

How to Hold a Successful Giving Day for your Nonprofit



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Contents

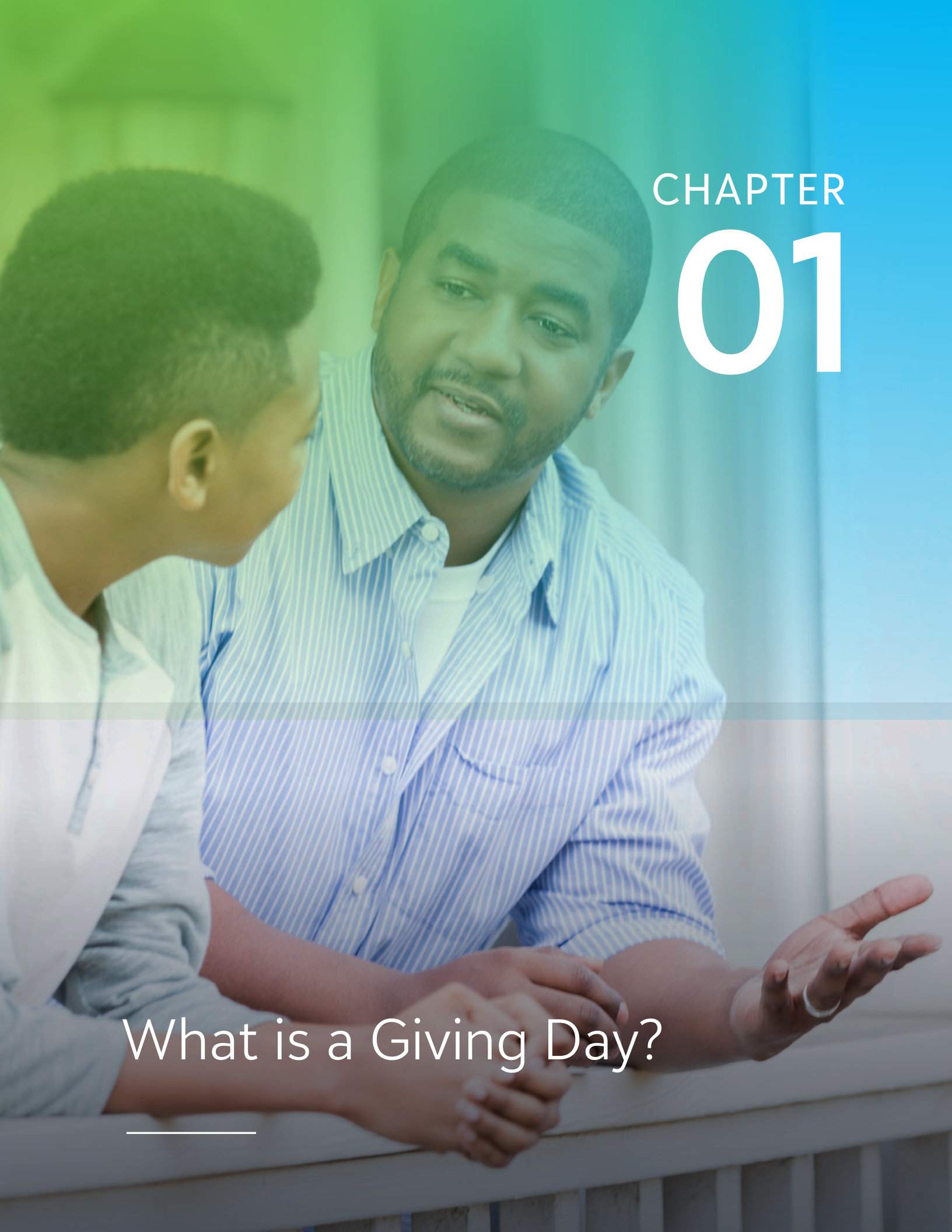
What is a Giving Day?	4
Standalone Days vs #GivingTuesday	7
Best Practices for a Successful Giving Day	10
Planning a Giving Day	17
Closing	22

INTRODUCTION

Giving Days can be a powerful and profitable fundraising strategy for all types of nonprofit organizations. Over the past decade, thousands of nonprofits have hosted successful giving days, and advances in technology have made these events easier than ever. In our experience, every organization (regardless of size) should run a giving day each year.

