

# Grassroots Fundraising Journal

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A PUBLICATION OF



## Technology & Communications Creative Strategies for Grassroots Groups

Social Media and Fundraising

Communicating by Committee

Text-to-Donate—Grassroots Style

Vote-to-Win Fundraising

Matching Gifts Online

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Groups that reach out to their members through many avenues—email, web, tweeting, Facebook, blogs, and print—risk overburdening supporters with too much information too often—unless they coordinate their communications. International Rivers couldn't afford to dedicate a staff position to the task, but a committee has taken on the job and has lots to teach about how to make it work.



### ON OUR COVER

Choice USA staff gathers at the 2011 Generation 2 Generation Celebration, an annual fundraiser that honors the reproductive justice achievements of young people and their mentors. In this issue's feature article, Choice USA's Deputy Director, Darshan Khalsa, describes how the group used social media to turn out a record number of people to the event.

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## Technology, Grassroots-Style

Priscilla Hung

**EACH YEAR, ONE ISSUE OF THE** *Journal* focuses exclusively on fundraising technology, including online communications and social media, to keep up with the constant changes in the field. Like many groups, we at GIFT are challenged to stay current. But as a small organization whose work is part of national movement-building, we recognize that continuous improvement in how we use technology is not optional.

So here at GIFT, we are once again in the middle of redesigning our website. We did a major redesign just three years ago, but as expectations change—for example, to find information faster, to have fewer links to get to a page, and to have more images and interactive features and less text—we need to stay current. If you have managed a website redesign, you know what a headache it can be. For example, in March, we were all set with a new design. Then a consultant looked at it and asked, “Where’s your ‘Subscribe to the *Journal*’ button?” Our hearts sank. She was right—it should have been easier to find, right on top. Back to the drawing board.

The new website will have a direct impact on you as a *Journal* reader. Thanks to the great feedback from our Readers Survey, we will have a new online store to make it easier to renew your subscriptions, and it will be faster for you to access the *Journal*’s online archive. Links to our Facebook page, blog, and YouTube channel are right on top. And, yes, a “Subscribe” button will be there as well.

Easy. Fast. Interactive. That is what donors want from their technology. Unfortunately, what we fundraisers hear more often is: Expensive. Clunky. Slow. Blah.

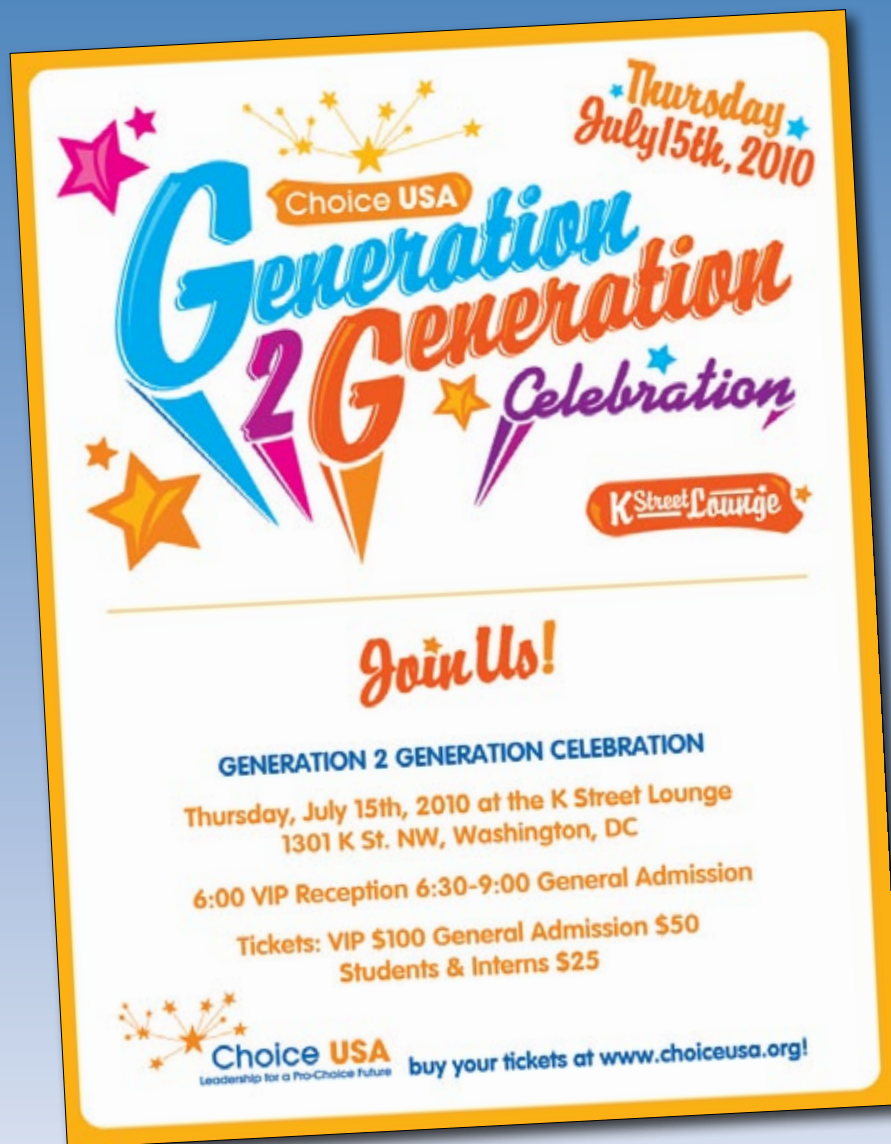
To help all of us navigate the shifting world of fundraising technology, this issue of the *Journal* has five great articles. Choice USA, a national organization with a small staff, shares its story of how they used social media to further their fundraising. Staff at International Rivers outlines how to create an effective communications committee when you can’t afford a dedicated communications director. If you’re interested in trying out mobile giving, Debra Brown provides a grassroots alternative to expensive text-to-give programs. Southwest Workers Union shows that when it comes to winning online fundraising contests, it all comes back to organizing. And Nzinga Koné-Miller rounds out the issue with advice for a successful online matching campaign.

