

Seattle Works

Seattle Works connects volunteers in the Seattle, Washington area with non-profit organizations, and has become a valued, trusted partner in the community to causes seeking to expand their audience. The organization is best known for preparing volunteers to join non-profit boards and public commissions, and delivering accessible volunteer opportunities that get volunteers in the door and started on a clear path to increased involvement. Seattle Works also hosts fun, informal, non-partisan events to connect communities with the candidates and provide information about issues on their ballot.

Challenge

Seattle Works is a volunteer-connector organization that helps people to get involved with local causes. The challenge is that most people tend to give directly to the non-profit they get connected with through the program, instead of giving to Seattle Works.

Highlights

- Maintaining the same number of peer-to-peer fundraisers as the previous year, and without the benefit of matching gifts, Seattle Works still met their 2012 fundraising goal with their “Be a Rock Star” campaign.
- Seattle Works focused on simplicity with their donation page, using Greater Giving Event Software Online and Online Payments.
- Organizers utilized social networking to reach more supporters, and raised more money per fundraiser than ever before.

Three years ago, Seattle Works started the Rock Your Community campaign, which runs through the first two weeks of December. They identify their most passionate, active volunteers, and invite them to become fundraising Rock Stars. In 2012, each Rock Star was given a fundraising goal of \$300.

In 2011, Seattle Works raised \$14,000 through the Rock Your Community campaign—with the help of a large matching gift program. Yet in 2012, there was no matching gift option, and the program again limited their recruitment to 50 Rock Stars, but with a higher fundraising goal of \$17,000. Meeting this new goal required reaching more people—and as Bevin Wong, Outreach Manager for Seattle Works (2010-2013) put it, “it’s more effective having friends ask their friends.”

Solution

Seattle Works began using the Greater Giving Complete Event Suite in 2008. It was in the organization’s price range, provided for all of their online and event fundraising needs, and interfaced well with their existing website.

Bevin started out just using Greater Giving Online Payments for a standard donation page, until the first Rock Your Community campaign three years ago. Since that first campaign, Bevin has investigated why people abandon donation pages. Now Seattle Works streamlines the online donor experience by keeping their donation pages simple, clear, and easy to use, without asking unnecessary questions. All click-throughs to the donation page are tracked via bit.ly links, so organizers can tell how donors are reaching the donation page, such as via Facebook or email.

With 2012’s much higher \$17,000 goal in mind, Seattle Works tried something new on the outreach front: where Bevin had previously handled all social media efforts alone, in 2012 their entire team of three staff members

and over ten volunteers got involved in building and maintaining the organization's presence on Facebook and Twitter.

Now they meet monthly to evaluate their strategy, discuss strengths and weaknesses, and the best times of day to post. "At first," says Bevin, "it was scary to release content to the team. But it's been great for us. If it's something your organization is thinking about—just do it!" For the first month, she reviewed all posts before they went out, until members of the team were confident in their skills.

Seattle Works also returned to their original voice in all communications with Rock Stars and donors, which was more fun, exciting, youthful and spirited than communications sent out in 2011. E-blasts contained hand-picked, unique stories, emphasizing what Seattle Works does for the community.

Tips from Seattle Works

- Provide peer-to-peer fundraisers with tools and training for effective outreach and fundraising.
- Post regular updates to the fundraising team to keep them inspired and in the loop on your progress.
- Know your audience. Whether it's via email, Facebook, or Twitter, communicate in your organization's unique voice and style.
- Pick only the best stories to share. Showcase what you do to inspire giving and draw larger donations.

In 2012, Seattle Works decided to focus their efforts on their peer-to-peer fundraisers. The organization empowered Rock Stars to send donation reminders via email and Facebook, and reach out to their own social networks for donations. The organization provided Rock Stars with tools and training to promote their fundraising efforts, such as email templates, graphics, and Facebook badges, and sent the Rock Stars daily progress updates.

Seattle Works does not rely on any one method of communication. Now they employ many methods—email, social media, and traditional mailers, to stay in touch with all members of their support network.

Results

In 2012, without matching gift options and keeping recruitment at only 50 peer-to-peer fundraisers, Seattle Works met their \$17,000 fundraising goal. Bevin called it "strange and exciting" to be able to grow their program in spite of these challenges and limitations.

She attributes their success to outreach. The new voice of their communications was more engaging and interesting to readers. Fundraisers used the provided tools and encouragement to remind their friends, over email and Facebook, to make a donation.

Social media had a huge impact—in fact, a good portion of donations to their Rock Your Community campaign came in from Facebook. It highlighted that word-of-mouth in peer-to-peer fundraising is a powerful tool.