

Small Community Nonprofit with Low DRR

Context: A small animal shelter with a budget of \$200,000 relies heavily on local donors, many of whom give small, one-time gifts during annual pet adoption events. The shelter has limited staff and uses a basic CRM (e.g., Little Green Light) for donor management.

Starting DRR (2024): 30% overall (below the industry average of 35-45%), with 15% for first-time donors and 50% for repeat donors.

Challenge: Many first-time donors give during emotional adoption events but don't return, leading to high attrition.

Growth benchmark: Increase overall DRR to 35% by the end of 2025 (a 5% increase) and first-time donor DRR to 20% (a 5% increase).

Strategies:

- Welcome series for first-time donors:** Send a three-part email series within 30 days of a first gift, including a thank-you, a story about a rescued animal, and an invitation to a shelter tour.
- Personalized thank-yous:** Train volunteers to send handwritten thank-you notes for gifts of \$50+ within one week.
- Impact updates:** Share quarterly newsletters with photos and stories of adopted pets to demonstrate donor impact.
- Recurring giving prompt:** Add a "Become a Monthly Paws Pal" option to donation forms and follow up with first-time donors via email to encourage monthly giving.

Tracking methods:

- Use Little Green Light to calculate DRR annually and quarterly, filtering for first-time donors (tagged as "New 2024") and repeat donors.
- Export donor data to Google Sheets to track retention by acquisition channel (e.g., adoption events vs. online).

- Monitor email open rates and recurring gift sign-ups to assess strategy effectiveness.

Progress (Mid-2025):

- By Q2 2025, first-time donor DRR increases to 18% due to the welcome series and thank-you notes.
- Overall DRR reaches 33%, driven by 10 new monthly donors (80% retention rate).

Outcome (End of 2025):

- Overall DRR reaches 35%, meeting the target.
- First-time donor DRR hits 20%, with 15% of new donors joining the monthly giving program.
- Revenue stability improves, reducing the need for costly acquisition campaigns by 10%.

Takeaway: Small nonprofits with low DRR can achieve significant growth by focusing on low-cost, high-impact stewardship like personalized communication and recurring giving prompts.