Every week, I come across a new tool or a new perspective on these technologies. A recent email petition urged cell phone carriers to release text donations for the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan immediately, rather than wait until the end of users’ billing cycles. And, of course, we all watched with rapt attention as we saw protests for democracy spread across North Africa and the Middle East...protests that were propelled by mobile phones, Facebook, and the Internet.

Technology doesn’t replace people power and money, but when all three are harnessed, we can create social change. Hope you enjoy geeking out on this issue of the *Journal*, and keep an eye out for our new website in June!

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# Social Media and Fundraising Our Great Experiment

Darshan Khalsa

**SOCIAL MEDIA ARE CHANGING HOW** we do everything: how we interact, how we think, how we buy. Social media are transforming our relationships, our businesses, our communities. So, naturally, they are altering the way we give.

As social media continue to change our world, nonprofits must do the hard but important work of adapting to these changes. For Choice USA, a national youth-led and youth-driven organization working on reproductive justice, the need for adaptation was clear. Globally, statistics show that Facebook has more than 500 million active users and Twitter has nearly

200 million users. As a youth organization, we know that nearly 100% of our audience spends most of their time on social networks. Organizationally, we concluded that we could no longer allow social media to be on the periphery of our work. We must discover creative and innovative ways to fully integrate social media into our communications, our programs and, of course, our fundraising.

During the past five years, Choice USA has begun to discover ways to integrate social media into everything we do. We began with our field work, at first engaging our members and

allies on Facebook and Twitter and later on YouTube. Next we used social media to enhance our communications, publicizing and popularizing our message through the various networks. Hiring communications and field staff well versed in social media, helped us learn that these tools were useful to enhance our face-to-face engagement with young people as well as our standing within the national sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice scene. Finding success with both our field

issued our save-the-date announcement, we first posted it on the homepage of our website, then sent out an e-blast to our list, with a reminder in our monthly newsletter. We duplicated this message on Facebook and Twitter. We chose not to create a Facebook event for the G2GC. Facebook events are very helpful in organizing events that are free, but not events that include ticket sales. Instead, we simply directed our Facebook fans and Twitter followers to our website event page. All in all, we have

## WE SAW SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN INEXPENSIVE WAY TO BUILD VISIBILITY AND BUZZ IN ORDER TO BOOST OUR TICKET SALES.

and communications social media work, we have moved to the daunting task of figuring out how social media can maximize our fundraising efforts.

### Building Social Media Fans for Fundraising

Our Generation to Generation Celebration (G2GC) seemed like a natural place to start. This popular event, hosted every year in Washington, D.C., is meant to bring in individual donors. Sponsored by partner organizations and individuals, the event honors the reproductive justice achievements of young people and their mentors. Awards include the Steinem-Waters Legacy Award for Mentorship, the Excellence in Leadership Award, and the Outstanding Chapter Award. With about 150 people purchasing tickets for the G2GC, it gives us an opportunity to promote our work to a wide network and cultivate relationships with people in the D.C. area—our members, local supporters, and allies in the movement. The G2GC is always an inspiring party.

Although the event is not high-dollar, it has perpetually been a money-maker. Then, in 2009, as the economic crisis took a toll on many nonprofits, we struggled to get organizational sponsorship and our ticket sales lagged. We were just able to break even.

When we sat down to do our backwards plan for the G2GC the next year, we intentionally began to integrate social media as part of our larger strategy to scale up the event in terms of ticket sales, sponsorship, and notoriety. We saw social media as an inexpensive way to build visibility and buzz in order to boost our ticket sales. Along with being inexpensive, we also found that integrating social media into the G2GC did not significantly cut into our staff capacity—all told, it took about 2% of our communications director's time over the course of three months.

When the time for award nominations came around, we posted regular reminders on Facebook and Twitter. When we

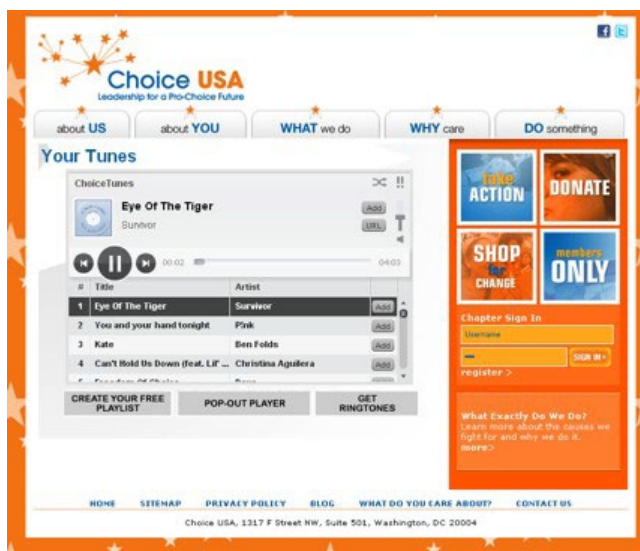
found that limiting the number of times people need to click to give or buy gets the greatest return.

When it came time for ticket sales, we wanted to up the ante in terms of our social media advertising. So we announced a contest on Facebook. At the time, we had only 430 Facebook fans. Knowing we wanted to expand this number, we asked that our current fans invite their friends and told them that when we reached 1,000 fans we would do a drawing from our fan list for two VIP tickets to the G2GC. Within hours, we added two hundred fans. Over the course of a month, we reached our goal.



The contest's success was two-fold. In gaining more than 700 fans whom we could engage on future campaigns, events, and fundraisers, we built our list in a big way. At the same time, we were able to plug the G2GC many times in the month before the event. And when we announced the winner of the drawing, our ticket sales shot up. Even fans who did not win did not want to miss out on such a fun event.

