

# How Giving Contests Can Strengthen Nonprofits and Communities

A case study of Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington



Presented by the Case Foundation in conjunction with the Razoo Foundation  
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## **About Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington**

*Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington was created by online fundraiser Razoo, and organized and supported by The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region and United Way of the National Capital Area. The other six members of the “Eight Neighbors” group—an alliance of local leading nonprofit and civic organizations - have also come together to support this event: Center for Nonprofit Advancement, Greater Washington Board of Trade, Leadership Greater Washington, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington, and the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers. These groups have united to offer any local 501(c)(3) the opportunity to earn hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash awards.*

## **About the Case Foundation—Social Impact Partner of Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington**

*The Case Foundation, created by Steve and Jean Case in 1997, invests in people and ideas that can change the world, with the ultimate goal of making giving back a part of everyday life. We create and support initiatives that leverage new technologies and entrepreneurial approaches to drive innovation in the social sector and encourage individuals to get involved with the communities and causes they care about.*

# INTRODUCTION

Since the launch of America's Giving Challenge in 2007, online contests have become a popular tactic for philanthropists and cause marketers. One form of the online giving contest is the giving or match day, where local donors and nonprofits come together for a day of giving, unifying a state, city, or region.

The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, the United Way of the National Capital Area, and Washington, DC, based social online fundraising platform Razoo decided to create a giving day on November 9, 2011, for the Greater Washington DC region's nonprofit community.

The effort sought to bolster charitable giving to the region's nonprofit community, a core aspect of its mission. This giving day sought to heighten awareness of the region's entire nonprofit community, provide new opportunities for individual philanthropy, and strengthen the nonprofit community's ability to fundraise year-round.

Washington, DC, became one of the first major metropolitan regions to host a multimillion-dollar local giving day, Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington. Almost 18,000 people participated in this online fundraising contest and raised more than \$2 million for 1,200 participating nonprofits.

This 24-hour fundraising effort was clearly a success for local nonprofits, but organizers were interested to know if it signaled a beginning trend in national philanthropy: giving days as a form of regional nonprofit development.

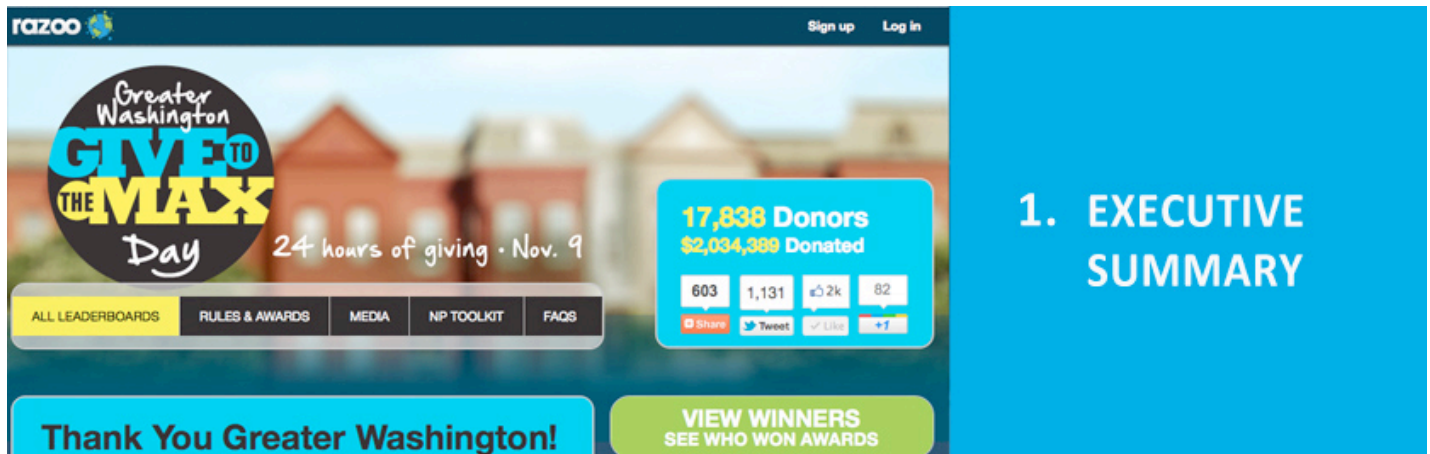
This report, commissioned by the Case Foundation, analyzes the impact of Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington through a series of research methods:

- Quantitative analysis of the giving day's financial performance
- Interviews with nonprofits, and a giving day partner, GiveMN Executive Director Dana Nelson
- Surveys of participating donors and nonprofits conducted immediately following the giving day
- Analysis of third party media reports and social media posts about Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington

The report seeks to show how a giving day contest impacts a metropolitan area's nonprofit community. In particular, can these contests provide a financial boost during tough economic times, strengthen relationships between donors and nonprofits, and serve as an online capacity-building moment for participating nonprofits, all while strengthening the general nonprofit sector? Or are they another giving gimmick that fatigues donors and distracts nonprofits from mission-based activities?

