



onecause®
POWERFUL FUNDRAISING SOLUTIONS

Fundraising Through A Pandemic:

Virtual Pivot Insights & 2021 Outlook

Introduction

2020 has been a year of pandemics, pivots, and new possibilities – especially for nonprofit fundraising professionals.

COVID-19 social distancing norms and the cancellation of in-person events sent supporters from the ballroom into their living rooms and nonprofit professionals back to the drawing board. In this changed landscape, nonprofits had to evaluate their fundraising strategies and experiment with new approaches to sustain their missions.

THE NONPROFIT SPIRIT IS RESILIENT.

They stepped out of their comfort zones and tried new strategies to connect with supporters and reach new donors. And from the front lines of the largest global fundraising pivot, the industry witnessed the acceleration of virtual events and online fundraising as nonprofits embraced innovation to drive engagement and inspire giving in a virtual world.

As the lines between traditional and virtual fundraising continue to blur, we wanted to better understand where nonprofits are finding success and how they are planning for the future. This report looks at how the pandemic impacted fundraising budgets and strategies, insights from those that pivoted to virtual fundraising, and the outlook for 2021. Results are based on an online survey of 1,997 nonprofit professionals* representing a wide cross section of organization sizes and operating budgets.

We designed this report to not only help nonprofits navigate the new virtual fundraising landscape, but also guide those who are still undecided with data to inform their fundraising decisions.

Let's dive into the key findings!

**The sample of 1,997 nonprofit professionals surveyed represent a cross section of nonprofits (details on page 10) and were not limited to users of OneCause fundraising solutions.*

Key Takeaways

- **COVID-19 impact to fundraising** is the number one challenge facing nonprofits.
- Many nonprofits (56%) are **raising less than budgeted**, specifically for event fundraising.



- Almost all nonprofits surveyed typically hold at least one fundraising event annually, but **2020 forced 48% to cancel at least one event** and 40% to postpone.



- The **62% that converted to a virtual fundraising event saw success** and are more likely to be raising at or above their original fundraising goals.

- **Engaging and retaining known donors** is the most important goal for nonprofits in 2021.
- Events remain an important part of 2021 fundraising strategy, with **78% of those surveyed planning to hold at least one fundraising event next year.**

Top Challenges Facing Nonprofits

In a year full of new challenges and uncertainty, it comes as no surprise that COVID-19's impact to fundraising is rated by the majority of respondents as their biggest concern (see Figure 1). Other top challenges affecting nonprofits this year include donor engagement, year-over-year fundraising growth, donor fatigue, and recurring giving. Staff turnover and board dynamics are least likely to be considered a major challenge.

