nonprofit's radio programming when you donate.

They wondered if they could increase clarity on the call-to-action, and lead more people to say "Yes" and donate.

Here are the 3 calls-to-action:

- **Version A:** Give Now

- **Version B:** Get Your CD For a Gift of Any Amount Here »
- **Version C:** For a Gift of Any Amount, Get Your CD Here »

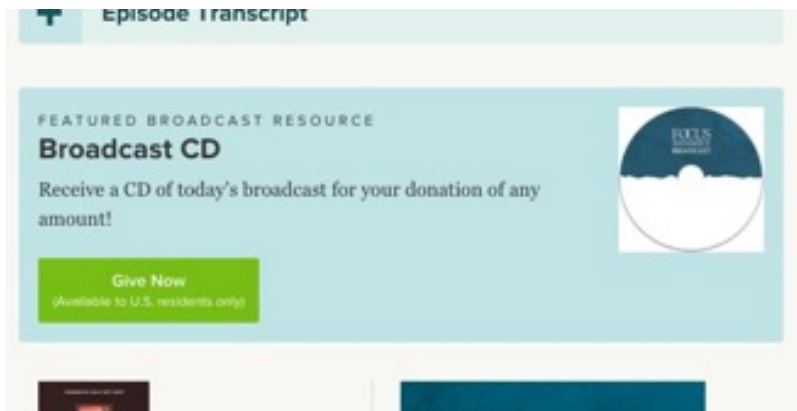
Version B led to an 18% increase in donations by providing the most clarity out of the 3 calls-to-action. It addressed the primary appeal upfront: "Get Your CD..." and clarified exactly how to get it "...For a Gift of Any Amount."

See the full experiment

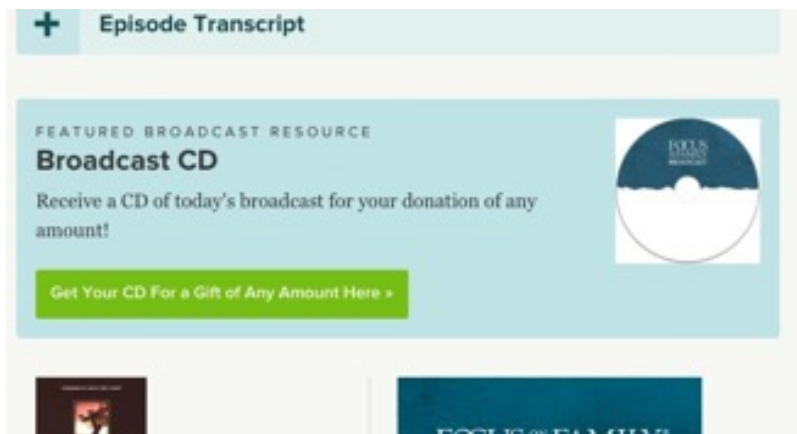


[www.nextafter.com/experiments/how-clarifying-the-call-to-action-affects-donor-conversion/](http://www.nextafter.com/experiments/how-clarifying-the-call-to-action-affects-donor-conversion/)