"We have long been an enthusiastic champion of efforts that democratize philanthropy. Nonprofits have to develop creative approaches to reach new donors and advocates, particularly in tough economic times. We're excited about Give to the Max Day's potential to do just that in our community and to serve as a model for the nation to follow."

*Jean Case  
CEO, the Case Foundation*



Giving days like Pittsburgh Gives, the North Texas Big Give, and Give to the Max Day: Minnesota raised tens of millions of dollars and generated significant publicity for their nonprofit communities. Now more states, regions, and cities are considering this model of philanthropic giving.

This research examines how a giving contest impacts a metropolitan region by analyzing the data available from Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington in contrast with other giving contests. Whether you are considering organizing a giving contest for your community, or thinking about participating via your nonprofit, this research will help you.

Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington was conceived to strengthen the area's nonprofit community, not only financially, but through improved online fundraising skills and better donor-nonprofit relationships. To achieve these goals, organizers built the event with three key components:

1. A contest structure that supported individual giving with a higher priority on individual donors versus size of dollars.
2. A nonprofit training program that would help organizations not only to perform better during the giving day, but also acquire long-term online fundraising skills.
3. Finally, a significant marketing program was deployed to heighten the awareness of the nonprofit community and facilitate the event.

The contest results were notable. Including prize money, Give to the Max Day raised \$2 million for 1,200 nonprofits from 18,000 donors on November 9, 2011, its inaugural effort. The event also generated a significant amount of grassroots word of mouth publicity.

Donors were happy with the event: 96 percent said they were more likely to give additional monies to nonprofits as a result of participation in the day. Nonprofits performed well, with 37 percent of survey respondents raising \$2,500 or more. Forty-one percent of nonprofit respondents said their best prior online fundraiser was \$2,500 or greater, showing the event rivaled most nonprofits' prior efforts.

The training program, a series of online and offline nonprofit boot camps which took place in the months leading up to the giving day, achieved its overarching goals. Eighty-eight percent of nonprofit survey respondents felt the training program helped, and 84 percent reported that the training increased their ability to interact and fundraise online. The training did reveal a social media and online fundraising knowledge division in the Washington nonprofit community, between those who are experienced and comfortable with related tools, and those still learning basic social media outreach.

Overall findings demonstrate that giving days offer regions an opportunity that bolsters their nonprofit communities with short-term funds, long-term online fundraising skills, and an increase in awareness of their important work. Other findings show how different factors can impact the health of a giving day. These factors include different event structures such as contests or matching grants, the strength or weakness of a region's identity, and multichannel marketing that addresses nonprofits and consumers.



## 2. GIVE TO THE MAX DAY: AN OVERVIEW

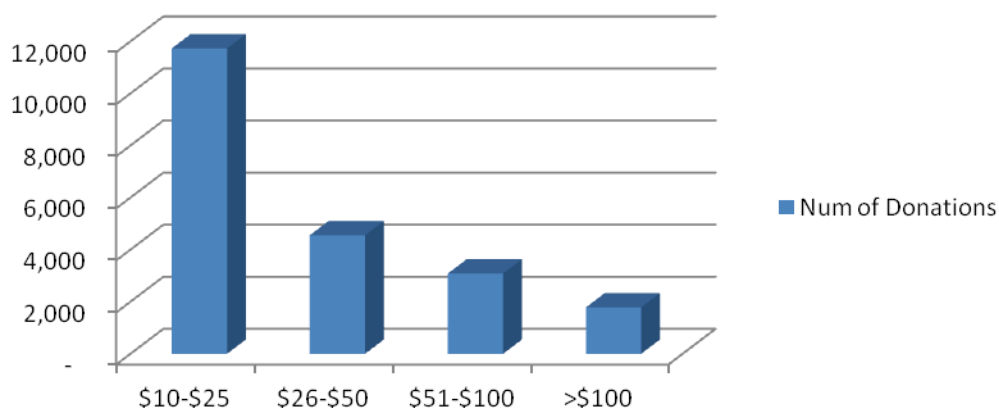
Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington was a 24-hour online fundraiser held on November 9, 2011, for the metropolitan Washington region’s nonprofits. Organized by the Community Foundation for the National Region, the United Way of the National Capital Area, and Razoo, the event featured a platform for fundraising and a contest that provided cash awards to nonprofits that performed best during the contest.

