



VIRTUAL FUNDRAISING:
HOW TO SUCCEED IN 7 STEPS



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As 2020 evolves,

a new reality in fundraising is clear. Virtual fundraising can help nonprofits survive today's changing landscape.

Many organizations are turning to virtual fundraisers as an alternate strategy to traditional events. This guide outlines what you need to know to go virtual!

Having best practices in your back pocket to bring your fundraising online can come in handy. Whether it's part of a planned attempt to grow online, or in reaction to an unforeseen change effecting your event (e.g., COVID-19, local emergency, weather, disaster, public emergency etc.) – nonprofits need a plan to continue the fundraising.

This guide covers everything you need to know to execute virtual events. From mobile bidding to peer-to-peer software, you can reach donors online with ease.



WHAT IS A VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER?

A **VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER** is a campaign or event that takes place entirely online and allows supporters to engage with your cause from anywhere. Because the fundraising takes place in cyberspace, supporters and nonprofits leverage technology to promote, engage, and execute their fundraising activities.

As virtual events are completely digital, they can be executed quickly and opened up to a wide group of supporters, increasing your nonprofit's reach.

Virtual fundraisers come in many shapes and sizes – so the sky's the limit in what your nonprofit can spin-up and execute. Find the virtual mold that fits your mission and donor landscape!



ONLINE AUCTIONS



*MOVING AN IN-PERSON
EVENT VIRTUAL*



*VIRTUAL & ONLINE
CAMPAIGNS*



*MOVING ON-THE-GROUND
EVENTS ONLINE*

TYPES OF VIRTUAL FUNDRAISERS

This guide covers four top scenarios for hosting virtual and online fundraisers. These virtual and online fundraising scenarios include:

1. ONLINE AUCTIONS
2. MOVING AN IN-PERSON EVENT VIRTUAL
3. IN-PERSON EVENTS WITH REMOTE DONORS
4. VIRTUAL & ONLINE CAMPAIGNS

ONLINE AUCTIONS

Online auctions are essentially digital silent auctions. To run an online auction, nonprofits use either mobile bidding or an online auction software to engage supporters. The software is used to:

- List out item descriptions
- Showcase item photos
- Track starting and current bid information
- Register bidders
- Enable remote bidding
- Easily collect payment information
- Automatically process invoices and credit card payments

Because they're completely digital, online auctions are cost-effective to plan and can be opened up to remote supporters, increasing fundraising potential and ROI.

MOVING AN IN-PERSON EVENT VIRTUAL

Sometimes things happen and you find yourself and your nonprofit in a situation where you have to move your in-person event to an online format. This can occur during inclement weather, disasters, regional and local disruptions, large-scale public emergencies (e.g., COVID-19).

The decision to move your in-person event is a move that should be made carefully. Be sure to consult your team, your board, your fundraising software partner, and your vendors prior to making the switch.

IN-PERSON EVENTS WITH REMOTE DONORS

Another common scenario for virtual fundraising is when nonprofits decide to conduct a hybrid event. This happens when your nonprofit hosts an in-person event and, for whatever reason, also needs to reach a group of remote supporters who are unable to attend the onsite fundraising.

Remote bidders can still give in the following ways to your event:

- Bid on silent auction items
- Make online donations
- Purchases merchandise or fixed price items
- Complete Buy It Now purchases

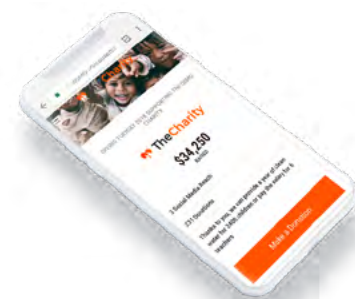
It doesn't matter where they are, what they are doing, or why they can't come - they can bid remotely and participate from anywhere! All you need to do is send them a link to your event, and they are off.

VIRTUAL & ONLINE CAMPAIGNS

These campaigns are uniquely time-bound online giving campaigns that leverage social and peer networks to raise money. They rely on peer-to-peer fundraising to raise money virtually.

You can execute these by conveniently having your campaign all in one place.

- All fundraising runs through your nonprofit online fundraising page
- Recruit participants to actively fundraise
- Form teams to spur competitive giving
- Create custom and branded participant pages



VIRTUAL FUNDRAISING BEST PRACTICES

STEP 1. EVALUATE PROS & CONS

Before jumping in, take some time to evaluate the pros and cons of taking your fundraising virtual. This is an important step to complete solo or with your team, as first step in your due diligence.

PROS

- **COST-EFFECTIVE.** With online auctions and virtual fundraisers, there is no physical event. Since you won't have to rent out a space, provide dining options, etc., event expenses can be reduced.
- **LOTS OF FLEXIBILITY.** Virtual fundraisers are very flexible. An online fundraiser can run for longer than a physical one, and people can participate at any time, from anywhere.
- **SEAMLESS DATA COLLECTION.** To host an online auction, your organization will set up a fundraising site through your peer-to-peer or mobile bidding software. The software can link to your nonprofit CRM, or standalone as your fundraising repository, making donor data and payment collection easy.