In this guide, you'll learn how to run a successful giving day. We'll look at tips and strategies for stand-alone giving days or “anniversary days,” as well as #GivingTuesday and #GivingTuesdayNow. You'll also get first-hand examples from organizations who have run successful giving days on what works and what doesn't. You can scale your giving day campaign to match your staff size and resources. Some campaigns are as simple as showing appreciation with notes of thanks. Others are elaborate with a website and events. Use this toolkit as a source of ideas and implement what you can—keeping in mind that your goal is to build your relationships with donors and entice them to be champions for your annual fundraising appeals.

Like with other types of fundraising, there's a learning curve to running a supercharged giving day, but it isn't steep. With the help of this guide, any organization—including yours—can successfully raise the money needed to help your nonprofit thrive from an annual giving day.

A photograph of a man and a young boy sitting on a balcony, looking out at the ocean. The man is wearing a blue and white striped shirt and has a beard. The boy is wearing a light blue shirt. The background is a bright, sunny day with a blue sky and white clouds. The image has a green and blue gradient overlay.

CHAPTER 01

What is a Giving Day?

Simply put, a giving day is a one-day fundraising campaign to generate awareness, find new donors, and raise money. For your organization, it's an all-hands-on-deck, 24-hour fundraising program. Of course, while the actual check writing and credit card swiping occur on a single day, successful giving days take months of planning to be successful.

Many organizations run their campaigns on #GivingTuesday (or may run it on #GivingTuesdayNow), but a giving day can occur on any day that you choose. These stand-alone events are like having your own #GivingTuesday—a day to generate buzz and revenue through a series of activities without having to compete with thousands of organizations asking for donations on the same day. If you're struggling to pick a day, you can find a nationally recognized day that coincides with your mission to use or the anniversary of your founding is a good option.

Regardless of whether you are running a giving day on #GivingTuesdayNow, #GivingTuesday or as a stand-alone event, the day typically includes various activities and lots of communication with your donor base to get them excited to give. We'll cover these strategies later in this toolkit.

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Giving days should build a sense of camaraderie on your team by making it feel like everyone is pulling in the same direction and toward the same worthy goal of supporting your organization and the communities you serve.

