United Way of Greater Victoria: Connecting with Millennials

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ABSTRACT

This is a live case, based on the experiences of fundraisers for the United Way of Greater Victoria (UWGV). It is set in Autumn, 2015 – prime season for fundraising. Runs for cancer research and treatment, lotteries for hospital charities, and many more, filled the landscape in Greater Victoria. It was also the season of United Way workplace campaigns, the major fundraising effort of UWGV. Brittany Decker, Director Community Campaign, was considering once again how long the organization could sustain itself by relying on donations from the workplace. As the donor population aged, it seemed increasingly important to connect with Millennials, Canadians between the ages of 18 and 30. While the United Way’s mission – to improve lives and build community – was important, traditional fundraising didn’t seem to resonate with Millennials. Students are challenged to develop a strategy whereby could UWGV become a charity of choice for new, young donors?

Keywords: Not-for-profit; social media; charity; Millennial; fundraising

Note: A full teaching note is available on request directly from the author at rgrant@uvic.ca
INTRODUCTION

Autumn was prime time for fundraising. Runs for cancer research and treatment, lotteries for hospital charities, and many more, filled the landscape. It was also the season of United Way workplace campaigns, the major fundraising effort of the United Way of Greater Victoria (UWGV). It was September, 2015, and Brittany Decker, Director Community Campaign, was considering once again how long the organization could sustain itself by relying on donations from the workplace. As the donor population aged, it was becoming increasingly important to connect with Millennials, Canadians between the ages of 18 and 30. While the United Way’s mission – to improve lives and build community – was important, traditional fundraising didn’t seem to resonate with Millennials. How, Brittany wondered, could UWGV become a charity of choice for new, young donors?

ABOUT THE UNITED WAY OF GREATER VICTORIA

The United Way (UW) was an international organization with a well-recognized brand. In 2010, Forbes magazine ranked the United Way as No. 26 in its report of the world’s 50 most valuable brands, the only non-profit on the list.¹ The United Way operated in 45 countries and comprised more than 1800 local organizations. While local United Ways shared the common brand, each operated independently in all respects, including setting fundraising goals, establishing funding priorities, and choosing what to fund.

Unlike most not-for-profits, the United Way did not raise money for its own projects. Instead, it distributed the funds it raised to other non-profits. The majority of local United Ways (including UWGV) used a “community impact model” to guide where and how it would invest donor gifts. That model was based on defining community impact priority areas and then vetting applications to fund programs that addressed those impact areas. UWGV accepted applications for funding from any non-profit in Greater Victoria.

Simply put, UWGV’s impact areas were “kids”, “poverty”, and “community”, expressed as:

“All That Kids Can Be - supporting kids and youth with resources to grow up healthy and transition into adulthood.
From Poverty To Possibility - building individuals’ financial stability and independence through access to healthy food, affordable housing and employment.
Strong Communities – developing the capacity of people to care for themselves and families by creating opportunities and places for social interaction.”²

The community model was focused on outcomes, rather than inputs. In addition to funding an agency’s operations, UWGV funded specific projects with predefined outcomes and held the agencies accountable for meeting achieving those outcomes and reporting back on their

impact in the community. It also provided reports to donors showing specific measures of how donations were used and the impact they made in Greater Victoria.

In 2014, UWGV provided $4.9 million in funding for more than 90 programs, delivered by 76 different agencies. In the area of “kids”, more than $1.1 million in UWGV funds supported teen suicide prevention programs, early childhood literacy, anti-bullying initiatives, and support for single and young parents, among others. Over $740,000 in “poverty”-related expenditures funded such programs as shelters and affordable housing programs, employability training and job placement services, and programs that ensured families had healthy food. “Community” programs received more than $2.2 million to do things such as help seniors and those with disabilities live more independently, help immigrants settle and integrate into their new community, support women and children who had experienced abuse, and ensure that people with addictions and mental health problems could find the help they needed. Another $900,000 was distributed to specific programs directly designated by donors.