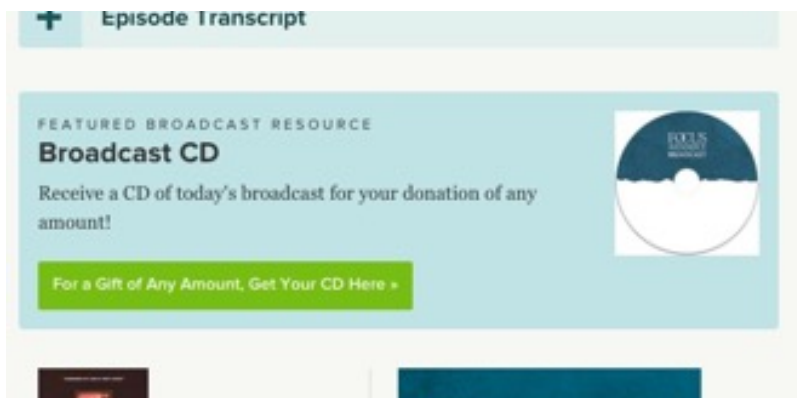




*"Give Now" Donate Button*



*"Get Your CD For a Gift of Any Amount Here."*



*"For a Gift of Any Amount, Get Your CD Here."*

# Credibility

*Does your ideal donor believe and trust you?*

**The credibility of your message — or lack thereof — can make or break the strength of your value proposition.**

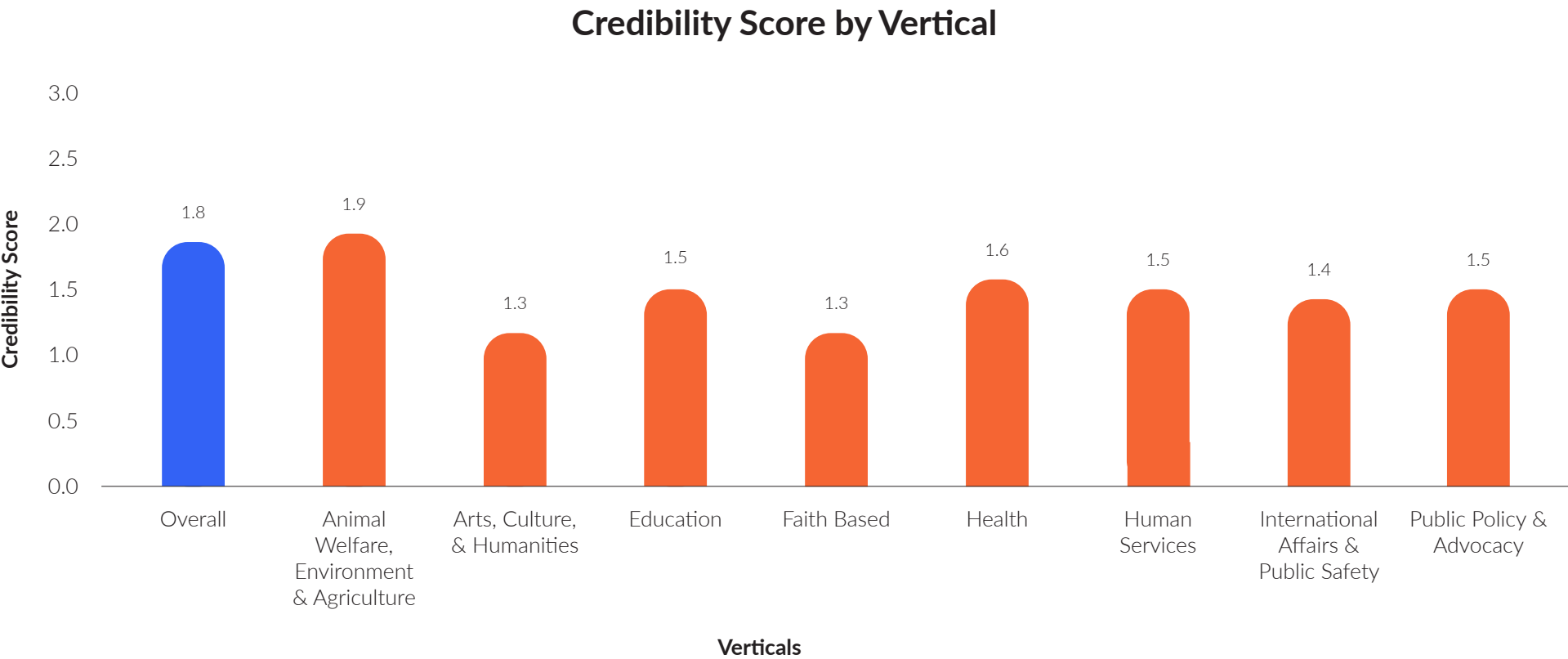
A donor might love your cause, think that your approach is unique and exclusive, and have a clear understanding of why you're asking them to give. But what if they don't trust you?

Some ways to boost credibility and trust on a donation page or in an appeal include:

