

Grassroots Fundraising Journal

VOLUME 34 NUMBER 3 • MAY-JUNE 2015

A PUBLICATION OF



A Multipronged Approach to Crowdfunding
Fundraising in Unequal Times
Healing Justice for Black Lives Matter
Fundraising Priorities for New Executive Directors

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Our cover is from Prison Radio's 2014 Annual Report. Chris Cozzone took the photo, and Kevin Cooper, a Prison Radio correspondent on death row in California, painted the image. You can read about Prison Radio's fundraising success in our feature article, "Our Multipronged Approach to Crowdfunding: Melding the Old & the New."

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Change is in the Air...

WELCOME TO THE MAY-JUNE 2015 issue of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*! We have some great articles inside that we're excited to share with you. First, Noelle Hanrahan and Lyla Denburg of Prison Radio describe how they combined old with new strategies to raise nearly \$60,000 to fight legislation that, if passed, would prevent them from continuing to broadcast the prison journalists they work with. Kim Klein follows with a thought-provoking piece on the effects of rising income inequality on fundraising, offering practical tips for how we can continue building resources for our communities. Next, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Susan Raffo provide a detailed account of how they were able to leverage the power of their healers' networks and social media to organize an event called Healing Justice for Black Lives Matter, which raised close to \$30,000 for the Ferguson bail fund. We close the issue with an article by Judy Levine of Cause Effective, which provides great insights for new executive directors planning and prioritizing their fundraising.

We also want to share some updates with you about GIFT's staff. After nearly five years of service, Ryan Li will be transitioning out of his role as movement building director at GIFT at the end of June. Ryan Li has been instrumental in shaping GIFT to be the organization it is today. His many contributions—including leading the program development of the Money for Our Movements conference, strengthening our relationship with strategic partners and supporters, and collaborating with me as co-editor of the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*—will leave lasting impacts on GIFT organizationally and me personally. Thank you, Ryan Li, it has been an honor and privilege (and a lot of fun) to work with and learn from you over these last five years!

We are thrilled to let you know that Crystal Middlestadt has joined the GIFT team as our resource development director. Crystal is a social justice fundraising leader based in Denver, Colorado with more than 10 years of experience with nonprofit leadership, resource development, gender justice, and anti-violence organizing. Most recently, she served as program staff and co-executive director of the Colorado Anti-Violence Program, a statewide organization dedicated to building safety and justice for LGBTQ communities. Crystal collaborated with GIFT to coordinate the 2014 Allied Media Conference's first "Resourcing and Sustaining our Movements" track, and has contributed to the GIFT blog and *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*.

For those of you who live in the Bay Area (or who may happen to be in town then), we hope you'll join us on July 10th to meet and mingle with GIFT staff and board, give a warm welcome to Crystal, and a fond "farewell-for-now" to Ryan Li. We'll share more details as we get closer to that date. Until then, we hope this issue of the *Journal* provides inspiration and ideas that help you keep building resources for social justice!

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Our Multipronged Approach to Crowdfunding

Melding the Old & the New

By Noelle Hanrahan & Lyla Denburg (with assistance from Beth Raps, Ph.D., RAISING CLARITY)

PRISON RADIO'S DIRECTOR NOELLE HANRAHAN always felt there was way too much organizing to do to spend time on what she identified as unquantifiable and untrackable, lost-in-the-ether social media. How is Prison Radio supposed to reach those “etheric” folks through social media if a prisoner has a medical emergency and needs someone to call the prison? Do we have a phone number or an email? Not necessarily. How do we contact Anon-Green Tara or I-Rastafari, two of our donors through Indiegogo? All we know about them is that one lives in Sedona, and the other in Costa Rica.

Social media did not fit into Noelle's old-school definition of sustainable, closed-loop organizing, in which we need to be able to count on constituents to act. To get them to act, we need to be able to reach them. But how can we touch them if we don't know their real names? Or hear them talk? How can we get them to wear our tote bag to the farmers' market? Or put our postcard on their fridge? Can “real” organizing also take place online, really? Don't you have to have a meeting on the ground at the barricades with an agenda, shared goal and commitment to accountability? Don't you have to come together by phone, in person and by mail? Facebook? Really!