One of the biggest challenges UWGV faced was how to explain its mission and motivate donors. It was much easier for charities that delivered programs directly, such as the Canadian Cancer Society, to explain what they did in a brief and engaging way: “We fund research. We fight cancer. Join the fight.” The UWGV’s mission was complex, its beneficiaries many, and the ways in which it helped varied dramatically. And while tens of thousands of individuals in Greater Victoria were helped by United Way funded programs, many were unlikely to share their stories with the public. For example, someone who was addicted to drugs or whose child had a mental illness were less likely to tell others about the help they received, either privately or in a fundraising ad, than would someone who had been supported by the Red Cross after a flood. Another challenge particular to UWGV arose from the demographics of Greater Victoria (see Exhibit 1). The region’s temperate climate made it a favorite retirement spot among Canadians; the population generally was older than the national average and aging over time. At the same time, Victoria was home to three post-secondary institutions – the University of Victoria, Royal Roads University, and Camosun College – which accounted for approximately 41,000 full- and part-time students.

UWGV ran a lean operation. Fundraising from the community was managed by staff of 6, headed by Brittany Decker. A “campaign cabinet” of 12 well-placed business people donated their time to support the professional staff for the September – December annual workplace campaign. Fundraising also depended on more than 1,000 volunteers in the workplace and community at large who ran campaigns, collected donations, gave speeches and sent emails promoting giving, and performed other vital activities. In addition to workplace and direct mail giving, UWGV raised significant funds through major gifts (individual donations in excess of $10,000 annually), an activity that ran year-round. In total, UWGV had 17 full-time and 4 part-time staff working in fundraising, fund distribution and management, administration, and communications. Exhibit 2 shows the distribution of revenue to programs, fund-raising and administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2014.

THE CHARITABLE GIVING LANDSCAPE IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

Canada’s non-profit and voluntary sector included approximately 80,000 entities registered as charities with Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). Exhibit 3 shows the 10 largest Canadian charities (based on donation revenue), as of 2013, but registered charities ran the gamut from the very large to the very small. After government funding, the majority of support for charities came from two sources: individuals and corporations. Individuals tended to donate directly or through workplace giving campaigns; corporate donations could be direct or tied to the results of cause-marketing campaigns.

Corporate Giving

Corporate philanthropy, or corporate giving, was the act of a company donating resources to charities. Corporations donated dollars (as grants, sponsorships, or outright gifts) or made in-kind donations in the form of goods or services. There were many ways in which firms supported charities. They included making a corporate donation directly to a charity, inviting and processing customer donations (with or without matching the customer’s contribution), providing charitable gift cards to stakeholders, promoting employee volunteering, and facilitating employee workplace giving campaigns. Such donations were not tied to directly measurable returns, such as an increase in revenue.

In its infancy, corporate philanthropy was highly controversial. But as corporate social responsibility gained attention, it had become more acceptable to shareholders for the corporation to dedicate a portion of its profits to charitable giving. By 2014, companies were widely expected to give back to the communities from which they profited. Despite its benefits, corporate giving was still low when compared to individual donations.

Cause Marketing

“Cause (or cause-related) marketing” was different from corporate philanthropy; cause marketing expenditures were not an outright or unencumbered gift. Cause marketing was based on a marketing relationship, i.e., a mutually beneficial alliance, typically between a firm and a charity. In the first such campaign, American Express donated one cent to the restoration of the Statue of Liberty every time someone used its credit card, and $1.00 for each new card application. That 1983 campaign raised $1.7 million USD for the restoration. American Express also experienced a 45% increase in the number of card holders and a 28% increase in card use. During its annual one-day “Let’s Talk” campaign (begun in 2011), Bell Canada donated 5¢ to mental health programs for each text message sent, mobile and long distance phone call made, tweet with the hash tag #BellLetsTalk, or Facebook “share” of the Let’s Talk graphic. In 2014, the campaign raised $5.5 million, bringing the program’s four-year total to more than $67.5

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Many millennials expected businesses not only to participate in corporate philanthropy but also to provide opportunities for customers to donate to causes they supported. A study by Abacus Data showed that 79% of Canadians were willing to switch brands to support the companies they cared about, and that millennials were willing to travel 21 minutes longer on average to buy a product that supported a cause they cared about. A Cone Research study of US consumers reported similar results and noted that willingness to switch was even stronger among millennials.

**Individual Giving**

People felt good about giving to charities and not-for-profit organizations. Many donated out of a feeling of compassion and a desire to help those in need in their community. Donors were also drawn to a particular cause, especially if a loved one had been affected by it. Those who did not donate often refrained due to financial constraints, inconvenience, or simply because they had never been asked. A survey commissioned by Visa reported that 56% of Canadians who donated money to charity in 2012 wished they could have given more.

