



Fundraising Events in a Time of Physical Distancing:¹ Ideas and Resources for Community-based Nonprofits²

Introduction

This document is designed to assist community-based nonprofit organizations consider how best to plan and implement fundraising events essential to their sustainability during a period when most people are not ready to be part of any large group of people they mostly don't know. It includes several sections:

- A rationale for adopting a new approach to fundraising events
- A brief history of online fundraising and why virtual events represent a natural evolution
- A summary of lessons learned from the hurried transition to online events during the first two months of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Suggested steps and considerations for shaping future fundraising events that are either virtual or partly virtual – with lots of footnotes to guide you to additional practical information
- A supplemental annotated bibliography of materials to help you choose, plan, and successfully implement online events

Need for a New Approach to Fundraising Events

Most Americans will not be attending large fundraising events in the near future. Since mid-March 2020, nonprofits nationwide have been scrambling to delay or replace long-scheduled face-to-face fundraising events that cannot be held during the COVID-19 epidemic. While their initial response has focused on how to restructure or replace events scheduled in the first half of 2020, it is very likely that events involving large crowds will be impossible or impractical not just in the next few months but longer-term – at least until both a vaccine and effective treatments for COVID-19 are widely available.

The quick-response alternatives used during the COVID-19 emergency offer some valuable lessons for the future. They are implemented out of necessity, but provide insights on what works well remotely, pitfalls and challenges, realistic goals, and promising models. Some of the earliest reboots of scheduled events happened before all gatherings were banned, and offer ideas for events that may include a small gathering as well as a large remote component. For example, Washington Performing Arts had to restructure its March 14 gala when Washington, DC declared a state of emergency on March 12. While the live and silent auctions went online, WPA was able to livestream performances and bring a few people together because there were not yet bans on small gatherings.

¹ “Physical distancing” is used instead of “social distancing” since events are designed to bring people together socially, even if that is accomplished electronically rather than physically.

² Prepared by Emily Gantz McKay, May 2020.

Remote or small-group fundraising events can be successful – and nonprofits that depend on events for long-term sustainability should begin developing them now. The process will take attention, creativity, and some risk-taking. The signature events that worked well for your organization pre-COVID-19 were probably developed, updated, and refined over several decades. You tried new approaches and learned what works for your organization, community, and targeted donors. You learned from the experiences of others as well as your own. This new process will be similar – but with different groundrules. Virtual events typically include fewer (though different) logistics and lower costs for facilities, food, and drink. Technology makes it easier to keep participants engaged after the event. Use of social media can attract younger participants who might not have attended your traditional event.

Expanded Online Fundraising

Online fundraising is not new – but is expanding and growing in new directions. It has become an essential component of nonprofit fundraising. It began around 1999, when donor-friendly online donation forms were introduced, and has grown exponentially. One recent large-scale analysis by Blackbaud³ found that online giving in the U.S. accounted for 8.5% of total fundraising revenue excluding grants in 2018. That is slightly below the 9.8% of U.S. retail sales using e-commerce. Increasingly, donors of all ages prefer to give online.

Smaller nonprofits raise a higher proportion of their funds online than large ones. The analysis found that in 2018, 13.4% of the total fundraising for small nonprofits (annual revenues under \$1 million) was from online giving, compared to 7.8% for medium-sized nonprofits (\$1-\$10 million) and just 4% for large nonprofits (more than \$10 million).

Future online fundraising (including events) must be designed for use with mobile devices. One national expert recently predicted that “Mobile devices will become the primary mechanism for digital giving.”⁴ In 2018, about one-quarter of online transactions were made using mobile devices, with higher rates for event registration and membership purchases. The overall increase in online giving was 1.2%, but was highest – at 3.7% – among medium-sized nonprofits, and about one-fourth of the online transactions were made using a mobile device. The Blackbaud report cautioned that “Every nonprofit organization needs to understand that being mobile friendly is linked to being donor friendly.”⁵

Online events could be a major area of growth for the future, with or without a pandemic. Most online fundraising involves donations and the purchase of tickets or products, not online fundraising events. However, the technology to support events has improved greatly in the past few years, numerous reputable companies and platforms are available (some at very reasonable cost), and people of all ages are becoming much more comfortable with online platforms because of the COVID-19 emergency.

