

Giving Tuesday: Alternative Fundraising in the Era of COVID-19

Sanjay K.A. Jinka, BS¹, Sneha Gundavaru, BS¹, Whitney Stolnicki, MD¹, Lacey Madison, MBA, MEd, LSSBB¹

1. Department of Family and Community Medicine, College of Medicine, Northeast Ohio Medical University, Rootstown, OH, 44272

ABSTRACT

This abstract discusses a virtual alternative to Casino Night: Giving Tuesday. Non-profit community health services, including free clinics, provide many aspects of care to community individuals. These individual needs are amplified as community health services are strained both financially and physically by the COVID-19 pandemic. Community health workers have been shown to provide vital services to communities, including advocating on behalf of patients, transferring and interpreting information, and ensuring patients are connected to care.¹ In-person fundraising events for these programs are restricted, leaving free clinics and other services across the country in need of alternatives to fundraising due to restrictions placed by COVID-19. The Student-Run Free Clinic (SRFC) at Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED) has responded to this challenge by establishing a virtual fundraising initiative, which has profited close to double of in-person events. In the past, the SRFC at NEOMED has hosted a one-night in-person fundraising event, Casino Night, which annually generated a profit of over \$10,000. Casino Night was attended by 250 community members with earnings coming from both ticket sales and donations. However, due to COVID-19, a large gathering was not possible, rendering the SRFC at NEOMED's main fundraiser obsolete. In this abstract, we discussed a virtual alternative to Casino Night: Giving Tuesday. This world-wide initiative used social media to reach audiences traditional fundraising methods may neglect.² We compared the processes of planning and organizing our 2019 in-person fundraiser to the 2020 virtual fundraiser. Costs to host the fundraisers and overall proceeds were also compared. Giving Tuesday was the most successful fundraiser in clinic history with a profit of \$21,330.90 and an operating expense of \$0 to the SRFC. The NEOMED Foundation provided the SRFC free access to the online donation portal, GiveCampus, a service the university previously paid for. In comparison, the 2019 Casino Night fundraiser generated \$22,013 with an operating expense of \$11,000. Giving Tuesday achieved this success with 154 gifts across 153 unique donors. Of these donors, 88 were first time donors to the clinic (57.5%) giving \$9,630.90 (45.1%). In terms of planning time, Casino Night required a conservatively estimated 800 hours compared to 80 hours for Giving Tuesday. This data shows our virtual 2020 fundraiser yielded close to double the profit of our 2019 event with a largely new group of donors. Additionally, the virtual fundraiser required less planning time and zero upfront costs due to the generous support of the NEOMED foundation. This suggests virtual fundraisers can successfully replace in-person fundraising events during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further research is necessary to identify how public perceptions of the clinic differ between in-person and virtual fundraisers and if this success is reproducible in the post-COVID-19 era.

Keywords: fundraising, free clinic, Giving Tuesday

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

All authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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