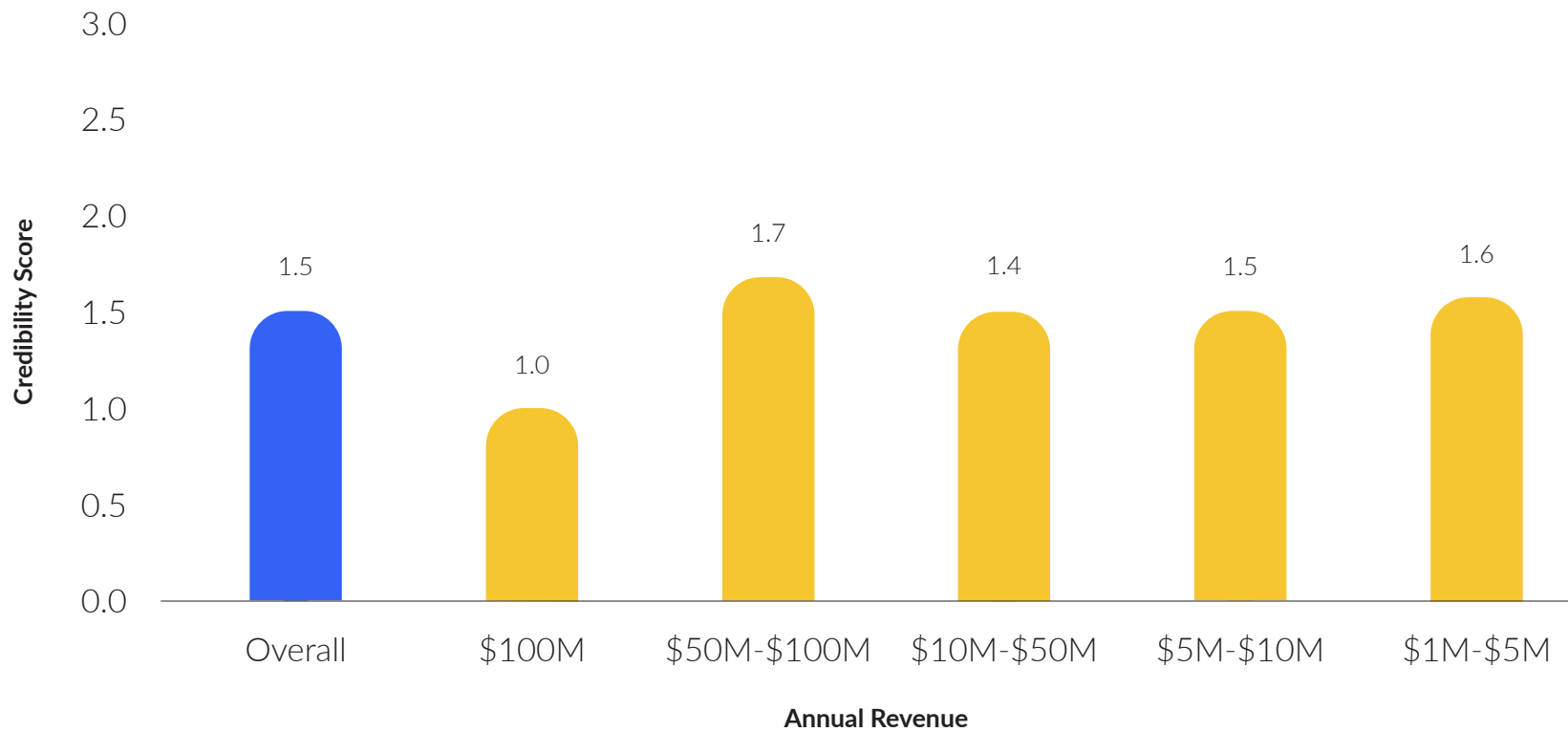
- Donor testimonies
- Testimonials from people impacted by your work
- Narrative and story-driven appeals
- A third-party credibility like Charity Navigator or GuideStar seals near the donate button

Our researchers scored credibility on a three-point scale. A 1 does not attempt to build credibility. A 2 makes some attempt. A 3 has clear language, copy, or other elements on the page to help increase trust.

# Benchmarking Credibility



## Credibility Score by Annual Revenue



# An Experiment on Credibility

In this experiment, you can see how something as simple as a testimonial can build credibility and make a meaningful impact on donations.

Version A and Version B of this experiment had the same exact design, layout, donation form, images, and reasons to give. The difference was that version B added a testimonial illustrating the value of the gift that a donor would receive after giving.

Getting someone else who has benefited from the organization to share **a testimonial helped build trust and credibility - leading to a 27% increase in donations.**




See the full experiment


[www.nextafter.com/experiments/how-the-addition-of-a-readers-review-for-a-giving-premium-impacts-donor-conversion-2/](http://www.nextafter.com/experiments/how-the-addition-of-a-readers-review-for-a-giving-premium-impacts-donor-conversion-2/)





## Donation Page-No Testimonial





### Teach kids about God's goodness

with a new picture book by Chris Tomlin!

