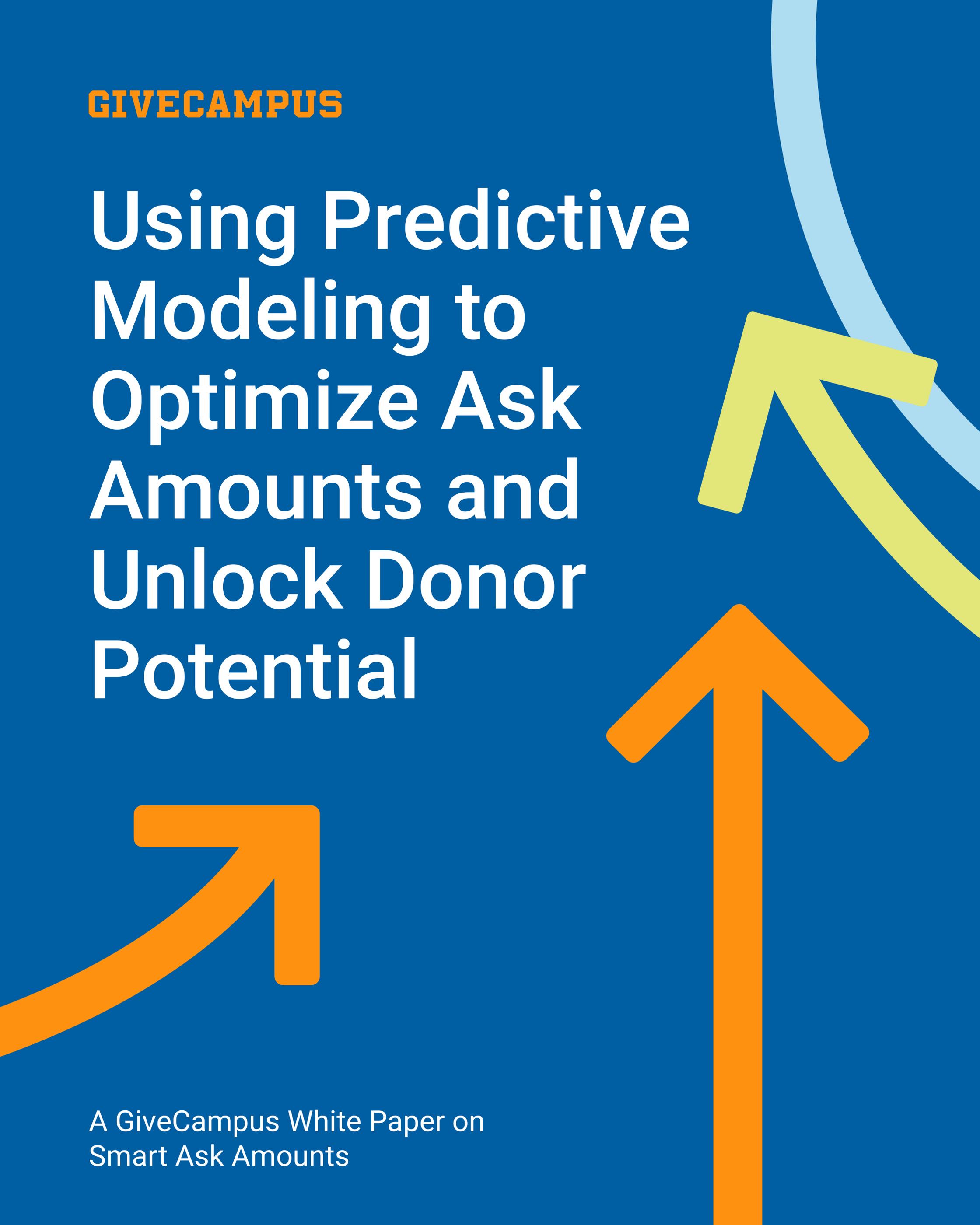


GIVECAMPUS

Using Predictive Modeling to Optimize Ask Amounts and Unlock Donor Potential

A GiveCampus White Paper on Smart Ask Amounts



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About GiveCampus

GiveCampus is a comprehensive educational fundraising platform that helps colleges, universities, and independent schools raise more money from more donors with less effort.

Our mission is to advance the quality, the affordability, and the accessibility of education. Since 2015, 1,500+ educational institutions have raised more than \$7 billion on GiveCampus. Today, our platform includes capabilities that help fundraisers execute workflows that are central to every stage of the fundraising process and impact every type of donor at every level of the donor pyramid.

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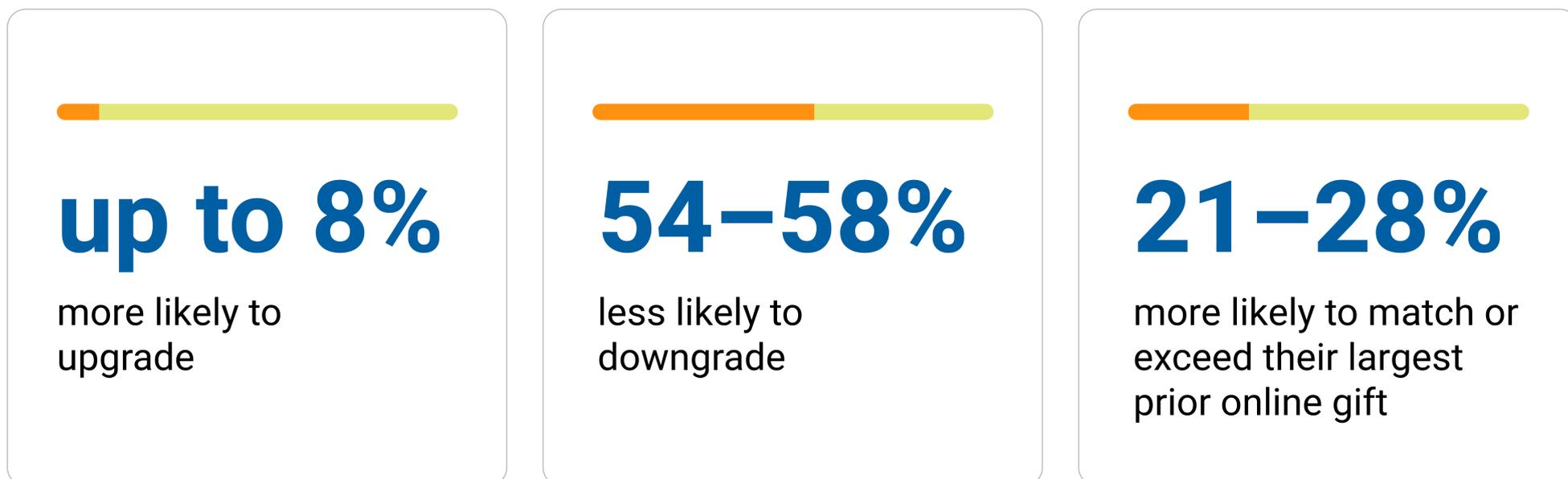
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Executive Summary

Selecting the right ask amount has always been one of the most consequential—and most subjective—decisions fundraisers make. Too high, and you risk alienating a willing donor. Too low, and you leave meaningful support on the table. For decades, advancement teams have relied on generic giving arrays, institutional convention, and educated guesswork to strike this balance. But as donor expectations for personalization rise, those approaches are increasingly showing their limits.

This white paper examines how Smart Ask Amounts, GiveCampus's AI-powered ask array solution, are reshaping that equation. Using predictive models trained on tens of millions of transactions and billions of dollars in charitable gifts processed across the GiveCampus platform, Smart Ask Amounts generate personalized suggested amounts designed to reflect a donor's demonstrated giving behavior—anchoring donors near the upper end of their capacity while preserving choice and autonomy.

Our analysis of Smart Ask Amount usage during the first half of Fiscal Year 2026 reveals a consistent pattern: donors shown personalized ask arrays give in healthier, more sustainable ways. Compared to donors who see generic ask arrays or no suggested amounts at all, donors shown Smart Ask Amounts are **up to 8% more likely to upgrade, 54–58% less likely to downgrade, and 21–28% more likely to match or exceed their largest prior online gift.** These improvements persist across donor types (e.g., LYBUNTs or SYBUNTs¹), prior giving levels, and institution types.



Looking across multiple years of historical giving, donors who retain their support consistently outperform those who downgrade, while donors who upgrade generate dramatically higher long-term value. In other words, modest differences at the point of ask can translate into meaningfully different giving trajectories over time. In fact, our models show that donors who upgrade today will give twice as much as downgraders over the next three years.

