



RAISING THE BAR

New approaches take fundraising campaigns and appeals to new levels

BY MEREDITH BARNETT

The game was students versus parents, and it was close. In Florida Tech's esports arena on the institution's November 2021 giving day, the two teams battled through a live "Family Feud" game of campus trivia. On the line: a donation to the winning team's Florida Tech cause of choice.

This was all part of the U.S. university's 2021 strategy to gamify its giving day. With the tagline, "Make an impact. Make a gift. Come play on giving day," the 24-hour, in-person and online event included games from Feud to a rock-paper-scissors tournament to the Alumni Rocket League (an esports mash-up of soccer and car racing).

Many institutions today host giving days, but Florida Tech's approach put a fresh, interactive twist on the activity. The project won a bronze Circle of Excellence Award for flash campaigns—and it wasn't the only 2022 awardee that put a new spin on the typical tactics in a development team's toolkit. In COE judges' comments about the 91 award recipients across fundraising categories, creativity came up most often as a descriptor (followed by terms like great, effective, and impact).

Here's a look at six essential practices advancement teams around the globe used to give fresh, impactful, award-winning twists to fundraising campaigns, events, and appeals.

RAISING THE BAR



University of
BRISTOL

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Blas
Sch

Alumni support
helps students to
thrive at Bristol

110
Futures
Scholarships

You've created 110 Futures Scholarships for students in financial need over the last two years. This innovative programme provides £2,000 for essentials in their first year combined with a further £2,500 for internships and employability opportunities later in their studies. Plus they receive guidance and career support from our dedicated Futures Coordinator.

50
Sanctuary
Scholarships

Thanks to alumni donations Bristol has awarded 50 Sanctuary Scholarships to talented students from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds since 2016. Such generosity creates new opportunities for bright and determined individuals, many of whom have had to overcome extremely challenging circumstances in order to rewrite their futures.

12
Healthy
Minds

Healthy Minds programme taps into the support Bristol offers to help students with mental health issues. In 2019/20 we supported 12 students with mentoring.

1. Build a case that resonates.

St. George's School planted seeds for support

A tree-lined drive in Middletown, Rhode Island, has led visitors to St. George's School since the 1900s. But by spring 2021, the trees along the boarding and day school's main drive were struggling. Weather and disease had ravaged the Norway maple trees (a non-native species). The advancement team launched a campaign to raise \$275,000 to plant 55 new trees.

The campaign went on to raise \$495,000, which can now support other landscape and sustainability projects, and won a silver COE Award for Targeted Campaigns and Appeals.

The key was crafting the right story to engage alumni and supporters.

"[As] one of the most beautiful and iconic entrances to a school, our main drive has always evoked a feeling of awe," wrote the St. George's team in its COE application. They wondered: "What if allies and donors got upset about taking down the old trees?"

In response, the campaign's email, digital, and print pieces focused on sustainability and emotion. For stories in the school's magazine and online content, the St. George's team interviewed the landscape architect spearheading the project to highlight how the new trees (native lindens and elms) would be heartier and healthier, preserving the campus alumni love.

"We created a compelling story that resonated with our audience. All alumni and families remember their first trip up the main drive to our school and seeing that sweeping vista of the [Atlantic] ocean," wrote the team. "Alumni and current families jumped at the chance to be a part of an effort to preserve an iconic piece of St. George's School."





THE URBAN NATURE PROJECT

the lost words

Spell Songs

Tuesday 2 February 2021

A unique online concert, live from the Natural History Museum, raising funds for the Urban Nature Project

thelostwords.org/nhm

FOLK BY THE OAK

The Urban Nature Project is supported by

NEW APPROACHES: Creativity drove award-winning projects like the Florida Institute of Technology's gamified giving day (far left), the University of Bristol's Black Bristol Scholarships appeal (middle), the Natural History Museum's Spell Songs virtual fundraiser (left), and St. George's School's Main Drive campaign (below).

2. Address a specific need.

Inside the University of Bristol's move to support Black students, researchers, and faculty

In 2020, the University of Bristol's development team saw an opportunity to support diversity and inclusion for Black students.

At the 27,000-student U.K. institution, the development team partnered with the university's antiracism steering group and student inclusion team to launch the Black Bristol Scholarships in 2021. The goal was to raise £1 million over four years to fund a total of 136 scholars.