The contest ended sooner than we anticipated. We never dreamed that we would be able to gain 700 fans in less than a month. To keep the momentum going, ChoiceTunes was born. Every year after the awards, the G2GC becomes a raucous dance party. So we asked our Facebook fans what they'd like on a playlist for the event. Dozens of fans commented on the post, and BitchMedia even pitched it to their fans. We then used playlist



.com to create a playlist that could be embedded on our website and sent the link in an e-blast and posted it on Facebook and Twitter as one of our final reminders about the G2GC.

In a final push, we offered our Facebook fans and Twitter followers an exclusive rate for tickets. In the end, we were able to turnout more than 125 people, a record number of attendees. By the day of our event, we had posted on Facebook and Twitter more than 20 times, sent out seven e-blasts and gave shout-outs in three newsletters. We also asked our partner organizations to push the event on their lists, which more than ten of them willingly did.

### Pushing It Forward

We did not stop at turnout in our integration of social media and fundraising. Just before the event, we launched a new Facebook page both to complement our programming on comprehensive sex education and to engage a diverse audience via social media. The page was titled, “We bet we can find 100,000 people who were clueless on sex growing up!” In days, this page inspired hundreds of young people to share their stories about being clueless on sex and was covered widely within online media.

Acknowledging the sweeping success of the new Facebook page as well as our social media engagement leading up to G2GC, we decided to plug the page widely at the actual event. Television monitors throughout the room displayed a loop of photos intermixed with URLs for our Facebook, Twitter and “Clueless on Sex” page. Stories from the “Clueless on Sex” page were shared from the podium. People were encouraged to

become fans and we gained roughly 50 more fans immediately after the event. We even brought our Facebook contest winner on stage for a shout-out.

### The Results

Using the G2GC to enhance our social media efforts and our social media efforts to enhance the G2GC was hugely successful. On the fundraising end, we had a record number of attendees and donations. On the social media end, our advertising and creative work around the G2GC gave us a new online momentum. The back-and-forth is exactly what social media are all about. Social media are social, after all. We cannot just use these platforms to get out our message and leave it at that. One-sided relationships cannot work in social media. Using social media to build a network of relationships and promoting an integrated strategy is key in turning a profit and raising visibility.

We know that this strategy may or may not work for everyone as it did for us, and we only dipped a toe into the deep pond of integrating social media into our fundraising efforts. With such a positive experience, we plan to delve even further this year, both in terms of event planning and soliciting individual donations. We are looking into Facebook apps like FundRazr to raise money for small projects. We want to incorporate YouTube videos from our members into our year-end appeal. And we are looking forward to expanding our social media efforts even more around the G2GC by hosting another contest and providing fun ways for those not in the Washington, D.C. area to give to the event.

### A Great Experiment

With mobile giving on the rise, nonprofits have not yet discovered how to fully integrate social media into fundraising plans and, for some, the concept of social media integration is still controversial. Currently, only 3.5 percent of organizations have raised more than \$10,000 via social media campaigns, with the average amount only \$1,000. However, with most people spending a majority of their time online and the opportunities related to social media continuing to grow, Choice USA plans to do more. We are hopeful that it will be a great experiment that benefits our programs, our communications, and our development work. ■

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Darshan Khalsa is Deputy Director at Choice USA. Darshan was previously the Deputy Director at the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (CAPACD), the first national organization dedicated to addressing the housing and community development needs of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

# Communicating by Committee

## How to Make it Work for You

Karolo Aparicio and Berklee Lowrey-Evans

**HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED HOW** your organization could manage its communications efforts—and get results—on a shoestring budget? Want to coordinate all the moving parts of a communications plan but don't have the budget to hire a communications director?

Your situation is not unique—far from it. A quick (and unscientific) survey we took of small, California-based nonprofits in early 2011 showed that about half the organizations surveyed didn't have dedicated communications staff.

At International Rivers, we were in the same situation. But we've greatly improved our communications results by leveraging our in-house talent and organizing a committee to attend to our communications needs. We think our experience can work for you, too.

### The CommComm

For most of our 26-year history, all International Rivers' communications were handled by individual staff members and without much formal coordination or a well-defined brand identity. But as we got bigger and opened more satellite offices overseas, our communications efforts needed to be tied together. We decided to organize relevant staff members into a committee tasked with coordinating these communications. The committee eventually came to be known as the Communications Committee, or "CommComm."

The CommComm wasn't always successful, and admittedly, some of our initial efforts could be characterized as "fits and starts." But by not getting discouraged and learning from mistakes, we have created a functional team that is achieving our communications goals of increasing our online supporter activism, maintaining our brand integrity, raising our media profile, and raising more money, even during the recent economic crisis.

The lessons we learned in organizing and running our committee provide useful ideas for how to coordinate communications efforts in organizations that do not have a budget for a communications manager, or for those that simply want to experiment with new ways of organizing their internal structure.

### Trial and (Mostly) Error

The first incarnation of the CommComm was an ad hoc committee consisting of program, web, and fundraising staff. The committee met on a periodic basis to exchange information about each department's communications projects and to provide a forum for staff to request support, advice, or feedback for specific projects.

This version of the committee was not particularly effective. What was wrong?

First, we had no clear mandate: We did not clearly state our committee's overall mission or over-arching goals.

Second, we had no plan: The ad hoc nature of this committee did not allow for much planning, and the committee served mostly as a body to which activities were reported. We were treading water, trying to maintain a minimum level of organizational communications, but we didn't really know where we wanted to go or how to get there.

Third, there was a lack of accountability. Our activities were not closely articulated to our job descriptions, and the communications work was therefore often treated as secondary to the other responsibilities we each had. Since no one was tasked with overseeing the communications work, there was no formal management structure to advocate on behalf of our communications obligations.