³ “2018 Charitable Giving Report: How Fundraising Performed in 2018,” Blackbaud Institute for Philanthropic Impact, February 2019. See <https://institute.blackbaud.com/asset/2018-charitable-giving-report/>.

⁴ “The End of the Beginning of Online Giving,” by Steve MacLaughlin, sgENGAGE, March 4, 2019. See <https://npengage.com/nonprofit-fundraising/the-end-of-the-beginning-of-online-giving/>.

⁵ “2018 Charitable Giving Report,” *op. cit.*

Lessons from the First Few Months of the COVID-19 Emergency

Beginning in mid-March in most of the U.S. many thousands of nonprofits have faced the need to delay, cancel, or transform planned fundraising events due to COVID-19. Their experiences offer many lessons for the future. For example:

- **Nonprofits who cancel an event due to COVID-19 often retain much of the funding from ticket sales.** When the face-to-face gala, awards dinner, or other ticket-based event is cancelled or part of the event becomes virtual, sponsors and ticket holders are often very supportive. Several very different nonprofits have reported retaining nearly 80% of ticket sales and sponsorship payments.
- **Many – perhaps most – fundraising events can be recreated as virtual events, with appropriate technology and creativity.** Awards can be presented, silent and live auctions carried out, and speeches made, though drinks, dinner, and dancing are more complicated to replicate. Athletic events can be rethought with individual activities. Live performances can sometimes happen remotely. Recent experience indicates that:
 - **Some activities may be more successful and easier to manage online.** Silent auctions were often at least partly online well before COVID-19, partly for convenience and partly because online advertising can help reach bidders beyond those attending a gala if an event includes both.
 - **The live donations (“paddle-raise”) part of a gala can be difficult** – it’s hard to create the same level of energy online. However, some specialized online platforms and techniques like Giving Boards showing donations in real time and use of texts to give can help create a competitive atmosphere.
 - **Even performances can be made virtual**, though it is easier if you have only one performer or if most or all of the group can be in the same location.
 - **Some physical activities can become virtual.** People can do their 5k run or walk in their own neighborhood or even their own yard. Smartphones, smartwatches, and GPS-enabled fitness devices are being used to support fundraising, with team events replaced with individual goals or virtual at-home competitions involving strength or endurance.⁶
 - **Online raffles and drawings are easy** – participants just need a number known to them and the nonprofit.
 - **Group competitions like costume contests, free throws, or other actions can be shared online**, with participants posting photos or videos, judges rating them online, and prizes announced online and then mailed.
 - **Film festivals can occur online**, with theater-going replaced by access to online showings, and livestreamed discussions before or after.
 - **You can still provide incentives relevant to your cause**, from T-shirts to hoodies – they just have to be mailed (as with public radio or television drives).
- **The transition from face-to-face to virtual event can occur rapidly.** For their annual signature events, Washington Performing Arts had only three days, 4-H less than two weeks to make the change. Smaller organizations also pivoted successfully. Girls on the Run Twin Cities, a youth

⁶ See “Virtual Fitness Fundraising Ideas for Any Nonprofit,” Soapbox Engage Blog, by Tim Forbes, May 7, 2020, at <https://www.soapboxengage.com/blog/1890-virtual-fitness-fundraising-ideas>.

development program in Minneapolis, replaced its annual luncheon with a virtual celebration that attracted more people and raised \$10,000 more than the 2019 luncheon. Upaya Social Ventures, a Seattle- and Bangalore-based nonprofit that lifts people out of poverty through job creation, transformed its annual gala into a virtual event with a live auction, and exceeded its fundraising goal with the help of virtual table captains.

