



Donor Structure & Relational Giving

Evidence from a small, zero-staff nonprofit whose donor architecture resembles major gift institutions — and what it reveals about the future of philanthropic sustainability.

- 2023–2025 Dataset
- 116 Donors
- Pareto 80/20 Analysis
- The GIVE Study

\$2,420,154
TOTAL RAISED

45.1%
TOP 9 DONORS' SHARE

\$6,870
MEDIAN GIFT

§ 1 INTRODUCTION

A Predictable Pattern, An Exceptional Result

Philanthropic revenue in most nonprofits follows a predictable pattern of donor concentration — yet GOSUMEC's structure reveals dynamics more commonly seen in university endowment campaigns. This report presents a single-organization case study, illustrating how relational donor networks can shape philanthropic revenue structures in small nonprofits.

CONTEXT

Traditional fundraising literature often references the **Pareto principle** — roughly 80% of funding from 20% of donors. More recent research in major gift philanthropy suggests an even stronger **90/10 dynamic**, particularly in organizations driven by relationship-based giving rather than campaigns.

The GOSUMEC dataset provides a compelling case study of this dynamic within a small, **zero-staff nonprofit** raising over \$2.4 million across just 116 donors.

KEY METRICS

\$20,863

Mean gift — far above most small nonprofits

116

DONORS

\$6,870

MEDIAN GIFT

\$500

SMALLEST GIFT

\$200K

LARGEST GIFT

§ 2 DONOR TIER STRUCTURE

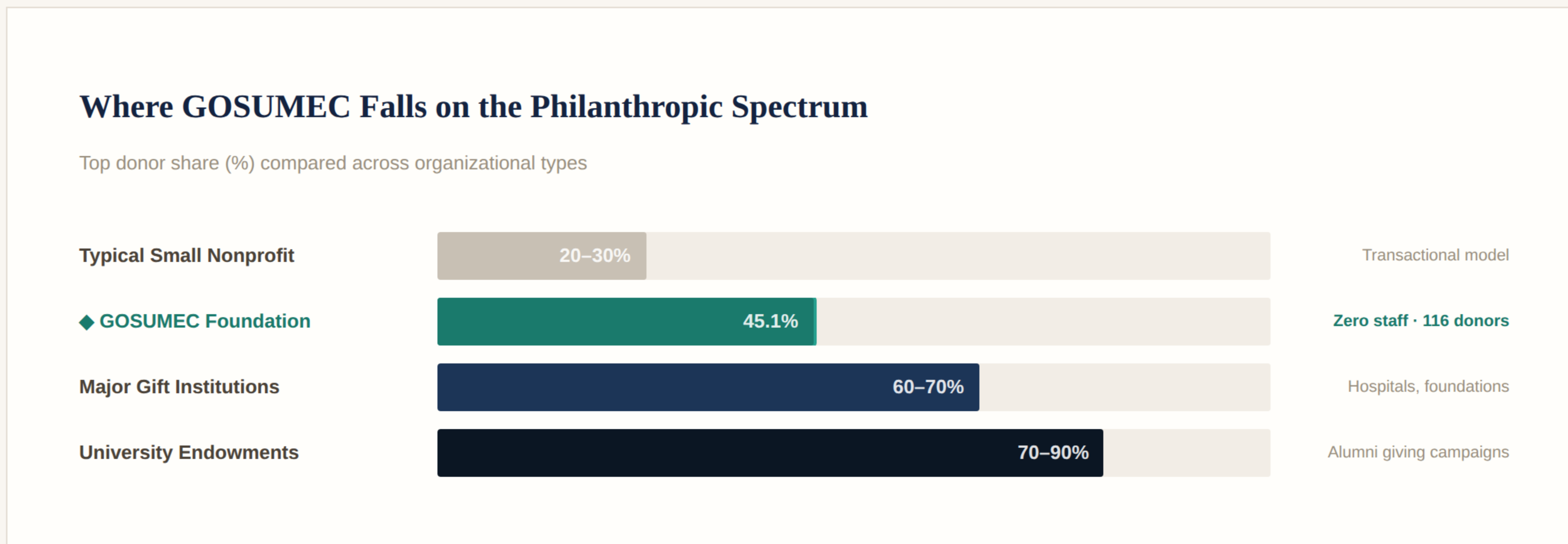
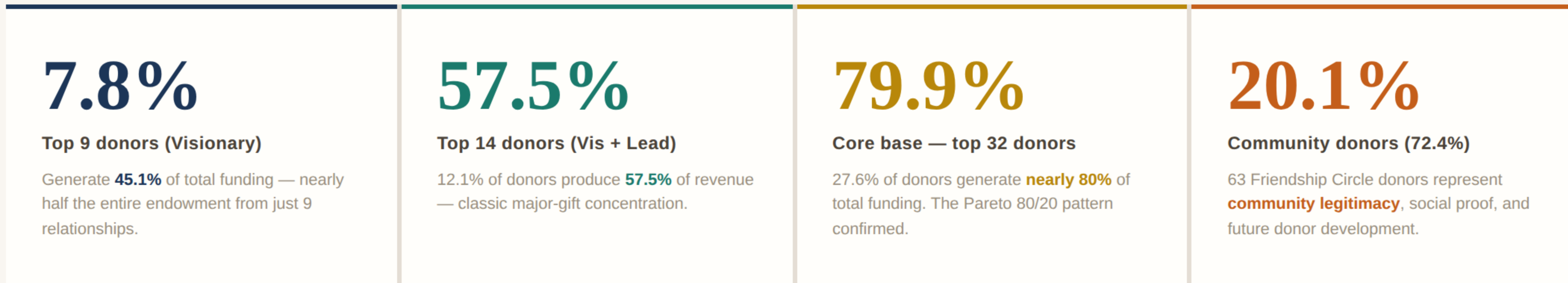
Five Giving Circles, One Philanthropic Architecture

