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End-of-Year Fundraising Tips

2020 data shows donors continue to support charitable needs

Best Friends has been addressing the financial impact of COVID-19 on animal shelters and rescues since the earliest days of the pandemic. We've used these pages to talk about the need for adjusting processes and funding models [to stay solvent](#), share [effective virtual fundraising ideas](#) and most recently, remind us to [lead with gratitude](#) in all our asks.

And we weren't alone in discussing this issue. Direct marketing strategy agency NewportOne held a [town hall in April](#) featuring more than 40 animal nonprofit and fundraising professionals talking about strategies for staying connected and raising critical funds during the crisis, and American Pets Alive! shared [six easy steps](#) to fundraise during the outbreak on its website. An array of other animal welfare agencies both small and large have worked hard to respond to the financial crisis and share what works with other organizations.

Though 2020 has most definitely been a time of chaos, the good news is that animal welfare organizations (and other charitable orgs) have continued to see an outpouring of support from donors:

- According to [Fast Company magazine](#), a Harris poll found that more than half of those surveyed about their nonprofit donations say they've been giving "the same amount since the COVID-19 pandemic began, and 21% say they now give more than they used to."
- A study by the [Indiana University's Women's Philanthropy Institute](#) (WPI) showed that 56% of American households gave to charity this year, and a full "one-third of households gave money directly to charitable organizations, other individuals or businesses."
- A NewportOne review of information from a variety of nonprofit industry data sources—including Best Friends' data— found that the animal welfare industry was outperforming average industry trends during the first half of the year. (Q3 and Q4 data was not yet available.)

The long and short of all that data? People are still inclined to give despite the hardships of this

unprecedented year.

"This has been a really hard year and we're all worried about what the future will bring," says Barbara Camick, director of annual giving for Best Friends. "But this has also been an extremely strong year for fundraising that is holding through the holiday season so far. Don't assume people don't have the means to give. A lot of people have embraced simplicity and they might be foregoing gifts and donating instead. And since people give to multiple charities, even if they are scaling back, they might give to three causes instead of 10."

Making the ask

Fundraising is daunting for many of us in animal welfare, who are more comfortable doing things like caring for ill animals or holding adoption events. At the risk of making things sound too easy, though, getting donor support for your work boils down to one simple thing: ask for what you need.

"Make it easy to donate, make it clear why the need is urgent and why they should give to your organization," says Kate Moore, senior manager of digital campaigns and email marketing.

"And make sure to stick to some best practice recommendations, like making the donor the hero, because the reality is that we can't do this without the support of our donors," Barbara adds. "Their support enables us to do the work. No matter what form your fundraising communications take, they need to be packed with gratitude and celebration for what donors make possible with their financial support."

One way to make that a very clear message is to equate donation amounts with what they can fund for the animals. Our symbolic giving campaign features a [catalog of kindness](#) listing opportunities to support direct animal care at a variety of levels. A donation of \$20 could purchase receiving blankets and stuffed animals for orphaned kittens, while \$1,000 can fund the care for a senior pet.

"We are careful to note that the funds may be used in those ways, but that ultimately they are unrestricted and will go where the need is greatest in any moment in time," says Kate. "We might even combine funds to support a particular need."

You should also consider leveraging donations into matching gift challenges.

"Matches can be incredibly effective and they don't have to come from a huge donation," says Kate. "Even a small gift can be used to inspire others to give."

Don't forget that donating to charity also has positive tax implications for the donor. In fact, this year the CARES act allows for a [\\$300 per household charitable deduction](#) even if you don't itemize deductions.

Making the most of social media

With the year ticking down, Kate notes that organizations should be using their social postings to drive end-of-year donations. The other good news that came out of the nonprofit donor reviews cited above? The challenges of 2020 have caused adoption and acceptance of digital-based tools to leap forward for the older donor generation, who now feel much more at ease with Zoom calls and Facebook Live.

"Make sure you use Facebook and Instagram live functionality," Kate stresses. "People really respond to being able to see what's happening in real time. That's why this year, as in previous years, we will be doing a live feed from the sanctuary to show how we take donated toys around to all the animal areas and let our resident animals pick out what they want."

Even if you don't opt to use the live function on Facebook, sharing videos will go a long way to motivate donors.

"People love video and that's what is performing the best now," Kate says. "They can be informal pieces that aren't highly produced and don't take a lot of time to put together. Less polished content does better on social channels. Use your cell phone and do something simple and straightforward, like

doing a tour of your facility or showing some behind-the-scenes stuff.”

“You can even do a simple, unproduced video featuring thanks from the animals in your care,” says Barbara. “That goes a long way to reminding people of all the good work they supported this holiday season.”

Now is not just the time to push out your best content on social media, but to include a donate button on every posting to make it easy for people to give. In fact, it’s a good idea to put donate buttons on your postings year-round. While that may feel like you’re overloading people with the giving message, Kate notes that it is unlikely people are seeing every post and email you send out with a request.

“People shouldn’t be shy to ask for donations and to ask frequently,” Kate says. “Don’t just send out one request; ask at least once a week. There’s a lot of noise this time of year, and you want your voice to rise above it.”

“Giving is usually an impulse and you need to remind people that it’s something they should do,” Barbara adds. “Nobody jumps out of bed in the morning and says I’m giving to so-and-so today. Something must happen within the day to prompt that action, to remind people that there is still a need. If your organization’s message is front and center, with a photo or video to remind them why they’re giving, you stand a good chance of being that motivation.”

For more information about upping your fundraising game, watch the town hall [Rock Solid Fundraising: Strengthening Your Financial Foothold](#) or listen to the podcast [Pivot on a Dime to Make a Buck](#). You can also find all sorts of funding resources in the [Network Lifesaving Library](#) or take our 11-lesson course on [Fundraising Fundamentals](#).

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