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Reimagine 2021

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Reimagine 2021

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Author Note

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Abstract

United Way of Santa Cruz has been a resource for the community for many years. Sadly, after the pandemic hit, it caused many financial hardships for the nonprofit organization. There is a lack of economic support for nonprofits all over the US that could be heard around the world. United Way exists to be able to support those in need, but at this moment they cannot provide that support without help. This is due to several reasons including high rates of unemployment, decreased spending during the pandemic, and reduced person to person contact with potential donors. All these factors contribute to the lack of financial support which could lead to devastating consequences, including a decrease in funding for programs, reduced staffing, and even possible closure for some nonprofits. Therefore, a fundraising event was the most fitting project idea. Reimagine 2021 Campaign Kickoff was a fundraiser that could help the organization raise money to help fund their youth programs. United Way hosted their event in mid-October, and it was successful although it wasn't in the ways they expected. It's important to be able to pivot in any unforeseen situation to make a negative into a positive in a short period of time.

Keywords: Nonprofit, funding, COVID-19, pandemic, fundraiser

Agency & Communities Served

United Way became a part of Santa Cruz about 80 years ago, when it first was created it was known as Pajaro Valley Community Chest and later became United Way of Santa Cruz County. It was founded by a group of community leaders that were passionate about helping those in need. They had one vision in mind and that was to create a program that would provide a better life for the residents of Santa Cruz County. The estimated population as of July 1, 2019, “is 273,213, 87% of the population alone is white” (U.S Census Bureau, 2019, para.1). This makes sense because most of the residents that live here have been a part of Santa Cruz for years and financially were able to stay here. The U.S Census (2019) also shows that even though the majority of the population is White, the second portion of Santa Cruz County is Hispanic which comes in at 34% which includes some people in both categories, Hispanic and White. One might think that because it is a White dominant county that there might not be a need but it just goes to show that United Way serves more of the White population than minority groups.

It is important to take into account that Santa Cruz County is a very expensive area to live in and the Census Bureau (2019) shows the average income to be about \$82,234. According to the U.S Census Bureau, “about 10.6% of the population is living in poverty”(U.S Census Bureau, 2019, para.12). This is due to lack of education and employment, which is a huge reason why these community leaders choose to come together to create an organization that stands for equity. This organization has a mission to try and close the gap and to provide an equal opportunity for everyone especially for the youth. As stated in the Census, “23.9% of Santa Cruz County residents are below the age of 18” (U.S Census Bureau, 2019, para.2). So starting this

change with youth only makes sense because as the youth grow so will the impact of these changes.

Over the years they began incorporating different programs within United Way and currently they have four, which includes United 4 Youth, Jóvenes Sanos, Youth Action Network, and 2-1-1 Helpline. All of these programs are geared towards helping struggling families and setting the youth up for success. Their mission is, “to improve the lives of youth and families in Santa Cruz County by uniting our community to address the basic needs of education, health, and financial stability” (UWSCC, 2021, para.1). United Way partners with donors, volunteers, advocates, governments and other nonprofit organizations to provide its residents with supporting emerging needs. It currently has over 3,000 volunteers helping raise and allocate funds to help struggling families. United Way of Santa Cruz County not only strives to provide help for families over time, but it is also set up to help during any emergency situations. In addition to helping the community, United Way is always working hard to evolve and expand with their community.

Problem Description

On March 11, 2020 the United States declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, which unfortunately affected everyone and everything, including the economy. As a result, the economy began to decline and so did the economic support for nonprofit organizations. In April 2020, Charity Navigator conducted a survey to assess the financial impact COVID-19 had on nonprofit organizations all over the United States. The results showed that “83% of the respondents reported they were suffering financially” (Charity Navigator, 2020, para.3). Nonprofits experiencing financial hardship stated a, “38% revenue decline for the April to June time period”

(Charity Navigator, 2020, para.4). This study was conducted on such a large scale but even on a smaller scale, United Way of Santa Cruz County experienced a 30% decrease in their annual budget for the year 2020.

