
THE CHRONICLE OF
PHILANTHROPY

NEWS AND ANALYSIS

MARCH 04, 2019

✓ PREMIUM

Inside Austin's Drive to Raise \$11.2 Million for Small Charities in Just 24 Hours

By Heather Joslyn

AUSTIN, TEX.



TAMIR KALIFA FOR THE CHRONICLE

Amplify Austin, a 24-hour giving day aimed at fueling charitable giving here in one of America's fastest growing cities, raised \$11.2 million when it ended at 6 p.m. Friday.

The total bested the \$11 million goal organizers set and is \$1.2 million ahead of last year's haul.

That is an impressive number for an event that started just seven years ago in a city that is only now beginning to significantly tap the philanthropy of the growing number of technology-industry workers building their wealth here. And its success offers lessons for nonprofits seeking to attract new donors to local causes.

A group called I Live Here I Give Here runs the event, and its staff and volunteers field questions from donors and nonprofits.

Amplify Austin was suggested by a volunteer for the nonprofit I Live Here I Give Here, which runs the event. The organization's new leader, Courtney Manuel, a veteran fundraiser from the University of Texas at Austin, took the helm five weeks ago.

"Incredible," said Manuel, basking in the success of her seven-employee team just after a flurry of giving lifted the total in the event's final hour.

Giving days like Amplify, Manuel said, have grown in part because they allow charities to raise money for operating costs, which is often a tough case to make to donors. It also helps level the playing field for small charities in an era when donor data is giving larger organizations an advantage in targeting supporters. On a giving day, small groups can take advantage of the event's media spotlight and tech tools. "A lot of small charities don't have the labor," she says. "They're shooting darts in the dark."

746 Charities Benefit

The \$11.2 million total included matches, notably \$1.3 million from the St. David's Foundation, an Austin grant maker that has supported the seven-year-old event.

This year's event featured more than 740 participating charities, including local affiliates of national groups, like the YMCA and the Humane Society, along with arts groups like Austin Playhouse, environmental groups like the Hill Country Conservancy, and outfits like the Yellow Bike Project, a nonprofit community bicycle shop.

About 80 of the participating charities this year are St. David's grantees, including AIDS Services of Austin, Hospice Austin, and Any Baby Can, which provides supportive services to young parents and their infants.

Not surprisingly for a city that is home to Dell Computers, a big Google outpost, and many other tech-driven businesses, much of the giving-day promotion depended on online connections and promotion. St. David's provided office space for Amplify's "command central," where some of the participating charities sent representatives to film Facebook Live videos to help promote the event, and I Live Here I Give Here staff and volunteers worked on laptops and phones, fielding questions from donors and nonprofits.

This year's Amplify Austin was the first with a new giving platform, GiveGab. The platform was selected because it is one of the few that integrates giving day and peer-to-peer fundraising functions, said Lindsay Muse, I Live Here's senior director of operations.

As more giving days are doing, Amplify Austin allows donors to make pledges online in the weeks leading up to the event that will be processed on the day. This year for the first time, it also started making contributions from donor-advised funds an option on its giving page.

Also for the first time this year, Amplify encouraged people to send text messages to their friends and relatives to nudge donors who made pledges to last year's event to do the same for this year's. The text tactic was used in the Senate campaign of Rep. Beto O'Rourke, Manuel says.

Fueling Competition

Amplify Austin fuels giving during the event by stoking competition among both donors and charities. Throughout the event, it runs "power hour" contests, in which charities compete to raise the most dollars during a specific hour (for each of the event's first 12 hours) or get contributions from the largest number of donors (for the second 12 hours), giving the winning charities an extra \$1,000.

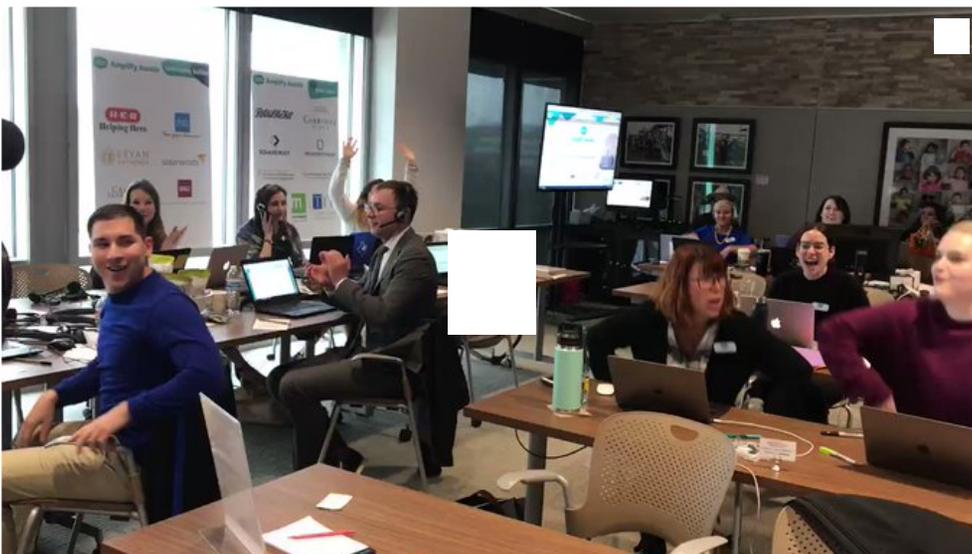
It also awards four \$5,000 grand prizes for large, medium-size, and small charities and for the group that raises the most in the run-up to the giving day. In addition, it recognizes the top individuals who raise money during the event on behalf of a cause. Local businesses put up the prize money. Leaderboards track progress, and "watching parties" spring up around the city.

