

THE CHRONICLE OF

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I Live Here
I Give Here

Inside the frenetic, exhilarating, draining, and ultimately successful Amplify Austin — and how giving days like it are raising millions in unrestricted cash.

**HIGH ON
PSYCHEDELICS**
Medical studies
rely on donors 22

ALLY IN GRIEF
A charity grows fast
to help military
families 28

FIGHTING HATE
The case for
foundations
to spend big 38



FREE MONEY!

Inside the frenetic, exhilarating, draining, and ultimately successful Amplify Austin — and how giving days like it are raising millions in unrestricted cash.

By HEATHER JOSLYN



FUNDRAISING

AUSTIN, TEX.

IT'S HAPPY HOUR inside the offices of the St. David's Foundation, a local grant maker that's been transformed on this gray, drizzly Thursday into command central for the city's annual giving day, Amplify Austin.

Zack Flores, director of philanthropic programming at Tito's Handmade Vodka, a longtime Amplify sponsor, pours drinks for volunteers and the seven staff members of I Live Here I Give Here, a local nonprofit that runs this 24-hour giving marathon.

This year, its seventh, the event aims to raise \$11 million, \$1 million more than the previous

year's goal — or \$7,639 a minute. It's reaching for this stretch goal with a new executive director — Courtney Manuel, a veteran fundraiser from the University of Texas, on the job a mere five weeks. Amplify is also being run for the first time on a new fundraising platform, GiveGab. More than 740 charities are hoping to raise money from the event.

If the people overseeing Amplify are nervous, they're hiding it well — or maybe the vodka and Stevie Wonder tunes help.

Finally, it's go time. Amplify Austin's command-central team members settle into their chairs, don their headsets, and fire up their laptops. At 6 p.m., after a countdown, a cheer ris-

6:00PM

0 TOTAL DONORS

0 TOTAL DONATIONS

7:00PM

1,202 TOTAL DONORS

\$379,216 TOTAL DONATIONS

8:00PM

2,291 TOTAL DONORS

\$872,983 TOTAL DONATIONS



CELEBRATION TIME
 Staff members of I Live Here I Give Here mark another milestone during Amplify Austin. The 24-hour event raised \$11.2 million.

TAMIR KALIFA FOR THE CHRONICLE

es. Everyone stares at the massive flat-screen TV at the front of the room, which shows the event's home page and its gift ticker. They look back at their laptops. Then, brows furrowed, back to the unbudging ticker.

After a few seconds' anxious pause, someone murmurs, "Refresh the site."

A click later, the digital ticker starts clattering. Ten minutes later, it hits \$172,197.

A Boom in Giving Days

Giving days have spread far and wide over the past decade. In Dallas, North Texas Giving Day,

the largest regional philanthropy marathon, raised \$48 million in 2018, its 10th year. Giving Tuesday, the day of charitable giving that occurs after Thanksgiving, saw charities in 47 countries participate last year, raising \$380 million for charities in the United States alone.

Charlie Mulligan, chief executive of GiveGab, says he expects to work with about 200 giving days this year. At GiveCampus, which runs a fundraising platform for schools and colleges, they're on track to do 1,000 events in 2019, according to Kestrel Linder, the company's CEO.

And there's more on the way, suggests Mul-

Continued on Page 10

9:00PM 3,275 TOTAL DONORS \$1,080,597 TOTAL DONATIONS ■ **10:00PM** 4,081 TOTAL DONORS \$1,296,212 TOTAL DONATIONS ■ **11:00PM** 9,907 TOTAL DONORS \$2,867,252 TOTAL DONATIONS



TAMIR KALIFA FOR THE CHRONICLE

NEW ON THE JOB

Courtney Manuel, a veteran fundraiser from the University of Texas, took the helm at the nonprofit that runs Amplify Austin only five weeks before the event.