- **Technology is a critical factor in the success of virtual events:**
 - **The technology needs to work very well, especially for a “formal” event** – which usually means you need a consultant or company to manage it for you, at least the first time.
 - **Some fundraising activities need specialized online platforms** – but there are numerous options available, many of them quite affordable.
 - **Live feeds work well** for performances, raffles, award announcements, and interviews with supporters and sponsors. Live feeds from Instagram or Facebook or some specialized providers can be integrated into remote platforms like Zoom.
 - **The technology you use should be quick and easy for your participants** – for registration, auction bidding, submitting a photo or video, or any other activity.
- **Virtual events offer some clear benefits.** For example:
 - **They often cost less than the face-to-face events** – especially if they replace a dinner with high costs for facilities, food, and beverages. Even if participation is lower, a remote event can be more profitable.
 - **If properly advertised, virtual events can involve more people than most face-to-face ones.** Your gala venue may limit you to 400 people, but you can open up online events to many more by allowing free access to silent and live auctions, making performances free while asking for donations, or having people pay online for access to a movie or event.
 - **Online events increase your reach by identifying new potential donors.** If you require a telephone/text or email before a person can obtain access to an event, these people become part of your contact list.
- **Peer-to-peer fundraising usually has an online component, but many nonprofits are now making it entirely remote.** Many large nonprofits have well-established processes for peer-to-peer events, where volunteer fundraisers raise money from family, friends, and colleagues in honor of a birthday or to support participation in some activity (a hike, run, or other “real-life or virtual challenge”)⁷ on behalf of your organization. One of these, the Cancer Research Institute (CRI) has a 7-page toolkit that describes each aspect of the process.⁸ The adjustment due to the COVID-19 emergency is that the activity itself must be remote – doing something alone or competing online rather than participating in a 5K run or a 24-hour marathon dance event. For example, the St. Baldrick’s Foundation uses volunteer-organized head-shaving events to raise millions for pediatric cancer research. In 2020, those events became virtual, using its Zoom platform and another live-streaming platform so its volunteers can shave their heads with family and friends watching.⁹

⁷ “How Nonprofits are Pivoting to virtual Fundraising in the Face of COVID-19,” by David Hessekiel, *Forbes*, April 23, 2020. See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhessekiel/2020/04/23/how-nonprofits-are-pivoting-to-virtual-fundraising-in-the-face-of-covid-19/#36f7c0226bec>.

⁸ CRI’s Fundraising Toolkit is listed in the references and is available online at: <https://www.cancerresearch.org/CRI/media/Files-for-download/CRI-Fundraising-Toolkit.pdf>.

⁹ “How Nonprofits Are Pivoting to Virtual Fundraising in the Face of Covid-19,” *op. cit.*

- **Sponsors/partners are key to the success of virtual events and need to be recognized in new ways:**
 - **Those who normally help pay gala costs will also support remote event costs** – and some can provide in-kind support. Videos of honorees are just as important for online award events, and media can highlight your event on their websites.
 - **They need to be thanked appropriately.** In addition to recognizing these entities online during live events, you can thank them publicly in pre- and post-event communications and on your website.
 - **Don't give up on donated products.** They can still motivate participation. These products can be mailed (for far less than the cost of a dinner).
- **Social media communications are essential to boost participation and attract donors.** People don't learn about your face-to-face events by chance, and this is equally true for online events. Information should be on your website, your Board members and friends still need to contact people, and everyone involved should make maximum use of social media. Of course, the message, focus, and targeting focus will depend on whether you are will be opening activities (like a silent auction) to the public or selling tickets to an online performance or activity. In any case, you will need to make your case online and reach potential supporters.

Preparing for Future Fundraising Events

Physical distancing is likely to be required or recommended throughout 2020 and perhaps beyond – until a vaccine for COVID-19 is widely available. This means that nonprofits will need to hold fundraising events that are partly virtual and/or bring together much smaller groups than the galas of the recent past. The creation of such events should begin soon. Following are some suggested steps and considerations that may help your nonprofit with that process, with lots of quick reference footnotes to help you find more information.

1. **Be clear on your event fundraising needs and capacity.** Answering the following questions can help you choose events appropriate to your organization:
 - a. How much do we need to raise annually through events? How much, if any, extra do we need to raise over the next year because of other lost revenue due to COVID-19?
 - b. How much money can we spend up front for consultants and access to online platforms? [Think of this as the equivalent of the deposit to the venue for a gala – cash you have to put up before you get income from the event.]
 - c. Who will be responsible for planning and marketing, and how much time can they realistically spend on events? How much help can other staff be expected to provide?
 - d. Given workloads throughout the year, is it better to have a heavy demand on staff for a short time – for a single major event – or a lower-level of demand over a longer period – for several smaller and less demanding fundraisers?
 - e. How much help can we get from Board members and volunteers?
 - f. Do we have staff, Board members, or volunteers with special skills that may be helpful for virtual events, such as skills with online platforms and social media? Will we need a consultant/company to handle all the online tasks, or can we do some of them ourselves – e.g., adapting our homepage to advertise the event, arranging online ticket sales, arranging

individual pages for each volunteer if we use a peer-to-peer model, handling social media posts to publicize our event, and managing the event platform?

- g. Is there a celebrity or well-known figure or group who will lend both name and time?
- h. To what extent do we already have phone/text or email contacts for potential participants? Do we have a clear pipeline (through staff or Board) for reaching new people, perhaps Millennials and Gen Zs, who are especially likely to participate in virtual events or peer-to-peer campaigns?
- i. What sponsors can we count on for support of a virtual event, and how much can we expect to raise from them, assuming we give them visibility and recognition?
- j. What other organizational strengths or relationships can strengthen our event planning or support?

2. **To guide event selection, develop some flexible but specific guidelines that reflect your mission and values, so the event both raises money and advances your mission.** Base your guidelines on the assessment, so they specify how much needs to be raised, preference for one versus several events, strengths or connections that should be incorporated, and types of approaches that should and should not be considered. For example:

- An arts organization will probably want to focus on events that use the arts and help show why arts and culture are so important to our society, regardless of economic conditions – perhaps a silent or live auction of paintings or other art objects, with the artists and the nonprofit sharing the proceeds; or peer-to-peer fundraising where the participants work with an online instructor to create a piece of art or videotape a performance to “earn” contributions provided by their friends or relatives.
- A nonprofit serving young children may want an event attractive to families – like showing of a child-appropriate movie or other performance, or an online competition where family members create something, participate in a virtual scavenger hunt, or try to get the highest score on some type of game.
- An advocacy organization will want an event that highlights its issue(s) – perhaps through screening a relevant documentary and then holding a discussion where participants can ask questions and recommend actions, or honoring individuals or groups for their work in support of that issue.

Some types of fundraisers may be perfect for some nonprofits and off-limits for others. Clarify this in your guidelines. For example, a nonprofit serving teenagers or a substance use treatment program may want to avoid events involving liquor, while a service provider that focuses on housing or employment training might choose a pub-crawl or its virtual equivalent.

3. **Learn from nonprofit experience with fundraising events during the first few months of the pandemic – your own and others – and from what we are learning about COVID-19.** A good deal of information about emergency virtual events is being shared through articles, webinars, and case studies (see the annotated bibliography). Some of the lessons were summarized earlier in this document. Washington Performing Arts has posted on its website detailed information including a webinar recording on how its planned 600-person event became a livestreamed virtual gala and the lessons learned.”¹⁰

¹⁰ See Washington Performing Arts webpage on Virtual Gala Resources, which includes a video recording of an in-depth webinar on the “Virtual Gala Transformation: Lessons Learned from a 3-Day Pivot,” a closed caption

4. **Bring creative people together to recommend possible virtual or largely virtual events, based on organizational strengths and relationships.** Form a working group and give it several months to come up with plan. Provide the guidelines, but also the freedom to innovate. The group might be 5-7 people including Board members, staff, and good friends (such as a key donor). Brief the group on lessons you have learned, share your self-assessment and your guidelines. Ask members to begin by reviewing available materials (like items in the bibliography attached to this document). Then begin the process of identifying and reviewing various options.
5. **Brainstorm and discuss multiple strategies and approaches, then choose several for more in-depth consideration.** Look at peer-to-peer fundraising, philanthropic crowdfunding (first used for raising capital for for-profit ventures),¹¹ performances, games/competitions, silent or live auctions, or a telethon. Read about events that have been successful, and consider whether and how they might be adapted to your needs. Consider your own face-to-face events and think about how they might be transformed to virtual or near-virtual events. Apply the guidelines you have agreed on. What options seems appropriate, given your mission, organizational values, and relationships? Choose several strategies or models that seem appropriate, for more review.
 - **Consider both virtual and near-virtual events.** When Washington Performing Arts had its gala in mid-March 2020, there was not yet a ban on gatherings of more than 10 people, so they were able to gather a small group of people and have their performances viewed both live and online. After strict guidelines have been lifted, your supporters may still be uncomfortable with an indoor dinner with 400 other people, but may be happy to be one of 50 people in a large venue with physical distancing who are part of the VIP reception for an otherwise online event – invited to meet honorees and watch a live performance that others will see online, and perhaps receive a mask with your logo on it. If the situation changes, you can adapt easily to online only.
 - **If you have limited time to manage events, consider simple events that earn less but can be repeated.** For example, performing arts organizations can schedule a series of online performances, perhaps featuring virtual receptions with the performers for higher-level donors. A community museum might provide a series of online painting or sculpture lessons. If you are a neighborhood nonprofit that benefited from pub-crawls or happy hours in the past, adapt the virtual pub-crawl used on Long Island, where 40 individuals or couples from the same neighborhood each get a different type of beer or bottled cocktail and bar food delivered to their doorsteps every hour for four hours (each by a different bar or restaurant) and participate in Instagram-live music and bingo.¹²
 - **For each of the approaches that seem promising, review case studies, tips, and toolkits so you understand what it takes to implement a particular approach.** Some, like peer-to-peer