Generational Organizing Styles Working Together = Strength + Success

At the start of our Indiegogo fundraising campaign, two things happened at Prison Radio: Our nonprofit got older, and our staff got younger. So together we jumped into the 21st century. We integrated hands-on, tried-and-true, what-brought-us-here tactics

with a vibrant new energy that included a lot of social media outreach. The result was eye opening for all of us.

Our younger staff, Lyla Denburg (lead organizer) and Jules Cowan (media developer), provided central campaign support and new strategies. Senior staff Noelle Hanrahan, Jennifer Beach, Carole Seligman, and Jen Black (representing over a 100 years of organizing experience) delivered on the old-school tactics.

We were all committed to reaching people and building a culture of success. But what is success given the huge battles we pick? Oh, you know—ending mass incarceration, state violence and white supremacy in our lifetime.

Most of the time, the campaign felt like a huge exercise in trust that our staff and constituents would catch us if we took this leap of faith. As it turned out, it was a much bigger risk than we imagined when we began.

What Unified Us

In October 2014, we were confronted with a critical event that threatened to shut down our core work of recording prisoners' audio commentaries and ensuring distribution of those recordings as far and as widely as we can.

Late that month, legislation signed by outgoing Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett targeted our work specifically. Within days of the Pennsylvania legislature passing SB 508, designed to turn off our microphones by banning prisoners in PA from speaking to the public, we launched a \$45,000 Indiegogo campaign to fund a legal battle to defeat SB 508. You can check out our campaign at bit.ly/defendfreespeech.

We set this up as a matching-grant campaign, with the match monies coming from our fiscal sponsor, the Redwood Justice Fund. We were inexperienced enough not to know just how hard the task would be, thankfully! In the end, it included every one of us—staff, volunteers, allied organizations, family, friends, and donors.

We raised \$46,930 on Indiegogo, with 630 people from across the world contributing to the campaign. With an additional \$3,300 pledged in checks from a few of our closest donors, we raised over \$50K. And we got additional support from donors who could only make charitable gifts through donor-advised funds and (importantly, we learned) not through Indiegogo. These donations brought our total up to almost \$60,000. On top of this, we mailed out our year-end appeal in hard copy, which still met our expectations—providing additional operating support at this demanding time.

What Worked?

We all knew pulling this off was going to take numerous strategies. We planned them from the start—phone calls, email blasts, social media, journal articles, hard-copy mailings, and phone calls. We also all knew each of us would need to mobilize our personal networks of organizers, friends and family.

Some of our plans developed en route, for example fundraising at events. Between one Berkeley, CA event and one New York City event, both organized by ally organizations, we raised over \$1,600 by providing laptops on site where folks joined our Indiegogo campaign and made gifts on the spot.

We leaned on, and planned for, hard-copy organizing strategies: We printed 15,000 postcards and mailed 6,000 out to our entire database of both donors and non-donors. We mailed 2,100 hard copies of our year-end appeal to our regular donors. We recorded and sent robo-call appeals to 1,700 people. And we picked up the phone and called our donors ourselves. Our campaign took significant resources to build, including the money spent on staff hours and mailings.

What Worked Best?

1. A short, fast-paced video that told the story of the campaign.

We were very lucky because we had just produced a theatrically distributed movie (*Long Distance Revolutionary: A Journey with Mumia Abu-Jamal*) that was striking. Using this footage, our staff created a three-minute video featuring Angela Davis, Amy Goodman, Noam Chomsky, and Alice Walker. These recognizable authors and activists provided trust in Prison Radio's work, and a clip from our interview on *Democracy Now!* communicated the urgency of fighting SB 508. The video has been viewed thousands of times now. Whether or not folks watched the whole thing, it gave authenticity to our campaign and showed that we were engaged and committed to winning the battle against SB 508.

