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# Community Foundation-Led Giving Days: Understanding Donor Satisfaction and Philanthropic Patterns

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*Keywords: Philanthropy, giving days, online giving, donor satisfaction, crisis management*

## Introduction

Charitable giving in the United States reached an all-time high in 2016 at \$390.05 billion, with individuals donating \$281.86 billion of that total (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2017). Increasingly, donors opt to make these donations online. Online charitable transactions grew by 7.9 percent in 2016 when compared with the prior year, and online gifts represented 7.2 percent of all philanthropic donations in 2016 (MacLaughlin, 2017).

This shift poses challenges and creates opportunities for traditional philanthropic institutions such as community foundations. The bedrock of many community foundations is the triumvirate of endowment funds, donor-advised funds, and grantmaking. These tried and true methods help ensure long-term, sustained asset appreciation and targeted investment in communities through grant funding. Yet, as technology continues to alter the landscape of philanthropy, community foundations have had to adapt — and some are embracing new forms of philanthropic activity, such as giving days.

This article is a starting point in filling a void in research on the topic of charitable giving days. First, an overview will define giving days and offer some initial context. It is followed by a case study of Give Local DeKalb County — a giving day that experienced extraordinary challenges when the technology platform used to process online donations failed. The data from a survey conducted after the event offer unprecedented insight into donor satisfaction with the giving day in the face of a disastrous technology failure, while also providing a glimpse at giving

## Key Points

- This article examines Give Local America 2016, a giving day beset by a technology failure that created challenges for donors and community foundations throughout the United States, and explores the experiences of donors as giving day participants.
- Philanthropic giving days have gained popularity as opportunities for community foundations to engage new donors, create excitement about organized philanthropy, and democratize charitable giving. This article, examining survey data collected after a giving day led by a community foundation in northern Illinois, provides unique insight into donor satisfaction levels, opinions, and giving patterns.
- Data suggest that giving days are not crowding out donations at other times of the year, but instead are viewed as a supplementary option for the public to engage philanthropically. The article concludes with practical recommendations for community foundations that are considering hosting a giving day.

behavior that suggests giving days do not crowd out donations at other times of the year. Finally, practical considerations are offered for community foundation-led giving days.

## Giving Day Overview

Giving days are described in a variety of ways, such as a “virtual party for your cause” (McDonald, 2016, p. 3) or, more negatively, as an exercise in hashtag activism or slacktivism.

Stated plainly, a giving day is a 24-hour fundraising event.<sup>1</sup> These events are an opportunity to engage donors, volunteers, nonprofit organizations, and entire communities with the goal of raising funds in support of common causes and/or nonprofit activities. A specific giving day may be geographically focused (e.g., citywide, countywide, or statewide) or may be global in scope. Some organizations host their own giving days; other giving days invite nonprofits to take part, which provides donors the option to select the organizations they want to support from a list of participants.

Online engagement is considered vital for the success of a giving day. At the core of this engagement is the giving day website. This hub of information and resources is generally the central location for nonprofit organizations to register for participation and to create a profile that shares organizational information to build a case for donor support. The website also acts as the portal through which donations are processed and details about the giving day are shared publicly. Social media is an integral method for creating excitement and awareness about a giving day. Hashtags and frequent web-linking in social media posts help to increase engagement and direct the public to the giving day website. In addition, giving days may include matching funds or “gamification,” such as prizes and contests, which can be promoted to generate enthusiasm among nonprofits and donors.

Giving days are a recent phenomenon, with the first examples starting in 2009, but it was not until 2012 that the most widely known giving day — #GivingTuesday — was established. Occurring on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving, #GivingTuesday is an opportunity for people to give back — in contrast to the consumerism that marks Black Friday and Cyber Monday (#GivingTuesday, 2016). Outside of #GivingTuesday, there are numerous examples of localized giving days, many of which are coordinated by community foundations.

## Methodology

The following analysis incorporates a case study focused on the Give Local DeKalb County 2016 giving day. This giving day was coordinated by the DeKalb County Nonprofit Partnership, a membership-based nonprofit capacity-building program of the DeKalb County Community Foundation. The case relies on secondary information, observation, and firsthand accounts of the 2016 giving day.

