

# How To Successfully Host Virtual Fundraising Events

9 min read



## Key Takeaways

- **Reach a Broader Audience:** Virtual fundraising events not only make it possible to stay connected to your donor base through trying times, but they also enable your organization to reach a much broader audience than before.
- **Make Invites Special and Easy to Use:** In the digital age, your fundraising efforts should be more personal and less transactional.
- **Be Mindful of Messaging:** Translate your gratitude into numbers by calculating the ROI of donor impact and your nonprofit's impact.

If the past year revealed anything, it's humanity's incredible resilience. The ability to come together, even when we can't physically be together, as well as our ingenuity.

As a nonprofit leader, you've had to revisit the way your organization operates by shifting to remote work. You've had to find creative ways to safely serve your beneficiaries by learning how to continue fundraising tactfully during a time when the entire world has been struggling.

One remarkable advancement that emerged from the challenges of the past year was the advent of virtual fundraising events in the nonprofit sector. Virtual events have made it possible for nonprofits to continue holding events with virtual streaming, remote presentations, and telethon-like call-in donations.

But just because the world is beginning to open up again, doesn't mean your nonprofit should do away with virtual fundraising.

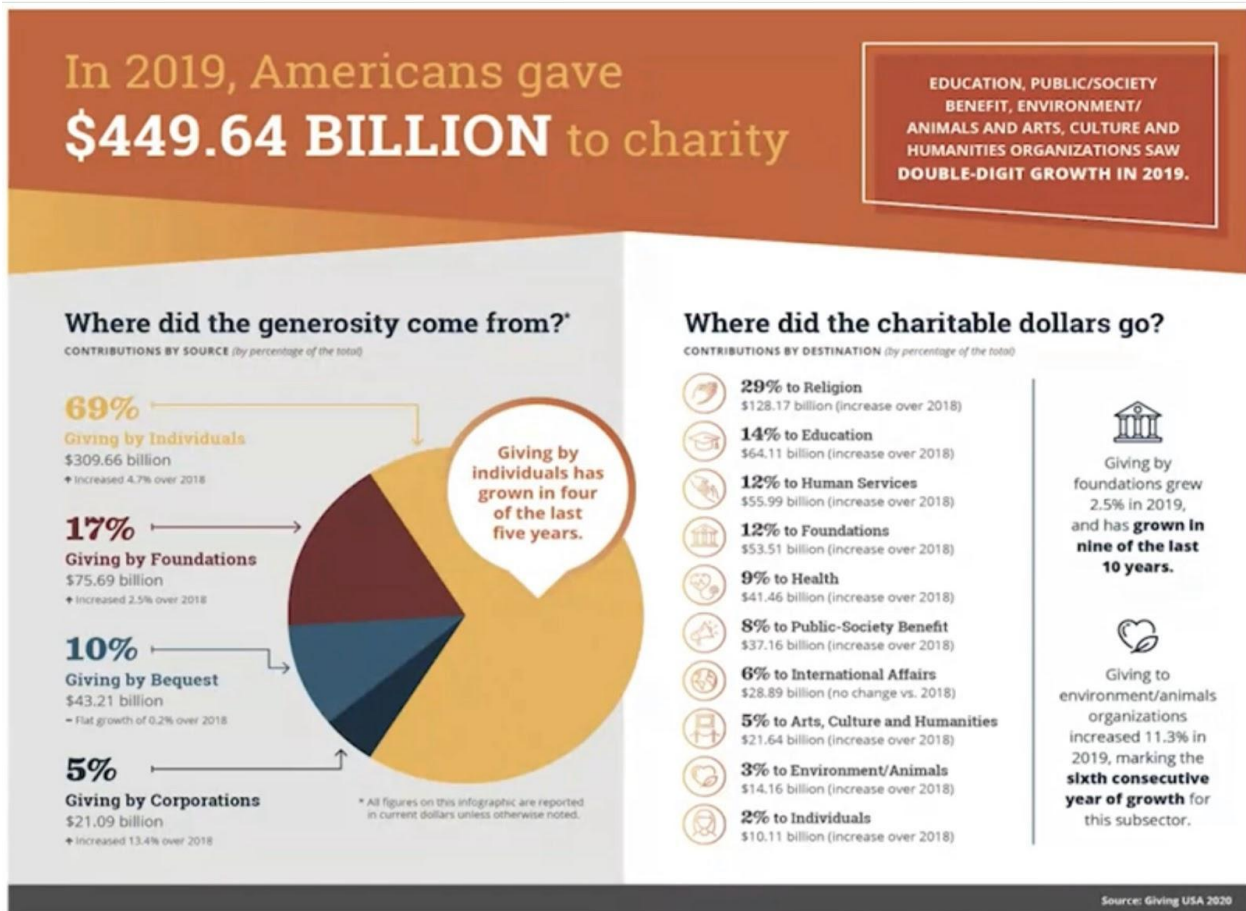
## **Why Virtual Fundraising Still Matters Coming Out Of The Pandemic**