Contributing Factors

Many nonprofit organizations depend on financial support from big corporations and their employees, but when COVID-19 hit many lost their jobs. To put this in perspective, the numbers of unemployment during this pandemic were substantially greater than they were during the Great Depression in 2010. According to Pew Research Center, “the number of unemployed Americans went from 6.2 million in February 2020 to 20.5 million in May 2020” (Kochhar, 2020, para.1). These numbers almost tripled in just a short four month time period. This is an issue because most nonprofit organizations gain revenue by donations. These donations can come in many different forms for direct cash or a variety of physical items. However, with so many Americans not working, it makes it hard for people to give money when money, many are already struggling.

The other portion of nonprofit funding comes from corporations like banks, hospitals, and retail stores. Every month these corporations write nonprofits checks to contribute to the workplace campaign fund but when the economy began to decline so did the amount of funding. There are many reasons why we saw such a decline in spending during the pandemic but the main reason was that people were not making enough money to spend on extracurricular activities. According to Brookings, “In 2020 there was decreased spending in food services, transportation, recreation, clothing, footwear and education” (Mitterling et. al, 2020, para.5). This means if people aren't spending money then big corporations aren't inclined to continue

giving or renewing pledges for the year 2021. Many Americans found themselves struggling financially and really just didn't have the funds to be donating to nonprofit organizations.

On top of dealing with the pandemic, on March 19, 2020 the governor of California declared a stay at home order and that meant no face-to-face contact with other people. This was a huge problem because it is essential for nonprofit organizations to meet with people in-person and strive on building new connections with the community. More specifically creating new connections with donors to help support nonprofits financially. AFP Global stated, “the first two months of 2020 nonprofits started out strong but, with the lockdown in March alone they saw an 11% decline in donations due to lack of in person contact” (AFPG, 2020, para.3). Without having that physical connection, it is hard to keep the public engaged so that the money keeps coming in. Nonprofit organizations were not ready for the devastation that came along with COVID-19 and the reboot they had to make to help stay afloat due the pandemic.

Consequences

Currently we are in March of 2021, almost one year post COVID-19 and nonprofits are still struggling to survive. With such a decline in revenue many nonprofits are forced to cut or decrease funding to community programs. Nonprofit Finance Fund conducted a survey on the impacts of COVID-19 nonprofits organizations. The study showed a “significant decrease of 25% in client usage in services and a 32% decrease in financial funding for nonprofit programs” (NFF, 2020, para.6). The reason behind the minimized usage of service is due to the stay at home orders placed all over the United States, people are unable to leave their home to receive services that nonprofits provide. These numbers are worrisome because many Americans that use these

services are low income and rely on the help. It is important that these Americans get the services they need because it can take a toll on them mental, physically, and financially.

The lack of economical support for nonprofit organizations has really created a domino effect within the organizations. First comes cuts to essential programs which is then followed by the reduction of staff members. According to the Independent Sector, “organizations reported a 47% decline in staffing in April and a majority either laying off or furloughing employees between February and May of 2020” (Independent Sector, 2020, para.4). Which means that these individuals that are losing their jobs are going to have to struggle to survive financially during such a difficult time. With limited staff and resources, how are these organizations supposed to help others when they themselves are struggling as well. It is important to understand that people are not just donating to individuals but to the organizations as a whole.

The last and most devastating stage of this domino effect is the potential threat of nonprofit organizations closing. There was a global study done by Charities Aid Foundation which showed that, “Americans find that one in three organizations are at risk of closing down within the next 12 months due to the revenue losses linked to the coronavirus pandemic” (Wiley Online Library, 2020, para.1). It is hard to imagine a world without nonprofits organizations but the sad truth is this just might become reality in the near future. It is crucial that we understand the world we lived in is no longer the same and now we have to find new ways of connecting and engaging with our local communities. Nonprofit organizations are going to look different moving forward because of the catastrophic impact of COVID-19. We are just going to have to learn how to pivot and evolve with the changes that have occurred and deal with the limited resources that we currently have.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
High rates of unemployment	Lack of economic support for non-profit organizations due to COVID-19	Decrease in funding for programs
Decreased spending during the pandemic		Reduced staffing at nonprofit organizations
Reduced person to person contact with potential donors		Possible closures of non-profit organizations

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project

The capstone project is planning and hosting the first ever virtual fundraiser event at United Way, the event will be known as Reimagine 2021 Campaign Kickoff. This event will help support the United 4 Youth programs. These programs include services to promote college and career readiness, health and wellness, economic stability and community engagement. The overall goal for the fundraiser event is \$10,000 but they are hoping for more. The first half of the fundraiser will allow donors to donate money as they please to help support the cause. During this time we will also be adding a silent auction and the auction items will be donated by local businesses.