Data derived from a donor survey are also used to explore donor satisfaction and the impact of Give Local DeKalb County on giving patterns at other times of the year. The seven-question survey was emailed to every donor with an email address who gave during Give Local DeKalb County 2016 (n = 946). It was sent on May 12, 2016, and data were collected for eight days, resulting in 160 responses for a response rate of 16.9 percent.

The case study and survey are used to better understand two questions:

1. How satisfied are donors with the overall philanthropic experience offered by giving days?
2. Do giving days reduce charitable contributions made at other times of the year?

Give Local DeKalb County 2016 serves as a crucial case to understand the first research question (see Eckstein, 1975). Given the technology issues associated with the giving day, it stands to reason that donors may express lower levels of satisfaction or outright frustration with the giving day experience. Using this least-likely case allows for a rigorous assessment of donor satisfaction while also adequately addressing the second research question.

## Case Study

For a variety of reasons, community foundations are often uniquely positioned to coordinate giving days: their connection with the nonprofit

<sup>1</sup> Other philanthropic initiatives, such as giving challenges or campaigns, are frequently time-bound but may not be a single day in length.

sector, their infrastructure for accepting and processing donations, and their relationships with donors, media, possible sponsors, and other community stakeholders. In addition, giving days tend to generally align with the mission of many community foundations. What follows is a case study of Give Local DeKalb County 2016, a giving day offered in DeKalb County, Illinois, on May 3, 2016.

### *DeKalb County, Illinois*

Situated 60 miles from Chicago, DeKalb County is one of 102 counties in Illinois and is home to 104,528 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017) residing in its 14 municipalities. Among the county's population, 92.2 percent are high school graduates and 30 percent have at least a bachelor's degree; both rates outpace the national average of 86.7 percent and 29.8 percent respectively. The median household income is slightly higher than the United States as a whole, at \$54,101 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The unemployment rate is generally stable and is currently at 4.5 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). DeKalb is a largely homogeneous county: 87.3 percent of its residents are white, a full 10 percentage points higher than the nation as a whole (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

DeKalb County has a rich agricultural history. Barbed wire was patented by an inventor from DeKalb in 1874 and DeKalb Genetics Corp. was founded in 1938, developing agricultural seeds with international distribution before being acquired by Monsanto Co. in 1998 (Bloomberg, 2017). While agriculture remains an important part of the county's economy, Northern Illinois University, Northwestern Medicine Kishwaukee Hospital, and distribution centers for businesses such as 3M and Target Corp. are among the largest employers (DeKalb County Economic Development Corp., 2017). In addition, there are over 500 IRS-registered nonprofit organizations in DeKalb County and nearly 7,000 nonprofit employees (see Bingle, 2015).

### *Community Foundation and Nonprofit Partnership*

The DeKalb County Community Foundation was created in 1993 with a \$3.6 million gift from

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Charlie and Mary Roberts, whose family started DeKalb Genetics Corp. Today, the foundation has over \$49 million in assets and typically disburses more than \$2 million in funding annually. The organization's eight staff members and 19 board members focus on building endowment, donor services, stewardship, grantmaking, and community initiatives (DeKalb County Community Foundation, 2017).

One such community initiative is the DeKalb County Nonprofit Partnership (DCNP), a membership-based, nonprofit capacity-building program of the community foundation. The DCNP's mission is to strengthen the nonprofit sector through leadership, professional development, and collaboration. Most active nonprofit organizations in DeKalb County are engaged in the DCNP, which has more than 100 members. The program has 1.25 FTE staff support and a steering committee consisting of nonprofit leaders who serve in an advisory role. The DCNP offers an annual conference, monthly trainings, an internship program, grant funding for professional development, board-member training, and networking opportunities, and serves as an information hub for members and the public.

*This shared governance encouraged ownership among nonprofit leaders and spread some of the administrative burden to committee members. Still, the bulk of the Give Local DeKalb County operation fell to a single foundation employee, who handled all matters — from communications and nonprofit registration to training and website content development.*

The foundation operates its giving day through the DCNP. While the public does not tend to differentiate the DCNP from the foundation, this arrangement helps distinguish the giving day from other philanthropic activities of the foundation, such as growing the endowment and encouraging charitable estate gifts. Moreover, the DCNP is a collective of nonprofit members and the giving day relies on its nonprofit participants to take an active part in promoting and organizing around the event. There are also capacity-building trainings offered in support of giving day participants, and capacity building is the core purpose of the DCNP. Finally, giving days require an intensive amount of communication and information-sharing. These are two roles that the DCNP plays year-round for the nonprofit community in DeKalb County, so it is well-positioned to assume these activities leading up to the giving day. Four giving days have been coordinated in DeKalb County for DCNP-member nonprofits. From 2014 to 2016, these giving days were part of the Give Local America campaign.

### *Give Local America and Give Local DeKalb County*

Kimbia Inc., an online fundraising technology and services firm, created the Give Local America initiative, a 24-hour crowdfunding event that took place in communities throughout the United States.<sup>2</sup> Started in 2014, the campaign raised \$53 million for 7,000 nonprofits; those figures jumped to \$68 million for 9,000 nonprofits in 2015. Kimbia described Give Local America as “an ideal crowdfunding format for community foundations,” which frequently served as the local coordinating partner and liaison between Kimbia and individual nonprofits and donors (Podder, 2015).

The DeKalb County Community Foundation participated in Give Local America from the start. In the first year, 37 DCNP-member nonprofit organizations participated in the giving day and jointly raised \$99,443 during the 24-hour period. These funds were matched proportionally by a \$20,000 “bonus pool” supplied by the foundation, resulting in a total of \$119,443 in distributions to the participating organizations. Over the next two years, Give Local DeKalb County benefited from increased name recognition, enhanced community support, and broader participation resulting in larger matching funds, more donations, and higher fundraising totals. (See Table 1.)

Give Local DeKalb County had a planning committee, coordinated by the DCNP, that consisted of nonprofit representatives charged with four primary responsibilities:

1. oversight and decision-making,
2. fundraising for the match incentive,
3. securing in-kind media donations for publicity, and
4. raising awareness through presentations and community outreach.

<sup>2</sup> Give Local America events now occur throughout the year. There were 20 giving days between February and June 2017, of which 12 were coordinated on May 2, 2017 (Kimbia Inc., 2017).

**TABLE 1** Give Local DeKalb County Results 2014–2016

	2014	2015	2016
<b>Number of participating nonprofits</b>	37	44	68
<b>Number of donations</b>	873	1,265	2,036
<b>Number of first-time donors (online only)</b>	193	216	338
<b>Number of states represented among donors</b>	22	25	30
<b>Number of countries represented among donors</b>	1	3	5
<b>Donations</b>	\$99,443	\$166,525	\$324,547
<b>Bonus pool/match</b>	\$20,000	\$23,000	\$103,750
<b>Total funds raised</b>	\$119,443	\$189,525	\$428,297

This shared governance encouraged ownership among nonprofit leaders and spread some of the administrative burden to committee members. Still, the bulk of the Give Local DeKalb County operation fell to a single foundation employee, who handled all matters — from communications and nonprofit registration to training and website content development. While the 2014 campaign was solely an online giving day, organizers decided to allow walk-in donations in 2015 and 2016. This provided donors with a low-tech option to give, bypassed credit card and platform fees associated with giving online, and was an opportunity to invite the general public to visit the foundation.

Heading into Give Local America 2016, Kimbia's goal was to raise \$100 million for participating nonprofits (Podder, 2015). In DeKalb County, efforts were at an all-time high, with more staff involvement, a larger committee, an enhanced focus on media outreach, and bolstered fundraising efforts to build the matching funds. Nonprofit participation increased to 68 organizations and over \$50,000 in matching funds was raised leading up to the giving day, on May 3. Multiple trainings were coordinated by the

DCNP to help position nonprofits for success, and staff were regularly communicating with Kimbia representatives in the final days before the event. This extensively planned approach, however, did not address all the challenges that emerged during Give Local DeKalb County 2016.

#### *Technology Failure and Crisis Management*

At approximately 9 a.m. on May 3, the Kimbia online fundraising platform being used for Give Local America events nationwide began experiencing delays. In DeKalb County, initial reports of slow load times and donation processing issues were recorded at 9:30 a.m. The first general communication from Kimbia acknowledged intermittent performance issues and was sent to its coordinating partners at 9:58 a.m.<sup>3</sup> Community foundation representatives from around the United States began communicating via an email listserv immediately after the technology issues emerged. Since the root cause of the issue was unidentified and its severity was unknown, there was a “wait and see” attitude among most of these community foundations — including in DeKalb County.

<sup>3</sup>To inform the content of this section, 319 emails were reviewed. Details have been withheld to protect the confidentiality of those communications.

*While managing the technology crisis, Give Local DeKalb County continued to accept in-person donations at the foundation. Those walk-in donations allowed the event to forge ahead no matter the status of online-giving capabilities. Moreover, those face-to-face interactions allowed organizers to hear donor concerns and gain anecdotal feedback — and to remind frustrated donors that Give Local was not a monolithic online event; rather, real people from the local community were working to make the event as successful as possible despite the circumstances.*

DeKalb County Community Foundation staff fielded questions and coordinated with Kimbia throughout the morning, but did not address nonprofit partners until 12:15 p.m. This delay was due primarily to a lack of concrete information to share with partners. While managing the technology crisis, Give Local DeKalb County continued to accept in-person donations at the foundation. Those walk-in donations allowed the event to forge ahead no matter the status of online-giving capabilities. Moreover, those face-to-face interactions allowed organizers to hear donor concerns and gain anecdotal feedback

— and to remind frustrated donors that Give Local was not a monolithic online event; rather, real people from the local community were working to make the event as successful as possible despite the circumstances.

Coincidentally, a major donor representing the Douglas C. and Lynn M. Roberts Family Foundation took special interest in the crisis and visited the foundation throughout the day. By 3 p.m. it became clear that local action was necessary to salvage the giving day. Three community foundation staff members met with the donor and his family foundation's community liaison. During a 30-minute brainstorming session, a path forward was identified:

1. The donor pledged an additional \$50,000 to the matching funds, raising the total to over \$103,000.
2. Hours were extended into the following day, May 4, with online donations accepted until 5 p.m. and in-person donations accepted at the foundation from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
3. Mailed donations would be accepted if post-marked by May 4.

These action steps and an update were emailed to all participating Give Local DeKalb County nonprofits at 3:44 p.m. on May 3. Media partners were also contacted and social media mobilization was prioritized. Fortunately, these actions reinvigorated the giving day and resulted in a record-breaking year for Give Local DeKalb County.

Despite the loss of online donation access, Give Local DeKalb County processed 60.9 percent more donations in 2016 than 2015, donations were received from 30 states and five countries, and \$238,772 more was raised compared to the previous year. (See Table 1.) The public rallied around the foundation, there was renewed support of Give Local DeKalb County, and press coverage was overwhelmingly positive.

Shepherding the giving day to a successful conclusion involved an extraordinary administrative

burden. A significant number of duplicate donations were recorded online from donors who repeatedly donated when the system lagged, not realizing their donation had already been made. The technical failures affected online receipting, and droves of donors did not receive proof of their contribution for tax purposes. Nonprofit partners had difficulty accessing donor information and the reliability of accessible data was questioned. Stakeholder management was intensive; major donors and contributors to the matching funds sought information and updates. There were also multiple interviews, radio appearances, and news articles that demanded careful messaging. Beyond all of that, standard procedures had to be carried out: reconciling balances, calculating proportional matching funds, transferring funds, data entry, and administering checks. In the end, 840 combined staff hours were allocated to Give Local DeKalb County 2016.

## Survey Results

After the giving day, a survey was sent to all donors who supplied an email address; the survey was planned ahead of time and was not in response to the technology glitch. Given the tech failure, however, gathering donor feedback through the survey took on heightened significance. Important questions were identified by the Give Local DeKalb County planning committee and the foundation staff and board members: How satisfied are donors with Give Local DeKalb County? Is the giving day dampening donations at other times of the year?

The following survey results offer insights related to both of these questions.

### Donor Satisfaction

While there is no systematic research specifically about donor satisfaction with charitable giving days, studies about donor experiences with online giving are available. Consensus among researchers is that the online-giving process matters and so does the time of year, with a third of all online giving taking place in December (Network for Good, 2015). In addition, donors tend to notice fees associated with online giving, and high fees can lead to less giving (Meer, 2014).

**TABLE 2** Overall Donor Satisfaction (n = 160)

Response	Percentage
Very unsatisfied	14.4%
Unsatisfied	2.6%
Neutral	7.8%
Satisfied	35.9%
Very satisfied	39.3%

NOTE: Valid percentages reported with responses of “don’t know/unsure” coded as missing values and not included in calculations.

Donors’ socio-demographic characteristics may influence their likelihood to give online (Shier & Handy, 2012), and those who give through social networking applications are not motivated by such traditional economic considerations as efficiency ratios, as is the case with many offline donors; rather, they direct their typically small gifts to organizations with robust web capacity (Saxton & Wang, 2014). All told, donor satisfaction with online giving depends heavily on the donation process, availability of high-quality information, and the overall online experience; in fact, the giving experience online has a significant impact on donor loyalty (Network for Good, 2015).

Give Local DeKalb County 2016 represents a stringent test of donor satisfaction because of the technology failure that occurred with the giving day website and underlying donation platform. To better understand satisfaction levels, donors were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with Give Local DeKalb County’s donor experience. All 160 survey respondents answered the survey question, but seven responded “don’t know/unsure.”

Despite the technology issues, only 17 percent of respondents indicated they were either “very unsatisfied” (14.4 percent) or “unsatisfied” (2.6

*Give Local DeKalb County donors were also asked to share their charitable behavior beyond the giving day to address a key issue: Is the giving day crowding out donations made at other times of the year? This question is important to nonprofits since the giving day is often not their only fundraiser, and they want to understand how a giving day impacts their other fundraising efforts.*

percent). Conversely, 75.2 percent reported some level of satisfaction with the overall Give Local DeKalb County donor experience. Of these, 39.3 percent were “very satisfied” and 35.9 percent were “satisfied.” (See Table 2.) While some donated before the technology problems surfaced, the majority of survey respondents’ giving experiences were impacted by the glitch.

On the whole, Give Local DeKalb County did not offer a streamlined, easy, engaging donation process or an online-giving experience that inspired confidence; yet, donors overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with the experience. Why? The following donor remarks shed light on this question:

- “I appreciate the clear communication and adjustments made by the community foundation and admire the Roberts Family Foundation for stepping in to help the situation. That certainly mitigated the confusion with the website.”
- “Although you had a computer glitch, I think you did a tremendous job of informing donors about the mishap. And, the extended time was very helpful, too. Keep up the great work!”
- “DCNP and the community foundation staff did an excellent job managing all the components of Give Local.”
- “The technical issues did not stop my donations, since I was able to donate the next day on May 4. Thank you for the extra time. I will use this opportunity to donate in the future.”
- “We appreciate you extending the giving period to enable us to give after the technical problems were resolved.”
- “Initially, the difficulty with the website was disappointing when going to give. However, the ability to give in person and steps made to correct the issues made up for any aggravations.”
- “Dropping off the donation in person was easy and quick. Thanks. Very satisfied with the local end.”
- “Communication was very good, especially with the glitches. Once I found out there was to be a second day, I just waited for everything to get straightened out. It was no big deal to me. When things happen beyond our control, you just have to roll with it ... and you all did that very well in DeKalb!”
- “It was frustrating that the website was not working the first two times I tried to donate. I was happy to see that donation time was extended and that the site was eventually fixed so that my online donation was accepted. The flexibility (lengthening donation time, etc.) in response to the difficulties and the acknowledgment and explanation posted was appreciated. I thought the problem was handled well and made me believe the people in charge of Give Local

**TABLE 3** Donation History and Future Plans (n = 160)

Prior 2016 Donation		Plan to Make Another 2016 Donation	
Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
Yes	79.2%	Yes	89.8%
No	20.8%	No	10.2%

NOTE: Valid percentages reported with responses of “don’t know/unsure” coded as missing values and not included in calculations.

DeKalb County were ... flexible, competent, and able to think on their feet — all reassuring qualities when giving money.”

These comments suggest the contingency plan — including the \$50,000 donation by a key community stakeholder, and the implicit endorsement of the giving day that the donation carried with it — and the proactive communication efforts were important factors in donor satisfaction. The competent and flexible response to the technical problems helped ease concerns and contributed to a satisfying donor experience.

### *Giving Patterns*

Give Local DeKalb County donors were also asked to share their charitable behavior beyond the giving day to address a key issue: Is the giving day crowding out donations made at other times of the year? This question is important to nonprofits since the giving day is often not their only fundraiser, and they want to understand how a giving day impacts their other fundraising efforts. The question is also relevant to funders who continuously monitor their regional philanthropic landscape.

