



Strategies for Successful Holiday Campaigns

As summer announces its close with cooler mornings and shorter days, Ohioans will soon begin planning for the holidays. Many times, those preparations include making annual donations to local nonprofit organizations and it's not too late for organizations to start planning a holiday campaign that may result in an extra boost of charitable donations.

Bob Zajac, a consultant for Highland Public Relations in Akron says nonprofits need to keep several things in mind when working on a holiday fundraiser. For instance, people have limited time and money during the holidays. With thousands of nonprofits competing for the same dollars, Zajac recommends organizations put a face on the holiday campaign and be specific about who or what will benefit from the campaign in order to differentiate your organization and campaign from others. Each year, St. Stephen's Community House in Columbus organizes a holiday campaign to provide meals and toys for needy families. According to Mary Leathley, director of development, the face of their Christmas Care Program is defined by the smiles on the faces of the 1,500 families who benefit from the program.

Zajac also recommends the holiday campaign should provide a benefit to the donor. In Leathley's case, donors who actually help distribute the food to the needy families feel like they are really assisting. "Believe it or not, we often don't even have to ask the volunteers outright for their help anymore." In fact, each year 400-500 volunteers and many area schools and corporations band together gathering thousands of toys, groceries, and dollars for families. Fundraisers that benefit donors don't have to be as complex as the Christmas Care Program. Zajac also suggests something as simple as selling customized holiday greeting cards or hosting auctions or reverse raffles.

Once you decide on a holiday fundraiser, it's important to share the idea with your donors. Zajac touts the often underestimated power of the well-written newsletter or mailer as a key marketing tool. This piece should highlight the advances, particularly those connected to human interests, made with donated funds in the last year. Additionally, it should specify the organization's intentions for incoming gifts. Indicating a requested amount in the mailer and providing the donor with a discount, benefit, or other incentive are also ways to maximize giving, particularly from previous donors who have a continuing interest in the organization. Leathley seconds these suggestions, recommending the mailer make an "appeal to the heart" with personal success stories. She also suggests offering a menu of various ways donors can contribute.

Finally, Zajac advises nonprofit organizations to be realistic in setting their holiday fundraising goals. As a fundraising consultant, Zajac understands that the holidays are a difficult time to generate large funds, especially if publicity around the campaign is low.

No doubt Leathley and the staff of St. Stephen's have realized and overcome challenges throughout the fifty-year history of the Christmas Care Program. Leathley says the key to their success is collaboration. St. Stephen's prioritizes their contact with the local fire department and Salvation Army in order to learn about and complement the needs of organizations with similar holiday missions.

With touching evidence, the history of St. Stephen's Christmas Care Program illustrates the soundness of Zajac's advice: planning ahead, starting small, maximizing contact with existing donors, and partnering up with similarly motivated organizations are smart approaches to ending the year, perhaps not with an immediate bang, but with a surefire boost into the next fundraising cycle.

http://www.nonprofitresources.net/articles/strategies_for_successful_holiday_campaigns/view