

Forbes

Giving Without Borders: How To Expand Your Fundraising Footprint For Growth

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A teacher at a Title 1 school in South Carolina, short on funds for essential classroom materials, starts a Facebook fundraiser with an impassioned plea and a wish list of books and other items. Within days, everything on her list has been purchased and sent to her, largely thanks to out-of-state donors who learned about her fundraising drive through social media.

The CEO of a Southern California-based nonprofit focused on supporting regional families with critically ill children appears on a personal growth podcast in Dallas, thanks to an introduction from a donor. She shares first-hand stories about the families her organization helps and, when the podcast airs, the nonprofit receives donations from throughout the U.S. and as far away as Denmark.

That second example isn't a hypothetical situation for illustrative purposes — it comes from my own experience with this kind of giving trend. Welcome to a world of giving without borders.

Today, even more than proximity, donors want to feel personal connection, passion and impact when it comes to causes they support, regardless of whether or not donors live where the charity is headquartered or the geographical communities it serves.

The trend started in e-commerce, with consumers quickly becoming comfortable shopping from businesses across the country and around the world. Today's global shoppers are increasingly active and brand loyal when their purchases are not solely based on acquiring goods, but on doing good as well. They shop to show support for small businesses whose ownership and missions are aligned with their own values and interests. Women- and minority-owned businesses are good examples, as are companies that incorporate corporate social responsibility into their business models.

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If they're not already, local and regional nonprofit leaders should be thinking outside their city limits, so to speak, leveraging opportunities to expand their awareness and fundraising footprint for growth. This may sound daunting, but we're not talking about buying Super Bowl ads here. In fact, there are a few simple ways to get started that require little to no budget but can deliver impressive results.

Storytelling: A Powerful Way To Connect With New Donors

The common thread in both examples that I shared at the start of this article is the use of storytelling via “borderless” platforms (e.g., internet, social media, podcasts, etc.) to form a powerful connection with an audience that is based on passion and impact versus geography. When you engage people with compelling stories that share an organization’s impact — versus simply delivering your mission statement — you are more likely to reach them on an emotional level, which can lead them to form a personal connection with your nonprofit. As I learned first-hand after a recent podcast appearance, podcasts can be a great way to connect with new donors, nationwide and globally, and offer many opportunities to reach audiences who have specific interests or passions that align with your organization’s mission. Be sure to consider including podcasts and other “borderless” forms of communication in your PR mix.

Syndication: Enlisting Supporters To Share Your Stories

Your team should be developing powerful stories that demonstrate your impact on a monthly basis. Share these with staff, board members, volunteers, and other supporters at meetings, via email and e-newsletters, and on social media. In this way, you can “syndicate” your stories to reach more people beyond your current sphere and geography. Ask supporters to forward your nonprofit’s email blasts or e-newsletters to five or more friends outside of your area each month, with a personal note that explains why they feel a connection to your organization and its work. Encourage your supporters to post about your nonprofit on their social media channels and suggest they use hashtags that will help others find their posts based on common points of interest and personal connection. You can make this process seamless for your supporters by providing them with one to two pre-designed posts per month, including captions. And, don’t forget that videos are one of the most effective ways to tell impact stories, as they are more often viewed and shared than other social media content. Consider adding a series of videos to your current campaigns.

Staying Connected: Spend Time Cultivating New Non-Local Donors

Just as you invest time connecting with your top donors, it can require extra effort to cultivate non-local donors. One silver lining of the pandemic is people's increased comfort with Zoom calls. There is nothing quite like eye contact when you are cultivating relationships and expanding your presence in new markets. We've found that new supporters outside our region welcome the opportunity to connect via Zoom and FaceTime. This approach also has helped us retain donors when they move out of our service region. In fact, some of these now out-of-state donors have not only maintained their support but have extended it by involving their companies as corporate sponsors. And Zoom calls save valuable travel time and budget.

As the landscape of the nonprofit sector continues to shift, with technology and media flattening the topography and erasing geographic fundraising limitations, regional charities need to adjust in order to grow. It's time for nonprofits to leverage storytelling to create powerful personal connections with supporters, thinking globally when it comes to fundraising while acting locally for impact.