Donors were organized into five giving circles, each representing a distinct level of commitment to the mission.

CIRCLE	THRESHOLD	DONORS	CONTRIBUTIONS	SHARE OF TOTAL	BAR
● Visionary	\$100,000+	9	\$1,091,219	45.1%	<div style="width: 45.1%;"></div>
● Leadership	\$50,000–\$99,999	5	\$300,590	12.4%	<div style="width: 12.4%;"></div>
● Benefactor	\$20,000–\$49,999	18	\$541,894	22.4%	<div style="width: 22.4%;"></div>
● Patron	\$10,000–\$19,999	21	\$259,647	10.7%	<div style="width: 10.7%;"></div>
● Friendship	Under \$10,000	63	\$226,804	9.4%	<div style="width: 9.4%;"></div>

Pareto Dynamics & Emerging 90/10 Patterns

When tiers are combined, the structure reveals concentration patterns that closely mirror major gift philanthropy at universities and hospitals.



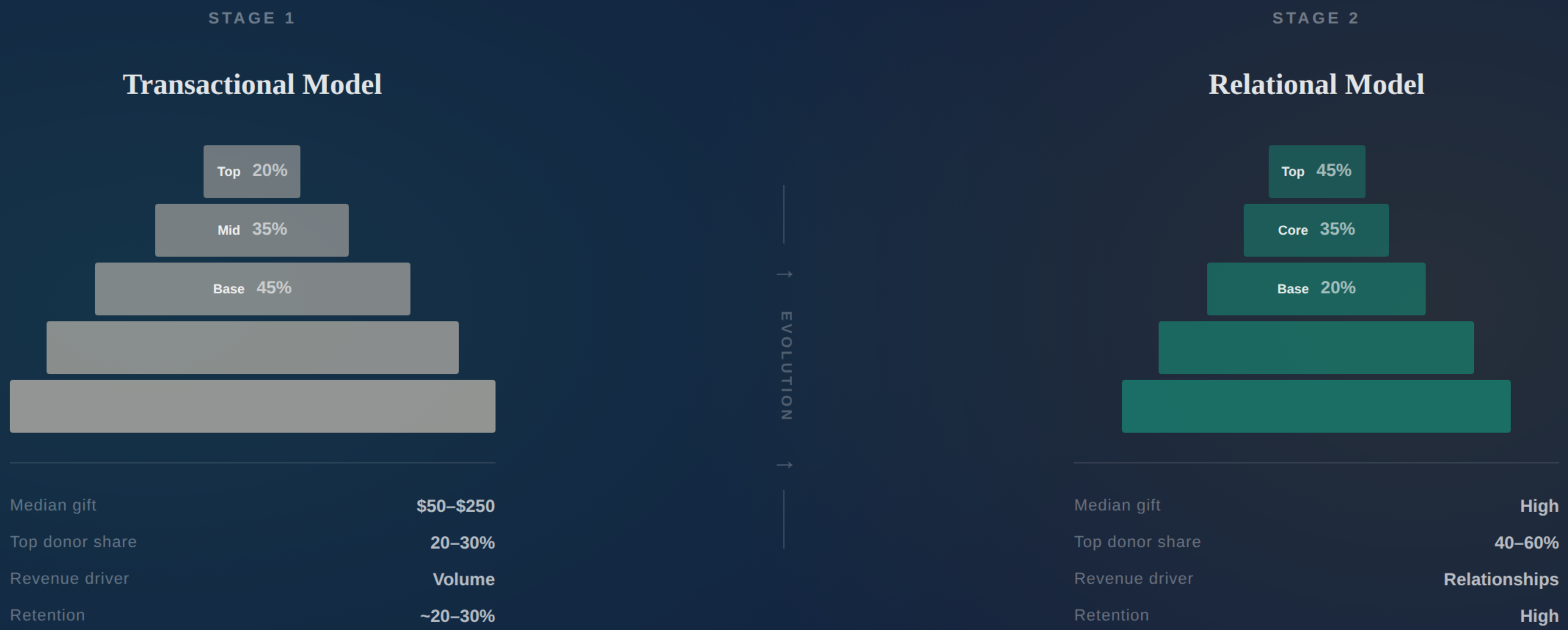
Ranges shown are approximate patterns reported in philanthropic research and may vary by sector and campaign structure.