Most giving days have unique elements that match the funders’ programmatic goals. For example, the North Texas Big Give featured nonprofits that successfully met the giving day’s approval process, so donors knew the organizations they were funding were vetted. The Big Give for Central Ohio featured matching grants instead of a contest. Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington had its own unique program elements, which included a contest, training and capacity-building for nonprofits, and marketing support.

### Contest Structure

The contest structure used gamification to reward nonprofits for certain behaviors, primarily the cultivation of the most donors. Gamification is the use of contest design techniques and mechanics—or prizes—to achieve programmatic objectives and engage audiences. For example, Give to the Max Day had a strong programmatic focus on encouraging individual philanthropic action.

### Number of Donations



A majority of prizes rewarded nonprofits for garnering the highest amount of donors and individual donations rather than dollar volume. Prizes from a \$148,000 award pool consisted of:

- One set of Grand Awards that rewarded nonprofits for garnering the most donors
- A second set of Grand Awards that encouraged nonprofits to raise the most money
- Awards for small nonprofits with less than \$1 million in revenue that garnered the most donors
- Awards for nonprofits with the most active individual fundraisers that garnered the most donors
- Ten Golden Tickets hourly awards, given to nonprofits that successfully garnered the most donors during a series of one hour competitions in the afternoon and evening
- Five Platinum and Diamond Tickets, also hourly awards, given to nonprofits that garnered the most dollars raised during afternoon and evening hours

Gamification added a level of excitement to a contest that is not typically present with a traditional match. Nonprofits felt a sense of competition and motivation to win awards, small and large, which in turn increased giving. This concept built upon lessons learned from America's Giving Challenge, where much energy and excitement and action was created through daily prizes between \$500 and \$1000.

### **Capacity Building via Training**

The training program treated the giving day as an exercise in best practices. Core elements included using the Razoo giving platform, content best practices, online storytelling, social media strategy, and donor cultivation. Live events included a training conference with nonprofit social media expert Beth Kanter as the keynote, and a series of seven simplified half-day training "boot camps" in Prince William County, Arlington County, Prince George's County, and Montgomery County.

The in-person events were complemented by a free, comprehensive online nonprofit toolkit. Components included video tutorials, local expert sessions, suggested calendars of activity, sample materials, frequently asked questions, logos, and a Twibbon for Facebook and Twitter use.

### **Marketing and Promotions**

The marketing program sought to unify the region's citizens and nonprofits in a collective day of action. Washington is a fractured region, which creates a stronger need for collective marketing than would be necessary in a state like Wisconsin or a metropolitan area like Denver, both of which see themselves as

#### **Snapshot of the Three Organizers for Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington**

##### Community Foundation for the National Capital Region

The mission of The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region is to strengthen the Washington metropolitan region by encouraging and supporting effective giving and by providing leadership on critical issues in our community.

##### United Way of the National Capital Area

United Way of the National Capital Area helps thousands of people in the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and Prince George's and Montgomery Counties improve their lives and their futures.

##### Razoo

More than an online fundraising platform, Razoo is a movement of people who want to make generosity a part of everyday life.

holistic geographic regions. Furthermore, marketing was essential to the success of the actual event, forming the backbone of nonprofit participation and donor excitement.

The marketing was divided into two tracks. One was a consumer-focused campaign that sought to unify the metropolitan area and prepare donors to “give to the max.” The second program encouraged nonprofit and individual fundraiser participation in the event.

### Consumer Outreach

The consumer outreach was very similar to a traditional nonprofit fundraising campaign. In particular, marketing sought to provide enough branding for the event to educate and prepare the consumer marketplace for solicitations. By familiarizing local donors with the giving day, nonprofits were empowered to fundraise as a part of the giving day without creating their own unique campaign. They could simply say they were participating in Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington. Nonprofits could then participate without investing excessive time.

While there was some paid advertising, most notably Facebook ads and train and bus advertising secured through a United Way of the National Capital Area relationship, the bulk of promotion was garnered through donated public service announcements (PSAs), public relations, and social media:

- NBC 4, Clearchannel Radio, *The Washington Post*, and Hubbard Radio all donated PSA air time or print media
- Public relations – led by the Community Foundation for the National Capital and the United Way of the National Capital Area – garnered several big pieces, including coverage by *The Washington Post*, NBC 4, and WUSA 9
- Social media via Razoo garnered more than 20 blog posts from the likes of Beth Kanter, The Huffington Post, Frogloop, and others
- Word-of-mouth initiatives like a flash mob on K Street, a rally the night of the event, and deep integration into a local internet festival, DCWEEK

### Nonprofit Outreach

Nonprofit outreach occurred primarily through the auspices of the three organizing partners as well as the extended group of regional nonprofits who supported the effort, including the Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington, Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the Center for Nonprofit Advancement, and the Greater Washington Board of Trade.

“Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington has created a local nonprofit giving day and designed a contest that should be a win-win for every nonprofit, even if they don’t win any of the prizes!”