Fourth, we had not assigned any clear individual decision-making power; we made all decisions by consensus. The best example of how this became a burden was during our re-branding

process in 2007. Details like a shade of orange, which font to use for a subtitle, and whether to use kilometers or miles as the default measurement have no right or wrong answers and come down to a matter of opinion. But trying to get six people to have the same opinion on every last detail of an organization's brand identity is close to impossible. We had made the mistake of delegating responsibility without granting authority.

As a committee, we had to admit that we were being ineffective and that something had to change. We realized that we needed to establish goals, define our mandate, assign authority, and create mechanisms for ensuring that the communications work was prioritized and executed. The composition of the committee could remain similar—we would still need representation from program, web, and development staff—but we would need to make sure that our mission and activities became goal-oriented.

### Goals and Activities

One of the first things we did was to create a set of goals for the CommComm. To be sure we accomplished the goals, we tied a set of objectives to each one and defined specific activities for each objective (see sidebar below). Committee members then volunteered to take responsibility for the projects that fit with their job descriptions and work plans for that year.

#### The Communication Committee's Goals, Objectives, and Activities

To make itself more productive, the Communications Committee specified goals, objectives, and activities and assigned responsibility for carrying out tasks. Here is an example.

##### GOAL: IMPROVE INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT

**Objective:** Information regarding communications will be more centralized and coordinated across the organization.

**Activities:**

- Produce and circulate a timeline of key communications events and activities throughout the year. Review this calendar monthly to determine communications priorities for the following month. Maintain the timeline and remind staff to give input (responsible: A., B.).
- Improve our use of the shared calendar to ensure that communications events are coordinated (responsible: B., K.).
- Devise a system to organize our graphics database (responsible: E., B.).

#### The Communication Committee's Mandate

The Communications Committee consists of representatives of all relevant departments—campaigns, development, web—and coordinates the organization's external communications. The Communications Committee is responsible for the following activities:

- Develop the organizational communications strategy
- Ensure that the organization's external communications are consistent, focused, and on-message
- Carry out organizational communications tasks
- Support the departments and campaigns in their communication efforts
- Coordinate communication efforts that involve more than one department

This system of setting goals, tying activities to those goals, and holding the committee members accountable proved more successful. For example, we began to use the shared calendar function of our new intranet to coordinate the timing of all of our communications vehicles. By timing emails, tweets, Facebook posts, homepage features, blogs, and print communications, we could prevent "list fatigue"—overburdening our supporters with too much information too often.

Keeping track of all those moving parts can be a tall order without a shared calendar. Now that we have our communications calendar, we can't imagine life without it.

#### Assigning Authority

However, there was still a lack of clarity about the committee's authority and decision-making power within the organization. We weren't sure if we should create a communications strategy for the whole organization or simply manage communications tasks for individual campaigns. As an organization, we decided that the CommComm should draft a mandate to focus on communications for the organization (see sidebar) and seek input from management and staff to ensure that it met their communications needs.

#### Insights

Through trial and error that brought us to an effective and efficient system, we've had some insights that should help other groups avoid the "error" part.

*Composition:* An effective communications committee should be composed of staff members who represent programs, development, and web. The committee should not be so large that meetings become unwieldy; however, the committee should have sufficient representation that it can advocate and inform on behalf of each department that has communications needs.

*Mandate:* The mandate of the committee should have broad



buy-in from staff and management. The committee should be empowered to make decisions that pertain to communications—for both programs and the organization—and within the committee there must be a well-defined decision-making process.

*Goals:* Overarching goals must be anchored by specific activities. Each activity should be assigned to a specific person and be included in that person's yearly workplan.

*Efficiency:* Standardizing processes benefits everyone. For example, the staff member in charge of creating our email blasts created a form, available on our intranet, with instructions for how staff can get the committee what it needs to create the blasts. By clearly stating what information is needed and providing examples and best practices, the form has reduced the time it takes to create an effective email blast.

*Democratization:* Training staff members and distributing communications tasks is an ongoing process. Staff should be trained to create their own communications vehicles. Staff who are empowered to write their own blogs, press releases, email blasts, and so on, become able to speak in their own voice about the nuances of their issue.

*Decision-making:* It is critical to have clear processes for creating each communications piece, identifying the person with authority to make a final decision, and assigning one person as the final arbiter in the event of a strong disagreement. When issues of personal opinion and organizational hierarchy versus communications or issue expertise arise, these processes will help sort things out.

*Consistency:* One of the key functions of the committee is to help maintain consistency in the organization's brand identity. The committee should create a style guide and enforce it. However, there can be tension between maintaining consistency in messaging as an organization and messaging to specific audiences. The CommComm is an appropriate forum in which to discuss this tension and arrive at policies and procedures for how to address it on an organizational and case-by-case basis.

*Coordination:* It is best for one person to be responsible for maintaining the essential shared calendar and for scheduling all communications activities. Each calendar listing should include the type of communications vehicle (newsletter, email blast, online action, press release, and so on), who is responsible for creating it, and who the recipients will be. These measures help avoid list fatigue and also help to coordinate the best dates to reach your target audience(s) through several channels—print, web, live events, and so on. For organizations with fewer than 3,000 users, Google Apps allows users to share calendars with each other and collaborate on documents in real time. Many other project-management programs have a shared calendar function (you can find them at [techsoup.org/learningcenter/software/page7648.cfm](http://techsoup.org/learningcenter/software/page7648.cfm)).

*Evaluation:* It is crucial to evaluate your communications vehicles and to use your evaluation results to inform your future

goals, objectives, and activities. Here are some questions to ask:

- Are your print and online communications achieving their intended goals?
- How many gifts are being made online and are they changing over time?
- How does this number compare to offline gifts?
- What are the average donation amounts, and are they changing over time?
- How many people are taking action online?
- Are those online actions having any noticeable effect in achieving campaign goals?
- How often are partners requesting your materials (and, for international organizations, how often are partners requesting translations of your materials into their local languages)?
- How popular are your web pages?
- How often are people posting, liking, or commenting on your Facebook page?
- How often are your tweets re-tweeted?
- How many of your press releases or op-eds are being published?
- How many media mentions are you getting? Are they in media outlets that are relevant to your program and fundraising goals?