2. Making a commitment to engage our personal networks.

During the first weeks of the campaign, data-driven Noelle began entering new contributors into our database and then researching them. An intriguing one was an Indiegogo contributor whose firm consulted with families managing multi-generational family businesses. Noelle called him out of the blue just to thank him. Right after he said, "You are very welcome," and he added, "Just so you know, I am [co-author of this article] Lyla's godfather." Engaging our most personal networks was central to building the campaign's momentum. At a time when senior staff were caught up in critical program work, it was especially important for us to realize that we all had to ask, and we had to ask everyone. This meant expanding our networks of friends and community and asking for contributions from people in the periphery of our organizing and social lives.

3. Leveraging our supporters' networks.

Beth Raps, who helped out with this article, made a \$25 impulse gift that fall to Prison Radio after seeing Mumia Abu-Jamal's Goddard College commencement speech online. Beth volunteered to run a lapsed-donor email appeal for our fundraiser so we could maximize outreach to our entire potential donor pool. Her appeal created a spike in our donations and was one of the most productive email appeals of our entire campaign. It even inspired one \$20 donor to give \$1,000 to the campaign.

We also conducted outreach through email and phone, asking organizational allies to link to our Indiegogo campaign on their Facebook and website pages. This both expanded our audience and reinforced our campaign's urgency for those who started seeing it on multiple sites and pages. For example, seconds after Michelle Alexander shared one post on her Facebook profile in support of the campaign, 1,334 people visited our Indiegogo page, 548 made the extra click to visit Prison Radio's website, 33 people made contributions, and \$1,685 was raised—all from a single post.

4. Making a point to engage donors we didn't know.

The campaign allowed us to make amazing connections and deepen our relationships with donors. For example, we entered a \$25 gift into our database and noted that the donor had only given us his email—no name, phone number or address. Upon doing an internet search of his email address, we learned he was a First Amendment attorney who worked with the Center for Constitutional Rights and wrote opinion pieces. Noelle found his number and called him. She asked him to write an article, and just a month and a half later, his brilliant article "Law an Attack on Free Speech" was published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer!* By working with a new supporter, we convinced the notoriously unfriendly editorial pages of a major newspaper to tell our side of the story.

5. Being flexible.

On the day we launched the Indiegogo campaign, a close donor who is a professional writer called

us and said, “I am going to stay up all night and rewrite your Indiegogo page.” While we at first felt slightly defeated—we did, after all, put hours into writing the content for the page—we loved her new version. It provided in-depth information and made our ask clear, strong and unforgettable. We relaunched with a revamped message.

6. **Using communication to uplift.** Social justice organizing can be stressful and tiring, and celebrating our wins can be easily overshadowed by the work ahead of us. Organizers and supporters alike need gratitude, inspiration and vision in our daily grind. By setting milestones along the way (“We reached \$10,000!”) and publicly thanking donors (tagging them on Facebook and Twitter when able), we exuded confidence and success even when we were feeling behind in our numbers.
7. **Creating a collaborative culture of success.** One of our most important ingredients was having a team determined to meet our goal. The campaign was fun (albeit stressful) and frankly, thrilling. It amped our fundraising. It engaged our staff. It significantly connected us with our donor base. We had a very good reason to ask, an urgent crisis, and a deadline. This combination enabled us to do multiple, cross-platform appeals to our constituency without much, if any, donor fatigue.
8. **Combining the old with the new.** What came through loud and clear as true during the campaign was a phrase we had heard over the years: You keep donors through the giving mechanisms that they originally come to you through—phone, direct mail, events, etc. We took this to mean we had to respect the way donors choose to give historically—even as we encouraged alternative and new giving methods.