While many of us can't wait to return to hosting in-person events and thanking our donors face to face, virtual fundraising still has many benefits that nonprofits can continue to take advantage of — **even after [fundraising](#) can return to normal.**

### **Maintaining Relationships**

Throughout trying times and even economic downturns, it's important to focus on maintaining relationships with donors and clients.

Nailing your donor relationships has always been the key to fundraising success- and this especially rings true with the new world challenges. Whether or not your donors can continue giving, staying in touch will keep you at the top of their minds, make them feel supported and appreciated by your organization, and ensure that they know you're still working hard on the mission that's important to them, too. According to the Giving USA 2020 report, Individual giving makes up 79% of donations in the US- (69% solicitation and 10% bequests) <sup>[1]</sup>.



[Giving USA 2020](#)

When the clouds finally part, you won't have to work twice as hard to rebuild your relationships because you will have continued keeping them strong the whole time.

As we come out of this pandemic and health rules continue to relax, it's also important to recognize that all of your donors, volunteers, and staff might not be on the same page when it comes to feeling comfortable in public spaces.

Virtual fundraising events will help you continue to stay connected to your donor base and community regardless of where each individual stands in terms of health risks, vaccinations, and spending time in public spaces around people who may or may not be wearing masks.

**Reach a Broader Audience**

Virtual fundraising events not only make it possible to stay connected to your donor base through trying times, but **they also enable your organization to reach a much broader audience than before.**

In-person events can only be attended by people whose schedules are accommodating, who live nearby, or who can afford to travel. However, virtual fundraisers reach a wider geographical audience and can be viewed after the initial stream, eliminating scheduling conflicts.

Although you might not expect strangers to care about a cause or an organization that's serving a community in another part of the country or world, all the individuals connected to your organization through your vast local network will love to show their support. Your staff, volunteers, and donors can share the event with their friends and family members who live in different cities or states and invite them to attend.

This will improve your fundraising success while giving your staff and volunteers the opportunity to share a special part of their lives with their loved ones in a new way.

### **Be More Accessible and Inclusive**

Virtual fundraisers also tend to be accessible to a more inclusive audience. Tickets to attend an in-person gala might cost \$1,000 for a plate, a price tag that's likely unaffordable for many people who might want to attend your events and support your organization.

Since virtual attendees have a much lower overhead cost than in-person guests, nonprofits can afford to charge virtual guests less or waive their attendance fee altogether. This means that corporations will be able to send more of their employees to your events while those who can't afford to purchase a table at your event can still feel like they're a part of the festivities.

Ultimately, more people end up supporting your organization through donations made at an event that can be attended virtually than one that's exclusively available for those who can participate in person.

# 8 Tips for Successfully Hosting a Virtual Fundraiser

## 1. Choose Your Streaming Platform and Software Wisely

The first step to hosting a virtual fundraiser is figuring out the logistics. You'll need software (like ECamm or Restream) that allows you to live-stream your fundraising event through your choice of platforms, and you'll need to be proficient with it before the date of your event.

Additionally, consider where you want to stream your [event](#). Do you plan to use Zoom, Facebook Live, or YouTube Live? Streaming through Zoom or Facebook allows users to easily connect on their tablets or mobile devices, and many people are familiar with both platforms. However, YouTube offers users with smart televisions the option to stream on a larger viewing device in addition to the option of watching on a mobile device.

## 2. Focus on Creating a Polished Production

Your production quality, glitz, and glam shouldn't suffer just because you're hosting a virtual event. If anything, you should strive to amp up your production quality so that your event really shines on camera.

Ask an individual in your organization who's comfortable with creating graphics to produce chyrons that will introduce all of your scheduled speakers. Additionally, you should hold a dress rehearsal so that you can work out any production bugs ahead of the actual event and make sure that lighting, camera angles, and sound are all on par with the type of event you're hosting.

You can also provide all of your presenters with guidelines or a checklist to help them be as prepared as possible for the main event. This self-recording [checklist](#) <sup>[2]</sup> from the nonprofit, Catalyst, is quite thorough and covers everything from selecting a location to lighting, audio, appearing on camera, and avoiding noisy accessories.