Individual Canadians donated approximately $12.8 billion to charities in 2013. Charitable giving tended to reflect the state of the economy; the total dollar value of donations declined in 2008 and again in 2009 but started to recover in 2010. By 2012, approximately 58% of Canadian charities raised more money than they had in 2011. According to Statistics Canada, average annual donations in 2013 ranged from $245 (for the 20-24 age group) to more than $700 for those 65 and over.

In recent years, many charities had noticed a worrisome trend: While the amount of the average individual donation was increasing, the number of donors had been declining and the average age of donors rising. The majority of adults in Canada made some donation to charity, but the individual amount was highly skewed. In 2013, for example, approximately 25% of donors were responsible for 84% of the total amount donated; the top 10% gave 66% of the

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Generations differed in the size of gift and the number of charities they supported (see Exhibits 4 and 5). Those who made the largest donations were typically older, had more formal education and higher than average income, or attended weekly religious services or meetings. A 2010 Cygnus Research survey had shown that, among donors under the age of 35, 54% were between the ages of 24 and 34, 56% were academics, managers, or professionals, and 75% were not supporting dependents.

Workplace Giving

Many individuals contributed to charity via “workplace giving,” that is, programs in which employees donated through a mechanism provided or sanctioned by the employer. Workplace giving most often referred to annual, formal fundraising campaigns. A particular workplace campaign might be limited to a single charity or provide a way for employees to give to a wide range of charities through one campaign. Workplace giving often offered a benefit that other approaches generally did not: matching funds. Many employers would match their employees’ donations to recognized charities, up to a predetermined limit per employee. Most sizable workplace campaigns offered the ability to donate by payroll deduction, which simplified giving for the employee. Employees completed a pledge form (hard copy or online), indicating the amount, timing and duration of the desired deduction. Donations were taken off the employee’s gross pay, and the tax “receipt” showed up as a dollar amount on the year-end T4 form. Some workplace campaigns gave employees the opportunity to donate by cash, cheque, credit card or automatic bank debit.

The United Way was the most visible presence in Canadian workplace giving; UWGV was one of 110 United Ways that ran independent local fundraising campaigns across the country between September and December. In 2013, those campaigns raised more than $519.9 million from individuals and $117.5 million from businesses for United Ways across Canada, a 2.5% increase over 2011. That same year, the United Way of Greater Victoria raised over $6.01 million from workplace campaigns, corporate contributions and individual donations.

ONLINE GIVING AND OTHER EMERGING TRENDS

Technology had a major impact on the environment for charitable donations. By 2011,

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12 Turcotte, M. ibid.

13 In the United Way of Canada’s 2012 campaign, for example, 31% of donors were aged 55 or older. Source: Fundraising Results for 2012, United Way of Canada-Centraide, Ottawa, Ontario, August 2013, p. 13.


15 An employee who chose to donate through one of those non-payroll methods received a tax receipt from the fundraising agency.


17 Fundraising Results for 2012, United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, August 2013, p. 9.
approximately 1/3 of Canadian donors had given online. Websites and online approaches reached large audiences and could support a wide variety of giving options, and they were particularly well-suited to connecting donors with small or global charities.

Commenting on a 2011 survey focused on Canadians and charitable giving, Steven Levy, COO of Ipsos Reid, said,

“What is very clear is that creating an engaging charity brand that has a human face is important […] But having an online presence and building secure and trustworthy online systems for donating is also crucial.”

Indeed, the Cygnus Research survey of Canadians who donated to charity in 2010 revealed that 75% had made at least one of their donations online – a figure that increased to 9 out of 10 among donors under the age of 35. That survey also showed that 60% of donors over the age of 65 intended to give online in the coming year. A 2013 survey reported that 46% of Millennials had made at least one online donation during 2012.

Information technology had also fueled a growing trend in micro-donating, that is, gifts of $20 or less. Micro-donation models focused on the volume of donations, rather than the size of any single gift. Simple software and the reach of social media made it feasible to encourage large audiences to make small gifts, raising large sums quickly with low overhead. For example, in the wake of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, nine different Canadian charities ran mobile giving campaigns to raise funds for earthquake relief in Haiti; the programs raised a combined total of more than $500,000 in $5 donations in a matter of days.