*Beth Kanter*  
Author, *The Networked Nonprofit*





### 3. GIVING DAY RESULTS

In total, Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington efforts netted participating nonprofits \$2,034,434, which included 17,838 individual donations totaling \$1,886,434, plus the prize money contributed by five foundations to be awarded to the giving day’s winners. The event fueled significant word-of-mouth marketing for regional nonprofits, and served as a proof point to many of the area’s nonprofits that social media can produce significant donations.

Survey results show that both donors and nonprofits were impressed with Give to the Max Day. An impressive 96 percent of donors said they were likely to give more money to their selected nonprofits as a result of their participation in Give to the Max Day. Ninety-one percent of nonprofits said they would refer Give to the Max Day to a sister nonprofit.

#### GIVE TO THE MAX DAY AT A GLANCE

Total number of gifts	17,838
Total dollars donated	\$1,886,434
Prize pool size	\$148,000
Mean average for gifts (on and offline)	\$105.75
Mode (most common amount) per gift	\$10
Largest gift size	\$50,000

#### Marketing Impact and Reach

From a marketing standpoint, Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington generated significant attention. Consider the following results:

- The event generated more than 60 media stories
- On the social media side, more than 8,000 tweets using the #give2max hash tag were generated around the event
- Give to the Max trended on Twitter throughout the day in DC
- The Give to the Max Day Facebook page had a 99.4 percent activation rate of people talking about the giving day—1,716 of the total 1,726 fans

## Fundraising Results in Context

Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington was small in comparison to leading 2012 state and regional giving day totals – Give to the Max Day Minnesota (\$13.5 million), the North Texas Giving Day (\$10.7 million), and the Central Ohio Big Give (\$8.7 million). However, each of these events were already well in their third or fourth year of existence. With the exception of Minnesota, which grossed an incredible \$14 million in its first year, each giving day has grown with time.

2011 GIVING DAYS THAT GROSSED MORE THAN \$2 MILLION		
Giving Day	Total # Donations	Total \$ Raised
Give to the Max Day: GiveMN	47,516	\$13,389,323
Colorado Gives Day	52,000	\$12,400,000
North Texas Giving Day	13,500	\$10,700,00
The Big Give (Ohio)	13,430	\$8,501,803
Pittsburgh Gives	13,643	\$6,448,448
Seattle GiveBIG	18,800	\$3,500,000
San Diego GiveBIG	6,175	\$2,109,640
Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington	17,838	\$2,034,434

Dollar totals don't necessarily reflect population size. For example, Ohio has a population of 11,500,000, while Minnesota has 5,200,000 people. Instead, giving totals have much to do with a region's character, cohesive identity, and the type of contest it has—match versus gamification—with gamified contests faring slightly better.

Perhaps a fairer comparison is Pittsburgh Gives, which, like DC, is a giving contest based on a metropolitan region centered on a city. During its inaugural campaign in 2009, Pittsburgh Gives netted \$1.5 million. In its third campaign, which took place in 2011, participating nonprofits netted \$6,448,448—a more than fourfold increase.

Additionally, Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington achieved \$13 donated for every \$1 in the prize pool. In comparison, the North Texas Give Day garnered \$9.70 to every \$1 matched (\$1 million in matching grants), and the Central Ohio Big Give netted \$8.70 for every \$1 of matching grant money.



Perhaps the true barometer of a social good movement was the organic spread and traction of the event messaging. Give to the Max Day clearly inspired the DC metro area. Word-of-mouth performance directly fueled half of the giving day's donations.

Word-of-mouth and the use of social networks were also effective in bringing non-local donors into the campaign; 19 percent of donors came from outside of the Greater Washington area. In comparison, 10.3 percent of donors to GiveMN were from outside the state in 2011.

Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington also experienced a higher non-local giving rate due to the city's highly mobile and connected population. Further, one of the more popular efforts was the IMAlive fundraiser, which featured nationally acclaimed PostSecret blogger Frank Warren. Warren's marketing of the giving day significantly boosted non-local participation.

The marketing program, which focused on consumer outreach and support for participating nonprofits' communications, created a successful inaugural event. Looking ahead, the 2012 Give to the Max Day event will continue the two-track approach.

#### Give to the Max Day Word of Mouth Impact

- 24% of donors heard about Give to the Max Day via an email from a friend
- 26% learned about the giving day from a Facebook update from a nonprofit or a friend
- 62% of donors said they shared information about the nonprofit(s) they gave to with their networks



## 4. NONPROFIT FUNDRAISING PERFORMANCE

Success in fundraisers is invariably related to return on investment (ROI). While a campaign may be fun and attract a lot of attention, ultimately, performance drives interest and continuity.