Among the results:

- Grand-prize winners were Boys & Girls Clubs of the Austin Area (large nonprofit category), Shadow Cats, an animal-welfare charity (medium nonprofit), the Missy Project, a health group (small nonprofit), and the YMCA of Austin (most scheduled gifts). Shadow Cats, which runs a sanctuary for special-needs felines, not only filmed a Facebook live from Amplify Austin's headquarters but also posted other live videos Thursday evening; it rallied supporters to win the 1 a.m. "power hour" and ultimately took in \$117,000, more than its goal of \$100,000.
- With \$559,045 raised, the Boys & Girls Clubs brought in the most of any charity, followed by Hospice Austin, Central Texas Food Bank, YMCA of Austin, and Health Alliance for Austin Musicians. Boys & Girls Clubs was boosted by help from individual fundraisers including Terrell and Amelia Gates, who raised \$147,295 on behalf of the charity, making them the top individual fundraisers in the event. Four of the top 10 individual fundraisers in the event raised money for Boys & Girls Clubs.
- Cirrus Logic, an audio tech company with roots in Silicon Valley, raised \$205,719 for Amplify Austin, making it the top business fundraiser. Nearly one in five of its employees gave, and the company matched those gifts dollar for dollar. The company

promoted the event internally for a week leading up to Amplify and kept the event's business leader board up on TV screens at its weekly happy hour Friday afternoon.

Corporate supporters also helped spur giving more widely. For instance, Tito's Handmade Vodka, an Austin company and a longtime supporter of the event, this year gave an additional \$5 for each gift from donors who made a pledge including the hashtag #lovetitos.



Heather Joslyn

@joslynChronicle

Big moment: [#AmplifyATX](#) hits \$10 mil at 5:36 pm. Catch the wave!

3 6:39 PM - Mar 1, 2019

[See Heather Joslyn's other Tweets](#)

Grant Maker Support

Amplify Austin's roots sprang from a 2011 *Chronicle* article about the then-nascent giving days trend, according to Cindy Work Abell, a former I Live Here board member who now serves on an advisory committee for the organization.

Abell, who has served on the boards of several nonprofit theater groups, saw the *Chronicle* article and recognized an opportunity to help small donors get more traction out of their donations through giving days. "I realized how donors felt disempowered if they couldn't give big dollars," she says.

I Live Here I Give Here, started in 2007 with a mission to spur more philanthropy in Austin, embraced the idea. It reached out to the giving-day organizers quoted in the *Chronicle* article and enlisted the help of the St. David's Foundation, which supports health charities, to provide a match and get local nonprofits involved.

"St. David's support is critical to this whole thing," Abell says. "It incentivizes their grantees to really reach."

Amplify Austin is intended in part to spur not just individuals to give but also rapidly growing local businesses. The Texas metro region has become a major center for the tech industry; Google, for example, opened an office earlier this decade.

Compared with other Texas cities, Austin's money is new, says Earl Maxwell, St. David's chief executive, and many of its residents are, too. The city's profile began rising in the 1990s; before that, he says, it was dominated by the state legislature and the University of Texas. "We don't have century-old oil wealth like Dallas and Houston," he says.

The foundation derives its money from the St. David's HealthCare organization and made \$63 million in grants in 2017, the most recent year for which data is available. Maxwell is retiring at the end of 2019 but looks ahead to the continued success of Amplify Austin over the next several years.

"I don't think there's a ceiling," he says. "I think that \$11 million could easily become \$20 million."

Look for more coverage of Amplify Austin in May as part of the Chronicle's magazine cover article on the growth of the giving-days phenomenon. Check out @joslynChronicle for Chronicle senior editor Heather Joslyn's hour-by-hour coverage of the event.



TAMIR KALIFA FOR THE CHRONICLE

© 2019 The Chronicle of Philanthropy

1255 23rd Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037