

Case Study:

Greater Twin Cities United Way + Community Relations



**Greater Twin Cities
United Way**

*How does the Greater Twin Cities United Way build relationships with key audiences?
How are these relationships developed and maintained?
What is the business value of the relationship?*

Last Modified: 11/17/14

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Organizational Background

Greater Twin Cities United Way (GTCUW) is a venerable 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency attacking poverty and building community in the nine-county metro area. GTCUW does this by focusing on three key areas: stabilizing families, helping children succeed, and empowering healthy lives. This broad focus on the greater good—paired with 10 distinct, actionable goals aligning with its mission—enables GTCUW to appeal to many diverse community partners, and the general population.

With annual revenues exceeding \$93M, GTCUW is one of the top-50 largest nonprofits in Minnesota¹, and among the top-five largest social services-based organizations, as compiled by the Star Tribune. That revenue is dispersed through an extensive network of more than 170 local agencies, running approximately 300 programs². GTCUW is, in a sense, a conglomerate of nonprofit agencies. The wide latitude of services and partnerships GTCUW possesses differentiates it from other nonprofits.

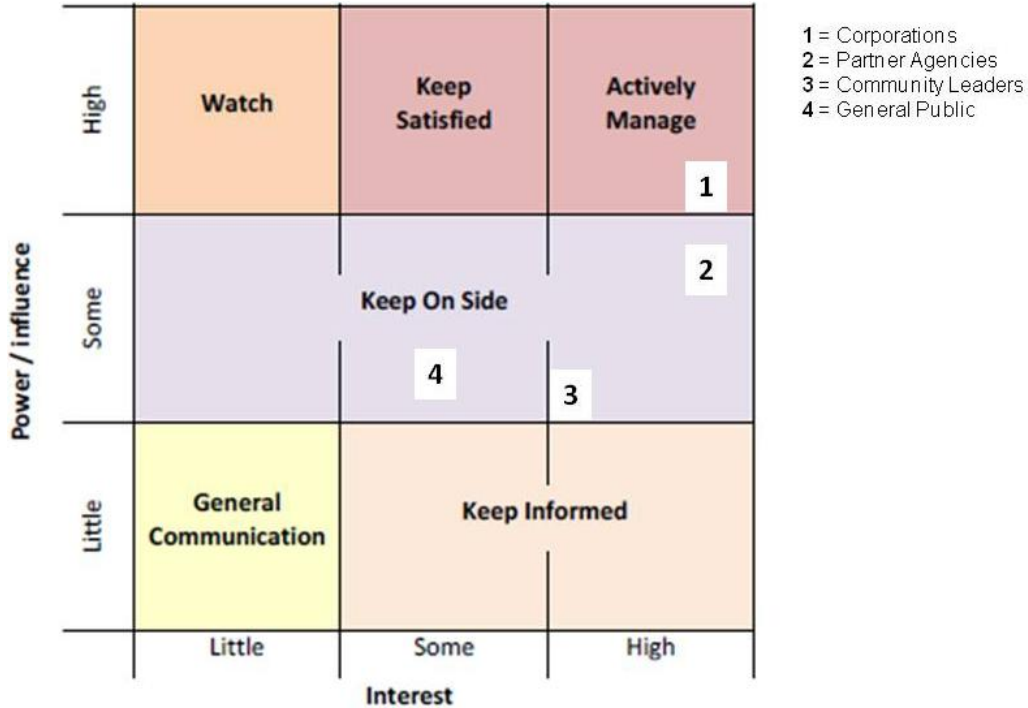
Key Audience Groups

GTCUW identifies its key audience groups as “partner agencies, corporations, community leaders and people like you.” While all of these audiences indeed “matter,” I contend corporate partners are the primary driver of GTCUW’s success and/or ability to pursue its mission. The below stakeholder analysis and power/interests grid furthers this assertion.

Stakeholder	Stake in GTCUW	What is needed from them?	Perceived attitudes/risks?	Risk if they are not engaged	Priority
Corporations	Charity of choice, Large donor influence	Fundraising support; Awareness in their org and/or larger business community	"Safe" charitable partner; Well-run, transparent nonprofit entity, also representing multiple additional community orgs.	Inadequate funding, greatly diminished resources and results	1
Partner Agencies	Policy advocate / influencer; reap benefit of GTCUW grants + funding efforts	Execute agency efforts/functions, provide experienced staff, commitment to aligning with GTCUW goals	Welcomed support/partnership with "big brother" GTCUW; potential anxiety with loss of agency independence, being "owned" or "steamrolled" by GTCUW	Inadequate partnerships to attain goals; diversion of GTCUW's mission; less resources to focus on GTCUW efforts	2
Community Leaders	Point-persons; cascade communications and leadership into their networks / orgs.	Public awareness--advocate, educate and grow the reach of GTCUW; Lead execution efforts	Great organization with comprehensive, integrated approach to attacking poverty, visible efforts in the community	Diminished brand awareness, poor advocacy / outreach efforts, eroded community connection	3
General Public	Social services support; directly impact from GTCUW services	Volunteer help, fundraising support	Well-known organization, perhaps not fully-understood (scope, partnerships, impacts)	Poor volunteer resources, diminished brand awareness, lessened community impact/connection	4

¹ http://apps.startribune.com/top_100_nonprofits/revenueView.php

² https://www.gtcuw.org/about_us/partners/agencies_programs/



The majority (57.1%³) of GTCUW's operating budget is derived from premier corporate giving partners. General Mills, 3M company, Target and Wells Fargo all contribute more than \$5M annually to GTCUW through workplace campaigns. Cargill, Best Buy, CHS, Ecolab, Medtronic, Land O' Lakes, Polaris and many other large Twin Cities' based corporations are recognized as contributing more than \$1M annually. There are some appealing tax benefits for partnering with GTCUW, however this alone does not warrant a corporate partnership.

