CLOSING THE LOOP

A research report into events fundraising in 2015 and the importance of communications in creating active and engaged life-long supporters.
Whether it’s baking a cake, running a marathon, climbing a mountain, dressing up in a particular style or doing something completely off-the-wall, participating in an event to raise money for charity provides a unique opportunity for everyone to be a fundraiser.

While charitable giving has remained steady over the last few years, participation in fundraising events has grown across the board. Undoubtedly, the impact of social media has had a positive impact: the development and refinement of online platforms such as everydayhero mean that it is simple and easy for people to start fundraising, provides a safe and convenient mechanism for individuals to donate, and an efficient and reliable service for charities.

It’s certainly encouraging to see that the majority of fundraisers that have taken part in this research are reporting that income from events is increasing – charities are doing something right in encouraging individuals to take part and support their causes. But, (as always!) we are looking at opportunities to achieve even more. We know that the best fundraising is not about a ‘one off’ - whether that’s a single donation or participation in one event - it’s about developing and maintaining a relationship, engaging people with a cause that they care about and offering them opportunities to support that cause in different ways and at different times.

That’s why we were delighted to partner with Blackbaud on this research, to look at how participating in an event can result in a long-term relationship and create a bond between a charity’s cause and an individual. The fact that 92% of events participants say that they would be likely to support the charity they raised money for again (whether that’s becoming a donor, leaving a legacy, or volunteering) shows that taking part in an event and raising money for a cause gives people the passion and motivation to do more.

We hope that the experience and views of the participants in this report provides some tips and ideas for charities and fundraisers to think about how best they can use that spark and keep it going to create those committed relationships with individuals that lead to a lifetime of support.

With best wishes
Daniel Fluskey

Head of Policy and Research
Institute of Fundraising
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Introduction

To help provide both information and practical guidance for charities, everydayhero, a Blackbaud service, in partnership with the Institute of Fundraising has launched this research to look at event fundraising as a whole. Findings are based on an online survey of UK not-for-profit organisations, conducted between 20 July and 10 August 2015. A separate online survey was conducted in July 2015 amongst members of the UK public who had taken part in fundraising events in the last twelve months. As is customary for research efforts like this, the data is based on self-reporting by the respondents, and should be interpreted accordingly.

The research builds on Blackbaud’s Successful Events Fundraising report launched in February 2015. This found that the majority of those participating in fundraising events didn’t feel acknowledged by the charity they were fundraising for, even though most were motivated to take part by their passion for the charity involved. This research takes a more in-depth look at how charities do communicate with their event participants and compares the results with fundraiser preferences. It also examines the significance of event fundraising within the charity sector in 2015.

We sought to answer a number of questions, including:

- How much importance do charities place upon event fundraising in their overall income stream?
- What types of events are on the rise and will charities be investing in them in future?
- How do charities communicate with event participants in the build up to and aftermath of an event?
- How do the event participants themselves prefer to be communicated with and how does this match typical charity practices?
- How engaged a supporter is the typical event participant?

Where relevant, we spotlight age or gender-specific differences in fundraiser preferences.
Overall Findings

Our Aim for the report
We hope that this research will provide you with further information on the event fundraising arena so that you can compare your experiences with those of other organisations. We also hope you will gain some insight into fundraiser preferences, which can inform future engagement strategies with your event fundraisers.