Smart Ask Amounts are designed to scale fundraiser judgment, not replace it—pairing predictive insight with human oversight and control. As fundraising continues to evolve, this research suggests that ask amounts, long treated as a tactical detail, are in fact a powerful lever for improving the donor experience, increasing revenue, and maximizing constituent lifetime value.

¹ LYBUNT is an acronym meaning "Last Year But Unfortunately Not This [2026]," identifying donors who gave in the prior year but haven't donated in the current period. Likewise, the acronym SYBUNT refers to donors who gave "Some Year But Unfortunately Not This [2026]."

Introduction

Why Ask Amounts Matter More Than You Think

For all the sophistication that now exists in digital fundraising, one decision remains stubbornly analog: how much to ask for.

Ask amounts are among the most visible and most influential elements of the giving experience. They frame a donor's sense of what is expected, what is appropriate, and what is meaningful. Behavioral science has long shown that suggested amounts act as anchors, subtly shaping how people evaluate options and make decisions. When set thoughtfully, they can encourage generosity and confidence. When misaligned, they can quietly suppress giving or push donors toward choices that don't reflect their true capacity or intent.

The challenge is that ask amounts are difficult to get right.

In conversations with advancement teams, we heard the same two challenges repeated again and again. First, setting ask amounts is time-consuming—often requiring manual analysis, spreadsheet work, and last-minute adjustments. Second, even with that effort, ask strategy frequently comes down to educated guesswork. Fundraisers may have strong instincts, but translating those instincts into scalable, individualized ask arrays is difficult to do consistently.

The result is a quiet but costly mismatch.

Generic ask arrays are designed to be safe. They aim to offend no one and to apply broadly across large populations. But safety comes at a price. When suggested amounts are too low, donors are nudged to give less than they otherwise might. When they are too high, donors may disengage or opt out altogether. In both cases, the giving experience feels less personal—and less aligned with a donor's actual capacity or intent.

This challenge has become more pronounced as donor expectations for relevance and personalization continue to rise. Constituents are accustomed to digital experiences that adapt to them: content that reflects their interests, recommendations based on prior behavior, and interactions that feel considered rather than generic.

This is where GiveCampus saw an opportunity to help. Because we partner with more than a thousand institutions and support millions of donations each year, we are uniquely positioned to observe patterns in how donors respond to different ask strategies over time. That scale creates an opportunity to supplement fundraiser judgment with data—particularly in an area where intuition alone is difficult to operationalize consistently across large donor populations.

From the outset, we also recognized that ask strategy is both an art and a science. No model can replace the contextual knowledge fundraisers have about individual constituents. The goal of Smart Ask Amounts was never full automation. Instead, it was acceleration: helping schools get most of the way to a strong, personalized ask strategy in minutes rather than weeks, while preserving the ability for fundraisers to apply domain expertise for the constituents they know personally.

Predictive modeling makes that balance possible.

GiveCampus uses machine learning and historical data to build predictive models that forecast future outcomes. In fundraising, these models can identify patterns in donor behavior that are difficult or impossible for humans to detect unaided. By analyzing large volumes of giving data across time, predictive models can estimate not just who is likely to give, but how much a donor may be inclined to give when presented with the right opportunity.

Smart Ask Amounts apply this approach directly to one of fundraising’s most fundamental decisions. Rather than relying on static or arbitrary ask arrays, Smart Ask Amounts use predictive models trained on tens of millions of gifts across the GiveCampus platform to generate personalized suggested amounts for individual donors. These suggestions are designed to reflect a donor’s demonstrated behavior, anchoring them near the upper end of their giving capacity while preserving choice and flexibility.

In this white paper, we examine the impact of applying this data-driven ask strategy. Drawing on Smart Ask Amounts usage data from the first half of Fiscal Year 2026, we explore how donor behavior changes, where the effects are strongest, and why even modest improvements in ask strategy can compound into meaningful long-term impact.

How Smart Ask Amounts Work

Setting ask amounts has traditionally involved a tradeoff between safety and specificity.

Many institutions rely on generic ask arrays designed to be broadly acceptable and low-risk. Others apply simple heuristics—such as last gift amount, highest gift, or broad segment-level rules—to tailor suggested amounts for certain groups of donors. These approaches are understandable and often necessary, given time and resource constraints. But they also have clear limitations.

Generic ask arrays prioritize safety over relevance, offering the same suggestions to donors with very different giving histories. Heuristic-based approaches can introduce some personalization, but they are often blunt instruments when applied at scale, and struggle to capture meaningful differences between individual donors.

What the Models Learn From

As stated above, Smart Ask Amounts are powered by predictive models trained on tens of millions of historical gifts processed across the GiveCampus platform. These models learn patterns from donor behavior over time, including how donors give, how often they give, and how their giving changes across different contexts and campaigns. The result is a prediction that estimates the likely size of each constituent’s next gift.

Why Platform Scale Matters

To generate Smart Ask Amounts for a given institution, the models incorporate:

- Historical giving data provided by the institution, typically spanning multiple years
- Behavioral signals collected directly as constituents browse GiveCampus-powered donation forms
- Basic de-identified demographic data, such as affiliations and class years
- Information about the institution itself (such as education level)

Our models observe aggregate patterns of similar donors across institutions, allowing the models to estimate an individual donor's giving capacity and inclination even in instances when a single institution has a limited volume of data. Importantly, the learning process uses exclusively de-identified data, respecting donor privacy and institutional confidentiality.

From Prediction to Ask Arrays

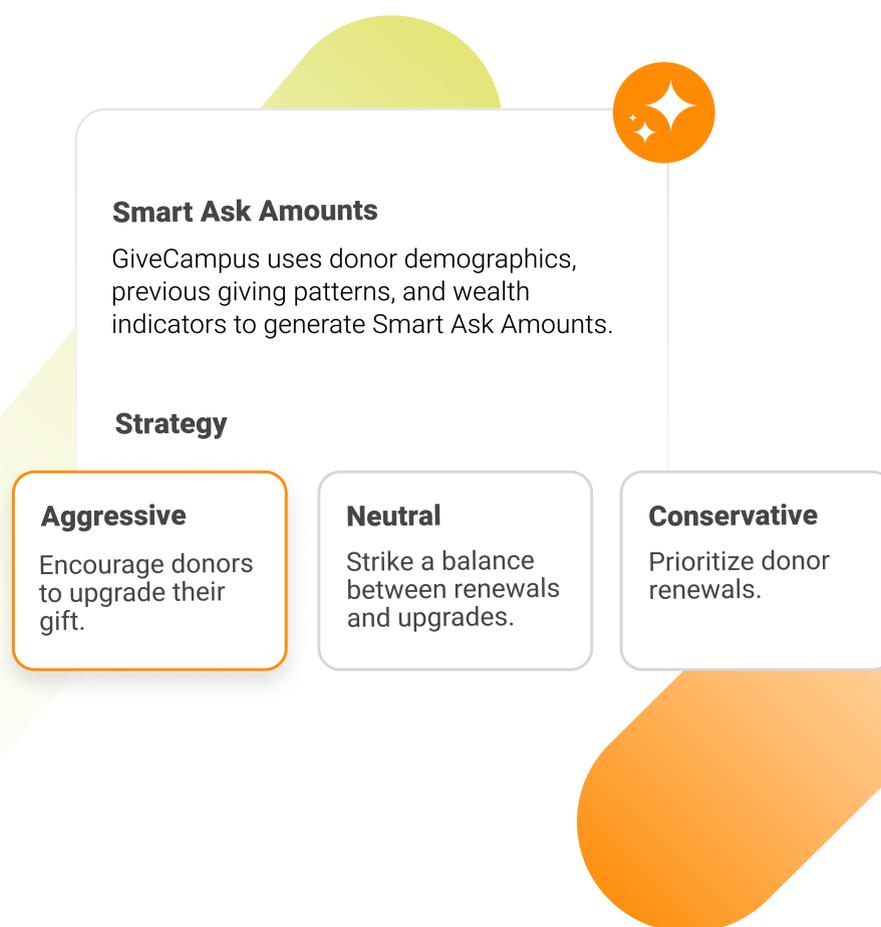
Our predictive models are adept at estimating each constituent's next gift size. But there is still work to do to transform that prediction into a full ask array that is practical and donor-friendly. That means including amounts that are:

- Data-informed
- Nicely rounded and easy to interpret
- Thoughtfully spaced to provide meaningful choice

The process by which we achieve this is built to capture the strengths of our predictive model, while acknowledging and mitigating its blind spots. Human behavior remains inherently variable, and even strong predictive models are occasionally wrong. Smart Ask Arrays are based on a forward-looking prediction, but they also incorporate constraints to ensure that asks don't stray too far from past giving behavior. The system also adjusts based on confidence, presenting a wider range of options when there is more uncertainty and a narrower range when the signals are stronger.