Donors who have consistently responded to our print mailing asks were a factor in our willingness to proceed with our regular mailings at the same time as our intensive Indiegogo campaign. This was a risk, but it proved to be a good idea. And the campaign excitement might have even helped our final year-end ask, with our response rate increasing by nearly one percent. Prison Radio constituents/donors/activists relate to us in specific and multiple ways. We use our quarterly hard copy mailings to deliver postcards made out to political prisoners, bookmarks, refrigerator magnets, other new information, and a remit envelope with a specific ask. We believe that a significant percentage of our constituents open our mailings, and we know that between five and nine percent donate.

A Slow Climb Up

By the end of the Indiegogo campaign we accepted what we knew all along: It is a slow, steady climb to the top. The homestretch is where everything pays off. Here’s a fun statistic: On December 3rd—exactly midway through the campaign—we raised \$387. On

the last day, January 2nd, we raised \$7,007—the most raised on any day of the campaign!

There’s a wide notion that social media fundraising is like a magic wand. Senior staff had such a belief that was quickly burst. We chose \$45,000 as our Indiegogo goal thinking, “Wow, that’s not much of a risk—we know 30 folks who will come through with big gifts.” What we did not realize, which became readily apparent within two weeks of our launch, was that our major donors prefer to give through checks, accountants or donor-advised funds—so there went the little safety net senior staff had imagined. We did not factor in that the average gift for a grassroots crowdfunding campaign is under \$100. We had also estimated that it would take 450 donors to reach our goal, whereas 250 of our 630 donors were first-time donors. Indiegogo was a new constituent portal for us, and a new avenue.

Our younger staff were confident that the notable activists, artists and media-makers who supported the campaign would significantly help get us to the finish line. While three well-known and respected people who jumped on board definitely helped us move forward, they did not rocket us to our goal.

Lessons Learned

Launch and follow through confidently. We planned to launch the campaign with \$10,000 from major donors, considering that launching with 20 percent of our goal would provide us an easier time gaining momentum. We did not get to that level until week three. This was initially very daunting, and the hill looked awfully tall to climb. Nonetheless, we pushed forward with full gusto, and our momentum slowly and surely increased. The tail-end of the campaign provided the most momentum.

Provide alternative giving methods. We did not realize that some major donors don’t give through credit cards online. Even though supporters wanted to give, when they did so using a check, it didn’t fuel our deadline-approaching campaign. Lesson learned? Plan from the beginning to create different avenues for donors to give that will still boost the campaign.

Simplify perks. When a donor made a gift at a designated level, we sent them all of the perks for each level below it (a card, CD, tote, DVD, silk screened poster and more). This ended up costing us too much money in production and mailing. Since perks are a major attraction of Indiegogo campaigns, we don’t necessarily suggest cutting down on awesome and exciting gifts. But in the future, we would take out “all previous perks included,” and simply make each level of donation special for the donor and less costly for us.

Don’t rely too heavily on Twitter. On the anniversary of Mumia Abu-Jamal’s arrest in 1981, we hosted a Twitterstorm, in which we invited numerous organizations, activists and artists to join us in a conversation on the impact of SB 508. With hopes that our conversation would engage folks whom we hadn’t yet reached to contribute to the campaign, hardly anyone on Twitter

clicked through to our Indiegogo link. While tweets didn't raise much money, we did build relationships with those who joined us for the Twitterstorm.

Choose the right strategy for your donor base. We tried to model a strategy after an allied organization's successful strategy, which encouraged people to ask 10 friends to donate. While numerous people spread our campaign link far and wide, we never did get a supporter to sign up to leverage 10 friends to contribute, despite our offering of a large perk if someone succeeded.

Work hard for media coverage. During the campaign, our outreach to journalists and media outlets was unsuccessful. We got just two media bounces from our huge, time-intensive outreach effort. This article will make it three.

Make it easy for donors of all ages to join a crowdfunding campaign. Statistically, our donor distribution is skewed to older donors, some of whom are not active online. The advice we would give as a result: When talking with donors who aren't computer-savvy but want to give, walk the donor through the online giving process on the phone, and mail them a hard copy of the campaign page, related articles and a donation envelope with a specific ask. Technology doesn't have to be a hurdle for contributions to the campaign.