Why Giving Days Are Such a Powerful Fundraising Strategy

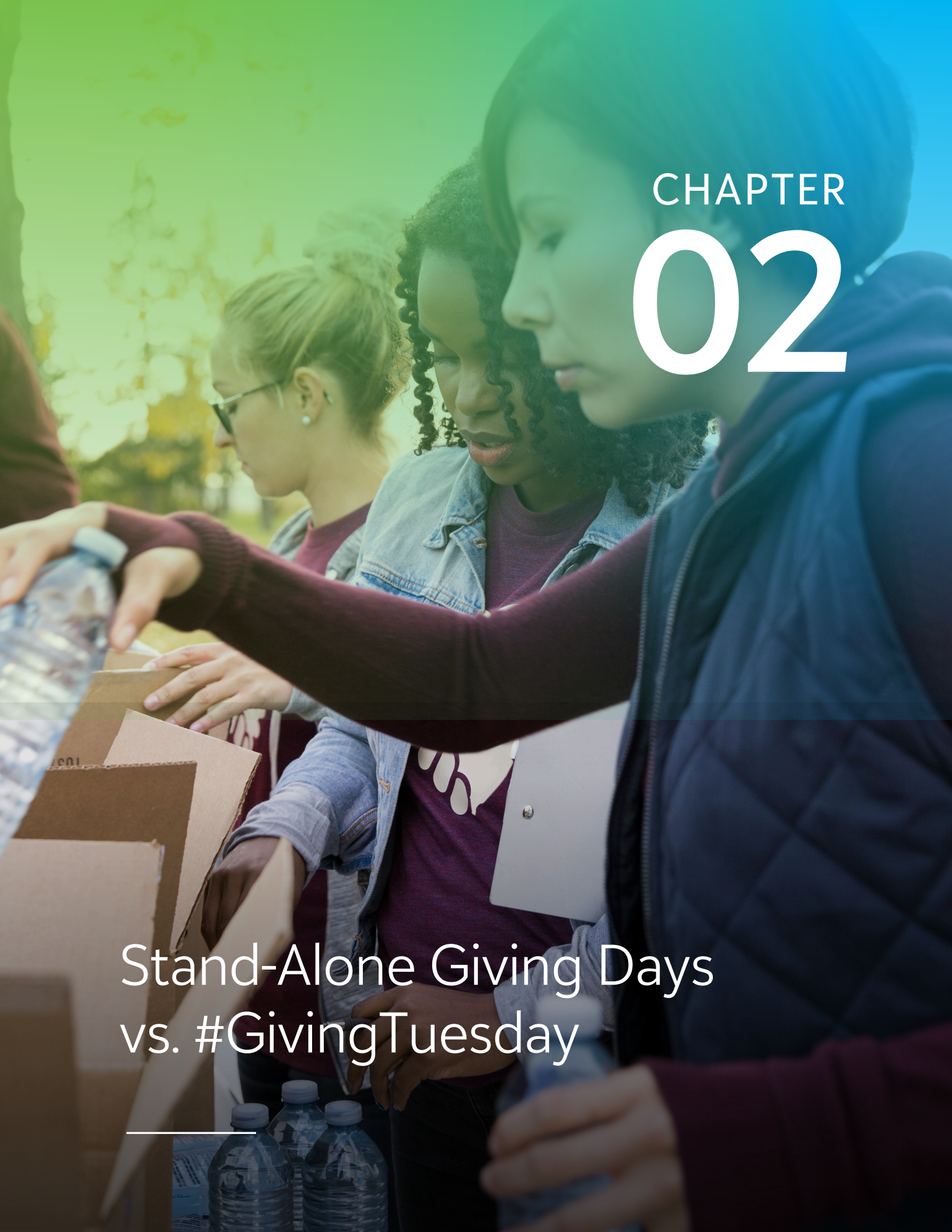
Depending on the size of your organization, your donor base, and the capacity of the donors and prospects in your network, a successful giving day could raise \$25,000, \$100,000 or even \$500,000 in one fantastic day of fundraising. What makes giving days such a powerful fundraising strategy? And why do giving days work so well?

Giving days work because they focus everyone at your organization on one task: raising as much money as possible in a single day. Giving days allow you to wrangle your board, staff, donors, and volunteers to help connect your fundraising team to donors and spread the word about your giving day activities.



By holding a giving day for your nonprofit organization, you can leverage your team's work into massive buzz and attention for your mission, expand your capacity by finding new donors, and remind your donors, board, and other supporters about the importance of fundraising for the success of your organization's mission and programs. Since a Giving Day can be executed at any time of the year, you can strategically pick a day to drive an increase in donations when you need it most. For example, maybe most of your donations typically come in at the end of the year and mid-summer is slower, make June 3rd your dedicated Giving Day!

Plus, giving days are—or should be—fun. Giving days should build a sense of camaraderie on your team by making it feel like everyone is pulling in the same direction and toward the same worthy goal of supporting your organization and the communities you serve.

A group of young people are shown from the chest up, focused on packing cardboard boxes. They are holding and placing plastic water bottles into the boxes. The scene is outdoors, with trees and foliage visible in the background. The image has a green-to-blue gradient overlay. The text 'CHAPTER 02' is in the top right, and 'Stand-Alone Giving Days vs. #GivingTuesday' is in the bottom left.

CHAPTER 02

Stand-Alone Giving Days vs. #GivingTuesday

Launched in 2012, #GivingTuesday takes place on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. The idea is that many people go shopping on Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving, for those of you not in the United States) and shop online on Cyber Monday (the Monday after Black Friday), so why not try to get people to give some of what they have left to nonprofits the following day?

Over the past several years, #GivingTuesday has grown exponentially. Tens of thousands of nonprofits, schools, churches, and other charities now participate, raising millions of dollars each year. Many news channels run special features on #GivingTuesday, and email inboxes are flooded with reminders to give.