Advancement teams can also select different strategic postures—such as conservative, neutral, or aggressive—to control how heavily the model prioritizes upgrades versus broader participation when translating predictions into usable ask arrays. This allows institutions to align Smart Ask Amounts with the goals and context of a specific campaign rather than enforcing a one-size-fits-all approach.

Throughout this process, human judgment remains central.



Human Judgment, Built In

Smart Ask Amounts are designed with a human-in-the-loop philosophy. Fundraisers retain the ability to review, edit, or override suggested amounts for individual constituents based on domain knowledge that may not be reflected in the data. This balance is intentional. Predictive modeling excels at identifying patterns across large populations, but it cannot account for every nuance of individual relationships. Smart Ask Amounts surface insights at scale, while decision-making authority remains firmly with the advancement team.

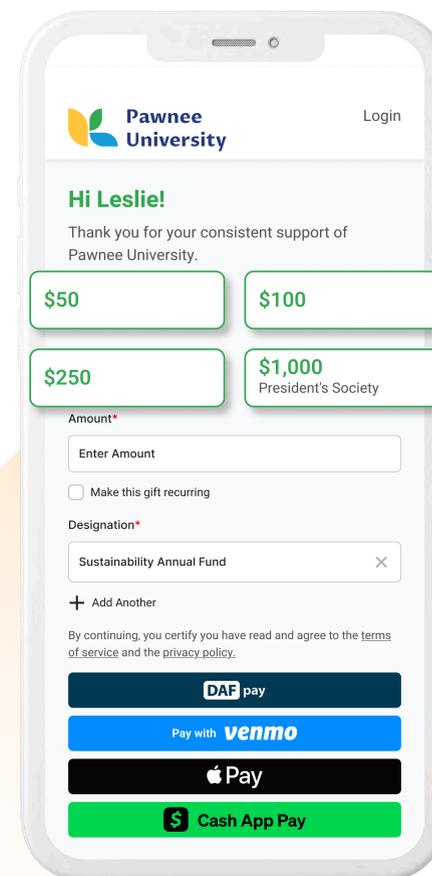
In practice, this means schools can rely on Smart Ask Amounts to handle the complexity of personalization across thousands of donors, while still applying human expertise where it matters most.

Deployment Across Channels

Once generated, Smart Ask Amounts can be reused flexibly across fundraising channels. Personalized ask arrays can be displayed directly on GiveCampus giving forms, carried through via personalization links in GC Outreach and other digital campaigns, or exported for use in offline solicitations and external systems.

This flexibility allows institutions to apply consistent ask logic across campaigns and channels while still tailoring messaging and timing to their specific audiences.

Next we'll examine how Smart Ask Amounts are associated with donor behavior in practice.



What We Found and What It Means for You

The findings that follow reflect observed relationships between ask strategy and donor behavior across online Giving Forms powered by GiveCampus. As with any observational analysis, this research does not isolate causal effects through controlled experimentation, and some observed differences may reflect correlated factors beyond ask strategy alone.

In particular, Smart Ask Amounts are deployed exclusively via personalized giving forms, where they are often accompanied by individualized greetings and other personalized elements. By contrast, generic or no-ask strategies may appear on either personalized or non-personalized forms. As a result, these findings should not be interpreted as strictly causal. However, the observed patterns are consistent, persist across segments and contexts, and are directionally aligned with how Smart Ask Amounts are designed to function.²

To account for potential selection bias, we examine outcomes across multiple donor segments, prior giving levels, and campaign contexts, including forms that used both Smart Ask Amounts and generic ask arrays at different points in time.

² A detailed description of data sources and findings is provided in the Appendix.

1. Smart Ask Amounts Are Associated with Fewer Donor Downgrades

One of the clearest and most consistent patterns to emerge from our analysis is that **Smart Ask Amounts materially reduce the likelihood that donors give less than they have in the past.**

To quantify this effect, we compared the percentage of donors who downgraded from their most recent gift (through any channel) across three conditions: Smart Ask Amounts, generic ask arrays, and no suggested amounts.

As shown in Figure 1, donors presented with Smart Ask Amounts were meaningfully less likely to downgrade than donors in either comparison group. In the first half of FY2026, **11% of donors shown Smart Ask Amounts downgraded**, compared to **24% of donors shown generic ask arrays** and **26% of donors shown no suggested amounts.**

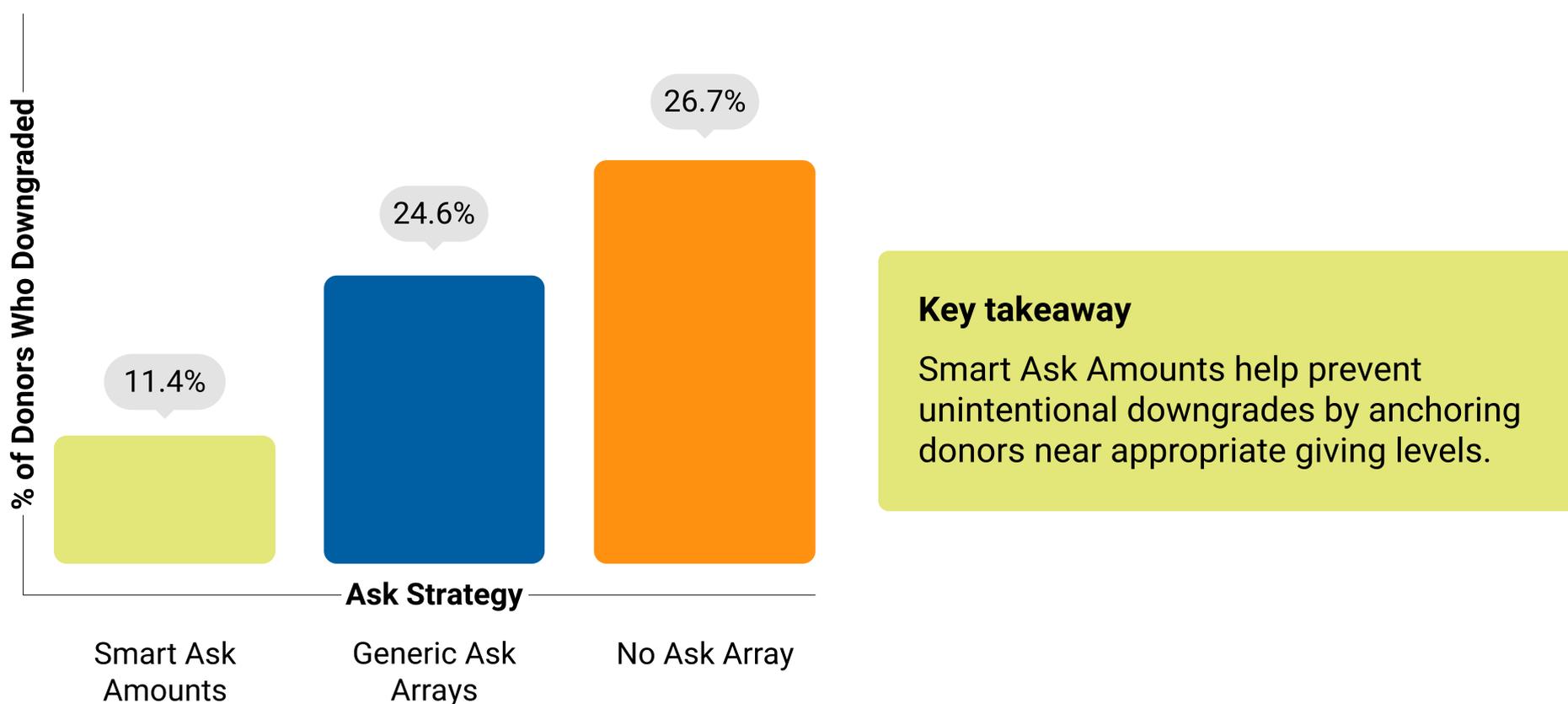


Figure 1. Percentage of Donors Who Downgraded from Their Most Recent Gift (first half of FY2026)

Why Downgrades Matter More Than They Seem

Why does this matter? Because downgrades are not just a short-term revenue concern—they are an early warning signal. A donor who gives less today is more likely to disengage tomorrow, while a donor who retains their giving level is more likely to continue supporting an institution over time. By helping donors anchor their gifts near familiar and appropriate levels, Smart Ask Amounts appear to reduce unintentional downgrades that can occur when suggested amounts feel arbitrary or misaligned with prior behavior.