Most of the applicable literature on this topic focuses on whether private donations are “crowded out” by government sources of nonprofit revenue (e.g., Warr, 1982), or if government funding is an indicator of solid

performance leading to increased private giving, or “crowding in” (e.g., Schiff, 1990).<sup>4</sup> Understanding how charitable donations made during a giving day may crowd out other charitable donations at another time of year is uniquely different and deserves further exploration.

All Give Local DeKalb County survey respondents were asked two questions about their giving patterns:

1. Have you made any other donations in 2016 (other than during Give Local DeKalb County 2016) to nonprofit organizations in DeKalb County?
2. Do you plan to make any additional donations in 2016 to nonprofit organizations in DeKalb County?

Each of the 160 respondents answered both questions. Six donors could not recall whether a prior donation had been made in 2016, responding with “don’t know/unsure”; 79.2 percent of respondents indicated they had given to a nonprofit in DeKalb County earlier in the year. When asked if they planned to make another gift in 2016 specifically to a nonprofit in DeKalb County, 89.8 percent responded affirmatively and 10.2 percent said they had no plans to do so. (See Table 3.) Based on these results, Give Local DeKalb County 2016 did not substantially dampen giving at other times of the year. While

<sup>4</sup>The research on how government funding may or may not crowd out charitable giving is substantial. For more, see Brooks (1999, 2002) and others (e.g., Abrams & Schitz, 1978; Andreoni & Payne, 2011; Heutel, 2014; Schattelman & Bingle, 2015; Simmons & Emanuele, 2004).

not all of those who said they would give later in the year (89.8 percent) may have actually followed through with another gift, nearly 80 percent had already made a donation in 2016 and still gave during the giving day.

## Discussion and Lessons Learned

One drawback of this study is that it is specific to DeKalb County, Illinois. Case studies often lack generalizability and, to a certain extent, that is true here. Community dynamics, staff capacity, stakeholder involvement, and the size of the giving day are just a few considerations that community foundations had to consider when crafting their responses to the technology failure. For example, the response from very large giving days shared some similarities with DeKalb County, but there are unique differences. The Seattle Foundation's GiveBIG day raised the most of any community (\$12.8 million) during Give Local America 2015, followed by the Pittsburgh Foundation's Day of Giving (\$5.7 million) (Hrywna, 2016). In Seattle, the giving day was extended another 24 hours, a response similar to DeKalb County's. In Pittsburgh, however, the giving day was suspended and rescheduled, with an additional \$100,000 added to the incentive pool (Hrywna, 2016). While Pittsburgh and DeKalb County were able to add sizable amounts to the available incentives, it is important to note that among the communities that could not do so, many were still able to salvage their giving days. Regardless of geographic and community-specific differences, taking direct action to address a giving day's malfunction is paramount, especially in the absence of a major gift.

For additional perspective across multiple communities, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation funded the Giving Day Initiative — a nationwide report on 18 giving day organizers that, together, ran 49 giving days. The report focused on the “long-term value of giving days for community foundations” (Third Plateau, 2016, p. 1) and identified four ways in which giving days created value for community foundations: advancing mission through growing and “democratizing” philanthropy, enhancing visibility and credibility for the foundation among the community, bolstering the capacity of

community foundations to fundraise online and engage wide-ranging donors, and positioning community foundations as information centers through centralizing nonprofit and donor data. The report also identified three strategies that community foundations have used to reduce costs associated with giving days while also aligning the giving events with their missions: charging a participation fee, partnering to share the workload, and linking the giving day to other foundation efforts (e.g., encouraging donors to create donor-advised funds or approaching nonprofit participants to establish endowment funds) (Third Plateau, 2016).