One of the most common questions we get from organizations looking to launch a giving day is whether they should participate in #GivingTuesday or hold a stand-alone giving day. There's no easy answer, as there are several pros and cons to each option. Let's examine those below.

#GivingTuesday

Many nonprofits participate in #GivingTuesday to leverage the buzz and excitement that already exists around #GivingTuesday—especially online. They feel that people recognize #GivingTuesday as an annual event and that many of their donors look forward to giving on this day. Some organizations also think that their board members and donors expect them to do something on #GivingTuesday, and they don't want to do anything half-hearted, so they run their giving days on that day.

On the flip side, as #GivingTuesday has expanded and become more popular, many donors feel inundated by fundraising messages. We know from receiving several dozen emails each #GivingTuesday from organizations we support. As a result of this oversaturation and coinciding with established end-of-year giving programs, and holidays, it has become more difficult for nonprofits—particularly smaller organizations with limited fundraising resources—to break through the noise during that time of year.

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One of the most common questions we get from nonprofits and social good organizations looking to launch a giving day is whether they should participate in #GivingTuesday or hold a stand-alone giving day.

Stand-Alone Giving Days

Nonprofit organizations that run stand-alone giving days, instead of (or in addition to) participating in #GivingTuesday, do so because they want to make sure that their donors and supporters are focused on their mission and organization, instead of competing with the tens of thousands of others trying to build buzz and excitement on the same day.


On the other hand, many organizations that run stand-alone giving days also send out an email or two on #GivingTuesday because they feel like their donors, board members, and families expect it. While doing so won't hurt your other fundraising efforts, you should know that you aren't likely to raise a lot of money on #GivingTuesday unless you fully commit to the effort. Simply putting out an email or two on #GivingTuesday may satisfy your board members and other supporters who expect you to do something on that day, but without a plan, weeks of prep work, and a full slate of marketing activities, you won't raise much from those efforts.

Our Recommendation

There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer in the choice between running a stand-alone giving day versus participating in #GivingTuesday. If you have made #GivingTuesday a tradition and are having success with it, my advice is to continue growing your #GivingTuesday fundraising programs. If you are just starting out, and want to test the #GivingTuesday waters, by all means go for it! There's no harm in trying, and you can always switch over to a solo giving day if your #GivingTuesday results don't match your expectations.

That being said, our recommendation, for those of you that haven't already established successful #GivingTuesday programs, is to launch your own stand-alone giving day! In our experience, it is far better to fundraise on a day where you are not competing with thousands of other nonprofits. Most of the other nonprofits we work with have found that being the only organization running a giving day makes the experience far more interesting, exciting, and noteworthy for the donor.

The remainder of this toolkit will delve into best practices, strategies, and tips for supercharging your giving days. Most of these strategies will apply whether you are running a stand-alone giving day or participating in #GivingTuesday or #GivingTuesdayNow.



CHAPTER 03

Best Practices for Successful Giving Days

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As more and more organizations run giving days, we collectively build our knowledge for what works and what doesn't.

Over the course of the past decade, hundreds of thousands of schools and other nonprofits have run successful giving days. As more and more organizations run giving days, we collectively build our knowledge for what works and what doesn't. These are the best practices you will need to understand in order to run a successful giving day at your organization, whether it's a stand-alone giving day or a campaign on #GivingTuesday:

1. Plan ahead...way ahead.

Planning a successful giving day that reaches its fundraising goals takes time and effort. For your first giving day, you'll want to make sure you start planning at least three months in advance. I recommend that you create a short, written plan for your giving day and treat it with the same care and forethought as any other fundraising campaign.

Don't fall prey to the most common misconception about giving days, which is that they can be thrown together in a week or two. The most successful giving days—the ones where nonprofits exceed their fundraising goals—are also the ones where the fundraising team spent the most time preparing before the launch.

2. Be transparent about what you are doing.

Giving days work, in part, because everyone understands that you are running a special fundraising day to support your mission and organization. Don't try to hide the fact that you are running a day focused solely on fundraising.

Many nonprofits run a "secret" giving day by sending out tweets and emails about fundraising without ever actually announcing the giving day. Don't make that mistake. Be proud of the fact that you are running a 24-hour fundraising campaign.