Continued from Page 9

ligan: “The vast majority of areas of the country don’t even have a giving day. If I tell my friends, my family, they’ve almost never heard of giving day. They don’t know what I’m talking about. So I think there’s a lot of room for growth in this area.”

Fundraisers have gotten better with each passing year at tweaking their events for maximum giving, rounding up matches and corporate sponsors and stoking competition with leader boards and hourly prizes. Giving days have helped charities corral new and younger donors. And they’ve

given many charities a much-needed crash course in online fundraising — and a rare chance to raise unrestricted support.

In an era in which donor data is king, a giving day like Amplify gives small charities some of the same advantages enjoyed by big organizations, says Manuel.

“A lot of small charities just don’t have the labor,” she says. “They’re shooting darts in the dark.”

Amplify Austin is one of the country’s older giving days. It’s run by an experienced team that operates smoothly, with no tech meltdowns so far, and a steady trajectory of growth.

In addition to raising money for local charities, it’s become an R&D lab of sorts, experimenting with innovations it hopes other fundraising events can adopt. (North Texas Giving Day, for instance, took cues from Amplify on helping charities’ supporters set up fundraising pages, according to Susan Swan Smith, chief giving day officer at the Communities Foundation of Texas. For more, see Page 18.)

The giving-day phenomenon over all, though, has suffered growing pains. Some communities aren’t a great fit for the giving marathons; Silicon Valley Community Foundation, for instance, suspended its giving day after 2016’s event, citing donor fatigue. And technology has sometimes proved an unreliable partner: On Give Local America Day in 2016, donation forms on the platform Kimbia loaded slowly or not at all, and the day’s haul was less than half of the previous year’s. The catastrophic performance caused an exodus of participants the next year, and now the event is kaput. (Kimbria is now owned by GiveGab.)

Amplify’s platform operates year-round, and it’s only one of several programs I Live Here runs to teach local residents about the value of philanthropy at all levels.

“There’s going to come a time when giving days are less trendy,” Manuel says. “And so what I wake up every day and think about is how to keep our giving day relevant, as things around social media and fundraising continue to change so quickly.”

Stoking Civic Pride

The city’s weak giving culture led to the creation of Amplify Austin and of I Live Here I Give Here. In 2003, Patsy Woods Martin read a ranking of America’s 50 most generous cities in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. Austin came in at a dismal 48. Incensed, she started I Live Here, originally as a program at the Austin Community Foundation, to promote charitable giving.

In 2011, Cindy Work Abell, then an I Live Here board member, ran across a *Chronicle* article about some of the first regional giving days. She showed it to Martin, and they decided to create their own event, asking the St. David’s Foundation for help.

The grant maker, which supports health causes, saw the giving-day concept as a way to help its beneficiaries broaden their support, get up to speed with online fundraising, and raise cash for operating expenses.

“It’s high, high energy,” says Earl Maxwell, the

Continued on Page 12



3:00AM

15,597
TOTAL DONORS\$5,335,948
TOTAL DONATIONS

4:00AM

15,656
TOTAL DONORS\$5,436,193
TOTAL DONATIONS

5:00AM

15,688
TOTAL DONORS\$5,451,950
TOTAL DONATIONS

“I don’t think there’s a ceiling. I think the \$11 million could easily become \$20 million.”

Continued from Page 10

foundation’s chief executive. “It’s free money for a grant partner. They don’t have to apply; they don’t have to report metrics.”

The foundation, which grants about \$75 million each year and is financed from the revenue of a regional hospital system, was also interested in boosting Austin’s philanthropic culture, including among local businesses. Now one of America’s fastest-growing metro areas, Austin has since the 1990s become a magnet for the technology industry; Dell remains a mainstay, while Google and Amazon opened beachheads here early this decade.

Compared with other Texas cities, Austin’s money is new, Maxwell says: “We don’t have century-old oil wealth like Dallas and Houston.” Matching gifts have become an increasingly vital part of Amplify, as they have for many giving days. This year, St. David’s provided \$1 million to match gifts to its 80 grantees that participated in the event; in addition, it provided \$300,000 to help all participants cover fundraising expenses, including gift-processing fees.