Promoted in a leaflet mailed with the university's magazine and a digital campaign with emails, blog posts, and social media testimonials, the campaign raised more than £700,000 in only three months. Zeroing in on Black students' specific experiences was central. COE judges called it ambitious and bold, awarding the program a bronze award for Targeted Campaigns and Appeals.

"We chose to focus on understanding the barriers to success experienced particularly by Black students, rather than attempting to create a single 'one size fits all' initiative to support Black, Asian, and minority ethnic students, as has been popular at other institutions," explained the Bristol team in its COE award application. The program included tailored supports for undergraduates, postgraduates, teachers, and researchers. This ensured a meaningful opportunity for students and what they called "a robust, evidence-based case for donor support."

3. Amp up anticipation—and avenues for participation.

The Natural History Museum's Spell Songs virtual fundraiser combined art, music, VIP access, and more

The Natural History Museum's Spell Songs concert wove together art and music, fundraising and engagement, digital technology and live performance.

Located in South Kensington, London, the museum houses millions of specimens from dinosaur skeletons to gold crystals. In 2020, the museum planned an in-person concert with musical ensemble Spell Songs to raise funds for the Urban Nature Project to transform the museum's five-acre outdoor space into a biodiversity hub.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the museum's team to pivot

MAKING A GRAND ENTRANCE

A jewel on our Hilltop,
Main Drive gets a gold-star makeover

We're in on the secret now, but can any of us forget the first time we arrived at St. George's? The moment when, about midway down the Main Drive, the stunning view of the ocean appeared to the east and the chapel tower rose from behind Old School?

Indeed, the entrance to St. George's has been a showstopper ever since our founder, the Rev. John Byron Diman, purchased the land here in 1901 and Old School was sited nearly 200 yards off Purgatory Road. Now, this summer, we've begun a comprehensive renovation project meant to help preserve our grand entrance for the next 120 years.

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ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOL // FALL 2021



\$257,515 Raised

1015 Donors

instead to an online fundraiser in April 2021. The event was part concert, part live art show, part auction. During a performance from the nature-inspired Spell Songs musical ensemble, illustrator Jackie Morris created live illustrations that viewers could bid on (along with other artworks and goods).

The concert itself was free, but the museum gave audiences multiple ways to give online before the event—including a special VIP preview day. On the February date that the in-person concert would have happened, the museum team hosted a sneak peek with Spell Songs musicians joining from their homes.

“Postponing the original concert meant ... we [had to keep] momentum and our audiences engaged,” wrote the museum team in its COE materials. The preview “built anticipation and excitement for the show.”

Some 50,000 participants globally logged on to watch the show, which raised more than £105,000—double the museum’s goal. It won a silver COE Award for Online Fundraisers. More than three-quarters of the donors were new to the museum, setting the stage for future engagement.

4. Act quickly.

The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine moved fast to meet an essential need

The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine captured donors’ energy at just the right time with its Bump It Forward campaign.

Founded in 1898, LSTM is a small teaching institution in the

U.K. with 600 students from 68 countries. By January 2021, the COVID-19 vaccine was rolling out in the U.K., but LSTM staff in Africa—like those at the Malawi-Liverpool-Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Programme—were dealing with a second wave of the virus.

LSTM’s fundraising team launched Bump It Forward (named after the pandemic “elbow bump” greeting), a campaign to marshal emergency support. It called on donors to give the same amount that their vaccine had cost (c£25/\$33) to protect health workers in African countries until the vaccine reached them. LSTM launched the campaign using the JustGiving platform in 72 hours.

Working with a team of just four staff, LSTM raised £285,989 in 12 months from nearly 5,000 donors in the U.K. and globally. Staff focused “on speed: to gain ‘first-mover advantage’ and to get funds and personal protective equipment to colleagues as quickly as possible. Therefore, decisions had to be taken quickly and with an acceptance of uncertainty,” the team shared in COE Awards materials.

5. Highlight a (relatable) hero.

The story behind Ohio University’s everyman annual fund appeal

When Ohio University staff discovered that its longest-running annual donor had given 59 years in a row, they knew there had to be a story there.

Enter Gary Clark, a 1960 graduate of the U.S. institution. He began giving as soon as he graduated.