Fourteen percent of participating nonprofits took the post-event Give to the Max Day survey. Eighty-seven percent of surveyed nonprofits said they were likely to participate again. Further, 60 percent said they would take the giving day concept and apply lessons learned to their topic-specific fundraiser (for example, a giving contest focused specifically on efforts to end malaria).

Thirty-nine percent of nonprofits who took the survey raised \$2,500 or more, faring better than the average Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington nonprofit. The average amount raised by a participating nonprofit was \$1,681.

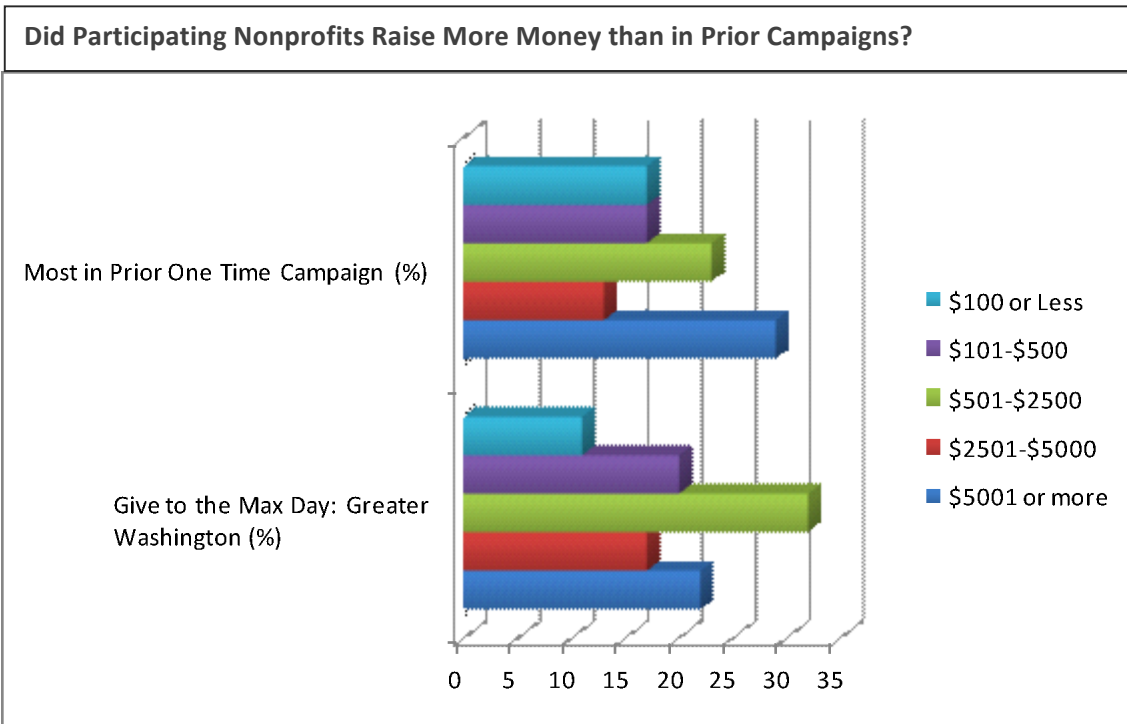
“Give to the Max Day was a great idea,” said Jessica Hazlett, Development Systems Manager at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. “There was some conversation within the organization about whether or not we could fundraise online like this without Give to the Max Day. I am not sure we can do it the same way. The challenge and the competition made a big difference.”

### **Give to the Max Day Success versus other Fundraisers**

Respondent data also shows that nonprofits’ Give to the Max Day efforts resulted in fundraising totals that rivaled results from their prior best one-time giving campaign. Sixty-nine percent of survey respondents said they had raised \$500 or more, 37 percent raised \$2,500 or more, and 20 percent raised \$5,000 or more. In prior online fundraisers, 64 percent of respondents said they had topped out at \$500 or greater, 41 percent raised \$2,500 or more, and 28 percent raised \$5,000 or more.

“We hadn’t had the experience of online being a blockbuster before. We never raised more than a few thousand bucks in any given point and time. With more power behind Give to the Max Day and the contest’s gaming structure, it was great to see what online fundraising could do.”

*Vera Maher, Manager, Washington Nationals Dream Foundation*



The giving day did more than just raise money for nonprofits. Fifty-eight percent of nonprofits recruited new donors, and 56 percent said they increased public awareness of their organizations among people in the region. The public relations value was also validated by the 96 percent of surveyed donors who said they would give more money in the future to participating nonprofits.

“We’re a pretty small player in the Washington, DC, nonprofit community,” said Andrea Messina, former director of development and communications, For Love of Children. “Now everyone is talking about us. We’re the winners. Give to the Max Day provided a huge public relations value for us.”



