CROWDSOURCING FOR NON-PROFITS

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Crowdsourcing means to "obtain information or input into a task or project by enlisting the services of a number of people, either paid or unpaid, typically via the internet." Unfortunately, crowdsourcing has only been applied to non-profits in the very narrow field of crowdfunding. The good news is there is much more available to non-profits through crowdsourcing than raising funds.

Many non-profits are hesitant to use crowdsourcing. First of all, many non-profit leaders aren't aware of the broad application crowdsourcing can have in their organization. This lack of knowledge is hardly a crime. You have a lot to focus on, and crowdsourcing can get pushed to the back burner. However, you're selling your organization short by not taking advantage of this incredible resource.

Some non-profit leaders are also concerned about liability when it comes to crowdsourcing. They're afraid someone could get access to information about their organization and use it unethically, or that a solution obtained through crowdsourcing wouldn't be truly theirs. It doesn't help that most governmental and legal guidance on crowdsourcing is aimed at corporations. Still, most of that advice applies to non-profits as well. In addition, the way you set up your program, processes and systems can help address those concerns.

This paper covers:

1. Why crowdsourcing helps non-profits

2. Different ways non-profits can use crowdsourcing

3. Examples of non-profits successfully using crowdsourcing

How Non-Profits Benefit from Crowdsourcing

At its foundation, crowdsourcing is simply community engagement. You gain valuable new ideas when you engage your community – whether it's your local community, your volunteers, donors, clients, or a community of like-minded people around the world. From crowdsourcing, you can gain ideas, feedback, and contributions that you otherwise wouldn't have access to. In addition, crowdsourcing can help you demonstrate transparency and openness in your decision-making process.

More than any other organization, non-profits have to do more with fewer resources. Crowdsourcing allows you mobilize an enormous community to not only raise funds but also to gain practical help and allow you to reach your goals.

Unfortunately, non-profits often find themselves in competition with each other for limited resources, volunteers, attention, and focus. You must innovate if you want to succeed. Crowdsourcing is an innovative way to break out of your normal geographical constraints and access a much larger, broader, and more active community. Through crowdsourcing initiatives, you can gain needed help and obtain your goals faster and easier when you reach out for help around the country or even around the world.

Research indicates that a non-profit organization's mission can also help facilitate innovation, which has been shown to be a key step to achieving excellent performance in an organization[1]. Here are some ways your mission can help you excel:

- A clear, motivating mission helps an organization to focus its attention on those innovations that will most likely support the accomplishment of that mission. As a non-profit with clear objectives, you're less likely to get distracted with unhelpful ideas.
- Such a mission also creates a climate in which innovations are given a fair chance to succeed. You realize, that new ideas that support your mission should be given every opportunity possible to succeed and make a difference.

As a result, organizations with clear, motivating missions tend to be more innovative. The bottom line is, if you have a task, question, or idea that you want to explore, you don't need to bring experts on staff to do so. There are many ways to reach and involve people. You should consider seeking creative ways to reach and involve your volunteers, donors, newsletter subscribers, clients, and local community.

But you can also reach beyond that through crowdsourcing and involve volunteers and thinkers from around the country or around the world. Think about all of the people who really want to make a difference, but are working a full-time job and can't take the time to volunteer. Many want to do more than write a check. Through crowdsourcing, they can. You can spread your mission far beyond your current community, and gain a great deal of traction and success as a result.

Types of Crowdsourcing for Non-Profits

When considering crowdsourcing, many non-profits think only of crowdfunding. The truth is that funding is just one of five different types of crowdsourcing that can be highly effective for non-profits. Think well beyond crowdfunding, and consider all of these types of crowdsourcing.

Pooling Knowledge to Solve Problems.

Many of the people who work on crowdsourcing projects do so to expand their skills and gain recognition for their ideas. Crowd workers are generally well-educated – more than 50% hold a bachelor's degree, and more than 20% hold a master's degree[2]. They love to put that knowledge to good use, especially if it's for a great cause!

As an example, consider Ushahidi. Ushahidi is an open-source software platform that plots a set of particular incidents, submitted by people via cell phone text messages, into an online map[3]. Ushahidi, which means "testimony" in Swahili, was initially developed to map reports of violence in Kenya after the post-election fallout at the beginning of 2008. This allowed not only for rapid intervention but served to document deaths, injury, and destruction when other media was unavailable. Since then, Ushahidi has also been used in disaster relief in Pakistan and to map crime incidents in Atlanta.

Other forms of pooling knowledge include using crowd knowledge to solve complex scientific problems, creating real-time traffic maps, and more[4]. How can your non-profit capitalize on group knowledge to solve a thorny problem?

