COVID-19: Making online fundraising events work for your organisation

Blog, Covid-19, European Equality Gala, Fundraising

As we gear up to bring our annual fundraising event online, ILGA-Europe's Partnerships Manager, Anna Shepherd gives her top tips for organising online events and bringing supporters on board.

The team at ILGA-Europe started planning our annual fundraising event, the European Equality Gala, way back last autumn. We came up with an exciting new theme, signed a contract with the venue and confirmed sponsors and entertainers. **Then COVID-19 hit, and everything changed.**

We entered lockdown and it became clear that the situation would last a while, so we needed to take a decision on whether to cancel, postpone or adapt the event. We carried out a thorough risk assessment weighing up different scenarios, financial impact, and our responsibility towards our community of supporters. In the end, we took what now seems like the only right decision to cancel the physical event and organise a virtual event instead. But how to do it?

Our Gala will go ahead on June 25 as planned, but it will be an online event. We'll be providing our supporters a virtual space to come together, enjoy some entertainment and inspiring speakers, and contribute to strengthening the European LGBTI movement. There won't be a cocktail bar or dance floor, but we aim to keep as much as the spirit of the Gala as possible.

Now that we're in full swing planning the ILGA-Europe European Equality Gala Online, we want to share some tips to help your organisation, whether you're moving a physical fundraising event online or trying out a new online fundraising concept.

Six tips for success

1. Get Your Creative Juices Flowing

Your imagination is the limit when it comes to online fundraising events: you could hold a virtual auction, raffle, quiz, drag show, concert, tutorial etc. Actual fundraising can take the form of tickets sold in advance, a suggested donation to enter, raffle and auction, or asking for donations in the run-up and during the event.

Here are a few inspiring examples of lockdown fundraising from LGBTI groups: German author Saša Staniši? gave an online reading collecting donations for Queerbase, an LGBTI refugee support group in Vienna. Drag artist Deliberately Steve did an interactive show via Zoom asking for donations to international LGBTI fund GiveOut. The Terrence Higgins Trust, a sexual health charity, are holding an online pub quiz to raise money to support people living with HIV. #EurovisionAgain is synchronised viewing of old Eurovision Song Contests every Saturday night, raising money for LGBTI charities in the UK. Diversionary, an LGBT community theatre in San Diego, held a virtual silent auction and raffle.

2. Do Some Savvy Platform Research

There's no shortage of streaming platforms available, so do your research and choose one that best fits your idea. There's Facebook and Instagram live; GoToMeetings, Zoom and other webinar platforms; gaming platform Twitch (yes, gaming fundraisers are a thing); and tools specifically designed for fundraising such as Givergy, GoFundMe Charity, jumblebee, GivePenny, Virtual Quiz Events.

Some are free and others come at varying fees, but price shouldn't be your only criterion: a platform that offers a great user experience and allows easy donations directly on the platform can be worth investing some money in if it can allow you to raise more.

3. Frame The Right Message

When framing how you are going to communicate about your event, make sure you have a clear ask. Tell people exactly what donations will help achieve. You will need to let supporters know how you are supporting your communities during the pandemic crisis and what the urgent needs are.

4. Spread The Word Wisely

Think about who you want to target — as always with fundraising you want to target those who are already supportive of your cause, so think past donors and event attendees, social media followers and community members. And of course with virtual events you don't have to limit yourself to audiences in your city or region. Then make the most of your digital communications tools — email, social media and website — to promote your event. Consider using paid promotion on social media and asking influential community members and supporters to spread the word on your behalf.

5. Plan Ahead For Smooth Running

Just like with a physical event, create a detailed running order and make sure everyone knows their role and responsibilities. Rehearse and double and triple check your tech. What's your Plan B in case your performer's WiFi goes down?

6. Don't Forget Your Supporters, Post-event

Don't forget to follow up with guests of your digital event to thank them and let them know how their support will help. Evaluate your event, get feedback and make a note of what could be improved in future events.

Further resources!

- **Fundraising Chat** is a Facebook group for people working in fundraising to share experiences and good practice. Not surprisingly, at the moment there's lots of chat about virtual fundraising events and tools and tech to support them.
- **Givergy**, fundraising tech company offering a range of solutions such as silent auction technology, started a podcast on fundraising during COVID-19.
- **Upaya**, a US-based charitable organisation, held their traditional black-tie gala dinner virtually, with a twist of fun. Read their blog about their experience for some useful tips.
- **GoFundMe Charity** have collected advice on how to handle cancellation of a physical event and host a virtual event when plans change.
- **SOGI Campaigns** hosted the webinar Let's FUNdraise For Solidarity! on May 7 and invited ILGA-Europe to take part. You can watch the recording here, in case you missed it: