

The prospects of fundraising today

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The year 2020 has been a turning point for non-profits. The economic and social collapse in many parts of the world, as well as the pandemic and its implications on human life have imposed many challenges in this sector. How is fundraising coping with such changes? What is its trend and how can one effectively fundraise in the new normal?

Actually, it is because of these difficult times that fundraising ought to thrive. Simply, people unite and help each other more in times of crisis. And today, campaigns behind which “giving” is initiated are increasing. Taking action has become more urgent because we have more complex health issues, more people getting poorer, more discrimination, more refugees and more violation of human rights.

There are different types of fundraising, and the trend of fundraising has changed throughout history. It is understood that fundraising is “the seeking of financial support for a charity, a cause or other enterprise” and an indispensable means for most non-profits to bring money needed to cover their expenses and fulfil their mission.

In religion, “charitable giving” is mentioned under different names in the holy books and practices like Islam, Christianity, Judaism. In Islam, giving comes in the form of “Sadaqat” meaning the act of charity that is referred to in the Quran. The Bible also mentioned charity and requires the giving to be in discreet. As for Judaism, charity is a tradition referred to as “social justice” and helping the Jewish poor is a fundamental obligation.

Charitable values that drive “giving” have remained consistent across history. Based on that, people and communities have long helped others in need. However, the way they raise funds has changed significantly over time.

In the early 20th century, the concept of organized modern fundraising became institutionalized. The so-called “Fathers of Fundraising,” Frank Pierce and Charles Sumner Ward, were the first to develop fundraising on a national and professional level. By implementing an effective publicity strategy, using advertisement and face to face they succeeded in raising \$4 million to support their cause, which was establishing the building of the YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) in New York.

Then, over time, universities, hospitals and non-profit organizations begun to use creative ways to raise funds and build awareness. Selling products, using the phone or writing letters, public campaigns and events are all traditional approaches that were progressively introduced. Media has facilitated the way for the fundraising campaigns to publicize and reach a large number of people in a very short time so that donors anywhere in the world can donate.

But more importantly, the use of social media gave fundraising another dimension. It has played a big role in connecting donors, getting them more involved in the cause and letting them see the progress and impact of their contribution. We even began to witness campaigns led by the public itself across the globe, such as “Black Lives matter,” which raised \$90 million in 2020, and the Ice Bucket Challenge, which raised more than \$100 million in 30 days.

Today, the global pandemic has surprisingly increased the popularity of online giving. A new study showed that “giving” jumped 10.6 percent in 2020. In the 2020 Global Trends in Giving Report, a survey involving 81 countries indicated that 80 percent of Covid-19 donors prefer donating online. These statistics are important to visualize the future trend of fundraising.

However, as much as these challenges are successful in meeting the target, creating one event or one big campaign is a short-term success for an organization to sustain and even survive. Bridging the gap between the donors and the cause they support is critical for the success of the fundraising and its continuation. But it is not enough for the survival of the non-profit or the charity in a difficult time. Organizations need to have a comprehensive strategy to expand the diversity of their donors.

What I mean is a truly integrated program that mixes a few short-term online fundraisers with the offline events needed for survival and then backing this with a long-term fundraising option to ensure sustainability and success and to sustain the donors and build their trust in the organization and the mission it supports.

Another vital aspect worth investing in is having an accountability system with a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to set a transparent model for the donors and gain their trust over time. Unfortunately, the non-profit sector, and charity in particular, rarely undergoes such process. To be able to survive and thrive in the digital era, an organisation needs to adapt by having a regular mechanism and setting a clear “inclusive donor” strategy to communicate with its donors, responding to its motivation needs, on top of which is transparency and trust.

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