Micro-volunteering to Achieve Big Tasks

Do you have a large project – maybe documenting files, reviewing data, or some other time-consuming work – that you have no idea how to tackle? If you're like most non-profits, volunteers are hard to come by. But by breaking up that large task into many smaller ones, you can take advantage of micro-volunteers through crowdsourcing.

Think of all the people who only have a few minutes but really want to make a difference in the area or passion that you serve. They can't take six months off to go to another country. They can't even commit to volunteering three hours a week. But they can take a few minutes to help you out through crowdsourcing.

Through sites like Amazon's Mechanical Turk, organizations can ask people to perform a small task, such as tagging a picture, finding a phone number or typing a particular piece of text in a specific format[5]. For example, after Hurricane Katrina, thousands of volunteers manually entered 15,200 records to consolidate all the dozens of sources of information about lost or missing people. Organizations also use microtasks to double check data, find flaws in software, and get feedback about a website or video.

Consider what large task you could break down into small pieces. Then, use crowdsourcing to take advantage of all of the helpful members of the worldwide community who want to promote your cause but normally wouldn't be able to. You'll be amazed at what you can get done through microvolunteering.

Crowd Creation

The crowd – that is, the massive community available everywhere from outside your door to the other side of the globe – is also great at creating new things. When you can tap a huge group of volunteers, you can create incredible new products, services, outreach campaigns, and more. For non-profits, this can mean everything from help designing a new headquarters to creating original pieces of art.

For example, The Royal Opera used Twitter to crowdsource a new "people's opera" that drew more than 900 contributions, resulting in a 20-minute production in London performed by professional composers[6]. Similarly, theSan Francisco Symphony crowdsourced musician auditions for a mash-up performance over YouTube[7]. The end result was a symphony orchestra of more than 90 players representing over 30 countries.

You can also add an element of challenge to the project by letting the crowd know about a specific budget. You can ask anything from "How could you do X for under $100" to "We need a new office for less than $5,000." People love being creative and coming up with neat ways to do things inexpensively.

What could the crowd create for your organization?

Crowdvoting

Have you noticed how much people love to share their opinions? Use that to your benefit. Crowdvoting allows people to weigh in on various options and has a real impact on the final outcome. You can use it for anything from book covers to logos to slogans and more.

More importantly, crowd voting allows you to draw attention to your cause and your organization. While people are voting on your logo, they're also sharing the contest with their friends and family, talking about your organization, and learning more about your mission. Crowdvoting is a great way to build engagement, especially ahead of another crowdsourcing initiative. It gains visibility for your non-profit in ways that traditional methods struggle to do.

A great example of this is the Brooklyn Community Foundation, which launched a campaign encouraging locals to submit and vote on projects to make the borough a better place[8]. More than 356 projects were nominated, and the number of votes totaled well over 300,000. By tapping into people's desire to share their thoughts, they increased awareness of their cause and drew in a new audience for their message.

What do you have that people could vote on? Let them share their opinion while also expanding the reach of your message.

Crowdfunding

This is the type of crowdsourcing that many non-profits are the most aware of, and still many don't use it to its full advantage. Crowdfunding doesn't have to be simply an internet extension of your normal funding drive – and it shouldn't be. Instead, think of fun and innovative ways you can use crowdfunding to not only raise money but also to bring awareness and generate enthusiasm for your cause.

This category opens the collective pocketbook, encouraging crowds to fund projects that benefit others. Perhaps the most widely-known is Kiva, a micro-lending website that uses crowdsourcing for its work[9]. By allowing people to make micro-loans as small as $25 to entrepreneurs in developing countries, the site taps into the generosity of donors to change the lives of thousands in the developing world.By showing donors the individuals whose lives are touched, they generate a different level of enthusiasm than a general funding drive.

Think Outside the Box

Another innovative way to raise money online is using interactive video. Remember the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge[10]? In 2014 those videos – and the donations that came from them – raised $115 million. To use videos yourself, find a fun activity that represents your organization and video yourself doing it. Have your volunteers do the same. When these are uploaded to social networks, add a challenge for friends and family to do the activity as well, donate to your cause, and nominate others to participate. People love fun challenges!

Crowdfunding should be far more than a donation link shared on social media. Get creative, and you'll be amazed how much visibility and funding you can raise!

Best Practices for Successful Crowdsourcing

Running a successful crowdsourcing campaign takes some thought and preparation. You need to know what your goals are, what platform you're planning to use, and how to measure success. Here are some best practices for successful non-profit crowdsourcing.