THE GIVE STUDY · KEY INSIGHT

The top 9 donors (7.8%) contribute **45.1% of total funding**, and the top ~10% generate roughly **50–55% of all revenue** — aligning with major-gift fundraising research showing that roughly 10–15% of donors often generate about half or more of philanthropic revenue.

The Evolution of the Philanthropic Pyramid

As fundraising models shift from transactional to relational, the geometry of the donor pyramid transforms — fewer donors, deeper relationships, larger gifts.



GOSUMEC FOUNDATION — ACTUAL DISTRIBUTION



Transactional vs. Relational Philanthropy

These two models differ fundamentally in how they generate and sustain philanthropic revenue — and in the nature of the relationships they create.

Transactional Model	Relational Model
Revenue Through Volume	Revenue Through Trust
Median gift	Significantly higher
Donor retention	High — relationship-driven
Revenue structure	Concentrated
Fundraising focus	Relationship depth
Top donor share	40–60%
Revenue driver	Identity & trust
Pyramid shape	Tall & narrow

The largest tier — the **Friendship Circle (63 donors, 54% of donors, 9.4% of revenue)** — mirrors a widely observed pattern in philanthropy. Although these donors contribute a smaller share of revenue, they provide critical functions: **community legitimacy, mission visibility, social proof, and future donor development**. Their value lies primarily in community expansion rather than immediate revenue — and in a relational model, today's Friendship donor is tomorrow's Patron.

"Sustainable philanthropy in small nonprofits emerges from relational networks rather than transactional fundraising systems."

What This Means for *The GIVE Study*

The GOSUMEC dataset illustrates that philanthropic sustainability does not require a large number of donors — it requires a dense network of trusted relationships capable of producing transformational gifts.

The donor structure observed supports a central hypothesis of The GIVE Study: **This dataset suggests that relational donor networks can produce sustainable philanthropic structures, even in very small nonprofits.**

"Philanthropic sustainability does not require a large number of donors. It requires a dense network of trusted relationships capable of producing transformational gifts."

In this case, major donors share identity ties with the mission, many relationships predate the organization, and giving appears driven by alumni identity, trust, and shared purpose. This relational structure allows a small nonprofit to function like a **major gift institution without large fundraising infrastructure.**

Despite operating with **no staff** and just 116 donors, GOSUMEC behaves structurally like major-gift philanthropic systems typically associated with universities and hospitals.

The Friendship Circle — while contributing only 9.4% of revenue — plays an indispensable role in community legitimacy and mission amplification. In a relational model, these donors are not footnotes; they are the **social infrastructure** that makes transformational gifts possible.

These findings reinforce the key insight explored throughout The GIVE Study: **In this case study, relational philanthropy appears to compress the traditional fundraising pyramid, increasing both donor commitment and impact per relationship.**

PARETO CONFIRMED

27.6%

of donors generate **79.9%** of total funding — confirming the Pareto 80/20 pattern

90/10 EMERGING

~50–55%

of revenue from the **top 10%** of donors — approaching the 90/10 major gift dynamic

ZERO OVERHEAD

\$0

staff cost while structurally resembling **major gift institutions** at universities and hospitals

GOSUMEC Foundation USA

Non Sibi Sed Omnibus — Not for oneself, but for all