CONS

- **LESS PERSONAL TOUCH.** Since the event happens in cyberspace, virtual fundraisers can lack a personal touch. You'll need to find ways to create mission moments and social donor connections online.
- **FEWER INCENTIVES.** Because there's not the same sense of friendly competition with an online auction, there can be less of a sense of urgency for people to bid. Your team can use gamification (max bids, buy nows, and outbid notifications) and social media to create a competitive online atmosphere.
- **HARDER TO STAND OUT.** Let's face it, because it's something participants do on their own time, you'll need to find ways to stand out.

STEP 2. DETERMINE YOUR BUDGET & GOALS

Once you've decided to undertake a virtual fundraiser, it's time to set a budget.

SET GOALS: Decide on a goal. Knowing what you're aiming for ensures your virtual fundraiser has a nonprofit success plan for your fundraiser.



WORK BACKWARDS:

Determine what you want to raise.

- **Silent Auctions:** Be conservative. Estimate 50-60% revenue generation for items. If you go over great!
- **Donations:** Determine what you've raised in the past and run a few revenue scenarios. It's important to get familiar with the numbers and possible implications for your virtual fundraiser.
- **Fixed Price:** Determine what fixed price items you can sell online (raffles, sign-up parties, games, merchandise). Raffles are subject to state by state regulations, so be sure to check with your local gaming commission on the regulations in your area.
- **Live Appeal:** plan out how you will conduct your mission moment and ask in a virtual world. Think through timeframes, video, donation software, and calls to action.
- **Live Auction:** Plan out how to livestream your live auction, and if you can partner with an auctioneer for a seamless auction experience.
- **Dual Budget:** In some cases, virtual fundraisers are paired with live events. If you're hosting a hybrid style fundraiser, be sure to factor in the costs of both events.

PRO FUNDRAISING TIP

For your online Silent Auction, **review minimum bids and raises.** Consider driving up minimum bids and/or raises to capture more revenue. See our blog on [silent auction pricing](#) best practices. Also consider using top industry amounts for Buy Now (250-300%).

STEP 3. ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM

To pull off virtual fundraiser, you'll need a slightly different team to oversee the event or campaign.

Think about all of the efforts needed to plan and execute your auction. Then, determine which staff members and volunteers have the time and skill set to manage these efforts. Recruit the following roles that are specific to virtual fundraising success:



SITE MASTER

A staff member or volunteer in charge of setting up your virtual fundraising site



PROCUREMENT TEAM

A team of staff/volunteers in charge of soliciting items & donations



PROMOTION & SOCIAL MEDIA

A staff member in charge of promoting the fundraiser



FUNDRAISING MONITOR

A staff member or volunteer in charge of overseeing the bidding, fundraising, and on-line logistics

STEP 4. PROMOTE YOUR VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER

As we've mentioned, a big plus of hosting a virtual fundraiser is that anyone can participate! This becomes a great opportunity for nonprofits to open up their fundraising to remote supporters across the country. It's also a way, thanks to social media and social networks, to attract new supporters to your cause.

How to promote your virtual fundraiser:

1. **INFORM SUPPORTERS.** Let supporters know you're going virtual. Give them the dates of your event or campaign and tell them about the goals you hope to achieve. Don't forget to tell them how you plan to use the proceeds. Sharing impact is important in a virtual world!
2. **EXPLAIN HOW TO PARTICIPATE.** Some of your supporters might not have done online fundraising before, so you'll need to explain how to participate. If you are simply taking your mobile bidding online, let people know it's the

same site and software they would use for you onsite auction. Reassure them that the only thing different is that they can bid from their couches, or wherever they want!

3. **SHARE THE LINK TO YOUR FUNDRAISING SITE.** Your online site will serve as fundraising headquarters. Share the link with supporters so they can bid early and donate. Put your auction catalog, appeal, fixed priced items (raffles, parties, merchandise) on the site. If you are running a peer-to-peer campaign, ask participants to spin up fundraising pages and share on social media.
4. **LEVERAGE AMBASSADORS.** Think about your most loyal supporters, volunteers, donors and staff and make them Ambassadors. Tap them to help spread the word about your virtual fundraiser. Set them up for success with social media toolkits and templates. Motivate them with contests (e.g., most new bidders, donors, or social reach. Make it fun for them to raise funds for your cause.
5. **BLAST ON SOCIAL.** Social media is the virtual fundraisers' best friend! It's free and has unlimited reach. Create a social plan to promote, engage, and excite. Be sure to embed mission messaging, impact statements, and the "why it matters" in posts to connect with supporters

STEP 5. LAUNCH YOUR VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER

Once the day of the virtual fundraiser rolls around, it's time to open the fundraising.

- **Online Auction & Hybrid Events:** Start the bidding! And turn on your online donations, fixed price items and any other online fundraising activities. Using Max bids can ramp up bidding and something to advertise so the "robots do it"
- **Peer-to-Peer & Virtual Campaigns:** Launch your peer-to-peer fundraising site, ask participants to spread the news on social and watch your campaign take off!
- **Send Updates & Share Progress:** No matter what type of virtual fundraiser you are running, remember to actively engage supporters throughout. Give them updates on high value items, progress to your goals and always send out reminders about when the fundraising (bidding and donations) will close.