transcript of the webinar, materials like the program for the reconfigured gala, the auction catalog, the gala invitation, and the OneCause Gala website. See <https://www.washingtonperformingarts.org/seasontickets/gala/>.

¹¹ See “Crowdfunding for Nonprofits,” National Council of Nonprofits, at <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/crowdfunding-nonprofits>; or “What Crowdfunding Means for Philanthropy,” by Lazar Finker, Lazar Finker’s Philanthropy Blog, April 2, 2018, at <http://lazarfinker.com/what-crowdfunding-means-for-philanthropy/>.

¹² “Where to find Long Island’s Virtual Pub Crawls and Happy Hours,” by Colin Hirsch, *Newsday*, updated May 13, 2020. See <https://www.newsday.com/lifestyle/restaurants/virtual-pub-crawls-long-island-1.44401842>.

fundraising, are very well documented.¹³ Experts provide advice, and the companies that support them through online platforms usually have informative case studies on their websites.¹⁴

6. **Choose one or more promising approaches to try – and be realistic in your expectations.** When you planned your first awards dinner or 5K run or performance, you weren't sure it would work. But you tried it, learned from the experience, and either refined and continued it (with improved results) or decided it wasn't a good ongoing investment and moved on to something else. Be prepared to do the same with your new event. You may initially have fewer participants online than in person, but you may still meet your fundraising goal because costs may be lower. If you feel safer doing several small events, consider trying two different approaches.
7. **Determine technology requirements and options.** You can hold some events with a simple meeting platform and livestream it with Facebook or Instagram; others – like silent auctions – need specialized software. If you consider publicity and ticketing and including several activities in your event, there will probably be multiple technology needs. Your website is also likely to play a very important role. Everything related to your event should be available and easily accessible in the same place online. For example, you will need to announce your events, manage ticketing or registration, recognize your sponsors/partners, and offer individual pages for each of your volunteer fundraisers if you do peer-to-peer fundraising. If your current website is not up to the task, be sure to arrange for expert help in providing a platform that is linked to it.
8. **Choose a company and/or consultant to help, unless you are confident you have the skills and time to do it all yourself.** Ratings from nonprofit clients indicate that some use state-of-the-art technology, care about our causes, are affordable, and provide excellent staff support. You will need to find someone you can trust. When choosing a consultant (which often means choosing their platform and software), be sure you know who will be working with you and feel comfortable that the individuals assigned are a comfortable fit.¹⁵ This involves not only competence but also more personal considerations – communications style, availability at appropriate hours, perhaps a special interest in your organization and its work. Spend some time looking at several companies appropriate to your needs, get to know the individuals who would be assisting you, and ask for references from clients of similar size and focus. There are many reputable companies.
 - Among companies with online event platforms that have good ratings are OneCause, Soapbox Engage (links to Salesforce), Classy, Fonteva (links to Salesforce), Bloomerang, DonorPerfect, Qgiv, Salsa Labs, and Fundly.¹⁶ They vary in focus and affordability.