There were three major types of online giving: (1) direct website; (2) online portals; and (3) mobile technologies. In the direct website model, a charity created and managed its own donation interface on its website and/or smartphone app. The charity used a third-party payment processor to handle the payment transaction, but received the funds directly and issued any donor tax receipts itself. Using this option meant that the charity always got the donor’s contact data, vital for developing an ongoing relationship with the donor. However, its use was typically confined to large and well-equipped organizations, since it required sophisticated software and financial expertise to manage the process correctly.

In the online portal method, a charity directed donors to a third-party site. The company running that site accepted donations for many charities, processed payments, issued tax receipts, and

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and distributed donations to the appropriate charity. Online portals offered charities a relatively quick and low-cost entry into social media and online fundraising. At the same time, portal donors might request anonymity; in that case, the charity would not receive the donor’s identifying and contact information (and thus be unable to directly solicit future donations from the donor).

In Canada, the most visible portal was the non-profit CanadaHelps.org, through which individuals could donate to any registered Canadian charity. The site provided the charity with customized donation web pages, donor contact databases, and fully bilingual donation services. It also issued an immediate electronic tax receipt to each donor. The organization could process recurring monthly donations, one time gifts, peer-to-peer pledge pages, and a variety of other forms of charitable donation. CanadaHelps took a fee of 3.5-4.5% covered the fees charged by banks for processing credit and debit card transactions, and another 1.8% went toward operating expenses.24

In 2014, CanadaHelps handled 602,650 donations – a total in excess of $83.6 million - to more than 15,000 charities.25 That year, the organization rated communities across the country on the basis of their giving through its online portal. Greater Victoria ranked first in that analysis, with 7.9 CanadaHelps donations per 100 people; Vancouver came in second, but with considerably fewer donations – 2.1 per 100.

Mobile giving was delivered in Canada by the Mobile Giving Foundation Canada (MGF Canada), established in 2009 in partnership with the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association. Using cell phones, donors could text a message to a specific short code, which triggered micro-donations of $5, $10, $15 or $20, depending on the campaign being run. For example, the Ottawa Mission ran a campaign in which donors texted the word MEAL to short code 45678 to make a $10 donation to the mission’s Christmas dinner for the homeless.26 The campaign raised $7000 in its first four months,27 and it became an ongoing element in the Mission’s portfolio of fundraising tools.

The amount of a texted donation appeared on the donor’s next cell phone bill. The donor’s cell carrier forwarded 100% of the donation to MGF which, in turn, disbursed 100% of the donation to the charity. Donors received immediate confirmation of the donation via text. Most mobile donations did not qualify for tax receipts, since the amount was so small; when a donation did qualify, donors could request a receipt. It took longer for charities to receive donations via mobile giving, since the donation was not sent until after the donor paid the cell phone bill on which it appeared.


MILLENNIALS AND GIVING

UWGV was quickly discovering that the Millennials were a unique demographic, with different views and needs than Baby Boomer and Generation X donors. Millennials were beginning to enter the workforce, and UWGV was just beginning to understand the value of garnering buy-in from Millennials, especially in the form of fundraising dollars. Research in the U.S. indicated that 45% of Millennials aged 25-30 reported donating to an employee giving campaign, and that percentage increased to 57% among Millennials over the age of 30.28

Millennial Donor Profile

The proliferation of social media and smartphones played a pivotal role in differentiating Millennials from former generations (see Exhibits 6 and 7). Millennials were introduced to Internet-based communication platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, at relatively young ages. The continued use of these platforms allowed young potential donors to access information and to scrutinize organizations far more easily than other generations. A majority of Generation X donors said that their number one reason for not giving to charities was over-solicitation from philanthropic agencies, but Millennial donors preferred being solicited by charities. Millennials were most likely to respond to requests made for donations in public places.29 Social media provided the opportunity for charities to solicit donor support from Millennials. At the same time, the increased ease of access to information through social media made individuals less likely to donate to specific charities year after year. In other words, as Millennials became exposed to more charities through social media, they also developed less brand loyalty to any specific organization.