Maxwell, who is retiring later this year after 12 years at St. David’s helm, sees a bright future for Amplify.

“I don’t think there’s a ceiling,” he says. “I think the \$11 million could easily become \$20 million.”

On the Town

On a successful regional giving day, the spotlight sweeps the city, with promotional, in-person events popping up all over town. Amplify is no exception; Thursday evening includes a viewing party (of the event’s online ticker and leader boards and Facebook Live videos) at the Mexic-Arte Museum, a benefit show at Austin’s fabled Continental Club, and a crowded event to promote

local charities at the Oskar Blues Brewery.

Inside Oskar Blues, the band Shy Beast unleashes a flurry of sound while patrons tuck into tacos and craft brews. Along the back wall, people from several charities sit at information tables, straining to answer questions about their work over the music. The Austin Humane Society, its staff members cradling small dogs ready for adoption, has no trouble making new friends despite the din — and ultimately raised more than \$58,000 on a goal of \$55,000.

Lee Miller, a volunteer at Health Alliance for Austin Musicians, or HAMM, gamely shouts answers to questions about his group: the 56,000 health-care appointments it financed last year for nearly 3,000 local, uninsured players, and the \$150,000 goal it has for Amplify.

This is hardly the only opportunity the group has to promote its mission in this city known for its world-class music scene.

“We’re pretty well known in town,” yells Miller, “Every week we have a table somewhere.” (Ultimately, HAMM’s Amplify haul was nearly \$239,000.)

A Year of Planning

Back at command central, a little before 9 on Thursday evening, as the ticker approaches its first \$1 million, Christine Herlin is at her laptop, smiling broadly, watching her carefully laid plans unfold. Herlin, I Live Here’s manager of customer and nonprofit relations, is the group’s liaison to the 740-plus charities that are participating in Amplify.

After each year’s Amplify wraps, the staff and its technology provider debrief, and brainstorming begins for the next event. In October, charities begin to register; the organizations are trained in how best to maximize their fundraising poten-

GIVING DAYS’ DECADE OF GROWTH — AND GROWING PAINS

2009

- First regional giving days launch in Minnesota and the Dallas and Pittsburgh regions.
- Give to the Max Day, the Minnesota event, raises \$14 million in its first year.
- The inaugural North Texas Giving Day raises \$4 million. Pittsburgh’s first Day of Giving brings in \$1.2 million.

2010

- Colorado Gives Day launches, bringing in \$8.4 million in its first year.



2011

- GiveBIG starts in Seattle. Its sponsor, the Seattle Foundation, bows out after the 2018 event, with \$116 raised over eight years; the event continues in 2019, organized by 501 Commons and Encore Media.

2012

- Giving Tuesday, a project of New York’s 92nd St Y and the United Nations Foundation, launches.
- An annual giving day starts at Columbia University; hundreds more colleges follow.
- The Knight Foundation starts its four-year Giving Day Initiative. The program makes grants to support 49 campaigns, which raised \$116 million, and produces a report and a playbook for starting such events.

2013

- Giving days emerge that focus on specific missions, such as Give Out Day. Sponsored by the Horizons Foundation, the event has raised more than \$6 million to date for LGBTQ causes nationwide.
- The Razoo platform, powering Minnesota’s Give to the Max, which raises just over \$17 million, crashes. The company makes amends by refunding part of charities’ gift-processing fees.

6:00AM

15,813
TOTAL DONORS

\$5,489,042
TOTAL DONATIONS

tial from then till January, including lessons in enlisting volunteers to raise money from friends and family, producing social-media content, and raising those all-important matching dollars ahead of the late February or early March event. (Many participants have raised their own matches in addition to those available from St. David's and other sponsoring partners.)

"We focus on how can you get the community to choose you," Herlin says.