2020 Nonprofit Challenges

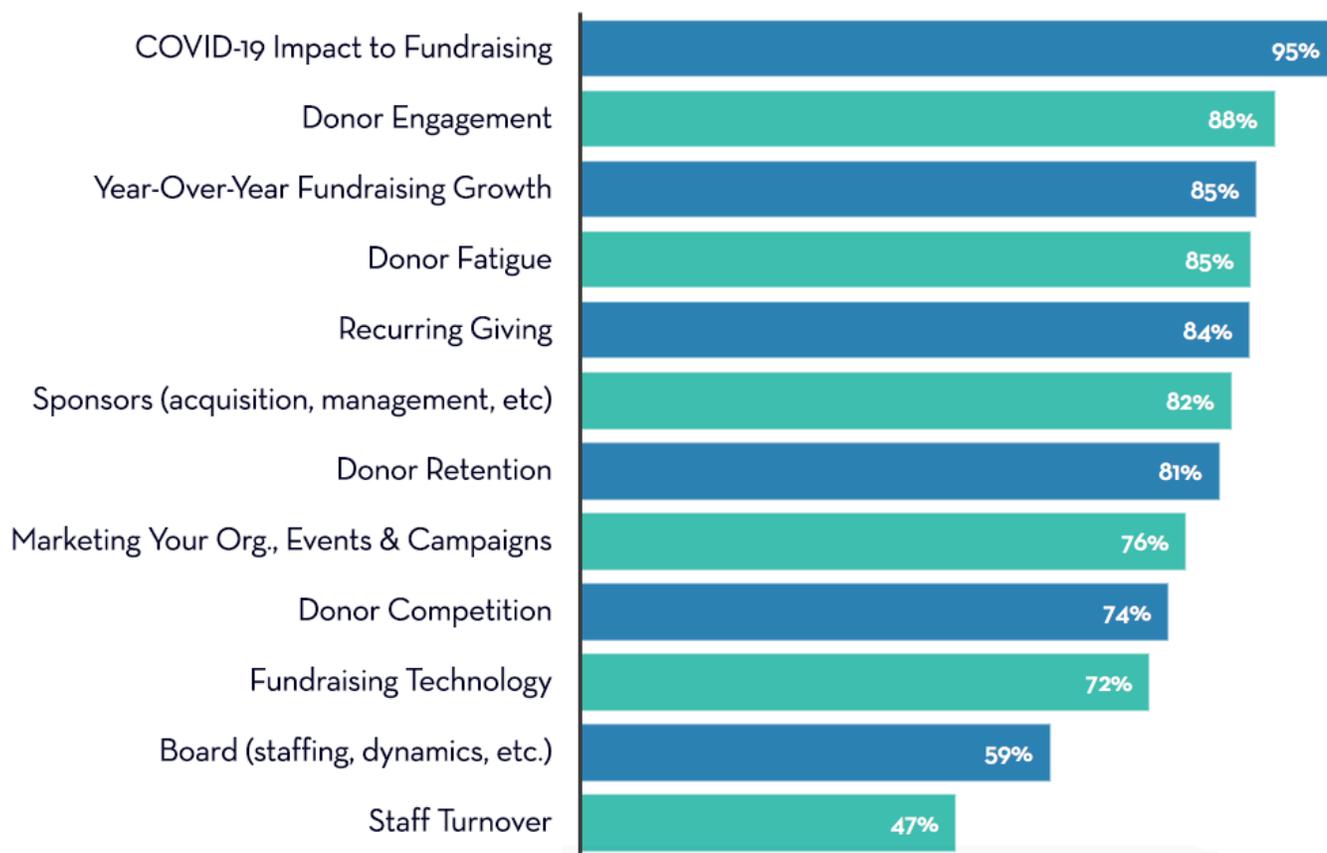
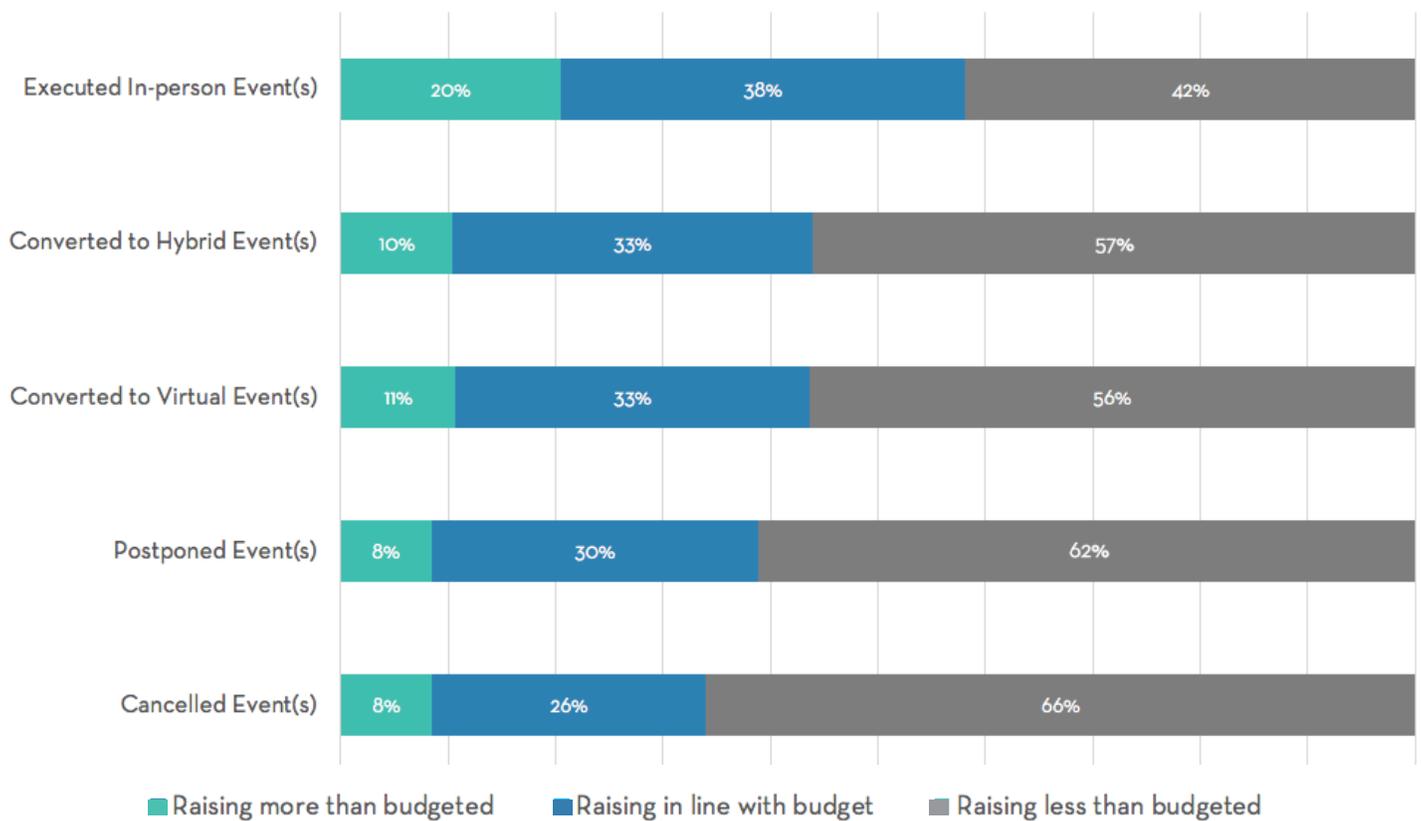