Tell your community that you have a great organization and mission with meaningful outcomes. Share your vision for the future and explain that it will cost money to get there, which is why you are running a giving day to support your mission and the community that you're in. Then, trust your donors and other supporters to partner with you by investing in your vision for the future.

3. Brand your giving day.

The most successful organizations create a brand around their giving days to make it easier to spread the word and to convince more donors to give. To build a brand, you'll need to assign a name to your giving day that aligns with your mission. Some examples include:

- The Central Food Bank One-Day Campaign
- 24 Cures in 24 Hours
- 3rd Annual Save the Animals Saturday
- Library Giving Week
- 25 Years of Service Silver Anniversary—raise \$25K

Likewise, you/your staff should create a short case for support that outlines why you are running the one-day campaign, how much you are trying to raise, and why it is essential to do so in a short period of time. This explanation will form the basis of your donor communications and should specifically target the need you are addressing by running a giving day.

4. Create a goal and a donor pyramid.

Don't be vague with your giving day planning. Set a clear fundraising goal so that everyone at your organization (your staff and board, including your donors) is on the same page when it comes to the day's activities. Instead of saying that you want to raise as much as possible that day to take in as many stray cats as you can this year, tell your donors that you are raising \$48,000 in one day to provide medical expenses and clean kennels for 100 more dogs this year than last.

Create a donor pyramid that you can use internally to show how many donors are needed at the various levels to reach the goal. Remember, if you are setting an ambitious goal (And you should!), you will need to include major donors in your giving day fundraising mix.

As you create donor goals, it is important to include donors at various levels. Ideally, you will find a small number of people to make larger gifts during the giving day, as well as a solid group of mid-level givers. Then, you can round out your donor pyramid with a large number of smaller donors. It is essential to create this giving pyramid during the planning stage so that you can target donor communications to the appropriate groups with the right level asks for each of your donors.

5. Giving days are not a set-it-and-forget-it fundraising tactic.

Some nonprofits think that giving days are a set-it-and-forget-it fundraising strategy. They plan out their giving day, develop a brand for it, and when the big day comes, they send out an email blast and post asks on social media. Then they go back to their regularly scheduled activities. Such efforts are doomed to fail. Successful giving days require constant activity for the entire day, and for your entire team.

The most common activities that organizations carry out on a successful giving day include:

- Events such as giving day breakfasts, lunches, and rallies
- Letters that arrive one to three days before the big day
- Email blasts sent before and during the giving day
- Phone calls asking people to donate during the day, including phone-a-thons hosted by volunteers
- Continuous social media reminders about your giving day activities and asks
- Meetings with affinity groups and other fundraising groups during the giving day
- PR such as press releases, talk radio interviews, etc.

Likewise, you/your staff should create a short case for support that outlines why you are running the one-day campaign, how much you are trying to raise, and why it is essential to do so in a short period of time. This explanation will form the basis of your donor communications and should specifically target the need you are addressing by running a giving day.

6. You need a team!

Speaking of your team—remember that you need one! In addition to your development staff, you'll need to get your board and your volunteers involved in the fundraising efforts if you want to have the most successful giving day possible.

I also recommend that you put together a Giving Day Leadership Committee composed of some of your most dedicated volunteers, staff, donors, and board members. This committee should be responsible for helping your team spread the word about your big day by being active on social media, sending out emails, attending events (if you have them), and of course, making a donation to support your giving day campaign. If you have a peer-to-peer platform in place, this is a great time to use it. Those platforms help individual fundraisers become team captains and advocates for you—they may even just help you drastically increase your donations by having their networks get involved. If you don't have a platform, you can learn more about **[Blackbaud Peer-to-Peer Fundraising, powered by JustGiving here.](#)**



7. Focus on your core donor universe.

As a nonprofit organization, you have a core built-in donor base. This includes your current donors, volunteers, event attendees, social media followers and the connections of your board members and staff. Don't ignore this base. The success of your giving day will rely on getting your current donor base to donate and spread the word.

