



CRA AT FORTY

Competitive Fundraising: The Game Where Everyone Wins

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More and more organizations across the United States are adopting the practice of concentrated fundraising campaigns and many, such as Girls Who Code, MENTOR, Rise Against Hunger and Girl Scouts of the USA are, for the first time, participating in competitive fundraising tournaments, with results to the tune of \$3.6M being raised and over 31 percent of donations coming from first-time donors.

Engaging in competitive fundraising efforts with other nonprofits offers many benefits to participating organizations, the most vital of which include increased awareness of a nonprofit's *cause* in donors' minds, better accommodation of donors' needs and preferences and a higher level of donor engagement.

A COMPETITION WHERE EVERYONE WINS

So what is competitive fundraising, and how does it work? Every March, Brackets For Good hosts single-elimination, bracket-style fundraising tournaments across the country that raise much-needed funds and awareness for nonprofit organizations of all sizes. Nonprofits can enter the tournament by December for competition the following March. We select 64 nonprofits for each tournament city; they retain all the donations raised as well as the donor information, regardless of their advancement in the tournament. The tournament takes place in six rounds over five weeks. It truly is a competition where everyone wins – nonprofits, their clients, corporate sponsors and the community as a whole.

Brackets For Good was founded in April 2011, when the entire state of Indiana was bleeding blue and white. While you may be thinking back to what was going on with the Indianapolis Colts in April 2011, we were actually supporting the Butler University men's basketball team. They had made it to their second national championship game in two years. Unfortunately, history couldn't be repeated, as Butler experienced a painful loss. But it was the energy and excitement that was flowing through the city at that time that prompted Brackets For Good's Co-

Founders to wonder if the same enthusiasm could be bottled up and put to use for good. That feeling quickly turned into a brainstorm, which led to the organization's founding.

HOW NONPROFIT COMPETITIVE FUNDRAISING WORKS

Multiple touch points help a nonprofit's cause stick in donors' minds

Big for-profit brands know that it takes many interactions, or brand impressions, with a consumer to alter their behavior or prompt an action. The nonprofit sector – and fundraisers in particular – can learn from these strategies.

For example, auto manufacturers know that a billboard in and of itself isn't enough to make a person buy a car. However, the billboard serves as one touch point among hundreds or thousands of consumer touch points that result in influencing behavior.

In the world of charitable organizations, it's critically important that these touch points aren't strictly pleas for support. To successfully encourage donors to support a nonprofit's cause, these touch points need to communicate impact statistics and stories about beneficiaries, in addition to appeals for financial support.

In a competitive fundraising initiative, support can be solicited through a variety of different communication channels, which gives participating organizations the chance to plan ahead and create multiple touch points with supporters.

It doesn't overburden nonprofit supporters

One of the least talked about – but most essential – skills that charitable fundraising professionals must have is empathy. To hone this skill, fund development and marketing personnel need to put themselves in the shoes of their donors and understand their feelings.

Generally, donors really do care a great deal about the mission of organizations they support, but a nonprofit's cause represents just a small fraction of the things they think and care about in a given week. Competitive fundraising events put a nonprofit's cause on donors' radars in an entertaining way, without overburdening them with too many asks. Additionally, competitive fundraising initiatives generally have predetermined end-dates in mind, so supporters can be invited to participate without worrying about ongoing commitments or open-ended timelines.

To ensure supporters are not overwhelmed, organizations should concentrate fundraising efforts in periodic pulses of activity throughout the year and create new, innovative touch points with supporters to keep them engaged. When a campaign ends, it's important to give them a break before ramping up the next fundraising effort; one of the best ways to lose a supporter is incessantly sending them pleas for support.

Ultimately, competitive fundraising allows a supporter to engage more fully for a short period of time and then, without guilt, lean away to focus time and efforts on other important aspects of their lives.

The element of competition helps donors have fun and feel more engaged

The unique format of a competitive fundraising campaign allows supporters to get involved on a new level and have fun while showing their dedication to a charitable cause.

Donors can share their involvement on social media, create incentives for their friends or coworkers to contribute and, through this enhanced engagement with the cause, find new ways to drive the mission forward.

In recent competitive fundraising tournaments organized by Brackets For Good, 64 percent of the nonprofit supporters reported that their experience rallying behind their favorite organizations made them feel more engaged with the organization they supported. 38 percent reported that they would now be more likely to volunteer with the organization they supported.

A GREATER COLLECTIVE IMPACT FOR COMMUNITIES

Since March 2012 through April 2017, Brackets For Good tournaments have only operated for 32 weeks out of 312 total weeks during that period. During those 32 weeks of tournament operations, we have helped to raise over \$6.3 million for local charities in the Ann Arbor area, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Denver, Hartford, Indianapolis, Louisville, Miami, Nashville, St. Louis, the Twin Cities, Washington D.C. and through a National Tournament (featuring 31 different states across the country). In the coming years, we will continue to expand our tournaments. We are proud to share that during that same time period, 31,921 donations were made, with 31.6 percent of those received from first-time donors.

Our tournaments not only support nonprofits in their fundraising efforts, but also offer corporate citizens, including banks, the ability to join in the action. Banks have been key supporters of the local tournaments in many of our cities. In addition, many of the nonprofits that compete in our tournaments conduct CRA-qualified community development activities including affordable housing, job creation, economic empowerment, homeless support, domestic violence advocacy, youth development and other support to low-income communities.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

REID MCDOWELL is a cause marketer and social innovator that parlayed for-profit marketing experience into a pursuit to create innovative ways for people to learn about and support charitable nonprofits. Reid co-runs Brackets for Good, focusing much of his time on tournament promotions and strategic partnerships. You can reach Reid at reid@bfg.org. For more information about competitive fundraising tournaments with Brackets for Good, visit www.BFG.org.

ABOUT THE BOOK

This article first appeared in **CRA at 40: Views on the Present and Future of Community Reinvestment**, published by findCRA in November 2017. The book was created in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Community Reinvestment Act. It tells the stories of community development, from the perspective of those working in our communities who bring their knowledge and passion to bear every day in confronting the most critical problems facing communities in need. The book is about real-world experiences told in plain language by those who live them to provide a lens for readers to see CRA at work, ideas for its future and most importantly, what it means in people's lives. To access the full text or order copies of the book, please visit www.findCRA.com/CRAat40.