Figure 1: Rate the following fundraising challenges your org could be facing.
(% represent those that rated as critical issue, definitely a concern, or somewhat a problem)

Top Challenges Facing Nonprofits

Cancelled and postponed events had an impact on event fundraising budgets. Overall, 56% of nonprofits report raising less than budgeted, while approximately one-third are raising in line and 11% are raising more than their original goals (see Figure 2).

Fundraising Budget Performance



THOSE THAT CONVERTED TO A VIRTUAL OR HYBRID EVENT WERE 10% MORE LIKELY TO BE RAISING MORE OR AT THEIR ORIGINAL FUNDRAISING THAN THOSE WHO CANCELLED EVENTS.

Figure 2: Considering both ONLINE and IN-PERSON fundraising, how are you performing against your 2020 event fundraising goals? (Select one)

The Virtual Fundraising Pivot

One of the most challenging and important decisions nonprofits had to make in 2020 was how to supplement the projected revenue from in-person fundraising events. Almost all nonprofits surveyed (98%) typically hold one or more fundraising events annually. In 2020, 48% had to cancel one or more events and 40% postponed (see Figure 3).

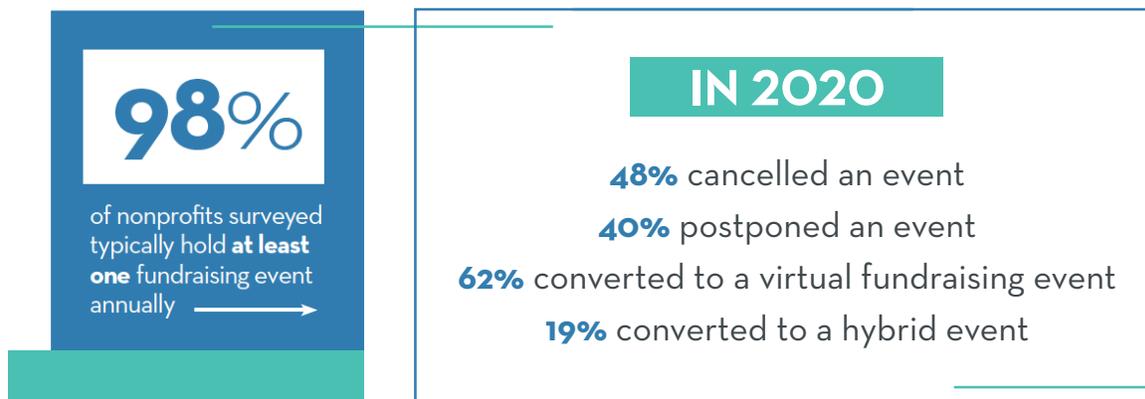


Figure 3: How were your IN-PERSON fundraising events impacted in 2020? (Check all that apply)

It's encouraging to see that of the 62% of nonprofits that converted to a virtual fundraising event, the majority (70%) describe the event as successful - i.e. either very or somewhat successful (see Figure 4). Only 3% felt their virtual event was not successful at all. According to those with "very successful" virtual events, mobile optimization and creative donation options are most important for engaging a virtual event audience (see Figure 5). Switching between livestream and recorded content and social media integrations were also considered very important. Interactive fundraising activities such as silent auctions and live appeals remain an important part of engaging supporters as nonprofits brought event experiences online.