Why So Effective?

GTCUW's effectiveness with corporate partnerships is the result of sound business practices, rigorous consistency and public advocacy. These attributes all help position GTCUW as an ideal philanthropic outlet, trusted and well-known in the public and private sectors.

Sound Business Practices

Core Strategy and Alignment

The mission and vision of GTCUW are focused and succinct. These branch out into actionable goals, with greater specificity within each area. It's textbook strategic planning for the short and long-term. More impressive, GTCUW's actions align with its strategy; it stays true to its mission.

GTCUW's volunteer board of directors⁴ highlights the diverse interests served—or, united—by the organization's comprehensive, coordinated approach to building community. It's an all-star lineup of community and business leaders, from executives of

³ [file:///C:/Users/LenzJ/Downloads/CN_History_4660%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/LenzJ/Downloads/CN_History_4660%20(1).pdf)

⁴ https://www.gtcuw.org/about_us/leadership/board_of_directors/

Fortune 500 companies, to superintendents of public schools, to senior legal experts and more. These 50 or so members work to focus and reinforce the work of GTCUW by assessing policy and strategic direction. Volunteer committees also oversee financial practices and provide counsel on operational issues. The resulting accountability is evidenced by meeting all 27 Accountability Standards of the Charities Review Council⁵. Charity Navigator, the largest and most-used evaluating organization of charities in the U.S., also rates GTCUW as a 4-star charity, scoring 93.51/100 overall⁶.

Transparency

Want to learn more about GTCUW? Have a question about where your donation goes and how it is purposed? An optimized website⁷ contains a wealth of helpful information. Easily find and get educated on the organization's financial standing. Or read through a narrative of how a GTCUW program or service impacted someone. For a more holistic understanding of the organization's impact, view the annual community report⁸, an organizational scorecard detailing how it performed against its objectives.

A quick Google search of "Greater Twin Cities United Way" will inevitably uncover the number 87.9%, or 88% (on GTCUW's website, Charity Navigator, StarTribune.com or TCBmag.com). This is the percent of funds raised by the organization that go directly to its programs and services. It's an impressive number, and it helps create the narrative of how the organization is driving real change throughout the community.

Rigorous Consistency

GTCUW's strong heritage in the community is rooted in nearly 100 years of existence. The Minneapolis Area United Way was established in 1915, and the St. Paul Area was formed in 1920. The two agencies merged in 2001⁹ and grew stronger under the more focused, combined approach. Charities Navigator has rated GTCUW as a 4-star charity for the last six years.

Another prominent and consistent element of GTCUW is its branding. The simple LIVE UNITED tagline, found unadorned on t-shirts, public transit and real people throughout the metro, pulls on heartstrings and evokes the immediate—and positive—connection to GTCUW. The simplicity of the font treatment speaks to the humility of the organization. The plain t-shirts¹⁰ modeled by volunteers or those who have benefitted from GTCUW have not diverged from the original. This strategy increases the identification and longevity of the campaign. The GTCUW brand has a consistent, credible image.

Public Advocacy

The reach of GTCUW is reflected in the breadth of its services and coordinated public and private partnerships. GTCUW has reaped the benefits of a well-connected board of

⁵http://www.smartgivers.org/Charity/Review/greater_twin_cities_united_way

⁶<http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=search.summary&orgid=4660#.VGbTmPnF8ud>

⁷<https://www.gtcuw.org/>

⁸https://www.gtcuw.org/about_us/partners/community_supporters/

⁹https://www.gtcuw.org/about_us/history/

¹⁰<http://bit.ly/LiveUnitedTees>

directors. Lynn Casey, PadillaCRT CEO, currently serves as vice chair of the board. Campbell Mithun CEO Steven Wehrenberg was previously on the board, and for more than seven years, his agency donated the annual integrated campaign¹¹ to GTCUW. Pro-bono work from a top agency goes a long way in spreading the honorable news about GTCUW to all of its key audiences.

Through its work in the community and communications strategies, GTCUW highlighted how corporations can become greater when viewed as community partners. It has, in the words of Edward Freeman, “[found] a way to rethink the problems so interests can go together, so even more value can be created for each.” Promoting a broader and more interconnected relationship between organizations, their members and the communities they serve has been a successful model of partnership.

Walking the Talk

Beyond communications, GTCUW communicates and interacts with its key audiences through service. Service in the form of giving, advocating or volunteering. Service highlighting real-world success stories, or effectively tracking and reporting on programs. Service in the form of behaviors exemplary of its mission in the community.

These distinctive qualities make Greater Twin Cities United Way a superlative philanthropic partner for corporations, and its other key audiences. Partnering with large, premier corporate entities in the Twin Cities has helped broaden the impact of GTCUW’s work, and generated a cyclical, grassroots momentum of greater awareness, advocacy and action with the organization. As GTCUW continues to operate effectively and with transparency while sharing its successes, organizations view it as an attractive community partner. As organizations partner, their employees become advocates who go out into the community and advocate or volunteer. As more people advocate for GTCUW, its impact and reach continues to grow.

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¹¹ www.cmithun.com/campbell_mithun_launches_every_one_counts_2011_united_way_campaign-2/