¹³ See, for example David Hessekiel's Peer-to-Peer Professional Forum, which includes lots of resources including a COVID-19 P2P Info Center, at <https://www.peertopeerforum.com/>. He also writes articles on peer-to-peer fundraising for *Forbes*.

¹⁴ See, for example, "Fundraising Campaigns Changing the World," Classy, at <https://www.classy.org/>; or "20 Virtual Event Ideas," by Jacob Thomas, Bizzabo Blog, April 9, 2020, at <https://blog.bizzabo.com/virtual-event-ideas>.

¹⁵ For help in choosing the right consultant, see "Hiring a Fundraising Consultant: 12 Essential Tips," Alys Sterling Philanthropy, at <https://alysterling.com/hiring-fundraising-consultants/>.

¹⁶ See "Best Fundraising Software," g2.com, at <https://www.g2.com/categories/fundraising>; and

- A number of companies have silent auction software that makes the process quick and simple for your nonprofit. Among the highly rated companies/platforms are OneCause, Qgiv, and Auctria.¹⁷
- For livestreaming, you can use familiar, generally easy-to-use social livestreaming platforms – Facebook Live, Instagram Live, and YouTube – or a platform developed specifically for livestreaming like Twitch Tiltify (owned by Amazon, providing interactive telethon-style livestreaming) or Mixer (owned by Microsoft, heavily used for live streaming video games).¹⁸

9. **Make social media a key part of your marketing and communications.** If you don't have someone on staff or Board who is comfortable using social media, you may need a consultant to help with promoting your first online event – but be sure you hire someone who will teach you how to do it yourself in the future. Often, younger staff, Board members, or volunteers – or their teenage or young adult children – can be very helpful since they are probably heavy users of multiple social media platforms. Good online advice is available as well, including descriptions of the best choices for reaching various audiences and sample messages.¹⁹

10. **Try it, carefully document and assess the experience, and then decide on next steps.** Keep good records of the number of participants/ticket purchasers, how many people connected and stayed to participate, how much money you raised, how much you spent, and your net income. If you had multiple components – for example, a performance, a silent auction, a raffle, and direct fundraising (Fund-a-Need) – look at what each one raised and what it cost. Also ask selected participants and key donors or sponsors/partners to assess everything – their experience with registering or buying a ticket and in getting online or accessing the livestream to participate, your social media choices and messages, how well you highlighted your cause and your impact, how you recognized your sponsors and partners, and the quality and level of excitement of the event. Debrief and review that information, and decide whether this is a model you will use again. If the answer is yes, immediately identify everything you will do again next time and everything you will change. If the answer is no, go back to the ideas you considered and look at them again – or do some new brainstorming now that you have more experience. As with any fundraising effort, learn, refine, and improve.

¹⁶ Fundraising Event Software and Tools for Nonprofit Fundraising,” Double the Donation, at <https://doublethedonation.com/tips/nonprofit-software-and-resources/nonprofit-fundraising-event-software/>.

¹⁷ See “Top Charity Auctions Software: 17 Awesome Charity Auction Fundraising Tools,” Double the Donation, at <https://doublethedonation.com/tips/nonprofit-software-and-resources/charity-auctions-tools-for-nonprofits/>.

¹⁸ See “The Livestreaming Platform for Your Nonprofit Events,” by Erin Booker, Fundraiser, March 18, 2020, at <https://www.funraise.org/blog/the-livestreaming-platform-for-your-nonprofit-events>; “Mixer vs. Twitch”, at <https://filtergrade.com/what-is-mixer/>; or “How to Use Live Streaming for Fundraising,” by Paul Richards, StreamGeeks, March 11, 2018, at <https://streamgeeks.us/use-live-streaming-fundraising/>.

¹⁹ See, for example, “7 Tips for Fundraising on Social Media,” by Hanna Harrison, TechSoup, August 8, 2018, at <https://blog.techsoup.org/posts/7-tips-for-fundraising-on-social-media>; or “The Beginner’s Guide to Online Fundraising, Chapter Five: Social Media Strategy,” MobileCause, at <https://www.mobilecause.com/online-fundraising-guide/social-media/>.

Annotated References

Online Giving

“2018 Charitable Giving Report: How Fundraising Performed in 2018,” presented by Steve MacLaughlin, Blackbaud Institute for Philanthropic Impact, February 2019.