Ideally, you are asking your current supporters to do two things on the giving day: first, to make a gift, and second, to solicit donations from their network—**better known in the nonprofit world as peer-to-peer fundraising**. Many organizations make the mistake of focusing on finding new donors or on inactive donors who don't currently give. Giving days can be a means for activating donors and volunteers who don't give, but your primary focus should be on current supporters. Ask them to give and to spread the word. Stay in constant contact with them in the days leading up to your campaign.

8. Make it interesting and fun.

There are lots of ways to make your next giving day more interesting and fun. One of the best options is to offer donor match challenges, where larger donors match a specific number of donations or dollar amount that comes in over a specified period of time. For example, you could offer a donor match challenge from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., and then another one from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. These challenges provide a reason to send urgent emails to your contact list.

Other ways to make your one-day campaign more exciting include pitting different teams against each other in a contest to see who gives more or offering incentives (similar to crowdfunding campaign perks) to donors who give at different levels. You can even challenge you a similar organization in a neighboring city in a fun competition to see who can raise more on their giving day (this works particularly well if both organizations are participating in #GivingTuesday or are running stand-alone giving days within a couple of weeks of each other).

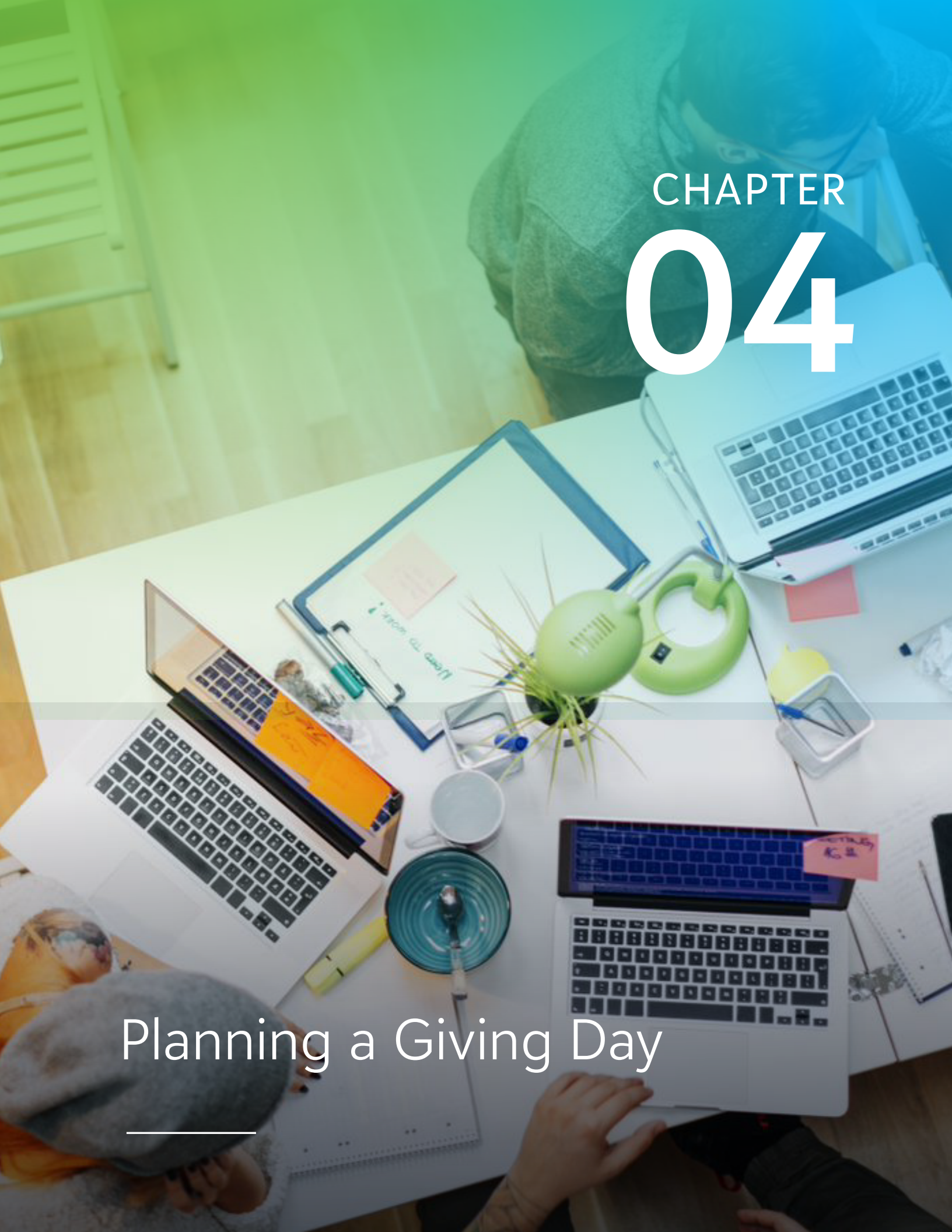


9. Go all in.

If your organization is planning to run a #GivingTuesday campaign, there are a couple of things to know in addition to the best practices listed above:

To compete with the hundreds of thousands of other nonprofits that are sending out millions of fundraising messages on #GivingTuesday, you need to turn up the volume by putting your #GivingTuesday campaign in people's inboxes, voicemails, and social media feeds constantly throughout the day.

If you're running a campaign on #GivingTuesday, chances are you are hoping to build off the #GivingTuesday buzz. Go all in and embrace the #GivingTuesday spirit of philanthropy and ethos of giving back during the holiday shopping season and work that philosophy into your donor communications for the day.

A high-angle, top-down view of a person's workspace. The person, wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt, is seated at a white desk. They are working on three laptops: one on the left, one in the center, and one on the right. The desk is cluttered with various items including a blue desk lamp, a small potted plant, a white mug, a blue bowl, a yellow highlighter, a blue pen, a silver container, and several sticky notes. The background shows a wooden floor and a white chair. The image has a green-to-blue gradient overlay.

CHAPTER 04

Planning a Giving Day

Giving Day Tech: What do you need to be successful?