**For Love of Children**

It's over! 45 Gifts – Totaling \$86,974 – by every estimate – a solid 1st place finish! So – with the Diamond Hour win (+\$2K) and hopefully the grand prize (+\$25K) and \$570 via Network for Good – that makes for potentially a \$114,544 day for FLOC! THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!

Unlike · Comment · Share · November 10 at 12:10am · 🌐

👍 You and 14 others like this.

💬 1 share



**Ana Greta** This is incredible! Congrats guys!!  
November 10 at 6:08pm · Like

Write a comment...

### Nonprofit Resource Requirements

Most nonprofits did not spend a great amount of time on the contest— 89 percent spent 30 hours or less, and 60 percent spent 10 hours or less. However, there was a correlation between time spent and success in fundraising. Sixty-two percent of nonprofits who spent 10 to 30 hours on the contest raised \$2,500 or more, and 67 percent who spent more than 30 hours raised \$2,500 or more. Conversely, only 23 percent of those nonprofits that spent less than 10 hours netted \$2,500 or more.

Only 31 percent of respondents reported creating special messaging for the Give to the Max Day campaign. Most preferred to leverage communications created by the contest organizers; several of the winners did not create their own unique story, and found the event’s publicity to be enough of an umbrella for their marketing efforts.

“Consider the scale of a giving day. Homeless shelters, theaters, and animal rights groups are all fundraising on the same day together. For the first time there is a sense of unity in a community. It’s a little mind bending, nonprofits don’t normally think collectively in this way.”

*Dana Nelson  
Executive Director, GiveMN*

A popular nonprofit, Miriam’s Kitchen, said at a Social Media Club event hosted by organizers that they didn’t invest in the event because it conflicted with their annual fundraiser. Forty-five percent of nonprofit survey respondents agreed with Miriam’s Kitchen’s statement, stating that Give to the Max Day presented a conflict with other fundraising activities happening around the same time. Sixty-one percent of nonprofits also asked for more awards with higher dollars available to participants.

### Low Participation by Large Nonprofits

Interestingly, most of the larger nonprofits in the area did not participate in Give to the Max Day, and those that did primarily sent out an email and a tweet, choosing to employ fairly passive participation. This was not an anomaly associated with Give to the Max Day. As noted by the *Fundraising Journal*, small nonprofits tend to participate more in contests than large nonprofits, which cite processes and rules that prevent them from being successful.

Several other factors may have driven the lack of large nonprofits’ participation, including competing annual fundraisers; the requirement that dollars generated by national nonprofits be used for locally-serving projects; and comparatively low award dollars in contrast to their usual funding streams.

The larger nonprofits that did participate saw fundraising performance tied to the amount of time they spent promoting the giving day. Larger nonprofits that spent more time on promotion, such as the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the Washington Nationals Dream Foundation (both featured as case studies), fared well. Others that chose not to invest significant time did not place on the leader boards.

## Nonprofit Suggestions for 2012 Contest

When asked what they would do differently next year, 80 percent of nonprofits asked for new categories in the competition. For example, environmental organizations could compete against each other rather than simply participating in the larger contest against every other nonprofit from the region. In 2012, Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington will feature category leader boards if they are funded by the local business and grant-making communities.

Another 61 percent asked for more awards with higher dollars available to participants. In addition, 37 percent of the surveyed nonprofits stated they would allocate more resources to future Give to the Max Day fundraising efforts. In consideration of the format, 60 percent said they would continue supporting an award structure that equally rewarded nonprofits for recruiting the most donors as well as raising the most dollars. Forty-six percent said they would support a donor-centric contest, but only 16 percent would support a contest focused only on most dollars raised.

Finally, nonprofits expressed experiencing several challenges with the contest. Fifty percent of respondents said they had significant to very strong difficulties with the challenge due to lack of time to prepare and implement their programs. For 2011, nonprofits had two months to prepare for the giving day, and many found out about the contest with just weeks to go.

In addition, 45 percent felt this initiative presented a conflict with other fundraising activities happening around the same time. Twenty-nine percent of responders reported that Give to the Max occurred at an inconvenient time of the year. However, when asked what time of year worked best for such a contest, answers were fractured. November was the most popular month with 27 percent responding. Overall, 50 percent of respondents deemed autumn months to be the most popular for a giving day (including November). Contest fatigue—reports that donors complained of too many campaign-related solicitations—was cited by only 12 percent as a significant or very strong difficulty.

“It was a very unexpected blessing. To generate \$30,000, we would normally have to do a jersey raffle or a golf tournament, and we usually net \$20,000 for an event like that. When I think of the amount of work we put in for \$10,000 or \$20,000, it was really impressive to see what could be done online.”