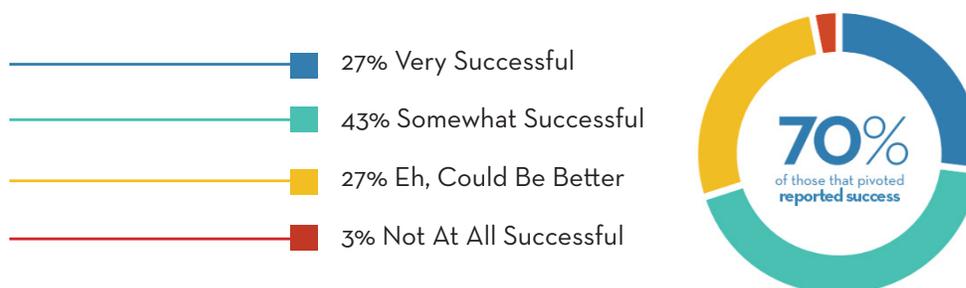
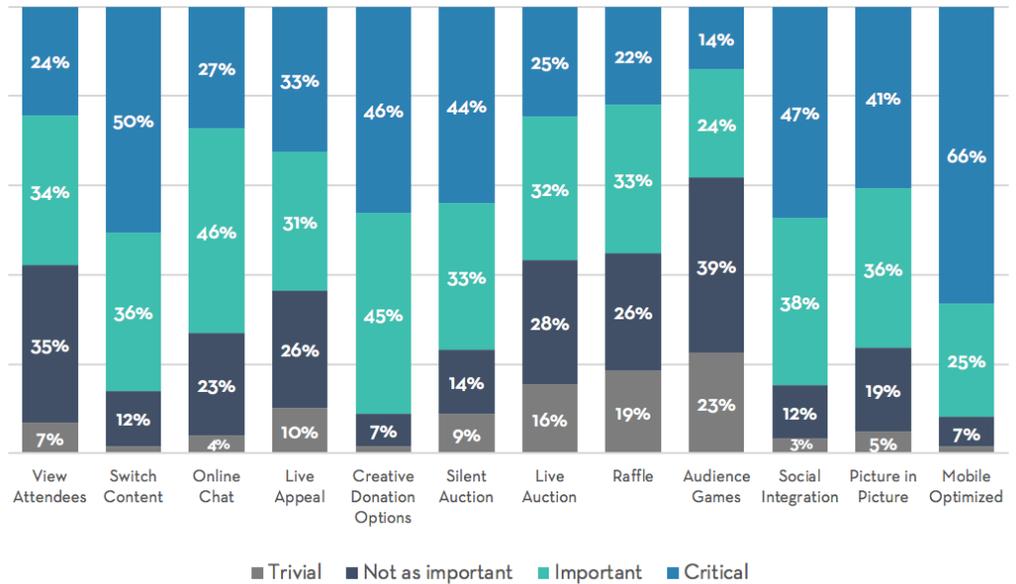


Figure 4: How successful do you feel your org has been with the following fundraising campaigns?

The Virtual Fundraising Pivot

Important for Engaging Virtual Audience

Figure 5: In terms of engaging your audience in a VIRTUAL event, rate the importance.



Nonprofits also found success with run/walk/rides, as 64% of those with peer-to-peer endurance events in 2020 describe them as successful (see Figure 6). Supporter-driven peer-to-peer (DIY fundraising) and online giving were two areas where nonprofits were not as successful.

Of those who executed these types of fundraising approximately 57% and 49% felt they could have done better or were not at all successful with these types of fundraising campaigns (see Figure 7 & Figure 8).

Runs/Walks/Rides

- 33% Very Successful
- 31% Somewhat Successful
- 28% Eh, Could Be Better
- 8% Not at all Successful



Online Giving

- 16% Very Successful
- 35% Somewhat Successful
- 41% Eh, Could Be Better
- 8% Not At All Successful



Peer-to-Peer (DIY)

- 16% Very Successful
- 27% Somewhat Successful
- 43% Eh, Could Be Better
- 14% Not At All Successful



Figure 6-8: How successful do you feel your org has been with the following fundraising campaigns?