Participating charities are also coached in creating an organization profile for Amplify's website. And they're given guidance in retaining the new donors they'll pick up online during the giving day.

The coaching is working: Of the charities that participated in last year's Amplify, 88 percent returned this year, Manuel says.

Tech Jitters

As the 10 o'clock hour approaches on Thursday, the pace slackens back at command central. The ticker inches along in the \$1.3 million range. The phones are silent.

At 10:06 p.m., Manuel looks at the ticker and notes another milestone: "One point five, guys!"

Last year, someone mentions, it took till midnight to reach that number.

But as the hour creeps along, the troops are yawning, punchy, rally-proof. Their day started early this morning.

"I don't know English anymore," jokes Amy Morris, I Live Here's director of finance, to stray giggles.

Soon people start packing up for the night, with instructions to return about 6 a.m.

As command central winds down, all the scheduled gifts — pledges made in the days before

Continued on Page 14



TAMIR KALIFA FOR THE CHRONICLE

WITH THE BAND
Western Youth plays a benefit at the Continental Club Gallery for the charity House of Songs.



HELLO KITTY
The Austin Humane Society promotes its mission at Oskar Blues Brewery.

TAMIR KALIFA FOR THE CHRONICLE

2014

■ The inaugural Give Local America launches. The event, aimed at encouraging donors to contribute through community foundations, raises \$50 million.

2015

■ Only 18 percent of Americans know about Giving Tuesday, compared with 93 percent who know about Black Friday, the retail-shopping bonanza after Thanksgiving, according to a survey by the John Templeton Foundation.

■ #iGiveCatholic, a campaign held on Giving Tuesday to support Catholic dioceses, schools, and charities, is started by the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Later, Catholic organizations in Atlanta, Cleveland, Santa Fe, and other cities join.

2016

■ Give Local America is hobbled when Kimbia, its giving platform, crashes. It raises \$29 million, down from nearly \$69 million the previous year. Fund-raisers around the country express concerns about the vulnerabilities of online-giving technology.

■ After three years, the Community Foundation of Silicon Valley announces it will not run its Silicon Valley Gives event in 2017, citing donor fatigue and concerns over online gift-processing fees. The event has never been restarted.

2017

■ Give Local America runs again, with 12 community foundations participating, down about two-thirds from the previous year. It has not been continued since.



2018

■ North Texas Giving Day raises \$48 million, the largest haul of any regional giving day.

■ Purdue University, the largest college-based event, raises nearly \$38 million.

■ Giving Tuesday raises \$380 million in the United States alone, despite some tech glitches from Blackbaud.

■ Kimbia is sold to rival GiveGab.

8 Ways Giving Days Are Evolving

Mobile-friendly appeals. On Give to the Max Day in Minnesota last November, the majority of donors made a gift using a tablet or smartphone, and other giving days are seeing big year-over-year increases in mobile giving. “You have to build strategies designed for mobile,” says Jake Blumberg, executive director of GiveMN, the nonprofit that runs Give to the Max Day, which supports Minnesota charities (and raised \$21.1 million last fall, its 10th anniversary).

Fundraisers need to remember how it’s difference from, say, sending emails to supporters, Blumberg says. “It’s the difference between a couple hundred words and two images being visible on a screen and seeing two sentences and maybe one image being visible and read.”

Mobile-friendly payment. Payment options that don’t require donors to type out their credit card numbers on tiny screens will increasingly matter more, says Kestrel Linder, chief executive of GiveCampus, a fundraising platform for schools and colleges that’s on track to run as many as 1,000 giving days this year. PayPal, Apple Pay, Google Pay, and other payment options can make transactions more seamless.

And don’t forget donor-advised

funds: Make transferring cash from these accounts one of the options for donors at checkout. At the Communities Foundation of Texas, more than one donor-advised-fund holder in four gives on North Texas Giving Day, according to Susan Swan Smith, chief giving-day officer.