## Conclusion

Every organization needs to reach its target audiences to gain support, funding, and attention and to meet its programmatic goals. But not every organization can afford to hire a dedicated Communications Manager to formulate and deploy a communications strategy and then evaluate its results.

Your program staff is already writing web content, tweeting, blogging, posting to Facebook, writing op-eds, granting interviews, and circulating online petitions and actions. Your fundraising staff is already sending appeals by mail and/or email and phone banking. By creating your own version of a CommComm, you'll be able to coordinate activities that you're probably already doing and thus do them more efficiently and effectively.

By creating a committee with a clear mandate, tangible goals, achievable objectives and activities, and evaluation criteria that inform future planning, you'll be able to help your organization meet its fundraising and program goals through effective communication. And by sharing the responsibility, you'll help to ease any one person's stress, increase the chances for creative approaches to the work, and even have fun in the process. ■

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Karolo Aparicio is the director of individual giving, and Berkle Lowrey-Evans is the Latin America program associate and online organizer for International Rivers, [InternationalRivers.org](http://InternationalRivers.org).



# Text-to-Donate Grassroots Style

Debra Brown

**IT'S NOT SURPRISING** that after the widely publicized success of the 2010 Red Cross “Text-to-Give” campaign for Haitian earthquake relief, many social change organizations wanted to hop on the text-to-donate bandwagon. After all, according to mGive .com, the Red Cross campaign generated an unprecedented volume of donations that brought in more than \$40 million.

The Red Cross is the perfect type of organization to run a traditional text-to-donate campaign. In this kind of traditional text-to-donate campaign, an organization selects a keyword that is significant to the organization (for example “justice,” “equality,” or “SOS”) and people who want to support the organization text that keyword to a short code (a five- or six-digit number) to make a donation of \$5 or \$10 (the amount is set by the organization) to the organization. The cell phone carriers add the donation amount to the donor’s phone bill, and the organization receives a portion of the actual donation amount.

But as many organizations quickly learned, the type of text-to-donate campaign the Red Cross ran was inaccessible for their groups for a variety of reasons, which will become clear below.

Nonetheless, there is a way for grassroots organizations to generate donations using text messaging. This article explores the various ways that texting programs can help social change organizations enhance their grassroots fundraising programs overall, and it compares grassroots text-to-donate campaigns with the type of campaign the Red Cross used.

## Costs

By and large, the biggest barrier for grassroots groups emulating the Red Cross-style text-to-give campaign is cost. The industry leader, mGive, for example, charges a one-time setup fee of \$500, which covers the lengthy and rigorous carrier application process. Then, there is a monthly fee ranging from \$199 to

\$799, depending on the package features. With each donation, there is a \$0.35 transaction fee, along with the service taking 3.5 percent of the amount donated. The real kicker, however, is that with this kind of text-to-donate campaign, an organization can only give donors the option of giving \$5 or \$10 at a time. And although people can make multiple donations, they can't give more than a total of \$25 per campaign.

Given those limitations and fees, for an organization to break even, it would need more than 21 donations of \$10 each month. If you spread the initial startup cost over the first year,

as a traditional text-to-donate campaign: making it possible for someone to make a donation to your organization by initiating a text message. In fact, you can create a text-to-donate campaign for a fraction of the cost of a traditional campaign, and you stand to gain much more than the initial donation. It just takes a little creativity and effort to collect on the pledge.

The reason a grassroots campaign requires some ingenuity, and arguably the biggest disadvantage of not running a traditional text-to-donate campaign, is that the organization does not automatically receive the donations once a person texts to

## **YOU CAN CREATE A TEXT-TO-DONATE CAMPAIGN FOR A FRACTION OF THE COST OF A TRADITIONAL CAMPAIGN, AND YOU STAND TO GAIN MUCH MORE THAN THE INITIAL DONATION. IT JUST TAKES A LITTLE CREATIVITY AND EFFORT TO COLLECT ON THE PLEDGE.**

the number of \$10 donations needed increases to 26 per month, or 311 donations of \$10 over the course of the year—just to break even.

The primary reason the Red Cross text-to-donate campaign was so successful is because of the reach they have as a very large and well-known national organization. Because they could use traditional mainstream media sources that are often inaccessible to grassroots organizations, knowledge of their text-to-donate campaign spread through endless diverse networks of people on a scale that would be incredibly hard for a smaller, less-well-known organization to achieve. Accordingly, for the Red Cross, the sheer number of people who were exposed to and in turn donated through the text-to-donate campaign easily absorbed the cost of running the campaign.

### **Making It Work for the Grassroots**

One day, after I had explained the costs and the number of donations required to make a traditional text-to-donate campaign lucrative to a very frustrated development director of a grassroots organization, she said, "This is outrageous! Why doesn't someone do something about it?" That's when it occurred to me that we could figure out a way to make it work for grassroots organizations.

So while it is true that it will not be possible for the vast majority of grassroots organizations to do a Red Cross-style text-to-donate campaign, it is entirely possible for an organization of any size and with any budget to use mobile technology to generate income from individual donors.

There are a couple of different ways to create a grassroots text-to-donate program that allows you to reach the same goal

donate. In a traditional text-to-donate campaign, the cell phone carriers play the role of the money collector. Because grassroots text-to-give campaigns bypass the carriers, it is not possible to have the money automatically charged to the donor when he or she texts in to donate. It becomes the responsibility of the organization to collect on the donor's pledge.

The easiest way to set up a basic grassroots text-to-donate campaign is to set up a regular text messaging campaign but publicize it as a text-to-donate program and customize the response text message accordingly. This type of campaign, best for organizations interested in gauging people's receptiveness to a text-to-donate program, can be implemented with virtually any text-messaging service provider. Like a traditional text-to-donate campaign, your organization selects a keyword and someone texts that keyword to a predetermined shortcode.