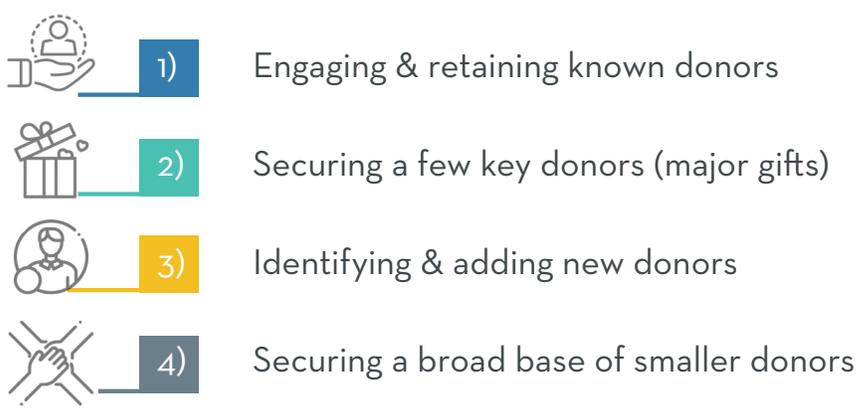
2021 Outlook



Engaging and retaining known donors is the most important goal for nonprofits in 2021 (see Figure 9). Securing a few, key major gifts, and adding net new donors are also of importance, while securing a broad base of donors is ranked as least important for 2021.

Most Important Goals for 2021 (in ranked order)

Figure 9: Considering your goals through 2021, rank the following in order of importance (one per column with 1 = most important; 4 = least important)



Fundraising events remain an important part of 2021 nonprofit strategy. Approximately 78% of nonprofits surveyed plan to host one or more events in 2021 (see Figure 10). Hybrid events are gaining popularity with 42% planning to hold one next year, that's nearly two times the amount that reported holding a hybrid event in 2020. Many organizations are also optimistic about holding at least one in-person event in 2021. Approximately 1-in-5 nonprofits remain undecided as to their 2021 event fundraising plans.

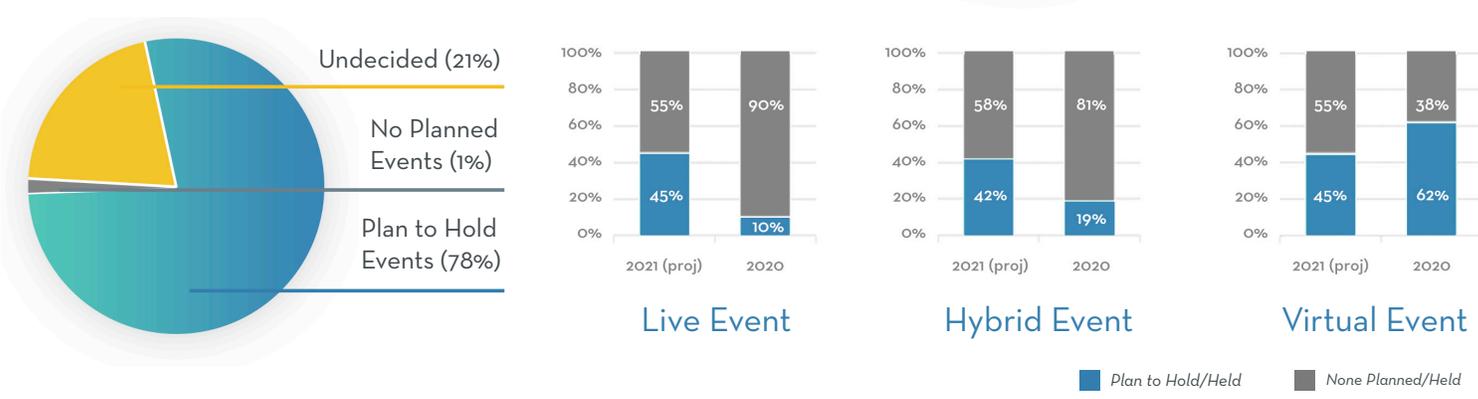


Figure 10: How many of the following fundraising events do you plan to hold in 2021? (% represent those that answered 1 or more to a given type of event)

Conclusion

2020 will be marked as the beginning of a massive change in the way nonprofits fundraise and connect with donors. Those that took the leap to virtual fundraising are finding success and new levels of engagement with their supporters. It's through the combination of innovation, connection, and engagement that nonprofits can continue to expand their mission, reach, and impact.