*Vera Maher, Manager, Washington Nationals Dream Foundation*



## 5. IMPACT ON NONPROFIT CAPACITY BUILDING

A tension exists between online fundraising and the time and resource investment that it takes. Nonprofits must successfully use social media and online tools for fundraising to succeed in a contest or online fundraiser. However, this presents resource difficulties for nonprofits who want to allocate staff time and resources consistently.

Give to the Max Day sought to counter some of those tensions with a training program that provided skills and turned the contest into a capacity-building exercise. Eighty-eight percent of nonprofit survey respondents felt the training program was very helpful, moderately helpful, or just helpful. And 84 percent of nonprofits reported that the training increased its ability to interact and fundraise online.

PostSecret's Frank Warren, who raised money for his preferred nonprofit—the Kristin Brooks Hope Center—participated in two virtual town halls and the team used the training materials on the site. “The virtual town halls were useful,” said Frank Warren. “People are participating in them, and it made a difference.”

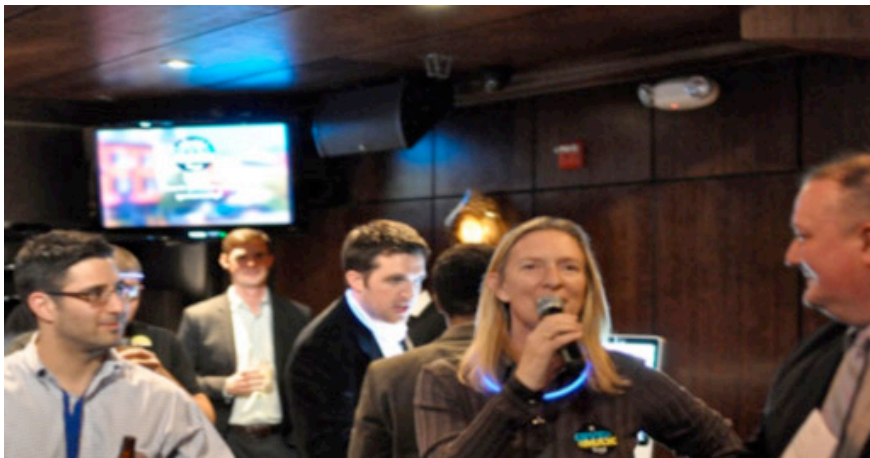
### **Nonprofit Capacity Gap and the Value of Training**

Some nonprofits surveyed felt the training was helpful; however, a clear division was revealed in the base level of nonprofits' knowledge and their success in training. Experienced nonprofits mentioned that the level of some training components on social media and storytelling was too basic for them, while others felt the training was too complicated, citing a need for more basics. Revealing the ever-present capacity issue, several nonprofits specifically asked for training on time management and social media.

Beyond training, the event succeeded as a capacity-building exercise. The Give to the Max Day contest increased the nonprofits' general experience with 72 percent stating they would be able to apply lessons learned from participating in the contest. Sixty percent of nonprofits indicated they had increased their awareness of online fundraising tools.

Nonprofits not only cultivated new donors, but they also recruited a significant amount of donors to a new giving platform. Seventy-five percent of participating donors said that Give to the Max Day was their first time using a social online fundraising platform.





## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In mid-2011, Blackbaud released a [report](#) declaring that social fundraising—or social media driven online fundraising—was nearing the \$1 billion mark in the United States. The report also predicted that this trend would increase as technology adoption increases. With social media adoption reaching 86 percent in the United States (Forrester Research, North American Technographics Online Benchmark Survey, Q3, 2011), and [80 percent](#) of U.S. nonprofits viewing Facebook as important, the data correlates to increases in peer-to-peer giving. Giving days like Give to the Max are on the forefront of the emerging trends in online giving.

There are no recent benchmark surveys for Greater Washington’s adoption of social media by the population, or by its local nonprofits to effectively judge performance beyond anecdote. However, more than 1,200 nonprofits signed on to the Razoo platform for the first time to participate in the event. Fifty-nine percent of donors were 45 years or older, demonstrating a very strong performance from the demographic that is the slowest to adopt social media and online giving.



Give to the Max Day successfully bolstered nonprofit capacity, provided nonprofits a successful fundraising platform, and heightened awareness of the needs of the local nonprofit sector. Given the fractured nature of the greater Washington, DC, region, the event overwhelmingly proved that city-based giving days can work.

At the same time, given the wealth in the city and its outlying suburbs, there is a significant opportunity to expand local giving in the metro area. The region is home to four of the ten wealthiest counties in the country according to *Forbes*, including Falls Church City, Loudoun County, Fairfax County, and Fairfax City. Washington's population of 5.6 million exceeds Minnesota, which is home to 5.3 million.