Community foundation leaders considering the possibility of hosting a giving day would be well-served to review the insights from the Giving Day Initiative. Interestingly, the case study of Give Local DeKalb County aligns closely with many of the takeaways outlined in the Knight Foundation report. The following elaborates on some of those points, and serves to highlight a few considerations for community foundation-led giving days:

- *Planning.* Planning matters. In the case of Give Local DeKalb County, there had been some surface-level planning for website issues but the actual action steps were not developed until the tech failure was in its sixth hour. Thinking through all conceivable scenarios — far beyond possible technology failures — ahead of time encourages organizers to prepare for the possibility of problems: What happens if a volunteer is sick? What if the phones go down? What happens in the event of a natural disaster? All of these questions, and many more, need to be answered ahead of a giving day.
- *Engage key stakeholders.* The endorsement of a giving day by key stakeholders contributes to its legitimacy. This can be done in a variety of ways: gathering sponsorships from reputable and recognizable local businesses, taking photos or video of community leaders holding giving day signage, or inviting elected officials to visit the foundation for a photo opportunity on the

giving day. In the DeKalb County case, the \$50,000 donation from the Roberts Family Foundation did much more than boost the matching funds — it also served as an endorsement from a prominent community leader at a critical moment.

- *Encourage ownership.* Give Local DeKalb County relies on a planning committee consisting of executive directors from nonprofits that participate in the giving day. This approach reduces some of the staff workload, but, more importantly, it engages participants in community leadership. Decentralizing decision-making to a representative committee of nonprofit participants spreads ownership of the event and democratizes the process.
- *Consider a match.* Give Local DeKalb County had a bonus pool of proportional matching funds. Such matching funds do not have to be large; evidence suggests that the presence of a match increases the size of donations and overall participation by donors, but larger match ratios have no additional impact compared to smaller match ratios (Karlan & List, 2007). Offering a giving day match incentive can encourage donors to participate and differentiates the event from another “normal” donation. A match can also create excitement and is a key attribute to include in promotional materials. In DeKalb County, 86.5 percent of donors said the matching funds were either somewhat or extremely influential in their decision to donate. Over time, however, the presence of a match may shift more donors to direct all of their donations for the year to the giving day. More longitudinal research is needed to determine how the availability of matching funds during a giving day impact giving at other times of the year.
- *Capacity building.* There are many opportunities to build the capacity of nonprofits that participate in giving days. Community foundations may assume that role or contract for training on topics such as online fundraising best practices, engaging donors

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online, peer-to-peer fundraising, and online communication strategies. Many giving day platform providers offer trainings, webinars, and resources as value-added capacity-building services, so the burden of implementing these activities does not have to fall solely on the community foundation organizers.

- *Communications.* Timely and effective communications are important when managing wide-reaching projects like a giving day. Multiple donors to Give Local DeKalb County noted that they appreciated the effective communication in the wake of the tech failure. Giving day organizers can prepare by scheduling social media posts, developing templates for various emergency scenarios, and identifying what communication channels will be used. Moreover, soliciting media sponsorships before the event can lead to wider promotion of the giving day at low or no cost.

- *Allow offline donations.* When tech issues halted online giving during Give Local DeKalb County 2016, offline donations continued to roll in. Offering this option is a built-in contingency plan in the event of technology problems. It also allows community foundations to invite donors to visit, encourage the press or elected officials to stop by, host a reception, and build in-person excitement throughout the day. Offline donations demand volunteers, physical space, organization, and a separate set of processes, but the benefits can be extraordinary.

## Conclusion

Community foundation leaders should carefully consider the resource commitment necessary before deciding to put on a giving day. Some additional considerations include whether to have a program of the foundation coordinate the endeavor or to charge a participation fee. Fortunately, valuable resources are available to help guide those who want to organize giving days (e.g., Third Plateau, 2016; Third Plateau & KDS Strategies, 2016).

The potential benefits of giving days for the community foundations that lead them are well-documented (Third Plateau, 2016). When relying on technology, however, there is always a potential for risk. This article explored Give Local DeKalb County 2016, a giving day that was disrupted because of a technology issue that emerged in every community participating in the Give Local America 2016 campaign. The findings from a donor survey revealed high levels of satisfaction with the donor experience despite the tech failure. Donor comments indicated that the actions taken by foundation staff to salvage the giving day and the proactive communication efforts were key in making the event a success. Additionally, Give Local DeKalb County did not crowd out other charitable giving in 2016, but that may change if more organizations focus on the giving day as their primary or sole fundraiser for the year.

Just how long giving days will prevail as viable fundraising events for nonprofits and donors

is uncertain, and the return on investment for community foundations is likely to continue to evolve. While giving days may offer new opportunities for community foundations, more research is needed to further understand their impact on the broader philanthropic landscape.

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