In 1962, Gary Clark made his first gift to Ohio University. He chose OHIO, and he's chosen to give what he can every year since—59 years of support for the experiences that shaped countless students' lives for the better.

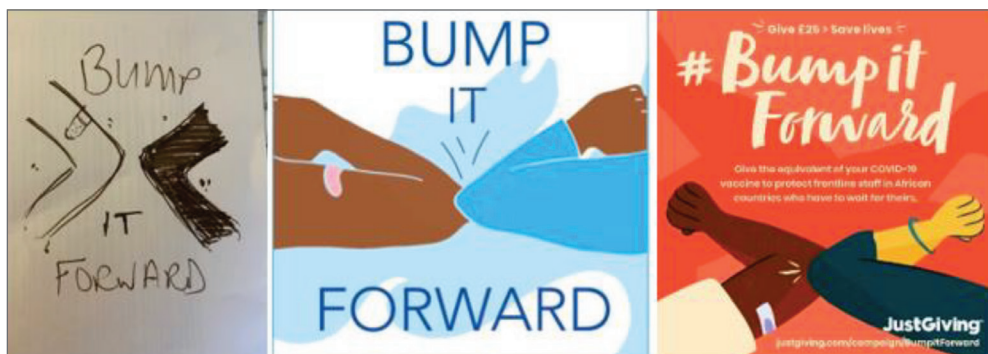
It might be hard to beat Gary's record, but it doesn't take much for you to start your own legacy. No gift is too small to make a real and lasting difference to the place that made a real and lasting difference in you.

Give today. Give Like Gary.
ohio.edu/gary

► Head online to see snapshots of campus and Athens from the 1960s and today, and see all that's changed since Gary's OHIO days—and what has stayed the same.



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APPEALS WITH IMPACT: Clear, creative messaging helped drive 2022 campaigns at the University at Albany (opposite page) and Ohio University (above). The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine's Bump It Forward campaign (left) evolved quickly from idea to launch to provide emergency support.

"Hey, you're not wealthy and you're not going to be wealthy," he told himself at the time. "But everybody needs to give back."

From staff members' first meeting with Clark, "it was clear he had the personality, attitude, and most importantly, a genuinely inspiring message to become the face of an annual giving campaign. Luckily, he was fully on board," wrote OHIO's team in its COE entry.

OHIO built a semester-long, multi-channel "Give Like Gary" campaign to inspire giving and share Clark's story. The team highlighted Clark on its giving day and in a feature story in the institution's magazine. Ultimately, Give Like Gary boosted cash gifts by nearly 11% and led to a 13% increase in donors, winning a Grand Gold COE Award for Annual/Regular Giving Campaigns (More Than 25 Staff).

COE judges noted how the campaign offered someone to whom alumni could relate.

"Give Like Gary was truly an exceptional campaign that can be replicated at other institutions. We all have a 'Gary' in some form or fashion, and this entry models how we can harness and magnify the generosity that our 'Gary' represents," judges wrote.

6. Bake in interactivity and teamwork.

Friendly competition paid off at the University at Albany

Teamwork turned the University at Albany's March Matchness campaign into what staff called a "game-changer."

The New York, U.S., university is a Division I athletics

school—so leveraging sports during college basketball's "March Madness" season made sense. A mini campaign, which ran from March 17 to 31, 2021, aimed to raise funds with targeted challenges and matching gifts. UAlbany built in competitive, engaging elements—like displaying online leaderboards (with social media interaction) for each of its major athletics teams.

For its gamified giving day, Florida Tech also used an online leaderboard to show real-time dollars and donors for each participating college, athletic team, featured program, and student organization. In addition to offering interactive online games like chess, it streamed an Alumni Rocket League tournament with live commentary from its varsity esports team—ultimately raising \$778,800 in funds.

At UAlbany, the March Matchness goal was \$100,000, but the university raised more than \$550,000—a 539% increase in dollars and 316% increase in donors during March 2020.

The Matchness project, which won a bronze COE Award for Annual/Regular Giving Campaigns (More Than 25 Staff), took collaboration. Athletics and coaching staff were involved; the university's annual giving and major gifts teams worked together to identify matching gifts that would engage the 17 segments of alumni and supporters UAlbany targeted in the campaign. This, wrote staff, "turned an annual giving event into a university-wide event." ●

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