Video. Facebook Live, YouTube, Instagram Stories, and more are increasingly important to giving days, says Linder.

It helps keep supporters engaged. “A couple of times a day, I’m going to come back to see the athletic director doing something goofy or watch a message from the [college] president that’s being livestreamed,” he says.

Online profiles. Regional giving-day organizers are helping charities that participate in their events create online profiles that provide contact information and describe what the nonprofit does, what the gifts will support, and sometimes the organization’s financial data. The profiles tout matching gifts the charity has raised to make supporters’ contributions go further — and often feature video to help make the pitch.

Online shopping carts. Many donors support more than one charity on a giving day. Amplify Austin, for exam-

ple, finds that its donors support an average of two causes. Rather than making donors check out for each cause they support, giving-day organizers are favoring platforms that let people easily make more than one gift at a time.

Fundraising focused on a single cause. Some giving-day events are succeeding by targeting specific missions. For instance, the Pittsburgh Foundation holds a “Critical Needs Alert” giving day in May, a 16-hour marathon to support frontline social-service charities. The Archdiocese of New Orleans started #iGiveCatholic in 2015 to piggyback on Giving Tuesday each year and gather support for local Catholic congregations, schools, and other charities; similar Catholic-focused giving days have sprung up in other cities.

At Kansas State University, a new daylong event in March called “All In for K-State” raised more than \$320,000 to combat hunger on campus. The university discovered that 40 percent of students skip meals due to financial issues; the campaign supported Cat’s Cupboard, the on-campus food pantry, and has helped make it available to university employees in need as well. The drive not only raised money but also uncovered major new supporters; for

instance, Dillons Stores, a supermarket chain, made a \$50,000 gift, its first to the university, according to Eric Holderness, associate vice president for development.

Tracking pixels. Tiny bits of code, like Facebook Pixel, can now help more charities track donors who visit giving-days websites and fail to give — and then follow them on their social-media or Google accounts with targeted ads aimed at nudging them to follow through. Tracking in this fashion can also make sure that thank-you ads appear in donors’ web activity once they give. “It enables real-time stewardship,” Linder says.

In-person connections. Holding events ahead or during a giving day can expose donors to the feeling of participating in something bigger than themselves, which leads to gifts. And don’t forget that giving days, and charities themselves, are often fueled by volunteers. At some events, such as North Texas Giving Day, charities have begun asking donors to pledge volunteer hours as well as money. During last September’s event in Dallas, people pledged more than 430,000 hours — the equivalent of about 200 full-time employees. —HEATHER JOSLYN

All day and night, charities compete to win “power hours,” in which they vie to attract the most donors or dollars raised.

Continued from Page 13

the big event — are released into the system. The process continues over the next three hours, a way of easing the load on the system by processing gifts while most donors sleep. By 11 p.m., the ticker shows more than \$2.8 million.

Later, Mulligan, of GiveGab, who is part of the company’s team on duty at Amplify’s command central during the event, will explain that a small glitch occurred, which was then ironed out: Gift processing “kept churning,” he says, but a caching issue was briefly preventing the data from processing in real time.

Power Hours

While most of the city slumbers, Amplify’s elves are still at work. I Live Here’s Catherine Lucchesi, director of communications and programming (who left in April to pursue a business degree), monitors social-media posts from participating charities, answering questions and thanking donors.

And every hour, competition keeps churning. Like many giving days, Amplify offers an array

of prizes to encourage charities to rally their supporters. Every hour is a “power hour,” in which nonprofits vie to raise the most money (each of the first 12 hours) or attract the most donors (each of the second 12). The power-hour winners get an extra \$1,000. To rally donors for those overnight hours, some charities tell their supporters to set their alarm clocks so they can wake up and give.

For instance: Shadow Cats Rescue, which operates a sanctuary for special-needs felines, will go on to win the 1 a.m. power hour. It leans heavily on Amplify: While recording a Facebook Live on Thursday afternoon at St. David’s, a representative mentions that the giving day is the charity’s biggest annual fundraising event. (It ultimately takes in \$111,763, just a little shy of its \$120,000 goal.)

Amplify also doles out four \$5,000 grand prizes, the costs covered by sponsors: one for the charity that raises the most money in pledges before the event starts and the others for the large, medium, and small organizations that raise the most total dollars.

With more than \$559,000 raised, Boys & Girls

Continued on Page 16

7:00AM 16,128 TOTAL DONORS \$5,546,573 TOTAL DONATIONS - 8:00AM 16,634 TOTAL DONORS \$5,668,958 TOTAL DONATIONS - 9:00AM 17,656 TOTAL DONORS \$5,898,888 TOTAL DONATIONS



TAMIR KALIFA FOR THE CHRONICLE

MEET THE PRESS

Courtney Manuel promotes Amplify Austin with “We Are Austin” co-host Trevor Scott. Participating in a giving day gives small charities a bigger spotlight than they could get on their own.

Nonprofits get creative for Amplify: A theater company, for instance, runs a campaign with a Game of Thrones theme.

Continued from Page 14

Clubs of Austin ruled the charities’ leader board and copped the grand prize in the large-organization category. It owes a big part of its success to the fundraising of its volunteers: Of the 10 people who brought in the most during Amplify, four raised money for the Boys & Girls Clubs, for a total of about \$266,000.

On Camera

In North Austin, it’s 8:40 a.m., and Amplify’s ticker is approaching \$5.9 million. Manuel, wearing a smart navy-blue suit with a flowing scarf, has arrived at the studios of KEYE, the city’s CBS affiliate for an appearance on *We Are Austin*, a morning show.

Inside the studio, Manuel encounters the arch nemesis of skirt-wearers everywhere: a high stool. Before the show goes live, she practices sitting demurely. (She’ll do the entire interview with her hands in her lap, holding down her scarf as it covers both legs.) *We Are Austin* co-host Trevor Scott — in jeans, a mustard-colored T-shirt, and a gray blazer — hops onto his stool beside her.

During the live interview, Manuel hits all the key points: how Amplify has raised \$46 million for charities to date, how so many local companies match employee donations, how the average Amplify donor supports at least two charities, the

matches by St. David’s, Tito’s Handmade Vodka, and more.

“Every dollar counts!” Scott enthuses.

“Every little bit counts when we meet our \$11 million,” Manuel agrees.

“I love that we just said *when*, by the way, and not *if*,” he replies cheerily.

Video Stars

Throughout Thursday and Friday, local TV news crews will tromp through command central. Manuel isn’t the only one facing cameras: Lucchesi leads a procession of charities participating in the giving day through recording videos for social media. On Friday, Lucchesi notes that Amplify’s social-media traffic is up by 40 percent over the previous year.

Lara Toner Haddock, artistic director of Austin Playhouse, which is running a *Game of Thrones*-themed campaign, and Susannah Winslow, vice president for development at KLRU, a public television station, stop by command central to shoot some video. “You can do TV, but Facebook Live is so much more informal,” Haddock says.

The ability to attract younger donors appeals to both of them, and it’s essential for nonprofits with older donor bases.

“But what is younger? Is it always millennial?”

Continued on Page 18

10:00AM

19,081
TOTAL DONORS

\$6,281,976
TOTAL DONATIONS

11:00AM

20,494
TOTAL DONORS

\$6,586,248
TOTAL DONATIONS

12:00PM

21,858
TOTAL DONORS

\$6,896,415
TOTAL DONATIONS

1:00PM

23,074
TOTAL DONORS\$7,130,358
TOTAL DONATIONS

2:00PM

24,280
TOTAL DONORS\$7,447,762
TOTAL DONATIONS

3:00PM

25,668
TOTAL DONORS\$7,790,626
TOTAL DONATIONS*Continued from Page 16*

I'd be happy with a 45-year-old donor," muses Winslow, whose group's campaign this year taps *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* nostalgia. (Both groups set \$60,000 goals: KLRU raised just over \$55,000, the Playhouse just over \$59,000.)