Importantly, this finding also highlights a subtle but critical distinction: **the absence of a downgrade is not the same as an upgrade, but it is often the prerequisite for one.** Retention creates stability, stability creates opportunity, and opportunity compounds.

2. Smart Ask Amounts Are Associated with Higher Upgrade Rates, Especially When Accepted

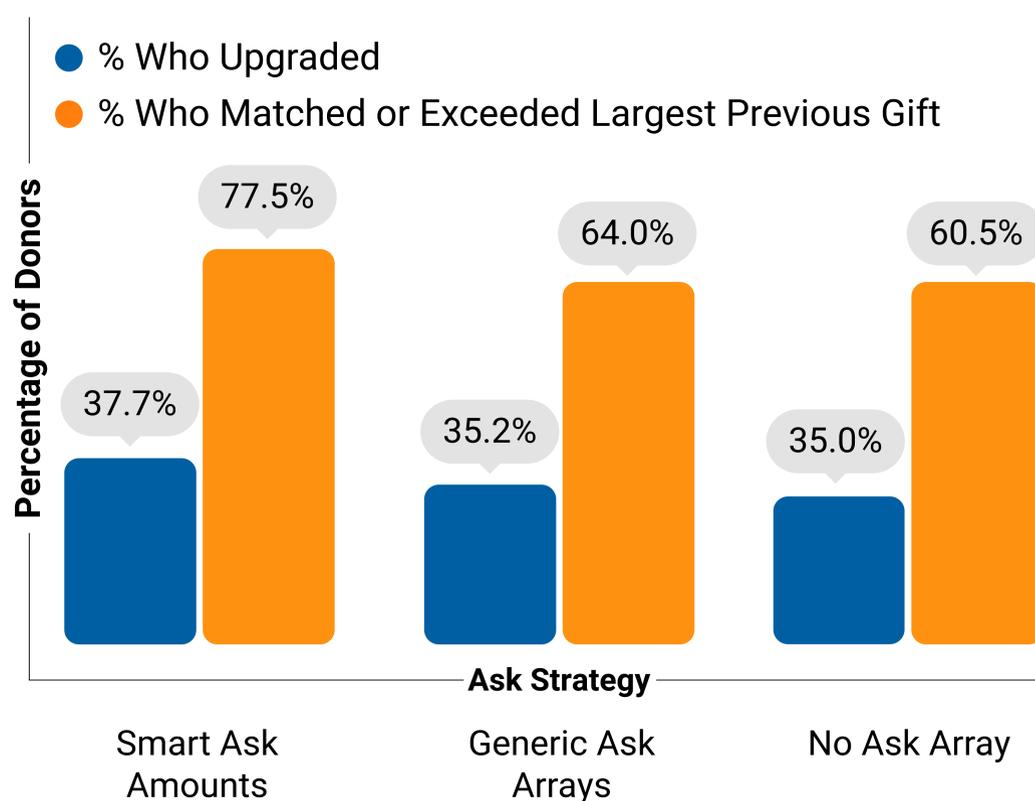
While reducing downgrades is an important first step, the more powerful signal emerges when we examine upgrade behavior and, in particular, what happens when donors engage directly with the suggested amounts presented to them.

Overall Upgrade Lift

Donors shown Smart Ask Amounts were also more likely to upgrade from their previous giving levels than donors shown generic ask arrays or no suggested amounts at all.

To understand how ask strategy influences positive movement, we examined donor gifts relative to their previous giving levels under each ask condition.

Figure 2 shows that donors presented with Smart Ask Amounts were more likely to upgrade and more likely to match or exceed their largest ever online gift, compared to donors shown generic suggested amounts or no suggestions at all.



Key takeaway

Smart Ask Amounts drive more upgrades and larger step-ups.

Figure 2. Percentage of Donors Who Upgraded from Their Most Recent Gift, and Matched or Exceeded their Largest Previous Online Gift via the GiveCampus Platform

What Happens When Donors Accept a Suggested Amount

The strongest signal in the data emerges when we look specifically at donors who accept a suggested amount.

Smart Ask Amounts are purpose-built to nudge each donor toward the high-end of their willingness to give. It's no surprise then that if a donor accepts this nudge, donation outcomes improve. Specifically, a donor who adopts a Smart Ask Amount **upgrades 33% more often** and **downgrades 90% less often** than a donor who rejects the suggested amount.

What this reveals is that showing generic ask amounts isn't always the "safe" choice. Sometimes, presenting a broad range of options just makes it easier for donors to give the wrong amount.

Smart Ask Amounts are explicitly designed to avoid this trap by influencing how accurately donors are able to express their intended generosity, as shown in the example on the following page.

Hypothetical Example

Say that John Smith lands on a giving form with a preconceived willingness to donate in the \$125-175 range. Smart Ask Amounts recognize this based on John's past behavior, and display the following ask amounts:

The diagram shows four rounded rectangular buttons arranged in a 2x2 grid. The top-left button is blue with a white border and contains the text "\$150" in blue. A blue mouse cursor arrow points to the bottom-right corner of this button. The other three buttons (top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right) are white with a green border and contain the text "\$200", "\$300", and "\$500" respectively in green. To the right of the buttons is a blue rounded rectangular callout box with white text that reads: "John selects the \$150 option, which is the closest expedient option to his underlying inclination."

Say instead that John arrived on a form with a generic ask array. John sees the following ask amounts:

The diagram shows four rounded rectangular buttons arranged in a 2x2 grid. The top-left button is white with a green border and contains the text "\$50" in green. The top-right button is blue with a white border and contains the text "\$100" in blue. A blue mouse cursor arrow points to the bottom-right corner of this button. The bottom-left button is white with a green border and contains the text "\$250" in green. The bottom-right button is white with a green border and contains the text "\$500" in green. To the right of the buttons is a blue rounded rectangular callout box with white text that reads: "In this case, the closest expedient option is \$100."

John settles for a \$100 gift despite the same underlying generosity, simply because the interface made it easier for him to choose a lower amount

This hypothetical situation shows up in a real way in the data: **donors who accepted a Smart Ask Amount on average made 16% larger gifts** compared to if they had instead selected the closest available generic option on that same form.

3. These Effects Persist Across Segments and Contexts

In the absence of a true randomized control trial, it is possible that the observed discrepancy between ask strategies is owed to selection bias. If the types of donors, forms, and institutions who use Smart Ask Amounts are substantially different from those that use generic or no ask amounts, then any differences in outcomes may not be entirely driven by the ask strategy.

If, for example, recent donors made up a higher proportion of the Smart Ask Amounts cohort, it could be the case that those donors were at baseline more likely to upgrade and less likely to downgrade, regardless of what ask strategy was presented.

To assess whether these patterns could be confounded by selection bias, we examined outcomes across multiple cuts of the data.

What we observed: While the magnitude varies, the relationship between personalized ask amounts and improved donor behavior does not disappear under scrutiny. Our takeaway: the benefits of Smart Ask Amounts are structural, not situational.

Donor Status

First, we examined whether the results held true when isolating individual specific donor statuses. To mitigate any potential bias, we stratified the data into two groups: LYBUNTs and SYBUNTs.

Across both types of donors, the directional effects remained consistent: more upgrades, fewer downgrades, and greater likelihood of matching or exceeding prior online giving levels.