The second half of the fundraiser will include a virtual cocktail hour. Since there is a need for social distancing, United Way will be sending cocktail kits to all the participants' homes. This kit will cost approximately \$100 and will include 3 signature cocktails that can be put together at home. The participants will have no problem making these as we will have a live mixologist

making the drinks along with the participants. This event will be a fun and exciting new way of experiencing a fundraising event.

Project Purpose

The reason a fundraising event is needed is because even though United Way isn't able to keep the doors open to the community due to COVID, it doesn't mean the expenses have stopped. They still have staff to support and programs that need to be funded to help our community. United Way has taken a hard financial hit and we have to come up with new ways to produce revenue for our organization. They have to continue to find new donors and pursue old connections with donors. It is vital that they continue their efforts to find ways to raise money for their programs because many people depend on them.

There is now a new “normal.” United Way has to learn how to adjust so the individuals that receive their services don't feel the disruption. When COVID-19 hit it impacted many lives in such a negative way and brought out a greater need for our services, but United Way can't help when they are struggling as well. If it wasn't for grants received, they would be facing the very tragedy other nonprofits are facing, which is an increased risk of closure. If this were to happen there would be an immediate impact and would continue to impact the members of the community especially the youth. No one expected COVID-19 to last as long as it did and create as much deviation as it did.

United Way of Santa Cruz really wants this event to be that one thing in the year 2021 to bring a sense of recovery to the community. It would help increase revenue for the organization as well as teach new ways of raising money. It won't be very easy due to the fact that this will be the first virtual event and they have nothing to refer to but this could be the start of something

new. It is important that they find a way to connect with others in a meaningful way but also be mindful of the fact that there is a pandemic so they have to conduct it in a safe manner. United Way is very excited for this event as it will definitely be something they can later look back at and could potentially become a part of history in how nonprofit conduct fundraising events in the future.

Project Justification

Pivoting to virtual events at this time is the best, there are many reasons why events such as fundraisers are being conducted on virtual platforms. The first being hosting virtual events can help lower the cost of the event therefore a nonprofit can donate more money to the cause. According to vFairs, “when an event takes place online, there is no need for a separate budget for travel and accommodation. Not just that- cost for venues, food and beverages, and parking spaces can be eliminated” (Zaman, 2021, para.2). When you get rid of all these extra costs, it leaves more opportunity to raise more money for programs. In this case United Way would be able to put all that extra money towards the United 4 Youth programs.

Another reason would be having these types of events can be beneficial, is that it can increase reach and potential donations. When they host the Reimagine 2021 Campaign Kickoff they will be reaching out to more individuals and not just limiting the event to Santa Cruz County. vFair states that, “being accessible from anywhere and on any device gives your nonprofit and its cause tremendously increased visibility” (Zaman, 2021, para.3). Increasing accessibility to the event is vital because again the more people that attend will equal higher revenue. It is important they reach their campaign goal because the youth depend on it.

The last and most important reason is safety. During this time it is too dangerous to host in person events. With limited accessibility to vaccinations and with COVID-19 being so transmittable, it is just not safe. The Center for Disease Control and Preventions (2021), recommends that people take risk factors of host in-person events into consideration. Some of these factors include the number of people that attend the event, number of COVID-19 cases in your county, event settings, length of event and level of safety precautions taken. Having to take all of these precautions present can really limit an event. This is why hosting virtual events is not only best but also the safest way to raise money for the cause.

After taking everything into consideration it is crucial that United Way really put everything into perspective. COVID-19 has really impacted our lives in many ways and for United Way the effects of this pandemic are still causing havoc. For example the virtual event was supposed to take place at the beginning of the year but with COVID-19 creating such financial devastation we are forced to change the date of the event. It just goes to show that having a virtual event is the best way to go. It can cut the cost and can bring not only more participants but also more revenue so they can make this event happen. It is important that United Way doesn't give up on their event because if they do then that means they are giving up on their community.

Project Implementation

United Way Reimagine 2021 Campaign Kickoff took place in mid October. When planning an event you first have to secure a date. On May 17, 2021 a meeting took place where it was decided that the event would take place on October 14, 2021. Next the sponsorship letter was created and we completed it after they secured the date. This letter is sent off to potential

donors which explains what would take place during the event and the reasoning behind the event. In addition, they created a sponsorship table that states the various awards and acknowledgements donors received. The table was added to the letter before it was sent out. Furthermore, the second part of this process was gathering and researching potential sponsors that helped to create a sponsorship list and mailing list. It is important that they not only email but also mail out hard copy letters to potential donors. All sponsorship tasks were completed by April 25, 2021.

After completing the first part of the event, they moved on to the second part of the event which is the cocktail portion. They connected with the mixologist to set up a meeting to talk about the pricing and packages that took place on May 30, 2021. It was crucial that they found a way to send out these packages as they contain alcohol and they needed a licence to ship alcohol. Around the same time, they were advertising the event and posting save the date flyers all over social media. United Way really wanted to get the word out to as many people as they could and the best way to do so was social media. After they put out their event, they then moved forward with fundraising which started June 1, 2021 and ended in August or September. The “fundraising window,” is known as the waiting period where individuals now know about the event and they start to donate. During this time United Way received donations via mailed checks and a donation page was created to collect money. The reason there is no specific end date on fundraising is because times are tough financially and they wanted to give themselves enough time to raise the money needed. They already had to move their event once because of this so now they must designate at least 3 months to pure fundraising. During this fundraising time on September 14, 2021 the official invitation was sent out along with the registration link.

By the beginning of October they had finalized and completed all tasks mentioned above. The week before the event was dedicated to putting together finishing touches on the event. They conducted a practice run for the event one day prior to the event to make sure the event went smoothly. The targeted time for the event is for it to start at 5:00PM and end at 7:00 PM. This time frame allowed enough time for the presentations and cocktail party. Depending on how long the agenda turned out, they could either lengthen or shorten the event. After the event the staff had one last meeting which took place on October 18, 2021. During this time they came together and recapped the event and discussed what worked and what didn't work.

Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes

The way United Way plans to measure the success of the event is by the amount of participants that attend as well as the amount of money raised. The goal is to have at least 50 attendees and have raised a total of \$10,000 dollars. If they have 25 or less attendees they will consider that a fair turnout but not great, and if they have 50 or more that will be considered a successful turnout. Another factor they will have to consider is the length attendees stay at the event. They can't just base a decision solely on the number of attendees. Just because they start with a certain number of people doesn't mean they will end with the event with the same amount of people. On the financial side, they are aiming to fundraise \$10,000 dollars but if they can raise more money that would be outstanding. At that point they can definitely say it was a success and they will utilize every penny they receive. There are many factors that need to be taken into consideration when determining whether or not Reimagine 2021 was successful. At the end of the event they just need to step back and look at the event as a whole to really come down to a decision.

The expectations are that they reach their fundraising goal of \$10,000 dollars and that they have a reasonable amount of participants attend the event. They have given themselves more than enough time to plan, prepare, and fundraise prior to the event so that the event has a high chance of success. They also have the drive, determination, and motivation to complete the event as they have youth that depend on the programs that United Way provides. In addition, to the expectation of a successful event they want their event to bring fun and excitement to help alleviate stress during such a stressful time. To just bring a sense of “normal” while also helping support a cause for the youth. This could be the start of something new. A new way of fundraising and a new way of hosting virtual events. Reimagine 2021 could be the foundation for many more virtual events to come for United Way of Santa Cruz County.

Project Results

The capstone project was successful, but not in the way it was intended to be. Prior to the Campaign Kickoff, United Way held Stuff the Bus and their annual Golf Tournament. Both of these events raised an enormous amount of money for their youth programs and United Way as a whole. So when it came to the fundraising capstone project it was hard to raise more money. They then had to think quickly and pivot the Reimagine 2021 Campaign Kickoff. This event changed immediately from an open invitation to an invite only event for those who financially supported United Way during the pandemic. They eliminated the auction portion of the event and became flexible with the goal of \$10,000. It was then decided that instead of charging \$100 for the cocktail sets, the organization would take on the cost for the participants as a thank you. Lastly, after removing several things from the event, the program was shortened to 5:30-7:00pm instead of 5:00-7:00pm.

Even after the staff had to pull off what seemed like the impossible, changing almost the whole event just one week before the event, it was successful. The program started at 5:30 pm, for the first 30 minutes of the program the event coordinator presented a thank you slide show presentation. During the whole event they also had a donation page accessible for anyone to donate but it was not mandatory. After they thanked the donors for the impact they had on United Way, they then moved on to the cocktail hour. It began at 6:00 and went until 7:00pm during this time all the participants were having a blast and were enjoying themselves. The event ended in all laughs and smiles.

On October 18, 2021 everyone attended a meeting to recap the event. After evenalting the data, it showed that 40 out of the 50 participants attended the event. This was an awesome turnout! The overall fundraising goal was \$10,000 and they were able to raise \$5,000 at the end of the event. This was huge because no participant was required to donate so, that means they donated willingly which was not expected. After taking out the cost of the kits which was \$1,000 it left United Way with \$4,000 as profit for their youth programs. Even though it wasn't the intended goal and the event didn't go as planned, it was still very successful. They couldn't have asked for a better outcome and neither could the participants.

Conclusion & Recommendations

United Way of Santa Cruz County has been an asset for the community for many years, they help youth and families but they also help during emergencies. Unfortunately, when the pandemic hit, United Way was not prepared for the financial devastation it would bring. It was so bad to the point where they almost had to close their doors. If this would have happened it would have impacted the community greatly. This is why it was essential to come up with a capstone

project that would address the lack of economic support for United Way of Santa Cruz County. This is where the idea of planning and hosting a fundraiser event was born.

The thought of hosting an event sounded fun and exciting but it was a lot of work. If planning an event wasn't stressful enough, now there was an added stress of the pandemic. It took the whole United Way team to make this event happen. It took strong leadership, organization, and time management to help everything come together. At the beginning of the implementation process it was running smoothly but as time went on they were running into more and more obstacles. Things such as limited donations, several events planned prior to the event, and limited resources due to the pandemic. Even though the odds were against this project the event was very much successful and did in fact help address the financial issue.

For future events that might be held by either the organization or by an individual, it is important to plan and be prepared for any obstacles that may occur. Some recommendations would be to make sure there are no events planned around the same time. This is because it is hard to ask for too many donations at the same time for different events. One event will always take priority over the other. Another recommendation would be to be able to adapt and become flexible if the original plan doesn't work or doesn't come out the way it was intended to.

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Scope of Work

Activities	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Create Sponsorship Letter	April 12, 2021	Ash Gonzalez
Create Sponsorship list & Mailing List	April 20, 2021	Keisha Browder & Ash Gonzale
Create Sponsorship Table	April 22, 2021	Keisha Browder & Ash Gonzalez
Create In-Kind Letter	April 25, 2021	Ash Gonzalez
Meeting to secure a date	May 17, 2021	Keisha Browder & Ash Gonzalez
Create Save The Date Graphics	May 20, 2021	Ash Gonzalez
Connect with Mixologist for Cocktail Hour	May 30, 2021	Keisha Browder & Ash Gonzalez
“The Fundraising Window” This is when we wait for money to roll in after notice of the event.	June 1, 2021 Until August/September 2021	Keisha Browder & Dawn Bruckel
Create donation page	June 1, 2021	Ash Gonzalez
Send out Reimagine invitations	September 14, 2021	Dawn Bruckel
Event Preparation	October 12 &13 , 2021	Dawn Bruckel
Reimagine 2021 Campaign Kickoff Event	October 14, 2021	Keisha Browder
Check-In After Event	October 18, 2021	Keisha Browder & Ash Gonzalez