Near 2:30 on Friday afternoon, with Amplify's ticker at \$7 million, two co-founders of Carrying Hope stop by to shoot a Facebook Live. The tiny group provides backpacks and diaper bags full of essentials, like formula and pajamas, for children placed in foster care. The charity's seed money was raised two years ago through Amplify.

One of the co-founders, Rachel Garza, is dressed as "Hope the Hedgehog," the charity's mascot, while the other, Mauri Elbel, makes a pitch to viewers. Garza's preschool-age twins, Abigale and Dylan, also appear; Abigale periodically tries to dance with her costume-clad mother, while Dylan wanders in and out of frame.

"We're crazy here at command central!" Lucchesi proclaims at one point.

Video chaos aside, Carrying Hope is having an impact: The group already prepares bags of supplies for every child newly placed in foster care in Austin's Travis County and is starting to expand to San Antonio, Waco, and elsewhere. But today also shows the limits of a giving day for sustainable fundraising: On a \$7,500 goal, the group raised only \$1,200.

Corporate Competition

On Friday afternoon, employees of Cirrus Logic, an audio tech company, are gathered for their weekly happy hour in a multipurpose space that

closely resembles an Austin nightspot: There's a bar, and band fliers are plastered on the wall behind a stage. Next to the empty stage hovers a flat-screen TV, displaying Amplify's leader boards. The ticker is speeding past \$8.3 million.

Cirrus is crushing the corporate competition, first among local workplaces in terms of money raised.

"We began to match contributions dollar for dollar. That made a huge difference," says Bill Schnell, manager of public relations at Cirrus. (With nearly one in five employees giving, the company ultimately raised just over \$205,000 during Amplify, including matches.)

The company's CEO, Jason Rhode, ambles by, wearing a T-shirt for the charity Emancipet, a low-cost spay and neuter clinic he and his wife support. He looks at the leader board and cackles: a friend and business rival's company is lagging behind Cirrus.

As Rhode moves on, Schnell says he thinks there's room for Amplify to turn up the volume: "There's so many in need in this city. There's always an opportunity to do even more."

Amplify's leader board of companies, which counts employee gifts, matching gifts, and the percentage of employees who are contributing, was something that I Live Here developed a couple of years ago and hopes to help GiveGab spread to other giving days, says Lindsay Muse, chief operations officer of I Live Here. It's helped "gamify" corporate giving, she says, and to stoke business leaders' competitive fires.

"I think it's helped companies see that corporate philanthropy isn't only from top-down," she

Continued on Page 21



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- **Hosting an Online Fundraising Event:** The 'What If' Checklist
- **An 8-Week Plan for Success** on Giving Tuesday or Any Giving Day

philanthropy.com/GivingDays

New Ways to Try to Avoid Tech Meltdowns

CONCERNS about a possible tech meltdown are always on fundraisers' minds on giving days. Many fundraisers are still smarting after the failure of thousands of donation pages for Give Local America, a nationwide event. And tensions grew higher after Blackbaud customers experienced temporary service outages during the last two Giving Tuesdays.

Technology experts understand the frustration but say it's naive to expect even a robust system to handle the volume of donors who give in a single day without the occasional hiccup.

Amy Sample Ward, CEO of NTEN, a group of nonprofit-technology professionals, said in an email to the *Chronicle* that charities need to be wary of "putting so much emphasis on a single day. Any day of the year

there are things that may happen beyond our control."

Participating in giving days, Ward added, "should be part of a larger and more holistic fundraising strategy and campaign. This is how organizations can better manage issues that arise in real time."

Donating Early

Still, nonprofits are finding ways to take advantage of the excitement a single day of giving offers while minimizing the risks of technology snafus.