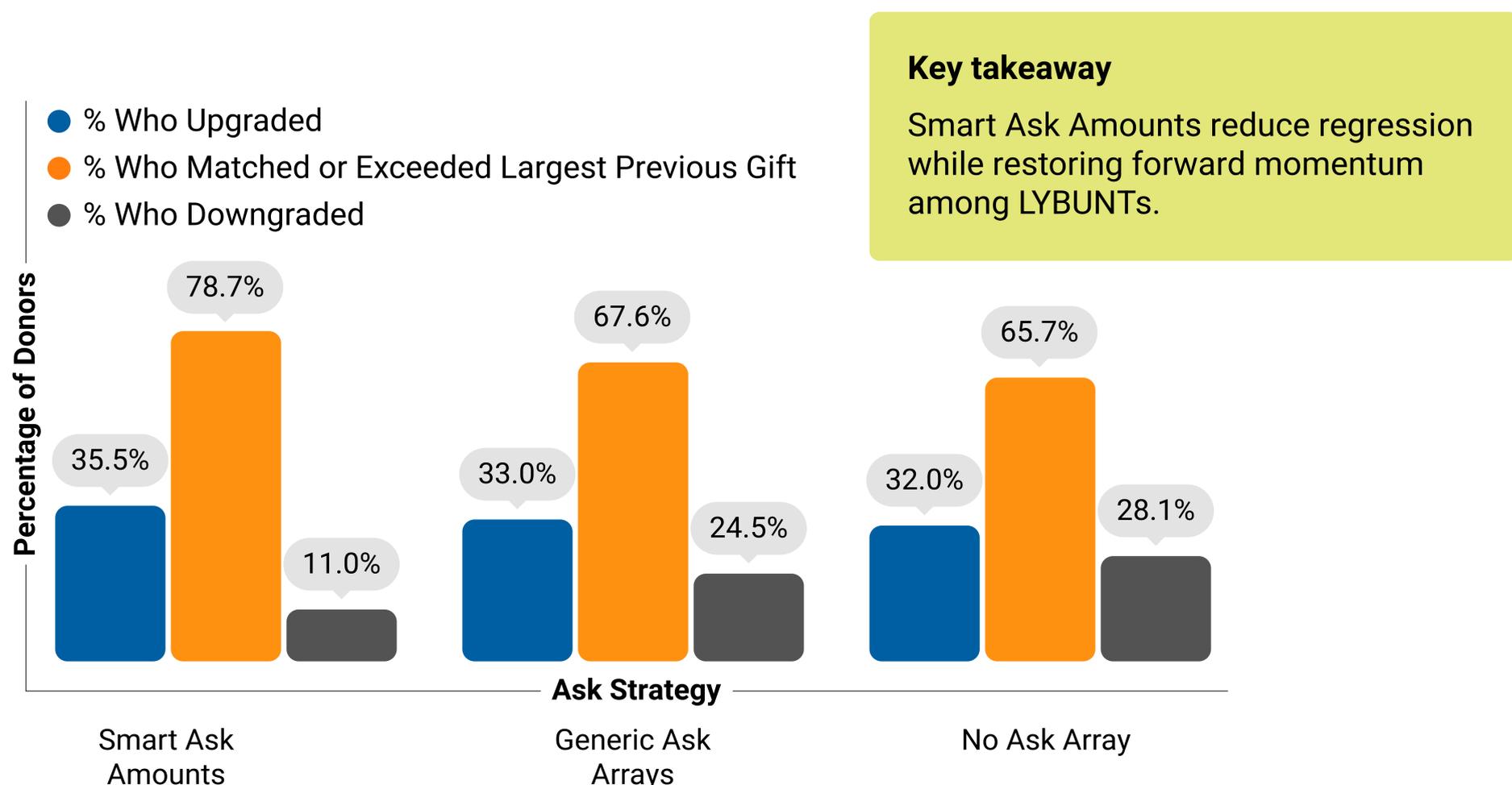


Figure 3. Donor Outcomes by Ask Condition for LYBUNTs

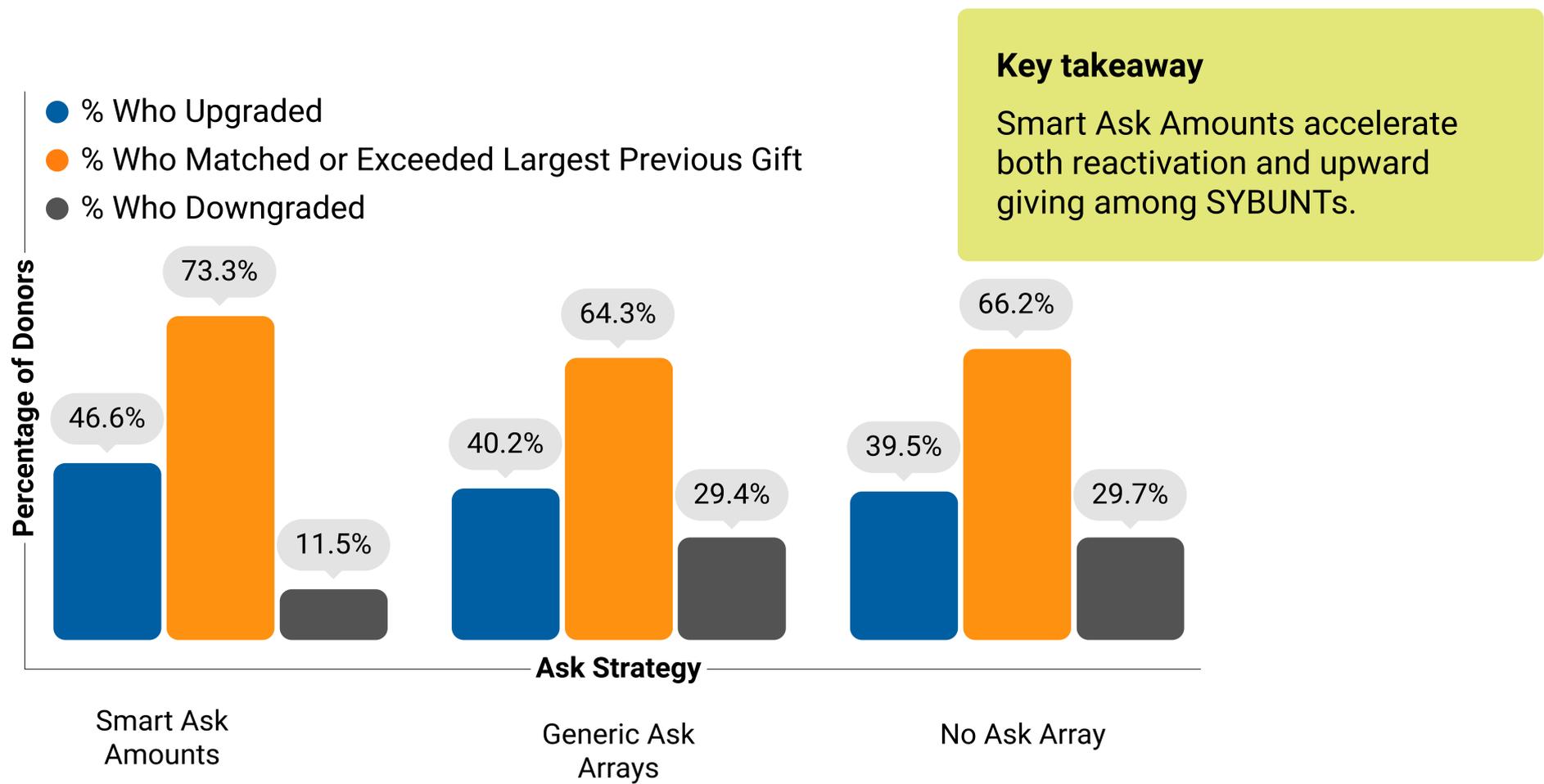


Figure 4. Donor Outcomes by Ask Condition for SYBUNTs

Prior Gift Sizes

Next, we stratified the data by prior giving behavior. Specifically, we classified each donor based on the size of their largest ever past contribution: \$0-100, \$100-500, or \$500 and above. These buckets were chosen in part to maintain a meaningful sample size within each group.

The directional effects on downgrades and matching or exceeding largest previous online giving levels remained consistent across all three levels, although the upgrade effect persisted only for those in the lowest and highest prior giving buckets.