## 3. Don't Forgo Sponsors

Treat your virtual fundraising events as if they were in-person events. So, definitely don't forget to find sponsors to help offset the costs of hosting your virtual event.

If the businesses that regularly sponsor your events have been hit hard by the recession, then tap into your network of donors, volunteers, and staff to talk with their business connections in your community. You might be surprised who steps up to support your nonprofit by sponsoring your virtual event.

#### **4. Make Invites Special and Easy to Use**

With virtual events, you must send electronic invitations and reminders so that your guests will have easy-to-find links to your live stream. Although you'll be sending electronic invitations and reminders, try to go the extra mile.

In the digital age, your fundraising efforts should be more personal and less transactional. What does this mean? It's more than just adding the first name to an email. Add a more personal touch to your invites by also sending invitations via snail mail or by selecting a list of guests to invite over the phone. This personal touch will make the virtual event seem less sterile and more like an old-fashioned gala.

Additionally, entice your donors to attend by giving them a sneak peek of what they can expect during your event. Who will be hosting, speaking, or presenting? Will there be any special surprises, speakers, or giveaways for guests to look forward to?

Be sure to post links to your event on your social media pages and on your website, too.

#### **5. Be Mindful of Messaging**

Although a virtual fundraiser might feel less formal, don't treat it like it is. Throughout the event, remember to be mindful of the language you use and the [messaging](#) you communicate to your audience of donors and potential donors. Be grateful, respectful, and show your donors how much they matter.

Use accounting as a fundraising tool. You can translate your gratitude into numbers by calculating the ROI of donor impact and your nonprofit's impact.

👉 **[In just one year, this Nonprofit jumped from a \\$75,000/year grant to a \\$150,000/year grant- from the same foundation. Read the full story here.](#)**

You can do this by breaking it down into dollar amounts and the power that \$5, \$25, \$100, \$500, or \$1,000 donations make in your organization. For example, \$5 might cover a week of meals for someone who's homebound and \$1,000 might cover the annual operating costs for a meal delivery vehicle.

In addition to providing the donor impact of specific dollar amounts, you should also show your organization's impact by communicating the number of people you've served in a year, how much you've grown, and the broader impact your organization has on the community as a whole. What have you done? How has your organization grown? What are you planning to do in the future and how will additional donations help you grow your cause?

In other words, you can incentivize and inspire giving by directly communicating how past donations have helped the community and how future donations will continue to help even more.

## **6. Be Engaging and Timely**

It should go without saying that your virtual fundraiser should be lively and entertaining. Whether your host changes costumes between segments, you encourage discussion and polling through your streaming platform, or you give away prizes throughout, be sure that your attendees feel entertained and want to stick around for the whole show.

Without cocktail hour, mingling, and meals to be served, virtual events don't need to last as long as in-person galas. While the length of events will vary from organization to organization, you can aim at capping yours at anywhere from 30 minutes to a few hours in length. Remember, that some of your guests might not attend during the live stream and

will choose to watch a playback later. Keeping your event on the shorter side will help encourage post-stream viewing.

## 7. Thank Donors in Real-Time

Live-streaming virtual events provide the opportunity to publicly recognize and thank donors in real-time.

Enlist a graphics person to create chyrons with donors' names as they call in. This immediate public recognition is a great way to make your donors feel appreciated while also encouraging others to give, too.

## 8. Host a Hybrid Fundraiser

As our communities become more and more comfortable with being together in public spaces, nonprofits will inevitably return to hosting in-person events. However, you can continue to reap the benefits of virtual fundraising with hybrid fundraisers that take advantage of live-streaming and celebrating together.

# Measure Your Virtual Fundraising Success to See What's Working and What's Not

Like in-person events, virtual fundraisers should be carefully budgeted, tracked, and evaluated to determine their financial success.

[Measure your ROI](#) on a variety of fundraisers to determine which platforms, speakers, and messaging work best for you. While we're all excited to dress up, eat fancy food, and support a good cause together again, you might be surprised to find that the virtual fundraising format is unexpectedly lucrative.

It starts with a smart back office. Attempting to track metrics related to your nonprofit's impact and ROI – without a system of robust, streamlined accounting tools – will only drain



your already limited resources. Learn more about how our Team + Technology approach helps nonprofits serve more people and raise more money.

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[1]

<https://givingusa.org/giving-usa-2020-charitable-giving-showed-solid-growth-climbing-to-44-9-64-billion-in-2019-one-of-the-highest-years-for-giving-on-record/>

[2]

<https://chronicle.brightspotcdn.com/b2/54/4229faf14a3aada4cc7f7bce4b4b/self-recording-tips-catalyst-002.pdf>