Many fundraisers ask us about the technology needed for a successful giving day. The good news is that you can be successful using very little technology. That being said, there are some great tools that can help make your giving day a resounding success. These include:

PHONE

It doesn't get any more old-fashioned than picking up the phone to solicit financial support. Yet many nonprofits assume that their giving day activities should be focused entirely online. Nothing could be further from the truth. Phone fundraising is an effective strategy that can benefit giving days, as long as you have your supporters' most up-to-date information. If you're struggling with updating your constituents' data, we can help—[learn more here](#). In the days leading up to your giving day, get on the phone to let people know it is coming. Then, on the big day, work the phones for donations. Many organizations have found that a volunteer-staffed phone-a-thon can provide a huge boost to the overall revenue from a one-day campaign.

WEBSITE

Your website is crucial to giving day success. Many people who hear about the giving day (or #GivingTuesday) campaign will go to the website to learn more. In the days leading up to the giving day, the event should be featured front and center on your home page with links for people to learn about participating.

Also, be sure to set up a dedicated page on the website to collect donations on the big day. This page should accept credit card payments and provide information on who to contact if someone wants to give by check or ask questions about the campaign. Many organizations also include a fundraising thermometer on their page to show donors how much progress is being made toward the overall giving day goal.

When doing this, it is important to create a different page from your standard annual giving page/form. You want to make sure donors understand that this is a special campaign—one that is different (and hopefully more fun) than your other fundraising activities. A separate page also allows you to keep the giving day messaging consistent. Including a thermometer or another way to track the campaign's progress will help keep donors engaged, similar to the crowdfunding campaign page suggestion below.

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Planning a successful giving day that reaches its fundraising goals takes time and effort

EMAIL NEWSLETTER

The backbone of the giving day communications plan should be your email list. Use your email newsletter provider to send mass emails several times over the course of the day asking for support. Since this is a one-day event, it's better to err on the side of sending too many emails than too few—don't leave any money on the table!

MOBILE CREDIT CARD SCANNERS

Some nonprofit organizations have had success with having staff members out in the community during lunch hours, school pick-up times, and end of the work day, reminding the community that it is giving day and allowing them to make donations on the go. While this is not a necessity for a successful giving day, it can be a fun way to boost your bottom line, especially if the staff members wear costumes and make signage. Many credit card processing companies, including Blackbaud®, **offer cheap and easy-to-use credit card scanners** that plug directly into your smartphone or tablet.