Plan Ahead

Start by choosing the right type of crowdsourcing based on your goals. Determine what you're looking to achieve, and find the best way to do it. Make sure you're engaging the right crowd, too. You'll need to apply targeted marketing principles to get your campaign in front of the right people. Choose people who already have a connection to your cause, are part of social media groups related to your cause, and more. Create a fully developed outreach plan, and consider a combination of social media, direct mail, and emails to current supporters.

Keep it Simple

Make sure it's very clear what you want the crowd to do for you. Break down your strategic goals into smaller tasks people can help with. You'll want to keep your message as easy as possible for others to understand, so they can easily share it with others. Be sure to set reasonable expectations to reach your goals. For crowdfunding, in particular, traditional best practices still apply: you need credibility, a strong network, a track record of success, and you need to be transparent on how the funds will be used.

Engage the Crowd and Reward Participation

Remember that crowdsourcing is an opportunity to engage a new group of potential supporters. Be creative in your outreach and plant your campaign in places that will reach new audiences. Think about how to regularly engage with your current supporters and start doing it. Consider giving incentives to reward participation—what do people want in exchange for their help? Try to really understand their motivation. Do they just want to be heard, have fun or learn something new.

Stay Positive

Stay positive both publicly and privately. Throughout any campaign, it's important to be personable with those who might contribute to your crowdsourcing project. A little personal interaction can increase the likelihood of an action or donation. Don't get discouraged. Have faith in the process and stay focused on your mission.

Examples of Non-Profits Successfully Using Crowdsourcing

Beyond the examples we described above in Types of Crowdsourcing, there are other non-profits successfully using crowdsourcing as well. Here are just two.

Cerebral Palsy Alliance

Founded in 1944, the Cerebral Palsy Alliance was the first organization in the world for people with cerebral palsy and has a long history of innovation. They have changed the lives of those living with cerebral palsy and created engagement and awareness worldwide. They use a five-step evaluation process that launched an incredible innovation using crowdsourcing. The steps include: posting ideas, voting, shortlisting, prototyping, and announcement of winners.

Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is an organization working toward open, participatory governance on a global scale. They created the Global Innovation Competition to challenge a global audience to design a solution that would improve the governments' responsiveness and accountability to their people. Anyone, from organizations to average people were welcome to apply – no matter where they were in the world. There was a grand prize of 65,000 British

The crowd is a diverse group of capable individuals who can make a significant contribution to your non-profit organization. Using crowdsourcing is simply community engagement at a much larger scale. Don't forget that crowdsourcing for non-profits goes far beyond raising money. From pooling knowledge to micro-volunteering, consider taking advantage of the specific ways you can use crowdsourcing effectively.

Innovation is essential to non-profits who want their cause to impact the world. New ways of thinking and diverse perspectives are vital. Through crowdsourcing, this innovation can be obtained at a fraction of the cost of traditional approaches. Many non-profits are already using crowdsourcing in a variety of ways – you don't want to miss out!

Related Reading

Blogs:

IdeaScale Blog	www.ideascale.com/blog
Innovation Management	www.innovationmanagement.se
Crowdsourcing Industry Site	www.crowdsourcing.org
The Daily Crowdsource	www.thedailycrowdsource.com

Case Studies Referenced:

Cerebral Palsy Alliance   https://ideascale.com/resource/2013-innovation-award-winner-world-cerebral-palsy-day/

Making All Voices Count   https://ideascale.com/resource/2015-innovation-award-making-all-voices-count/

Books:

The Wisdom of Crowds	by James Surowiecki
Crowdsourcing	by Jeff Howe

A Guide to Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing: Advice From Leading Experts edited by Paul Sloane (First published in Great Britain and the United States by Kogan Page Limited 2011)

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1. An Investigation of Innovation in Nonprofit Organizations: The Role of Organizational Mission: http://nvs.sagepub.com/content/36/2/256.abstract
2. Behind the Scenes of Crowdsourcing: Who are Crowd Workers?: http://www.crowdsource.com/blog/2012/11/behind-the-scenes-of-crowdsourcing-who-are-crowd-workers/
3. Ushahidi: https://www.ushahidi.com/
4. Innovate with InnoCentive: https://www.innocentive.com/
5. Mechanical Turk: https://www.mturk.com/mturk/
6. Twitter used to write collaborative opera lyrics: http://www.blogherald.com/2009/08/11/twitter-used-to-write-collaborative-opera-lyrics/
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8. Brooklyn Community Foundation: http://www.brooklyncommunityfoundation.org/
9. Kiva: http://www.kiva.org/
10. ALS Association: http://www.alsa.org/fight-als/ice-bucket-challenge.html