However, instead of receiving a message directly from the carrier confirming the donation amount and requesting authorization to add the amount to the donor's cell phone bill, the donor receives a customized text message from your organization thanking them for their pledge and providing a link to an online donation portal. From there, it is the responsibility of the donor to complete the donation transaction, either from their smart phone or by pasting the donation URL into a website browser at a later time. Because this grassroots method requires more work on the donor's part, it is reasonable to expect pledge fulfillment rates to be lower than with a traditional text-to-donate campaign.

The second type of grassroots text-to-donate campaign addresses the pledge fulfillment issue head on. In this approach, the organization looks at a text-to-give campaign as a donor

cultivation technique instead of just a method of collecting one-time donations. Thus, the money-collection obstacle becomes a non-issue, especially when compared to the possible payoff. By altering the process, and committing to put in the same amount

service, the cost and risk are much lower than with a traditional text-to-donate campaign. You should quite easily be able to find a service provider that will charge you a minimal cost (\$25-\$100) for setting up a campaign—if they charge anything at all—and

## **A TEXT-TO-DONATE CAMPAIGN SHOULD BE LESS ABOUT SOLICITING THE DONATION AND MORE ABOUT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH DONORS AND ADVANCING AN ORGANIZATION'S MISSION.**

of time as with any other type of grassroots fundraising donor-cultivation campaign, a grassroots text-to-donate campaign can be quite successful.

The way it works is just like with a traditional text-to-donate campaign or a basic grassroots text-to-donate campaign: your organization sets up a keyword that the donor texts if they are interested in making a donation to your organization.

Instead of receiving either a message from the carrier or a link to your donation portal, however, the donor receives a text message thanking them for their commitment to make a donation and informing them they will receive a call to complete the payment. With any text messaging service provider, you will have access to the phone numbers that text in using your keyword.

You can then create a script that provides much more information about your organization and is much more intimate than the text message a donor would receive from a traditional text-to-donate campaign. In this scenario, when you call to collect on the pledge the donor committed to making—which can be any amount, not just the \$5 or \$10 limit imposed with a traditional text-to-donate campaign—you can also start building a relationship with the donor

The advantages of this more intimate, grassroots-style of text-to-donate campaign are highlighted by a study of donors conducted by CCS, a firm that provides fundraising consulting and management services. First, the study participants (all of whom had made donations via text) suggested that they would like to have the option to give more than the \$5 or \$10 currently allowed. When asked the maximum level they would consider giving via text message, 73% said \$25, while 15% indicated \$50 and 9% indicated \$100 or more. Second, 86% of the study participants said they are willing to consider giving larger amounts via other channels. These additional channels can easily be introduced to a text-to-donate campaign donor during a pledge fulfillment call.

Because a grassroots text-to-donate campaign can be implemented using virtually any text messaging company's basic

you should be able to obtain usage-based packages or monthly service plans that can provide everything you need to launch a successful text-to-donate campaign for less than \$50 per month.

Similarly, where the traditional text-to-donate campaign requires a minimum one-year contract, many text messaging service providers have month-to-month services. If you give a campaign a go and for whatever reason it is not working the way you hoped, you can discontinue the program with minimal financial outlay.

### **As Always, It's About Relationships**

At the end of the day, the success of both traditional and grassroots text-to-donate campaigns depends on the organization's ability to leverage mobile technology as part of a comprehensive fundraising strategy. A text-to-donate campaign should be less about soliciting the donation and more about building relationships with donors and advancing an organization's mission. With a traditional campaign, you may receive more one-time donations of small amounts, but you are unlikely to have the chance to build a relationship with the donors as you can with the kind of grassroots campaigns described here.

Organizations should take advantage of the opportunity to use text messaging in many ways: to promote their legislative agenda, to send emergency calls to action, and to remind donors of other ways they can get involved, such as attending meetings, volunteering for phone banks, and so on. All of these are opportunities to build a relationship based on more than just asking for money.

Sending people text messages is a very personal method of communication; used correctly, it can help people feel more connected to your organization and more invested in your work. Those feelings will lead to greater financial support. ■

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Debra Brown is the co-founder and COO of MobilizeUs, a social enterprise that provides organizations with affordable and effective text messaging and text-to-donate services. Contact her at Debra.Brown@MobilizeUs.com or 1-877-498-1698.



# Harvest's Bounty

## One Garden's Experience in an Online Grant Contest

Diana Lopez

**EVEN THOUGH THE WORK OF ORGANIZERS** is rooted in the physical world, the virtual world's growth has led both to new kinds of fundraising and to new kinds of fund-giving. One such new variety of giving is the trend by givers to leverage the Internet's democratic potential and turn control over who receives a grant to an online, popular vote. Last summer, San Antonio-based Southwest Workers Union (SWU)—a grassroots organization working to promote worker's rights and environmental justice—was one of the beneficiaries of such a grant.

In 2007, while participating in a large and eventually successful struggle on San Antonio's east side to stop the construction of yet another hazardous fuel storage-tank farm, SWU began to understand that blocking negative spaces such as the tank farm was not enough. We saw that the area needed to establish positive spaces as well, so with the community's assistance, we cleared previously industrial land and established the Roots of Change Community Garden. The garden continues to grow, and many of SWU's members now wear the gloves of gardeners in addition to the hats of organizers.

It was as organizers, though, and not gardeners, that we

experienced a successful harvest last summer, when years of community building helped us win a \$5,000 micro-grant for the garden project from the Brighter Planet Project Fund, a fund established to provide money for community projects that help people fight or adapt to climate change.

The seed that sprouted our harvest was small—we learned about the grant through an ally organization that had previously competed for it. "Competed" is the key word; instead of selecting a recipient, Brighter Planet only screens project descriptions, then hosts a two-week online contest. At the end of the round Roots of Change participated in, ten projects out of more than fifty submissions that made it past the initial screening were awarded \$5,000 each. We did not have much prior experience with online fundraising of any kind, and none with this format, but we saw that the process seemed geared to reward applicants who are able to successfully mobilize voters (and therefore well suited to grassroots organizations), and we were excited to try it out.

As gardeners, however, we knew that one cannot just sow a seed and expect a plant to grow. If the soil has not been

prepared and amended beforehand, the chances of a seed (or an applicant in a grant contest) succeeding are much lower. We believe that the secret of our success in winning the Brighter Planet grant was our “soil quality”—that is, the wonderful community we are part of. The Roots of Change garden had been building a presence and networking for three years before entering the contest, and SWU had been doing the same for eighteen years before that. Most of that networking was the traditional, offline kind, but we feel that traditional networking is as important as ever in our digital age, and by the time voting began, our community had twenty-one years of cultivation behind it.

After one has good soil, all it takes to grow strong, healthy plants is good sense and nurturing. Once the contest was open for voting, Roots of Change nurtured their chances of winning through three methods:

- First, we worked through online social networking mediums like Facebook and Twitter to raise awareness about the grant contest and ask for people’s votes. Key to this effort was having a strong youth component that spent the past year building online presence for the garden and the organization.
- Second, we all sent emails to our contacts, informing them of the vote and soliciting their support. Later, when the vote was coming to a close, we sent out another reminder.

- Finally, we got down and dirty and headed out to the central library with laptops, where we collected a few last-minute votes from community members. Although these did not constitute the bulk of the votes, they were important in raising awareness about the garden and allowing people to become involved in a simple, effortless way.

When all was said and done, Roots of Change had more than 3,000 votes and a grant. We also had the opportunity to reaffirm ties with our community. One of the most rewarding parts of the experience was to see the community come together in support of the garden.

We strongly recommend that other grassroots organizations give this type of grant seeking a try. The growth of the Internet has already led to many important changes in organizing, and this new kind of fund-giving has the potential to become an important component of grassroots organizing in the future. So sign up, reach out, and watch as rewards bloom. ■

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Diana Lopez is the environmental justice coordinator at Southwest Workers’ Union, and a driving force behind the Roots of Change Co-op. In addition to her work gardening, Diana organizes around military contamination, dirty energy, food sovereignty, and youth empowerment.

## Vote-to-Win Fundraising

Over the past couple of years, vote-to-win fundraising contests have been proliferating online. To enter these contests, organizations submit an application to the contest website and then encourage their supporters to vote online for them. To cast a vote, people usually need to submit their email address or create some kind of profile or log-in on the contest website. Those with the most votes receive a monetary donation from the sponsoring company.

This process generates both positive advertising for the company and funds for the winning organizations. It also gives organizations, regardless of whether they win, the opportunity to mobilize their supporters around fundraising without actually having to ask them to donate themselves.

The main benefit to organizations participating in these kinds of contests is that it provides an exciting incentive to expand their audience and generate publicity. If you get everyone in the organization to email a link to the contest to all of their contacts, Facebook it, tweet it, and so on, and encourage people to vote for you and sign up on your email list, then you can go back to ask those supporters to get involved in the organization and donate money themselves.

Because the contests are sponsored by for-profit companies and your organization would essentially be providing free advertising for them to your supporters, check your organization’s gift acceptance policies before signing up. As with all “exciting” or “new” fundraising strategies, make sure that it makes sense within the context of your overall fundraising plan. In order to use these contests effectively, you need sufficient time and the participation of everyone in your organization.

Here are three such contests that we’re familiar with:

- [projectfund.brighterplanet.com](http://projectfund.brighterplanet.com)
- [refresheverything.com](http://refresheverything.com)
- [facebook.com/ChaseCommunityGiving](https://facebook.com/ChaseCommunityGiving)

—Editor

# Meeting Your Match

## Using Matching Gifts to Supercharge Your Online Fundraising Campaign

Nzinga Koné-Miller

**MATCHES HAVE LONG BEEN A STAPLE** of fundraising. From direct mail to online fundraising and public radio membership drive campaigns, matching gifts inspire supporters to give and give generously. Matches work so often that it's simply a given in the world of fundraising: if you want to do something that will result in more money and more gifts, use a match.

Using matches to bolster the performance of fundraising campaigns was a best practice long before a 2006 study by economics professors Dean Karlan and John List published in the *American Economic Review* found that the mere existence of a match increased the likelihood that an individual would donate by 22 percent. A match not only boosted the response rate—the number of people who gave—but it brought in more cash overall for the direct mail appeal they tested. While the test was conducted in a direct mail context, the principle remains the same in the online world: matches make your donors more likely to give.

### Find a Donor

So what's stopping you from running a match campaign? The few barriers organizations perceive that prevent them from using this tactic can seem significant. Perhaps you don't have a donor who will make a matching gift. Maybe you're afraid of what will happen if you can't meet the match—will you have to offer refunds to everyone who contributes toward it? Maybe you don't know what size match works best.

The biggest of these barriers is the lack of easy access to a donor who will commit to making the matching gift. If you don't already have a match lined up, you might wonder how you'll come up with an additional \$10,000, \$50,000, or \$100,000 gift with which to challenge your other donors.

But don't let that stop you—if you're not able to get a commitment for an additional gift, ask a donor who has already donated a substantial gift to your organization if you can use that gift to create a match campaign. This can be a little unnerving if you intend to proceed with a truly conditional match—the type of match that is contributed only if you meet your stated goal.

But there are a couple of ways around this. First, consider using a match that isn't conditional—that is, your organization will receive the gift even if you don't hit your stated goal. Many organizations have used unconditional matches to great effect.

Here's how you might speak to your constituents differently about a conditional and unconditional match:

*Conditional:* An anonymous donor has committed to making a gift of \$100,000—but only if we can meet her match before midnight tonight. Make your tax-deductible gift now.