Key Findings

- Events fundraising is a key part of the fundraising mix:
  - Most organisations are planning to run more events in the future.
  - A vast majority have seen fundraising income from events stay the same or increase, with nearly one in ten seeing income rise significantly.
- Corporate and sporting events are the most common types organised by charities.
- Sporting and community events are the two areas where most charities are seeing an increase in demand.
- Event participants are a particularly engaged and motivated audience: The majority of event participants would take part in another event for the same charity, do want to be contacted again, are interested in how much was raised and how money is being spent. They are also willing to support the same charity in other ways, such as volunteering.
- Communications with event fundraisers could be improved upon: Many are not hearing from the charity regularly, being asked to take part in another event or finding out how money is spent.
- Participants want help with fundraising: These are committed fundraisers yet many cite fundraising targets being set too high and not knowing how to start fundraising as one of the main challenges when taking part in an event. 23.3% say they would like fundraising tips before the event but only around half of charities surveyed said they always provided these tips.
- Resourcing is an issue for many charities: ‘Lack of resources’ or ‘volunteers’ were cited as being among the main challenges in communicating with event participants.
- Over 17% of organisations don’t segment data at all: Yet there are big differences between the way different age groups, for example, want to be communicated with.
- ‘Champions Programmes’ aren’t commonly done: Champions programmes, which include special treatment for those event participants who have raised the most money, are the most vocal, or are in other ways exceptional supporters for your charity, can have a positive effect on fundraising yet aren’t done or considered by 76.84% of charities.
Event Fundraising is a key part of the fundraising mix

As other forms of fundraising may be under increasing pressure, the overall good news for the sector is that there is no sense of the popularity of fundraising events abating.

For a quarter of organisations surveyed, events are considered an important part of their overall fundraising, accounting for between 25 – 50% of overall annual income. For an additional third of charities, events accounted for between 15 – 25% of annual income.

An overwhelming majority of organisations (87.11%) have seen income from events rising or staying the same. The biggest proportion saw income rising (56.03%) with 11.94% saying that income has risen significantly.

Looking ahead, the majority of charities (67.33%) are planning to do more events in future with nearly half planning to run more different types of events in future. Only a very small number (5.18%) are looking to do fewer events.
Corporate and sporting events are the most popular types of events

When looking at events that the charities organised themselves (only 14% didn’t run any of their own events), the most common type of events were corporate ones (e.g. balls, auctions, dinners), closely followed by sporting events (runs, bike rides, zumbathons, etc.). Mass participation events were the least common.

This corresponds with Blackbaud’s Successful Events Fundraising report earlier this year, where sporting events were the most popular amongst fundraisers surveyed.

The types of events that raised the most amount of income broadly followed the same order except sporting events raised the most income (43.19%), closely followed by corporate events (39.18%). Baking events raised the least amount (3.62%).

Sporting and community events (such as summer fairs) are the only types of events where the majority of charities are seeing an increase in demand. For all other types of events, most charities are finding demand remains the same.
Case Study - Children With Cancer UK

Emily Roff is Sports Events Manager at Children with Cancer UK. This year they had 1,400 runners taking part for them at the Virgin Money London Marathon, raising £2.7m. They also have places at events such as RideLondon, Great North Run and is the official charity partner for Rat Race Dirty Weekend.

Frequent contact programme
“Recently we merged our Running and Challenge Events Teams to become a Sports Events Team of 5 people. As part of this merger we came up with a Charter to ensure that all our events participants receive excellent supporter care. We put a lot of effort into our communications programme to make sure that our supporter journeys are the best they can be. We use a mixture of email, texts, direct mail, newsletters, phone calls and face-to-face events to stay in touch. As soon as the participant signs up, they receive a welcome email ensuring they have the initial information they need and encouraging them to set up their fundraising pages. They’ll receive fundraising packs in the post with sponsorship forms, training plans and fundraising tips. This is followed by monthly fundraising emails with tips themed around certain times of the year like Bonfire Night.”

Personalised treatment for bigger events
“We also arrange pre-events such as Training Days for those who take part in flagship events such as the London Marathon and will make courtesy calls in the run-up to an event to check how they’re doing with their fundraising and training. We’ll phone and email them to wish them good luck just before the event and will send them a text the night before the event.”

Post event follow up
“After the event, we send a ‘well done’ letter and email to all participants as well as asking them to complete a feedback survey. In the following months we’ll send them their certificates. At the beginning of each year we send a Sports Event Diary to all those who have supported us in the last 2 years, so that they can see what they can sign up to in the coming year.”