We hope this report encourages those who made the pivot to continue to experiment and refine their fundraising strategies. May the findings provided also guide nonprofits who are still undecided with insights on how to successfully embark on new initiatives to fundraise through the pandemic.

Continue to Experience and Innovate. A high point in a difficult year has been the creativity and resilience displayed by the nonprofit sector. The innovation and advancements recently made are not short-term. Continue to expand your online fundraising footprint and diversify your revenue sources.

Streamline the Giving Experience. Nonprofits who focus on humanizing and simplifying the digital giving experience will continue to be successful. Think beyond a single donor transaction and build an experience that drives engagement and cultivates year-round giving.

Prepare for Hybrid Fundraising. As we prepare for the next evolution of event fundraising, nonprofits will need to adapt to hybrid strategies creating a seamless, dual experience to drive better engagement and higher impact with both in-person and virtual supporters. Use what we learned about important factors to engaging a virtual audience to help reshape your event strategy.

About The Survey

The online survey of 1,997 nonprofit professionals was conducted between September 14 - October 16, 2020. Survey respondents represent a wide spectrum of nonprofit organizations including those with annual revenue of less than \$350,000 to \$50 million+ and small teams of less than 5 employees to large organizations with 100+. The majority of respondents identify their roles within development, events, or executive leadership. Additional insights were provided by a smaller representative from marketing, IT, volunteers, and board members. Nonprofits surveyed utilized a wide range of technology solutions, spanning the spectrum of fundraising software and donor management tools, as well as a diverse cross-section of technology vendors. Data is self-reported, not transactional.

Org. Size

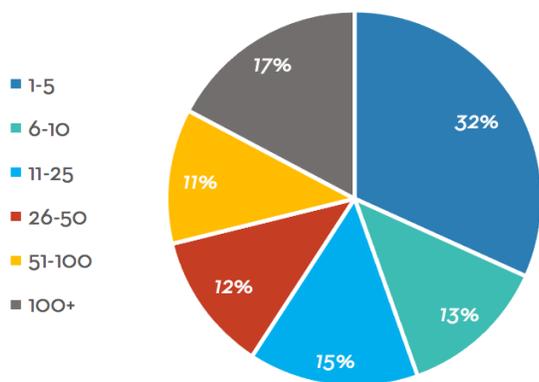


Figure 11: How many full-time employees are in your organization?

Annual Revenue

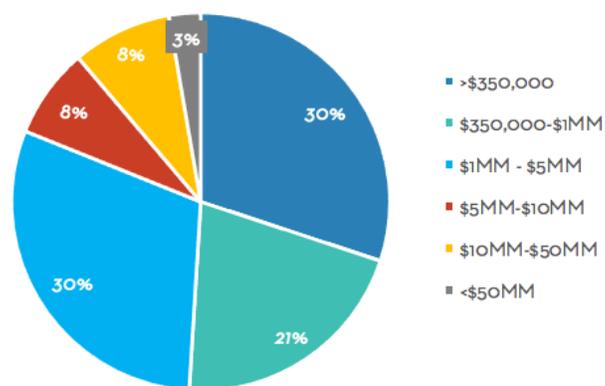


Figure 12: What is your organization's annual operating revenue? (Select one) (The 282 that answered "Not Sure" are not represented in the above figure)

Respondent Roles



Figure 13: Which of the following most closely aligns with your role (select best answer)

Additional Resources

[Virtual Fundraising Resources](#)

[Online Fundraising Resources](#)

[Peer-to-Peer Fundraising Resources](#)

[Event Fundraising Resources](#)

About OneCause

OneCause is committed to helping cause-driven organizations amplify their message and raise more funds with easy-to-use fundraising solutions. OneCause offers a full suite of solutions including online giving, event management, mobile bidding, and peer-to-peer fundraising for nonprofit organizations of all sizes. Since 2008, OneCause has supported more than 20,000 fundraising events and campaigns, helping nonprofits raise more than \$2 billion. Located in the marketing technology hub of Indianapolis, OneCause has been recognized on the Inc. 500 list of Fastest Growing Companies, received a TechPoint MIRA award for Mobile Technology Excellence & Innovation, and is a five-time Stevie® Award winner for excellence and innovation in Customer Service.