# Types of Nonprofit Raffles Explained

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## A Research-Based Classification of Raffle Fundraising Formats

Nonprofit raffles are often discussed as a single fundraising activity, yet in practice they consist of multiple distinct formats — each with its own structure, rules, and operational requirements.

This research article provides a standardized classification of the most common raffle types used by nonprofit and community organizations in the United States.

The purpose of this taxonomy is to reduce confusion, establish consistent terminology, and support accurate planning, compliance review, and technology evaluation.

## Why Raffle Classification Matters

Many fundraising challenges arise not from execution, but from misunderstanding the type of raffle being conducted.

Different raffle formats vary in:

- Ticket allocation
- Prize distribution
- Drawing frequency
- Duration of fundraising
- Administrative complexity

Treating all raffles as interchangeable can lead to inaccurate expectations, operational strain, and donor confusion.

A clear classification system allows nonprofits to select the appropriate structure for their goals.

# Core Categories of Nonprofit Raffles

Based on observed nonprofit fundraising practices, raffle formats can be organized into six primary categories.

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# 1. Traditional Raffles

## Definition

A traditional raffle involves the sale of tickets where each ticket represents one entry into a single drawing for one or more prizes.

## Key Characteristics

- One primary drawing date
- One shared ticket pool
- Fixed prize list
- Simple winner selection

## Common Use Cases

- Quick fundraisers
- Event add-ons
- Seasonal campaigns

Traditional raffles are the most widely recognized format but also the least flexible.

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# 2. Basket Raffles

## Also Known As

- Tricky trays
- Chinese auctions
- Prize basket raffles

### Definition

Basket raffles allow participants to allocate tickets across multiple prize categories rather than entering a single drawing.

Each prize maintains its own ticket pool, and winners are selected independently per prize.

### Key Characteristics

- Multiple prizes
- Multiple ticket pools
- Participant-directed entry selection
- Higher overall ticket volume

### Fundraising Impact

Basket raffles frequently outperform traditional raffles because supporters can engage with multiple prizes based on interest.

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## 3. 50–50 Raffles

### Definition

A 50–50 raffle is a split-pot raffle in which a defined percentage of ticket sales is awarded to the winner, with the remainder retained by the nonprofit.

### Key Characteristics

- Dynamic prize amount
- Percentage-based payout
- Real-time pot growth
- High transparency expectations

### Common Variations

- 50–50 (equal split)

- 60–40 or alternative splits
- Event-based or ongoing

Accurate pot calculation is critical to maintaining trust.

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## 4. Ball Drops and Numbered Object Raffles

### Definition

Participants purchase numbered entries tied to physical objects such as balls, golf balls, or tokens released simultaneously during an event.

The winning number corresponds to the first object reaching a defined target.

### Key Characteristics

- Strong visual appeal
- Sponsor-friendly
- Event-centered execution
- Requires accurate number assignment

These raffles are commonly used for large community fundraisers.

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## 5. Duck Races

### Definition

Duck races are a variation of numbered object raffles where participants purchase entries assigned to floating ducks released into a waterway.

### Key Characteristics

- Sponsored entries
- Family-friendly format
- High community engagement

- Similar structure to ball drops

Duck races rely heavily on accurate entry-to-object tracking.

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## 6. Queen of Hearts Raffles

### Definition

A Queen of Hearts raffle is a progressive jackpot raffle that continues over multiple drawings until a specific outcome — typically selecting the queen — occurs.

### Key Characteristics

- Ongoing weekly drawings
- Progressive jackpot growth
- Card tracking system
- Long-term participation cycles

### Fundraising Significance

Queen of Hearts raffles are among the most powerful long-term fundraising formats when managed transparently.

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## Comparison of Raffle Types

| Raffle Type | Duration | Complexity | Engagement Pattern |
|---|---|---|---|
| Traditional | Short | Low | One-time |
| Basket / Tricky Tray | Short–Medium | Medium | Multi-entry |
| 50–50 | Short–Medium | Medium | Pot-driven |
| Ball Drop | Event-based | Medium | Visual |
| Duck Race | Event-based | Medium | Community-driven |

| Raffle Type | Duration | Complexity | Engagement Pattern |
|---|---|---|---|
| Queen of Hearts | Long-term | High | Recurring |

## Operational Considerations Across Raffle Types

Each raffle format introduces different administrative needs, including:

- Entry tracking
- Prize-specific odds
- Drawing documentation
- Public transparency
- Record retention

As raffle complexity increases, reliance on manual systems becomes less practical.

## Technology Implications

Not all fundraising systems are capable of supporting every raffle type.

Many platforms only accommodate traditional raffles, while more complex formats require:

- Multiple ticket pools
- Ongoing jackpot logic
- Prize-level entry allocation
- Historical draw tracking

Understanding raffle taxonomy helps organizations evaluate whether a platform aligns with their fundraising strategy.

## Summary

Nonprofit raffles represent a diverse set of fundraising formats rather than a single activity.

Clear classification improves:

- Fundraising planning
- Donor communication
- Operational accuracy
- Technology selection

A structured understanding of raffle types allows nonprofits to deploy raffles intentionally and sustainably.

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