Let's instill God's truth in the hearts and minds of the children in our lives, taking every opportunity to point them to Jesus!

With fantastic colorful pictures of Tucker the Bear and his friends, *Good Good Father* teaches children about their loving heavenly Father, and their identity in Christ.

Nieces, nephews, kids, grandkids, and neighbors—are there children in your life that you can reach with this good news?

At Harvest, it's our passion to share God's Word with young and old alike, and your donation to this ministry allows us to reach more people each and every day through:

- Radio
- Television
- Crusade evangelism
- Daily Devotional e-mails
- Sermon webcasts and archives
- Online training
- Harvest America
- And more!

When you make a financial gift to Harvest Ministries today, we will send you a copy of Chris Tomlin's simple yet profound picture book for children, *Good Good Father*.

**Make your gift using the secure form below:**

\$25

\$35

\$50

\$100


\$250

\$

Your contribution supports Harvest Ministries.


☒ Get *Good Good Father* now with your donation:


CONTINUE



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## Donation Page-With Testimonial





### Teach kids about God's goodness

with a new picture book by Chris Tomlin!

Let's instill God's truth in the hearts and minds of the children in our lives, taking every opportunity to point them to Jesus!

With fantastic colorful pictures of Tucker the Bear and his friends, *Good Good Father* teaches children about their loving heavenly Father, and their identity in Christ.

Nieces, nephews, kids, grandkids, and neighbors—are there children in your life that you can reach with this good news?

Here is what one reader had to say about *Good Good Father*:

*As a grandmother, I want my grandchildren to know that our God and King is not distant, but He is a good good Father who delights in their wanting to be with Him and know His great love for them. I love how simple stories like this one can teach young children powerful truths about our good good Father!*

At Harvest, it's our passion to share God's Word with young and old alike, and your donation to this ministry allows us to reach more people each and every day through:

- Radio
- Television
- Crusade evangelism
- Daily Devotional e-mails
- Sermon webcasts and archives
- Online training
- Harvest America
- And more!

When you make a financial gift to Harvest Ministries today, we will send you a copy of Chris Tomlin's simple yet profound picture book for children, *Good Good Father*.

**Make your gift using the secure form below:**

\$25

\$35

\$50

\$100


\$250

\$

Your contribution supports Harvest Ministries.

☒ Get *Good Good Father* now with your donation:

CONTINUE



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**27%**  
In Donor Conversion

## Next Steps and Conclusion

Driving high donor retention rates is more complicated than one-off tactics and strategies. It appears that organizations that have a combination of strong values alignment with their donors, as well as an intentional investment in building a recurring giving program, have the best chance of securing high donor retention rates.

The one-off strategies around improving the value proposition on a donation page, although not directly correlated to donor retention rates, are a key factor in influencing someone to give right at the point of conversion.

Taking all these findings into account, we'd recommend 3 main next steps for any nonprofit organization that wants to increase retention rates:

1. **Invest in developing an organizational value proposition** that is strong in its appeals to ideal donors, unique from other organizations, clear in its language, and credible in its presentation.
2. **Train and equip your staff to communicate** this value proposition across channels including donation pages, email communications, direct mail, advertising, and more.
3. **Develop a proactive strategy to either build or expand your recurring donor program.** By nature, recurring donors tend to have higher retention and value than one-time donors.

The combination of a **strong value proposition** at the point of conversion, **value-focused messaging** woven throughout your communication, and an **active recurring donor** base will put you on the path to higher retention rates and more sustainable revenue down the road.

# Additional Resource

## How to Write Your Nonprofit Value Proposition to Increase Donations

Crafting a compelling value proposition involves understanding your donors and their preferences. This article on **4 Proven Ways to Help Donors Understand Why They Should Give** provides specific and tactical pointers to refine and improve your value proposition.

In the article, you'll dive deeper into using appeal, exclusivity, clarity, and credibility to refine your value proposition and test into more effective copy and messaging.