A majority of Millennials were enrolled in University or employed in entry level positions. Low disposable income meant that Millennials were more likely to volunteer their time than donate money. It also meant that, when Millennials did donate, they were more likely to make one-time donations than recurring monthly or annual gifts. Research conducted in 2014 indicated that 85% of U.S. millennials had donated to a non-profit in 2013; 49% donated $100 or less, while 22% donated $500 or more.30

With the disposable income that they did donate, Millennials’ access to social media platforms led them to create a paradigm shift in the types of institutions to which they donated. While Gen X and Baby Boomers were more likely to donate to specific charitable agencies that they had supported throughout their lives, Millennial donations were positively correlated to an


organization’s fiscal success over the past year. This, combined with the low brand loyalty of young adults generally, meant that charitable institutions needed strong campaigns combined with good financial results during the fiscal year in order to maximize Millennial support.

Millennial Donation Methods

The proliferation of smartphones and social media networks revolutionized ways that charitable organizations requested donations, and young adults were a driving force behind those changes. At least 83% of Millennials owned smartphones, and they generally preferred to donate using technology. This allowed them to make quick micro-donations when they found a charity with a mandate which they felt strongly about. Smartphone proliferation led to a steady increase in the number of mobile fundraisers being offered by charities. With events such as the Calgary floods and the Haiti Relief fund having garnered strong support through mobile campaigns, charities were focusing more on mobile fundraising campaigns directed towards Millennial donors.

The proliferation of social media use also created strong peer-to-peer fundraising opportunities. While Generation X members made their online donations through websites, Millennials generally used websites to research the charity and then reconnected with the charity over social media to donate. They relied on social media platforms to stay connected with strong personal networks. Those networks had the potential to motivate giving: young adults were approximately 30% more likely to trust information provided by their peers compared to communiqués sent by corporations and charities. As a result, Millennials could use their online networks to spread advertising for specific charities and to garner strong donor support online.

WHAT TO DO?

If Millennials required good financial results to donate to organizations, but were less likely to donate to the UWGV than their parents, how could the United Way garner enough Millennial donor support to sustain their operations into the foreseeable future?

REFERENCES


33 Ibid. (Accessed November, 2015)


APPENDIX
EXHIBIT 1
Selected Demographics for Greater Victoria

Victoria – Population by five-year age groups and sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Median age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>40.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>43.1</td>
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EXHIBIT 2
Revenue Distribution, 2014

EXHIBIT 3
Canada’s 10 Largest Registered Charities as of end of 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charity</th>
<th>Donations ($ million CDN)</th>
<th>$ Cost to Raise $100</th>
<th>Category</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Vision Canada</td>
<td>282.2</td>
<td>20.60</td>
<td>Int’l Aid/Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Cancer Society</td>
<td>188.4</td>
<td>36.80</td>
<td>Health/Health Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>180.3</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>Fundraising Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Red Cross</td>
<td>156.8</td>
<td>18.30</td>
<td>Health/Health Services</td>
</tr>
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<td>Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada</td>
<td>124.0</td>
<td>46.70</td>
<td>Health/Health Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Way of Greater Toronto</td>
<td>116.9</td>
<td>13.40</td>
<td>Fundraising Agency</td>
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<td>SickKids Fdn.</td>
<td>110.1</td>
<td>25.90</td>
<td>Hospital Foundations</td>
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<td>Plan International Canada</td>
<td>107.1</td>
<td>25.30</td>
<td>Int’l Aid/Development</td>
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<td>Aga Khan Foundation</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Int’l Aid/Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>27.60</td>
<td>Art/Culture/Research</td>
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EXHIBIT 4  
Generational Donor Profiles

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Civics”</th>
<th>“Boomers”</th>
<th>“Generation X”</th>
<th>“Millennials” (Generation Y)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of total giving</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong># of Canadians in age group who donate</strong></td>
<td>2.4 million</td>
<td>5 million</td>
<td>4.8 million</td>
<td>3.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of age group who donate</strong></td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>62%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average annual gift</strong></td>
<td>$1,507</td>
<td>$942</td>
<td>$831</td>
<td>$639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average # of different charities supported</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXHIBIT 5
Donations by Generation

Of the total annual charitable contributions in Canada, each of the four generations will contribute approximately:

Exhibit 6
Importance of Social Media to Canadian Internet Users – By Age
(As of July, 2013)

EXHIBIT 7
Social Networks Used by Canadians By Age
(as of January, 2015)