The report is a respected source of data about charitable giving, including information about overall, online, and mobile giving trends. It includes Blackbaud Index data from 9,029 nonprofit organizations that together represent \$319 billion in total fundraising and 5,537 nonprofits representing \$2.7 billion in online fundraising in 2019. Blackbaud describes itself as “the world’s leading cloud software company powering social good.”

<https://institute.blackbaud.com/asset/2018-charitable-giving-report/>

<https://blog.givecentral.org/2019/07/increase-online-giving/>

“The End of the Beginning of Online Giving,” by Steve MacLaughlin, sgENGAGE, March 4, 2019.

Describes the growth of online giving, identifies several common best practices that “remain uncommon,” uses data to show that some widely held assumptions (like the effectiveness of year-end campaigns) may no longer apply, and provides some predictions for online giving over the next 20 years. MacLaughlin is the Vice President of Data & Analytics at Blackbaud.

<https://npengage.com/nonprofit-fundraising/the-end-of-the-beginning-of-online-giving/>

Moving from Live to Virtual Events

“7 Easy Steps to Move Any Fundraising Event to Virtual,” Bloomerang, undated but recent.

The steps are: (1) Choose the format – livestream event or time-limited online fundraiser hosted on a campaign landing page; (2) Select a streaming platform – free (public), honor system (semi-private using an unlisted URL sent after registration), or pay-per-view (private, most complex and expensive, with authentication so tickets can only be redeemed once); (3) Plan event logistics (lists resources for event preparation); (4) Promote simple step-by-step guidelines for supporters; (5) Rehearse the event with your team to ensure video, sound, internet connection, and backup are all in order; (6) Go Live! Don’t be afraid of inevitable mistakes and provide donor recognition; (7) Follow up, say thanks (again), and ask for one last donation. Also lists seven virtual fundraising ideas, from galas to scavenger hunts.

<https://bloomerang.co/blog/seven-easy-steps-to-move-any-event-to-virtual/>

“Checklist: Pivoting to a Virtual Fundraising Event,” GiveSmart by Community Brands.

GiveSmart is a company that supports online giving, but also makes many useful tips and steps available free on its website. The checklist is detailed and informative. Other available blogs address issues like “Essential Steps for a Text-to-Donate Campaign.”

<https://www.givesmart.com/blog/checklist-pivoting-to-a-virtual-fundraising-event/>

“Reboot Your Fundraising Event,” Chronicle of Philanthropy webinar, April 30, 2020.

Webinar featured presenters from Classy, Washington Performing Arts, and High Fives Foundation, describing how planned events were rebooted to become virtual, sometimes in a period of only a few days. Access to archived webinars is through purchase only.

<https://store.philanthropy.com/pages/webinars>

Virtual Fundraising Events

“20 Virtual Fundraising Ideas during COVID-19,” by Tim Forbes, Soapbox Engage Blog, updated March 15, 2020.

Provides a list of 20 ideas for virtual fundraising, each of which you can click on to access a detailed description of how this has been used, why it works, and how to get started. Some examples: a virtual gala with individuals hosting individual tables, a virtual talent show with individual performers and use of an event registration app, a virtual open mic night, virtual cooking lessons, a virtual paint or craft night (ideally reflecting your cause or theme), a Facebook Live event with performers or speakers, a birthday challenge fundraisers where people give money based on the individual fundraiser’s age rather than gifts, some kind of free digital download in exchange for a donation (e.g., book, digital art), “marathon” events where people contribute to an individual for some kind of activity like watching 24 consecutive hours of films starring a particular actor.

<https://www.soapboxengage.com/blog/1863-virtual-fundraising-ideas>

“8 Tips for Hosting a Virtual Fundraising Event,” by Tim Forbes, Soapbox Engage Blog, April 29, 2020.

The eight tips, each explained, are: (1) Create a clear vision, (2) Develop a detailed plan, (3) Do a practice event, (4) Get audience participation, (5) Repeat the event or use video or other content in multiple ways, (6) Create an atmosphere and make sure people look their best on camera, (7) Track the data (e.g., how many people attended, how long they stayed, average donation), and (8) Follow up (and thank participants).