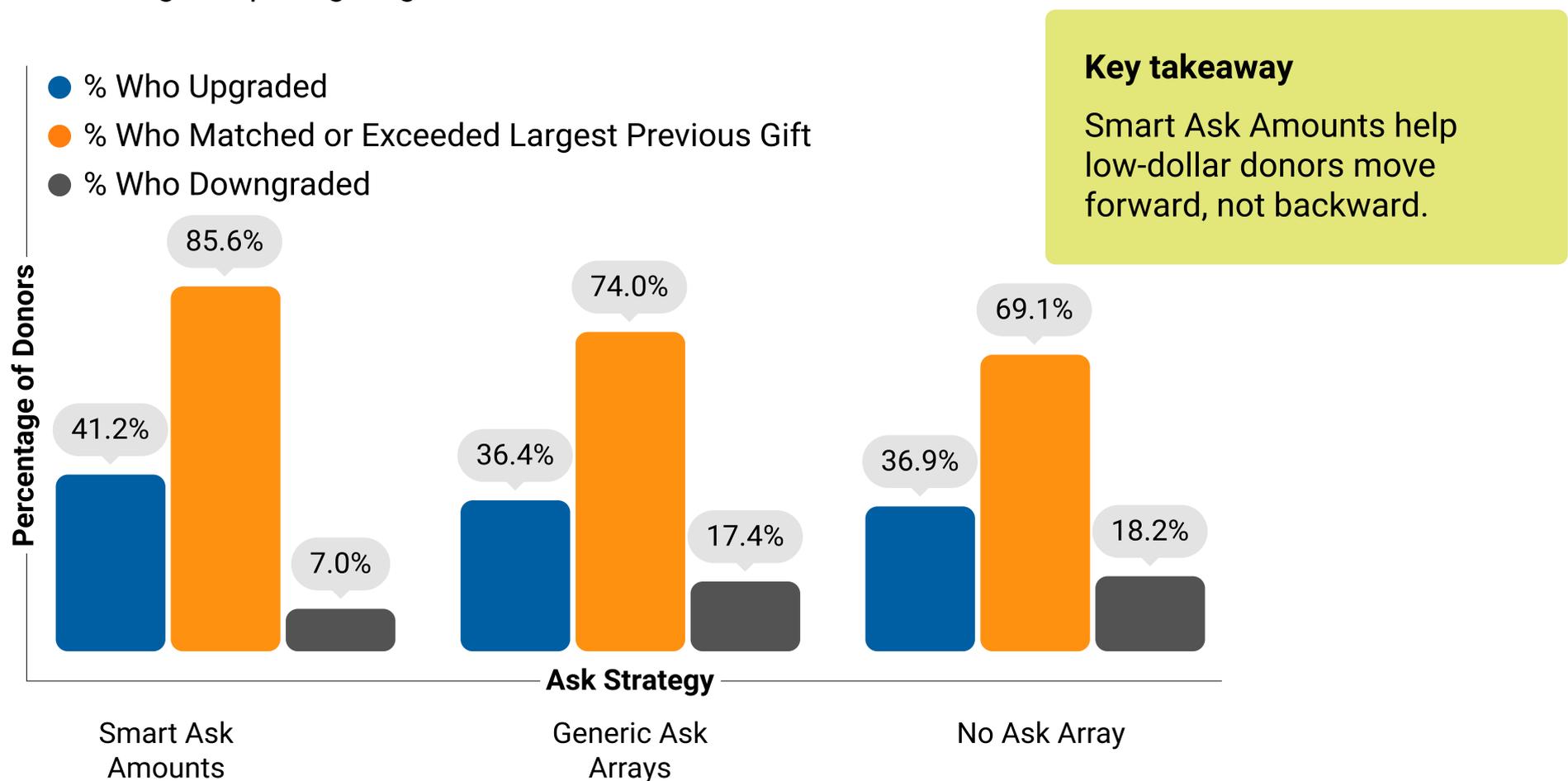


Figure 5. Donor Outcomes by Ask Condition for Constituents Whose Largest Prior Contribution Was \$0-100

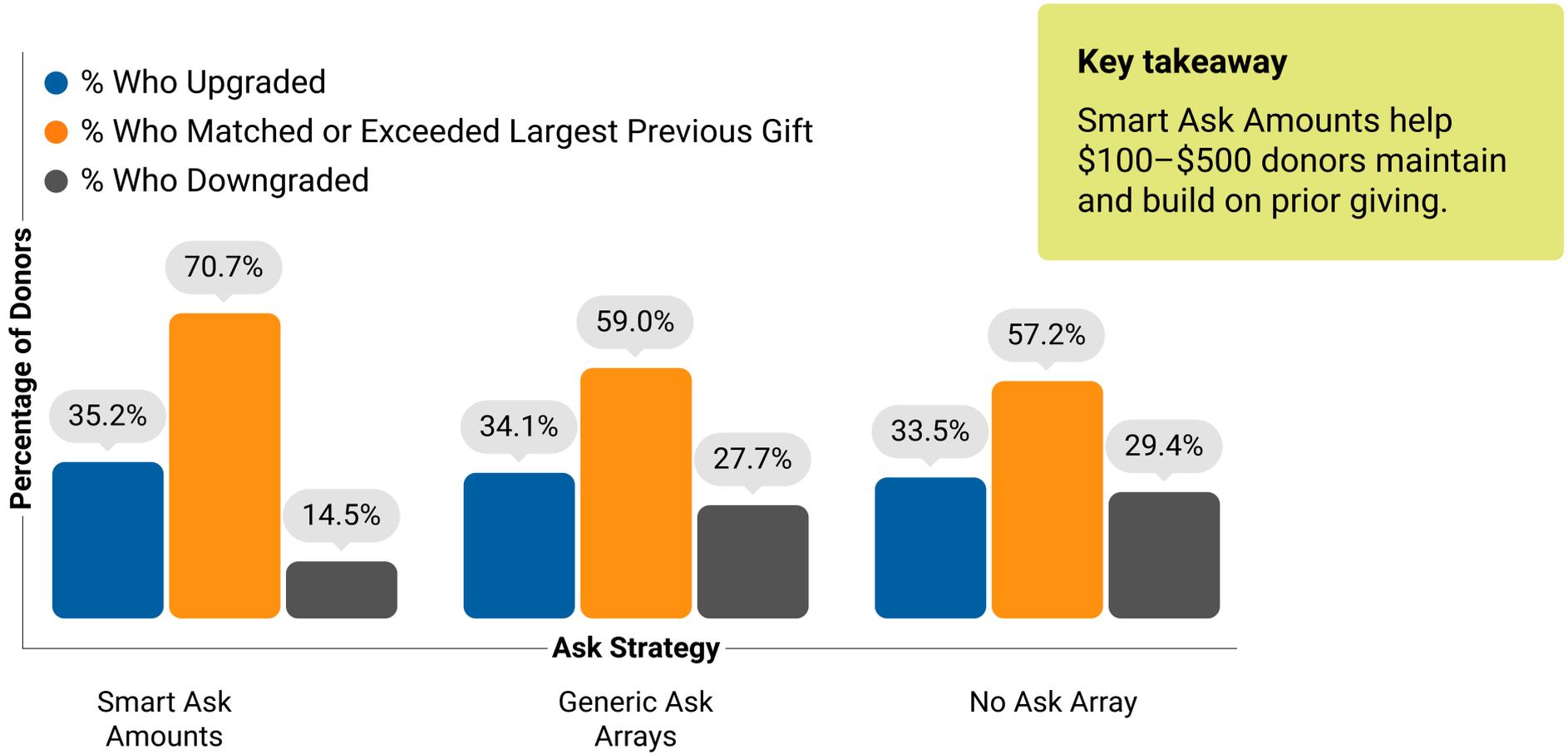


Figure 6. Donor Outcomes by Ask Condition for Constituents Whose Largest Prior Contribution Was \$100-500