STEP 6. END YOUR VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER

The clock is ticking, and the end of your virtual fundraiser is almost here.

Luckily, you don't have to worry about closing the bidding or online fundraising, because your mobile bidding or peer-to-peer software will automatically do it for you!

Most online fundraising platforms require bidders to enter their credit card numbers before the bidding or donating to they follow through on their bids and/or donations. Winners are charged automatically, so your organization doesn't have to worry about chasing down payments in a virtual world.

PRO FUNDRAISING TIP

Properly package and ship out each item to the winner in a timely manner. **Be sure you require an address** and insert a flat shipping charge if you need to.

Virtual Campaigns are one of the fastest growing fundraisers in the nonprofit world today.

STEP 7. FOLLOW-UP AND EVALUATE PERFORMANCE

SAY THANKS: Thanking virtual supporters is critical, especially if they are new to your cause. Social donors, those engaging in giving through online channels and social networks, want to be connected to the causes they support.

Be sure to send out thank-you notes that recognize donors for their support. Use social media blast posts to thank everyone who helped: donors, staff, volunteers, peer-to-peer participants.

Most of all, tie all donor communications to the results you achieved, the dollars raised, and how the funds will be used to support your mission.

EVALUATE PERFORMANCE: Evaluate the success of your virtual event by tracking your performance. Tracking your results with peer-to-peer or mobile bidding software should be pretty straightforward.

Since the virtual fundraiser is happening online, all item and supporter information will automatically be recorded in your online software for you to analyze now and in the future.

SOCIAL DONOR STUDY

According to our Social Donor Study, 80% of Peer-to-Peer participants say it's important to receive **information on the impact of the money raised**, but only 19% percent ever received any impact information from the benefiting nonprofit.

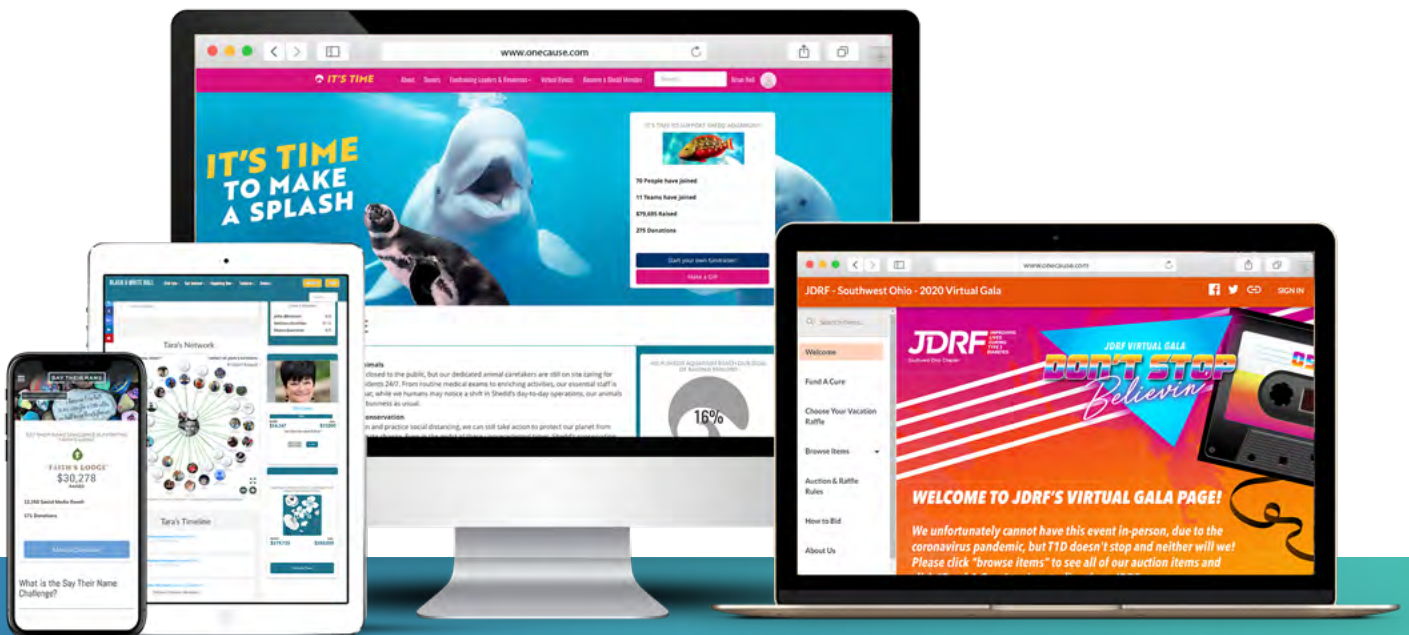
[Check out the Virtual Fundraising Resource Center to dive into all things virtual.](#)



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