*Unconditional:* Make your tax-deductible gift before midnight tonight and your gift will be matched by an anonymous donor, dollar for dollar, up to \$100,000.

A second option is to proceed with a conditional match, but stick with an amount that you're certain you can meet. The amount of the match is less important than the presence of the match—in the Karlan and List study, there was no significant response difference between segments of the file that received letters with match amounts of \$25,000, \$50,000, or \$100,000.

That said, you'll want to choose an amount that you consistently hit in all your online fundraising efforts. For example, if your last three online fundraising campaigns have brought in \$25,000, \$18,000, and \$15,000, you'll likely be in the clear if you go with a \$10,000 goal for your match. Just make sure you use a benchmark other than your year-end fundraising campaign to set your goal—year-end campaigns almost always blow other campaigns out of the water. Finally, be mindful of the spacing of your fundraising campaigns. If you just launched a series of online fundraising appeals last month, launching a new campaign again this month could be risky unless you regularly launch appeal campaigns in back-to-back months—and you've factored in their performance in deciding how much your match should be.

### Set a Deadline

One way to help ensure you meet your goal is to run a deadline-driven campaign. In these campaigns, you communicate a deadline to potential donors for participating in the match campaign. For year-end campaigns, there's a natural deadline of midnight on December 31 for tax-deductible giving (matched or not). But incorporating a deadline into other campaigns that use matches is worth considering, since appeals that incorporate the urgency of a deadline tend to perform better than those that do not.

## KEEP IN MIND THAT THE MATCH, WHILE COMPELLING IN ITSELF, SHOULD NONETHELESS BE ACCOMPANIED BY A STRONG CASE FOR GIVING.

There can be a little bit of a trade-off in this approach—it removes the flexibility to run the campaign for longer than initially planned if you don't meet your match within the planned duration of the campaign, but you will likely see stronger results (in terms of number and/or size of gifts) than if you don't impose a deadline.

### Making the Case for Giving

With a donor, a campaign type, and a deadline established, decide what your campaign will be about. It can focus primarily on the match, in which case your initial messaging should introduce the match, and subsequent messages may include updates about your progress toward your goal.

Keep in mind that the match, while compelling in itself, should nonetheless be accompanied by a strong case for giving. Why, aside from the presence of the match, should your supporters give to you at this time? What will their gift help you accomplish? Here are a couple of edited examples plucked from two different fundraising organizations' messages:

*“Will you help us meet this match to provide much-needed funds to build an even stronger movement of people saying yes to justice, self-determination, and full equality for Palestinians and Israelis?”*

*“Give today and help provide food to more than 35,000 families in need this Thanksgiving and beyond.”*

Although the match can be the focal point of your campaign, it's a tactic that is often employed in campaigns that have some other theme as their focus, like a year-end or holiday fundraising campaign, or a spring membership drive. In that case, you have the additional flexibility of postponing the introduction of the match until the second or third message in your series (depending on the total number of messages you have planned).

The thinking behind this delay is that, with the introduction of a match, you may entice people to give who were on the fence, or who simply put off their response when they received the earlier message(s). This approach allows you to build up to the match by first introducing your focus and case for giving and then reiterating those messages and sparking new (or renewed) interest with the introduction of the match.

### Running the Campaign

Aside from the possible distinctions noted above, a match campaign really is like any other online fundraising campaign. Although all campaigns aren't exactly the same, you'll likely

want to plan for a series of email messages (typically three or four) as well as accompanying social media content to drive potential donors to give.

Before making a mad dash to use a match in all of your fundraising campaigns, keep in mind that you can have too much of a good thing when it comes to match campaigns. “Too much” may vary from organization to organization, but at least one group experienced disappointing performance after launching their second match campaign within the same year as their first. This may hold true for you—or, like another organization we work with, you may find that you can launch two or three match campaigns in the same year and still meet your goals.

If you listen to public radio you might find yourself thinking, “But they use matches all the time!” Although this is true, they likely have more leeway than most nonprofits, as they're constantly fundraising—probably more times per year than most organizations. In that case, the threshold for repeated match appeals may simply be higher because the frequency of asks is probably higher overall, and radio stations have what appears to be the benefit of a large, diverse audience. Even when you've turned the dial because you can't take hearing one more ask about helping them keep the lights on, it's likely only a matter of days (or minutes) before you turn the dial back. And if their current appeal doesn't motivate you to give, it's likely that a segment of the station's listenership will give to the current offer.

In the grassroots nonprofit world, though certainly there are segments of your list who will tune out your online fundraising appeals, they will likely remain engaged once the topic of your messaging changes back to something that interests them.

### Make it Your Own

Although your own experiences in obtaining and using matches may differ, these facts and anecdotes suggest that you should choose wisely when deciding when to deploy your match and that you may need to be judicious in your use of them. That said, as with any industry or best practice recommendation, you should always look at ways you might be able to chart a course that is unique to your organization. Industry recommendations are often great starting points—but use your own organization's results as your compass to ensure your match campaign efforts are helping you move in the right direction. ■

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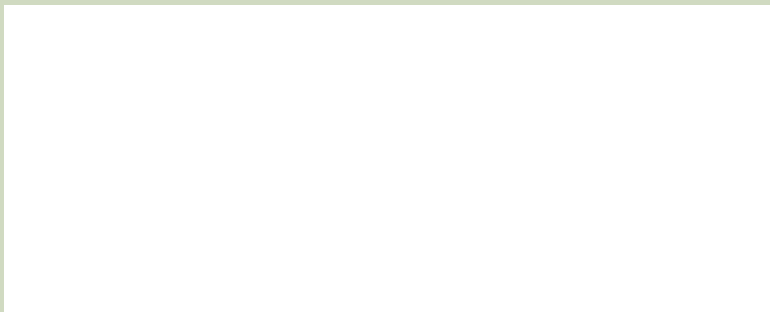
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