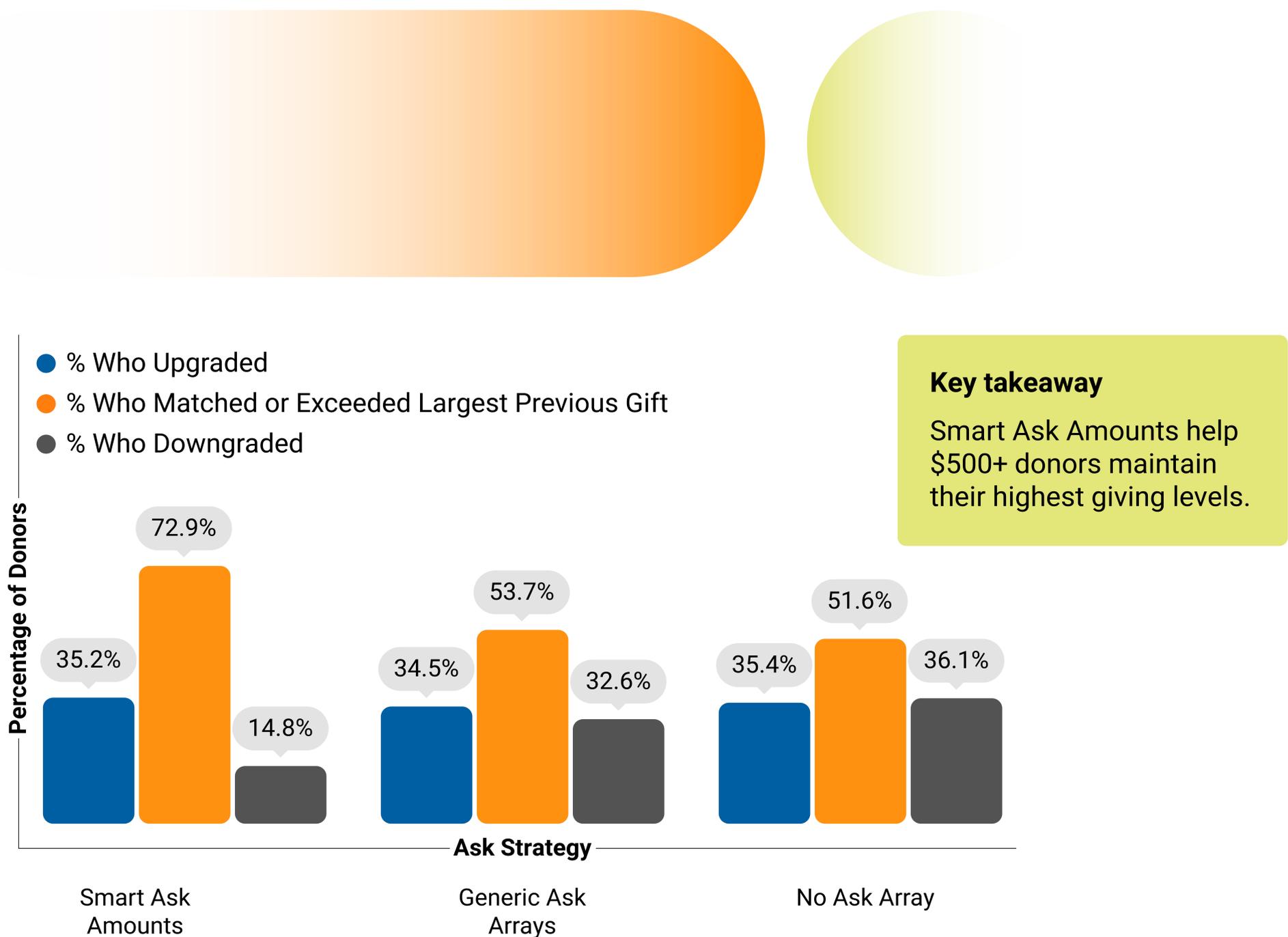
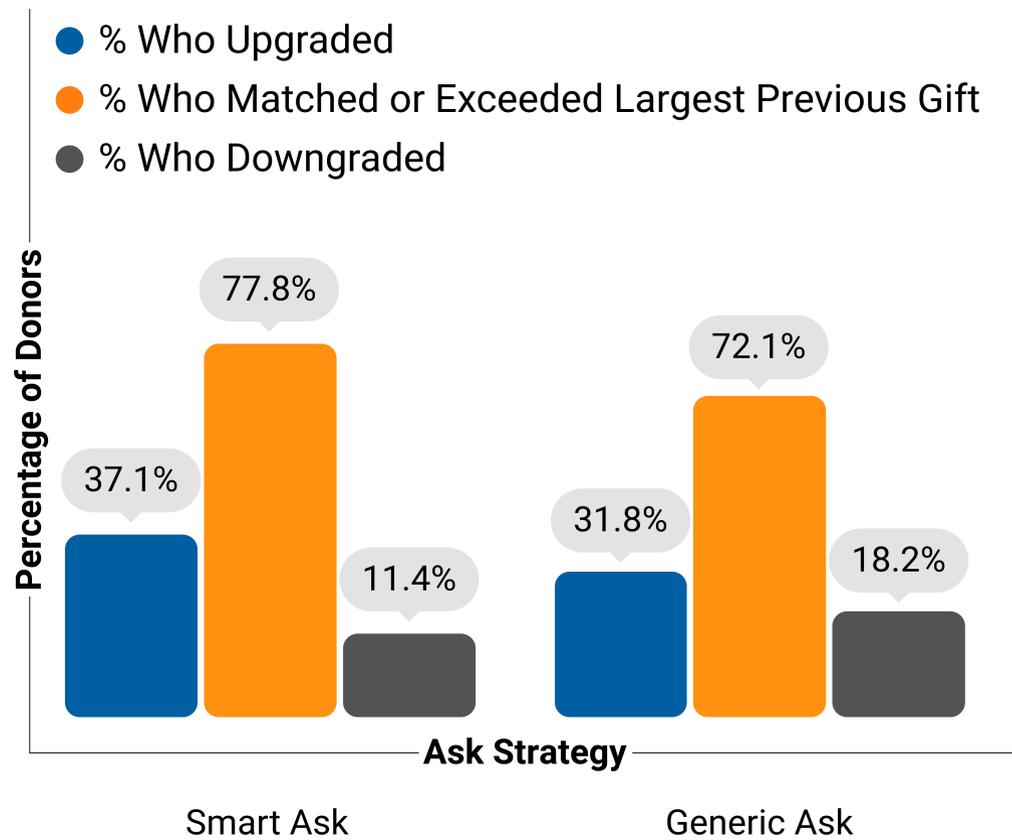


Figure 7. Donor Outcomes by Ask Condition for Constituents Whose Largest Prior Contribution Was \$500+

Prior Gift Sizes

Finally, we examined data from giving forms that leveraged both Smart Ask Amounts and generic ask amounts at various points in time. Whereas the previous two analyses were designed to control for differences in the donor populations, this analysis controlled for differences in the institutions who leveraged each strategy. By filtering the data in this way, we ensured that both ask conditions comprised the same set of institutions and giving experiences (aside from the ask strategy).

Again, we found that donors who experienced Smart Ask Amounts on these forms delivered stronger donation outcomes than those who saw generic ask arrays.



Key takeaway

Smart Ask Amounts outperform generic asks even when form design is held constant.

Figure 8. Donor Outcomes by Ask Condition for Constituents Within Giving Forms that Utilized Both Strategies

4. The Compounding Effect: Why These Associations Matter Over Time

For fundraisers, the implication is straightforward but significant. Suggested amounts are not neutral design elements. They actively shape donor behavior. When those suggestions are misaligned, they can suppress generosity. When they are thoughtfully personalized, they can unlock it.

Next, we explore why these short-term improvements matter beyond a single transaction and how nudging donors toward retention and upgrades today creates compounding value over time.

The most important effects of Smart Ask Amounts do not end when a campaign closes or a fiscal year rolls over. While reduced downgrades and increased upgrades are meaningful in their own right, their true significance lies in what they signal and what they set in motion.

Historical giving data shows that donor behavior compounds.

Small Behavioral Shifts, Large Long-Term Outcomes

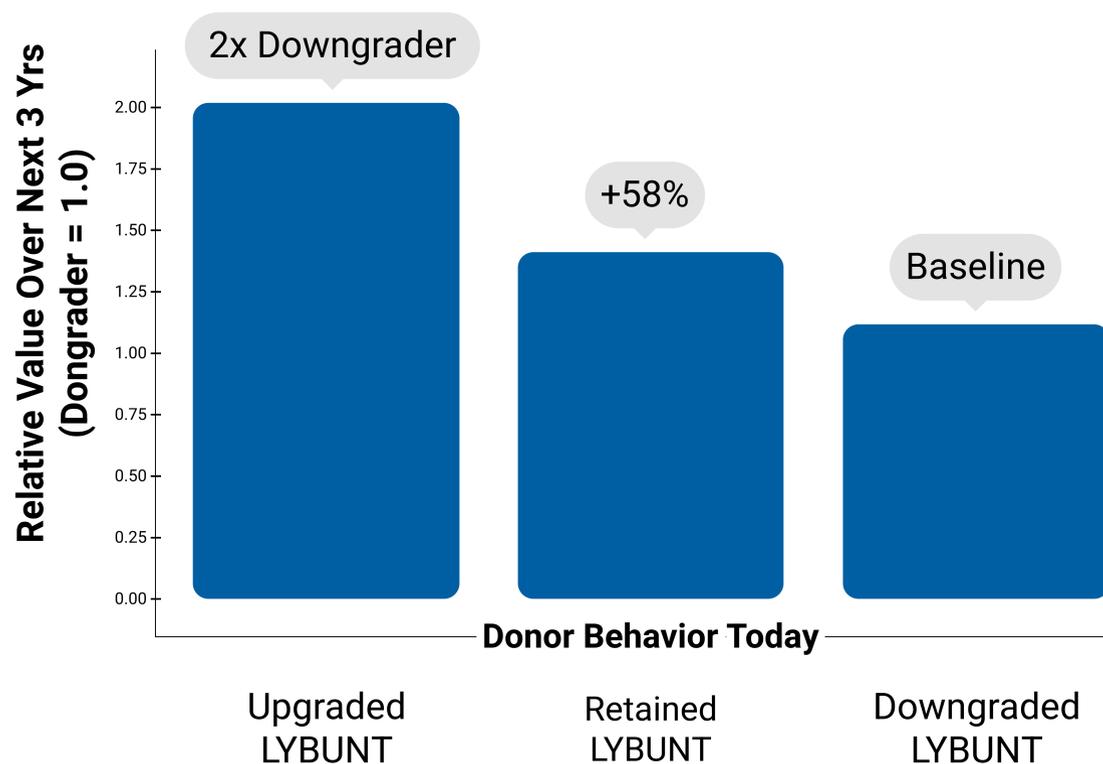
Looking at five years of historical contribution data, clear differences emerge between donors who retain or upgrade their giving and those who downgrade. On average, donors who maintain their giving level today go on to give substantially more over the following years than those who reduce their support. Donors who upgrade today generate even greater long-term value, contributing significantly more in subsequent years than their downgrading counterparts.