A screenshot of the NextAfter website showing an article titled "Nonprofit Value Proposition: 4 Proven Ways to Help Donors Understand Why They Should Give". The article is published by Nathan Hill. The content discusses the importance of a value proposition for nonprofits and provides a table of contents with six items: 1. A Value Proposition is Not Your Mission Statement, 2. A Value Proposition is Not an Incentive, 3. #1 Appeal - Helping donors understand why they should want to give, 4. #2 Clarity - Communicating your value proposition using clear language, 5. #3 Exclusivity - Setting your nonprofit's work apart from others, and 6. #4 Credibility - Building trust through your copy and design. The article also includes a quote: "Why should I give to you, rather than some other organization, or at all?" and a call to action to activate a course on nonprofit value proposition.

# Additional Resources

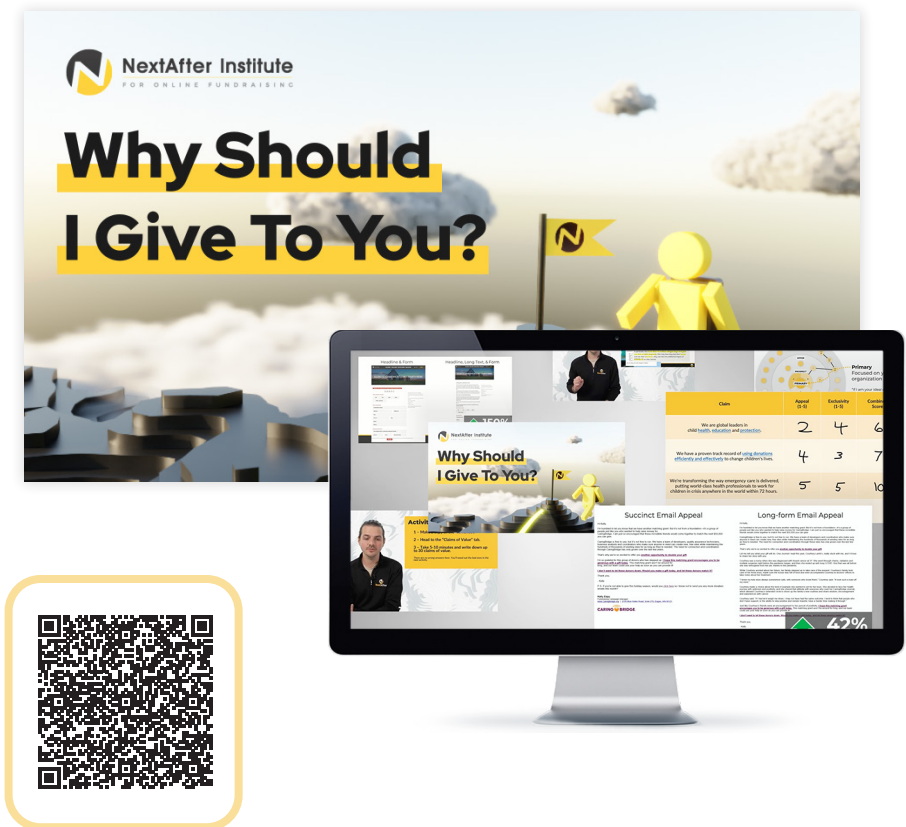
## Why Should I Give to You? | Online Course

This 6 session course will walk you through a proven process for developing your organization's value proposition — including worksheets, templates, and guidelines for testing your best messaging ideas to get real donor feedback.

Backed by tested and proven tactics and examples, you'll learn:

- The 4 elements of an effective value proposition
- A proven process for developing and testing your value proposition
- How to contextualize your message for the right people at the right time

Activate the **Why Should I Give to You? course** to improve your value proposition and increase giving.





## About NextAfter

NextAfter helps nonprofits grow their digital fundraising.

Combining the perpetual learning of a fundraising research lab, the practical application of a digital-first agency, and the rigorous instruction of a training institute - we're on a mission to decode what works in fundraising, make it accessible to as many nonprofits as possible, and unleash the most generous generation in the history of the world.

If you want to **learn more about how to partner with NextAfter** to develop and grow a digital-first fundraising program, you can learn more and get in touch at [nextafter.com/let-us-help](https://nextafter.com/let-us-help).





## Special Thanks to Virtuous

Special thanks to Virtuous for helping us assess the donor retention rates of the organizations represented in this study. Their data contribution played a critical role in helping pinpoint how impactful the value proposition can be on donor retention.

You can learn more about Virtuous at [virtuous.org](https://virtuous.org)