Don't limit giving channels. We asked a renowned activist to give \$1,000 to the Indiegogo campaign and another \$4,000 in a manner of their choosing. We assumed they wouldn't want to make a significant gift online, as many of our large donors did not. However, their second gift of \$4,000 came in through another online portal separate from our Indiegogo page. At first, this made our heart sink because of the timing—we only had a few days left to meet the deadline with a long way to go monetarily. Yet, if they had filled our Indiegogo campaign with their generous dollars, we would definitely have missed the opportunity to gain support from many new donors who pitched in during the last two days to get us to our goal!

Prepare perks early on and keep up with donor entries. We did not prepare perks before the campaign started (burning CDs and ordering more totes and books), nor did we fully input donor information into our database along the way. We absolutely encourage folks to update their data as it comes, and to send out perks on a routine basis before the campaign ends.

Ask early. We generally do our major donor asks at the end of the year. Last fall, we simply did not start early enough. The political crisis that prompted the campaign happened in October, true. But we should have begun major donor asks in September. One donor told us, "I have already made my decisions for the year, you should have asked me for a gift earlier." This donor gave a significant gift, but it would have been more had we talked to her earlier. Starting in September, rather than November, would have allowed donors to plan their giving.

Let your major donors know about a crisis right away. Donors really care, and they often have insights in how to approach

problems. In order to make sure that we contact them quickly Director Noelle Hanrahan's phone's "favorite" contacts consists of only her mother, her daughter (her son doesn't have a phone yet), her partner, and Prison Radio's 30 largest donors. When a crisis or a win happens, she calls and texts them all individually. Being on the front lines with these major donors and getting them involved in advance is crucial.

Biggest Takeaways

Here's the statistic we are most proud of: In 2014 the number of constituent gifts jumped by 510 people! This was a 33 percent increase from 2013. Our support grew, and we did it in old and new ways. Another incredible takeaway was feeling the campaign's impact when we wrote a check for \$25,000 to the lawyers of the Amistad Law Project and the Abolitionist Law Center.

It is important to be realistic when budgeting campaign expenses. We spent some serious money. Just a few line items included Indiegogo overhead of seven percent or \$3,500; match-partner Redwood Justice Fund's 12 percent overhead or \$5,500; paid staff hours, \$8,000; promotional mailings, \$6,000; perks, \$2,000. Total cost for the campaign: \$25,000. Was it worth it? Yes. But it is important to be very hard-nosed about expenses. We wrote into our agreement with the lawyers that it might cost us five times as much in expenses to raise every dollar designated for legal fees! For this campaign, we were very lucky that it was a better than one-to-one. It was in part this good because of the infrastructure and reach we had already developed—the payoff on investments we had made over 25 years of work. We must not underestimate that our base had been built through years of direct donor mailings, calls and other database retention work.

Every day we struggle to amplify our prison journalists' voices and to make the First Amendment right to free speech vibrant, active and real for prisoners.. We will likely defeat this version of SB 508—the Prisoner Silencing Act—in Pennsylvania. We remain in court in Ohio with "Hanrahan v. Mohr," a lawsuit which embodies Prison Radio's commitment to both defending and exercising the First Amendment. We are partnering with Staughton, Alice Lynd and Christopher Hedges to record Ohio's death row prisoners Keith LaMar and Siddique Abdullah Hassan (among others). We remain vigilant in Pennsylvania as well: The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, at the instigation of the Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge Five, has been utilizing prison regulations and prison phone companies like Securus Technologies to block our correspondents' calls. As our most dedicated correspondent Mumia Abu Jamal notes, "I will keep writing if you keep listening."

For program and legal updates, please check out our Indiegogo page, which you can access through prisonradio.org

Noelle Hanrahan has been organizing with Prison Radio for 25 years. Lyla Denburg is Prison Radio's newest organizer, beginning in 2014.