<https://www.soapboxengage.com/blog/1887-virtual-fundraising-event-tips>

Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Fundraising

“6 Ways to Engage Peer-to-Peer Participants and Increase Donations for Your Virtual Events,” by Laura Higgins, Cathexis, April 20, 2020.

The article identifies ways to increase participant involvement and donations from peer-to-peer virtual events. It distinguishes two types of peer-to-peer events: virtual events/campaigns set up by the organization, where individuals support an event created by the nonprofit, and do-it-yourself (DIY) events/campaigns where the individual chooses the activity or event. Suggested approaches include hosting Facebook Live events, issuing social media challenges, using theme days (e.g., “crazy hat day”), sending out a call for videos that can motivate other participants, offering incentives, and “getting creative with your online space” (e.g., educating participants about your work through a competitive treasure hunt leading participants to different areas of your website or social media).

<https://cathexispartners.com/engage-virtual-p2p/>

“7 Great Peer-to-Peer Fundraising Event Ideas,” by Tim Forbes, Soapbox Engage Blog, December 5, 2019.

Provides ideas for peer-to-peer fundraising, where people donate to a friend or relative based on some kind of activity or event. Ideas include celebrating special days like birthdays, going on strike (e.g., giving up coffee or soda or another small item in their daily lives and invite friends to do the same, to gain donations to a cause, athletic events or online activities), wearing (or not wearing) something, inviting supporters to set personal challenges, hosting a “marathon” (some kind of test of endurance, like playing a board game for 24 hours), or watching a movie together online.

<https://www.soapboxengage.com/blog/1824-6-great-peer-to-peer-fundraising-event-ideas>

Peer-to-Peer Professional Forum

The Forum “supports the thousands of professionals who manage peer-to-peer fundraising programs that engage millions of people to raise billions for good causes.” It provides a variety of services including webinars, descriptions of successful P2P programs, and offers numerous links to articles and materials. In addition to a special COVID-19 Info Center, it offers numerous materials offering “insights into best practices,” special reports “Building Innovative P2P Fundraising Programs” and “The Essential Guide to Peer-to-Peer Fundraising,” a blog on topics like “Fundraising Alternatives when COVID-19 Knocks Out Your Traditional P2P,” research, and a newsletter.

<https://www.peertopeerforum.com/>

Fundraising Toolkit, Cancer Research Institute (CRI)

CRI uses a “community of grassroots fundraisers who leverage their personal networks of friends, colleagues, and others” to support CRI, through a wide range of activities, “from bake sales and video game live streams to marathons and memorials.” A concise 7-page guide that shows how a nonprofit can engage individuals to fundraise on its behalf. Gives guidance for these fundraisers that other nonprofits could use, covering:

- Impact – e.g., \$100 helps pay for a day of a young doctoral fellow’s research and training
- Steps – start off strong, tell our story, spread the word, follow up, thank your supporters
- Customizing the fundraisers’ individual CRI webpage – with a name for your fundraiser, photo, a goal, a shared story, and a thank you
- Ways to ask – ask directly, ask on social media, ask repeatedly
- Sample messages for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and email
- Saying thank you – with a personal phone call, email, public speech, or social media post, then follow up in a few months to show them the impact of their donations

<https://www.cancerresearch.org/CRI/media/Files-for-download/CRI-Fundraising-Toolkit.pdf>

Using Social Media

“7 Tips for Fundraising on Social Media,” by Hanna Harrison, TechSoup, August 8, 2018.

These are quick tips for creating and launching an effective fundraising campaign that includes social media. They include: (1) Create a campaign plan; (2) Decide which social platforms are the most relevant; (3) Reach out to influencers; (4) Select appropriate fundraising tools; (5) Tailor your message to each platform; (6) Show your supporters how their donation can make a difference; and (7) Celebrate milestones and thank your donors.

<https://blog.techsoup.org/posts/7-tips-for-fundraising-on-social-media>

“The Beginner’s Guide to Online Fundraising, Chapter Five: Social Media Strategy,” MobileCause.

This chapter in an online guide provides data on use of social media and lays out three key steps: (1) Make a plan; (2) Customize your message; and (3) Inspire participation. It also describes a number of sound practices.

<https://www.mobilecause.com/online-fundraising-guide/social-media/>