In comparison to other more mature giving days, Give to the Max Day: DC is relatively small, though still one of the few that has grossed more than \$2 million. Washington as a region has not yet been mobilized to the same degree as Minnesota, for example, but this may be due to the nature of the region, its mobile urban population, and local fragmentation between DC, Maryland, and Virginia.

Additionally, as the giving day matures, lessons learned will be applied, more time will be invested in the organization of the event, and the nonprofit community will adapt Give to the Max as a part of its annual fundraising calendar. The success of Give to the Max Day is expected to increase, in line with the trajectory of other giving days.

### Six Tips for Participating Nonprofits

1. Fundraise under the umbrella of the giving day's marketing campaign and participate in the overall community's effort instead of creating a completely unique campaign.
2. Plan to invest 10-30 hours of staff time in a campaign to perform well in an online giving day.
3. Develop success metrics before the day that include more than winning a prize. For example, treat the giving day like a capacity building exercise; use it to highlight a program, or to cultivate new donors.
4. If free training is available, take advantage of it to advance your online fundraising skills.
5. Use contest awards to create a sense of urgency that excites your team, donors, volunteers, and advocates.
6. The giving day should not conflict with your larger efforts. Incorporate messaging to support your annual drive or amplify programmatic objectives into the giving day effort.

### **Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington Successes**

The primary strategy of gamification of the awards proved to be very successful. In comparison to larger most mature giving days, Washington, DC, participants donated more per award or matching grant dollar available in the contest.

As for the marketing of Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington, the consumer outreach initiated by program organizers worked well. This allowed two-thirds of nonprofits to simply run Give to the Max Day fundraisers using the event's umbrella messaging instead of creating their own unique stories for the event.

Overall, a majority of surveyed nonprofits found the event to be the same or better than their prior best online fundraiser. Furthermore, half of donations were triggered by word-of-mouth via email or Facebook. Organizers in other cities would be advised to actively market their giving day using multiple channels, including public relations, social media, and transportation, and donated public service and social network ads.

"The region's nonprofits are celebrating a fundraising victory after a 24-hour online giving campaign last week pumped \$2 million into a sector that has struggled with fewer donations during the nation's slow economic recovery."

*Vanessa Small  
The Washington Post*

### **Lessons for 2012 Giving Days**

Moving forward, there were a few lessons and challenges learned from the giving day. While the event was successful from a fundraising perspective, more thinking is needed to find ways that a giving day can work to support nonprofits in their overall campaigns.

Furthermore, giving day organizers should find ways to incentivize larger nonprofits to participate. Addressing their lack of participation—whether because of internal approval issues, competition with other fundraisers, or the size of the award pool—is crucial to expanding participation.

Another core aspect that must be addressed is building capacity. Given the different levels of sophistication among nonprofits with social media, fundraising, and time and project management skills, it makes sense to tier training materials and activities for a variety of organizations.

Given the increasingly widespread successes and maturation of giving days nationally, and the success of Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington, would-be organizers should feel that giving days offer them a new source of fundraising potential.

### Ten Tips for Potential Giving Day Organizers

1. Time is a critical component to organizing the event, notifying nonprofits, and garnering support from grant makers and cause marketing partners. A suggested timeframe for planning is six months or more.
2. Gamification yields more donation dollars per prize dollar than matching grants. Consider adding contest elements to your giving day.
3. To maximize impact, marketing should be split into two tracks: nonprofit marketing and consumer outreach.
4. Give NPOs tools such as logos, tip sheets, templates, and sample press releases to fuel nonprofit marketing success.
5. Providing training and turning the giving day into a capacity-building exercise for nonprofits significantly boosts local nonprofit capacity and makes the event more valuable to NPOs.
6. Consumer outreach helps prepare the market for the giving day by engaging donors early and preparing them for solicitations, while fostering a sense of community.
7. In order to effectively market to a region, multichannel marketing is needed. Consider traditional advertising and PSAs, media relations, social media, and word-of-mouth events.
8. Create a way for nonprofits to include the giving day as part of their overall annual fundraising drives. For example, encourage them to include messaging about their specific campaigns.
9. Ensure the event can serve as a publicity and marketing platform for giving day partners.
10. Select an online giving platform that is secure and user friendly

Finally, event organizers for Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington recommend a longer planning cycle for Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington 2012. Expectations for the next iteration of the giving day are higher given more expected planning time and increased participation from the region's grant makers and corporations. Six to eight months are recommended to plan a successful regional giving day. Planning should include notifying nonprofits at least three months prior to the giving day.

Planning for Give to the Max Day: Greater Washington 2012 is already underway. The three event organizers are excited by their initial results, and see the giving day as an important programmatic vehicle to further strengthen the Greater Washington nonprofit community. Overall, the event demonstrates that giving days are not a phenomena limited to select cities and states in the middle of the country, and that they not only create a great fundraising moment, but can also achieve larger philanthropic goals.