These differences are not marginal. Over multi-year horizons, retained donors consistently outperform downgraders, and upgraded donors outperform them by an even wider margin. What may appear as a modest decision at the point of transaction—giving slightly more, or simply not giving less—can translate into dramatically different lifetime outcomes.

This is why ask strategy matters.

To assess why retention and upgrades matter beyond a single transaction, we examined historical contribution data across multiple years. Figure 9 compares future giving among donors who retained, upgraded, or downgraded in a given year.

The differences are substantial. Donors who retain their giving today outperform downgraders over time, while donors who upgrade generate dramatically higher long-term value.



Key takeaway

Short-term donor behavior is a reliable signal of long-term engagement.

Figure 9. Three-Year Giving Trajectories by Donor Behavior

Smart Ask Amounts are explicitly designed to nudge donors toward behaviors that support long-term engagement: retaining familiar giving levels when appropriate and upgrading when capacity allows. By anchoring donors near amounts that reflect their demonstrated generosity, Smart Ask Amounts help avoid the subtle downward drift that can occur when donors are presented with poorly calibrated suggestions.

Importantly, these nudges do not rely on pressure or friction. Donors are never required to select a suggested amount. Instead, Smart Ask Amounts shape the context in which decisions are made, increasing the likelihood that donors choose options aligned with their own giving history and intent. **For advancement teams, this reframes the value of Smart Ask Amounts.** The benefit is not limited to incremental dollars raised in a single campaign. It extends to the quality of donor behavior being reinforced over time. Retention and upgrades are not just outcomes; they are leading indicators of future value.

Viewed through this lens, Smart Ask Amounts function as a long-term investment in donor relationships. By helping donors give in ways that feel appropriate and sustainable, institutions are better positioned to cultivate consistent support, deepen engagement, and realize compounding returns in the years that follow.

What These Findings Add Up To

Taken together, these findings point to a consistent conclusion: ask amounts are not a neutral feature of the giving experience. They are consistently associated with donor behavior in ways that influence retention, upgrades, and long-term value.

Smart Ask Amounts appear to work not by pushing donors to give more at all costs, but by aligning suggested amounts more closely with donor behavior and capacity. In doing so, they reduce unintentional downgrades, increase the likelihood of upgrades, and reinforce giving patterns that compound over time. The result is not just stronger performance in individual campaigns, but higher-quality donor outcomes overall.

What This Means for Advancement Leaders

The results outlined in this research suggest a clear takeaway for advancement leaders: **ask strategy is no longer a tactical afterthought, it is a strategic decision with measurable downstream impact.**

Smart Ask Amounts demonstrate that relatively small improvements in how asks are framed can meaningfully influence donor behavior. Reducing downgrades, increasing upgrades, and reinforcing retention are not just short-term wins; they are leading indicators of long-term value. When applied at scale, these effects compound.

Preparing for this shift does not require abandoning institutional judgment or overhauling fundraising operations. It requires acknowledging that static, generic ask arrays are increasingly misaligned with donor expectations and fundraising goals. Predictive modeling offers a practical way to bring greater precision to ask strategy while preserving flexibility and control.

For leaders, the opportunity lies in focus. Rather than asking teams to work harder or move faster, tools like Smart Ask Amounts enable teams to make better decisions more consistently. The result is improved efficiency, stronger donor outcomes, and a giving experience that feels more relevant and intentional.

As fundraising continues to evolve, institutions that treat personalization as infrastructure—not a one-off tactic—will be better positioned to sustain growth and deepen donor relationships. Smart Ask Amounts represent one step in that evolution, translating predictive insights into a concrete, repeatable advantage.

The question is no longer whether institutions should rethink how they set ask amounts. The question is how quickly they choose to do so.

Appendix

About the Research and Methodology

To understand how Smart Ask Amounts influence donor behavior, GiveCampus conducted an analysis of Smart Ask Amounts usage and outcomes across the GiveCampus platform during the first half of Fiscal Year 2026 (July 1 - December 31). This research builds on the same predictive modeling principles and data science practices [outlined in our prior work on forecasting donor behavior](#), adapting them to the specific and highly consequential question of ask strategy.

Research Objective

The primary goal of this research was to evaluate whether presenting donors with personalized ask arrays generated by predictive models meaningfully affects how they give. Specifically, we sought to understand how Smart Ask Amounts influence:

- Donor retention and downgrade behavior
- The likelihood that donors upgrade from prior giving levels
- Donor responses relative to generic suggested amounts or the absence of suggested amounts altogether

Rather than focusing solely on immediate revenue lift, this analysis also considers how changes in donor behavior may shape long-term value over time.

Data Sources

Smart Ask Amounts are powered by predictive models trained on tens of millions of historical gifts made through the GiveCampus platform. These models learn patterns from donor behavior across a wide range of institution types, campaign formats, and giving contexts.

For the purposes of this white paper, we analyzed Smart Ask Amounts performance data from the first half of FY2026, incorporating giving behavior from donors who were presented with:

- Smart Ask Amount arrays
- Generic ask arrays
- No suggested ask amounts

The dataset spans a broad cross-section of campaigns and institutions, including higher education and independent schools, traditional giving forms and social fundraising campaigns, and donors across a wide range of prior giving histories and gift sizes.

Interpreting the Findings

As with all predictive modeling research, the results presented in this white paper reflect probabilistic outcomes rather than deterministic guarantees. Donor behavior is influenced by many factors beyond ask strategy alone, including timing, messaging, and personal circumstance. Accordingly, this analysis does not claim that Smart Ask Amounts determine how donors give, only that they meaningfully shape the context in which donors make decisions.

Percentages and rates cited throughout this paper are rounded for clarity and readability. Patterns are emphasized over isolated outcomes, and findings are presented in aggregate to protect donor privacy and institutional confidentiality.

Taken together, this research is intended to provide advancement professionals with a clearer, data-informed understanding of how ask amounts function as behavioral anchors and how predictive modeling can be used to set those anchors more thoughtfully, more consistently, and at scale.

A Small Disclaimer

Unlike balancing a budget spreadsheet or calculating a tax deduction, forecasting human generosity is not an exact science. Philanthropy is shaped by emotion, context, timing, and personal circumstance—factors that no model can fully capture.

Smart Ask Amounts are powered by predictive models that estimate likelihoods, not certainties. They do not determine how much a donor will give, nor do they remove choice from the giving experience. Donors remain fully in control of their decisions, and many will give more, less, or differently than any model might anticipate.

That said, predictive models do not need to be perfect to be useful.

Behavioral science shows that small changes in context—such as how options are framed or which amounts are presented—can meaningfully influence decision-making. Ask amounts function as behavioral anchors, shaping how donors evaluate what feels reasonable, generous, or attainable. By using historical data to place those anchors more thoughtfully, Smart Ask Amounts aim to improve the odds that donors give in ways that align with their demonstrated capacity and intent.

It is also important to note that predictive models are iterative by nature. As more data is collected and models are retrained, their estimates become more refined over time. Improvements in accuracy may be incremental, but even modest gains can produce outsized impact when applied across large donor populations.

Finally, Smart Ask Amounts are designed to complement—not replace—fundraiser judgment. Advancement professionals bring essential contextual knowledge that no dataset can replicate. The role of predictive modeling is to surface insights at scale, helping teams make more informed decisions, more consistently, while preserving the human relationships at the heart of fundraising.



Ready to Explore What Smart Ask Amounts Could Do for Your Institution?

The findings in this paper suggest that small improvements in ask strategy can produce meaningful, compounding gains in donor retention and long-term value. If you'd like to see how Smart Ask Amounts could apply to your donor population—and see what implementation looks like in practice—schedule a conversation with our team.

[Talk to a fundraising expert.](#)



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