CROWDFUNDING PAGE

Another option that many schools use successfully is a crowdfunding page—often directing website visitors to the crowdfunding site instead of supporting the campaign on the school's site. Through a service such as **Blackbaud Peer-to-Peer, Powered by JustGiving®**, these pages provide an easy way to create attractive campaign pages and accept donations. While using a crowdfunding page as the hub of your giving day activities can be a quick and easy way to set up a great-looking campaign page, keep in mind that these pages typically include a fundraising thermometer that only tracks donations made on the page.

This means that donations solicited elsewhere won't appear by default. So, if your goal for the giving day is \$100,000, and you raise lots of money through checks, donor matches, and in-person giving that day, your crowdfunding page thermometer may only show \$20,000 in donations even though you are very close to hitting your \$100,000 goal. Weak results also tend to depress donors because people feel less enthusiastic about your organization hitting its giving day goal.

Make sure that the crowdfunding service allows offline donations to be entered (This is a feature of **Blackbaud Peer-to-Peer, powered by JustGiving**) and that someone is responsible for updating this throughout the day so that the thermometer reflects the actual amount raised.

A Sample Calendar for Running a Successful Giving Day for Your Organization

Okay, now that you know which strategies and tactics will help make your giving day a resounding success, let's review a step-by-step calendar to help you prioritize.

Remember that every organization is different, so while this calendar will work for the majority of you, you may need to start earlier, move things around, or add/subtract some of the items that are included in this guide. In other words, use this calendar as a template for your own giving day schedule, but be sure to customize it based on your organization's unique needs and resources!

12 Weeks Before Your Giving Day...

- Put your giving day on the calendar
- Develop the fundraising goal, theme, and branding for the giving day, as well as the case for support (what the money will be used for and why people should give)
- Develop a prospect list for the Giving Day Leadership Committee

10 Weeks Out...

- Develop the collateral materials for the giving day, including the giving day webpage, letters to be mailed to your current donors, and flyers to be put out around your community
- Invite people to join the Giving Day Leadership Committee

8 Weeks Out...

- Hold a Giving Day Leadership Committee meeting
- Introduce this year's giving day date, theme, and message to your staff, board and volunteers
- Find at least two donors to offer donor matches on the big day
- Start getting the board excited about the giving day

6 Weeks Out...

- Send a snail mail letter to your top donors to let them know about the upcoming giving day
- Assemble a team of volunteers to make calls during the giving day

4 Weeks Out...

- Hold a Giving Day Leadership Committee meeting
- Send an email blast to start building buzz for this year's giving day

2 Weeks Out...

- Send a follow-up email blast about the upcoming giving day
- Start touting the giving day on social media
- Develop the call list for the big day

1 Week Out...

- Hold a Giving Day Leadership Committee meeting
- Send an email reminder about the upcoming giving day
- Keep touting the giving day on social media
- Post giving day flyers at local community areas

The Week of your Giving Day...

- Send a second email reminder about the upcoming giving day
- Ramp up social media efforts for the upcoming giving day
- Hold a giving day rally for donors/volunteers

On the Giving Day...

- Send at least four email blasts during the day
- Post on each social media channel at least once per hour
- Have your volunteer team make calls to your call list
 - Announce your donor match challenges and any other fun activities you have planned for the day
 - Make sure the fundraising thermometer is being updated with all donations

After the Giving Day...

- Announce the results
- Fulfill any promised donor benefits
- Thank the donors, Giving Day Leadership Committee, staff, and volunteers for a successful giving day

It's a lot of work, but it's worth it. As your organization runs several annual (or biannual) giving days, you'll start to learn what works and what doesn't for your donor universe. Don't be afraid to test new things, cut out aspects that didn't work, and focus more resources on the successful elements. Your goal should be to raise an increasing amount each year while decreasing the level of hassle and stress.

You can do this!

Successful giving days aren't magic. Using the strategies and tools provided in this guide, every nonprofit—including yours—can run a supercharged giving day. Remember, your organization does great work. You need to raise more money to carry out that work. Giving days (whether stand-alone or as part of #GivingTuesday) are a great way to boost your revenue, energize your current donors, and bring new donors onto your team.

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