One way some giving days are managing the crush of gift processing is to allow donors to pledge gifts ahead of time, as Amplify Austin and other regional events have done. It's intended to give charity supporters more flexibility in deciding when to give.

But there's another advantage:

Processing those early-bird gifts overnight, when most users are sleeping, makes a platform less likely to crash, notes Catherine Lucchesi, former director of communications and programming of I Live Here I Give Here, the nonprofit that runs the seven-year-old Amplify Austin event.

I Live Here's chief operations officer, Lindsay Muse, keeps an eye on giving-day technology; the organization switched from Civicorps to GiveGab for this year's Amplify in February because of its integration of giving-day and peer-to-peer fundraising functions, she says.

"We're constantly evaluating the landscape and looking at how we can meet donors where they are," Muse says. "And that changes."

This year, for instance, Amplify, which raised \$11.2 million for more than 740 local charities, experiment-

ed with Hustle, a texting platform that allows charities and their supporters to remind friends to give. Groups like Planned Parenthood have had success with it, finding that the texts have a higher open rate than emails do, Muse says.

More charities are finding that giving days, and online fundraising more generally, are unearthing robust support, she says: "We've had a lot of organizations that did big galas or fundraising events sunset those because they realize they can meet new donors so much easier when they put their marketing resources behind an online fundraising campaign."

Tech's role in giving days will certainly grow, she says. "Who would have thought when we started Amplify that people would be donating by Alexa, and chatbot? Those are places we want to go." —HEATHER JOSLYN

4:00PM**27,315**
TOTAL DONORS**\$8,266,420**
TOTAL DONATIONS**5:00PM****28,963**
TOTAL DONORS**\$8,711,721**
TOTAL DONATIONS**6:00PM****31,108**
TOTAL DONORS**\$11,221,087**
TOTAL DONATIONS

Continued from Page 18

says. It's given them more understanding that giving should not only be aligned with business goals, but it's about your employees and their passions."

There's plenty of room for growth, too. Amazon and Google, which both have much bigger local work forces than Cirrus — which has roughly 800 Austin workers — languish at Nos. 20 and 22, respectively, among companies on the leader board. Amazon's and Google's Austin employees ultimately raise a combined total of about \$16,000.

A Final Wave

In the final hour, back at St. David's Foundation, the ticker numbers scroll, stutter, and hiccup. Suddenly, the total rushes past \$9 million.

In the back row of tables, Manuel nervously runs her hands through her hair.

The GiveGab crew keep stoic watch, troubleshooting anything that could slow the ticker's roll.

At 5:36 p.m., the ticker hits \$10 million. The

room erupts into cheers and a sloppy version of the Wave.

Lucchesi calls a donor who's won the hour's "golden ticket," an extra \$100 awarded to a supporter picked at random, to give to any charity that person chooses. There's only 15 minutes left to use it, she tells them.

In the final moments, command central goes nearly silent with tension except for the furious clicking of laptop keys. Volunteers and staff stare at their screens and at the TV ticker.

Ten point nine.

"Where's the champagne?" asks Abell, the former board member. Someone's laptop plays Hall and Oates's "You Make My Dreams Come True."

And suddenly it's over. In a final burst, donors push Amplify Austin 2019 over the top, for a total of \$11.2 million.

The crew cheers, applauds, filters out of command central's laptop-strewn war room, headed for an in-house party. Manuel leans against a wall, letting out a sigh. "Incredible," she says, grinning.

On Monday, Amplify Austin 2020 begins. ■

A leader board tracks the local companies whose employees give the most, fueling competition among business rivals.



TAMIR KALIFA FOR THE CHRONICLE

LOUD AND PROUD

Current and former board members of I Live Here I Give Here celebrate Amplify Austin's reaching its \$11 million goal at the event's command central. The event's organizers see lots of potential ahead as they continue to tap the city's generosity.