Segmentation and supporter journeys
“Currently we segment communications more by event than anything else – so London Marathon runners will receive more personal contact, but otherwise everyone’s supporter journey is similar. Resourcing is always a challenge when it comes to data segmentation, but going forward this is something we’re planning to do more of. Previously, our data was on various spreadsheets, so segmenting communications would have been really difficult. But earlier this year we invested in a new CRM system which means we will be able to make better use of data to tailor communications accordingly – e.g. one email for those who have already set up their fundraising pages, another for those who haven’t.”

One piece of advice?
“Make sure you get feedback after the event to check you’re doing the right things and take advantage of the different ways of communicating with people – for example, we find that using text messages is really effective at getting quick responses.”
Case Study - For Jimmy

Sorrelle Morris is Events, Fundraising and Donor Relations Co-ordinator at For Jimmy, a charity set up by the Mizen family after their son Jimmy was killed in an unprovoked attack. Their work takes young people beyond the schools gates, where they indentify issues in their local community and lead the change required to make communities safer.

Promoting events
“For fundraising events, we have our annual 21 Bridges (which is a walk through London from Richmond to Tower Bridge), we climb mountains, we work with a range of corporate partners to support their events or get them involved in ours and have a festival set for 2017. We do lots of events and projects with schools across Lewisham and Southwark, so are always in contact with parents and teachers and are able to use school newsletters and letters to parents to let people know about our events and how they can get involved.”

Making use of technology
“During the events we use our fundraising platform’s messaging function to really keep up to date with our event participants and tailor our messages from the moment they sign up. So if, for example, they started their fundraising with a real bang we can send them a congratulatory message acknowledging this, which they in turn can share on social media with their friends and sometimes those friends end up registering for the event as well.”

Small team, pragmatic approach
“We tend to plan out our communications so that there is a bit of time between contact from us but our supporters never get a chance to forget about us! So, for example: they might receive a copy of our new magazine (which has an online and print version) in the build up to an event; after the event they’ll receive a thank you email; after that it’ll be a link to our Flickr page with photos of the event; then the 2nd issue of our magazine; then we’ll let them know about the grand totals raised by the event. Finally, they’ll be reminded about registration for the following year’s event. We do get a lot of repeat event participants.”

Supporter journeys
“We are a small team so have to be pragmatic about what we can do. This means that the communications programme is largely the same for everyone (post event). So, we will let everyone on our supporter database know how much money was raised in an event even if they didn’t take part, as it shows what we’re doing. Likewise, event participants will receive information about volunteering opportunities, how they can get involved in activities such as stewarding, performing at an event, trading and even joining our fundraising committee. We’re lucky enough to have extremely talented photographers so all pictures are our own and since our re-brand this has had a major impact as our communications are extremely visual and we think help make people feel involved. Often young people who have been on one of our schools programmes will take part in a fundraising event or volunteer for us.”

Getting the voice right
“We continually try and get the ‘voice’ of our organisation right. It’s a balance between communicating effectively with parents and potential donors and also producing content that appeals to the young people we work with. The organisation was set up by Jimmy’s parents, Margaret and Barry, and they along with Jimmy’s brothers are still heavily involved on a daily basis. Margaret takes part in most of our fundraising events alongside supporters – including every mountain we climb. So it’s very important that their voice comes through in everything we do. We want to push our charity brand and message out further, but at the same time not to be seen as too big and clinical, as Jimmy and the family are still at the heart of everything we do.”
How are events resourced?

Of those organisations who responded, there was virtually a 50:50 split between charities who do (51.18%) and those who don’t (48.82%) have a dedicated events fundraising team. Of those who do, around three quarters (74.51%) have a small events team of between 1 and 5 people. Only 1 in 10 (10.62%) have an events team of over 10 people.

Considering that 67.33% of charities are considering putting on more events in the future and only around 5% are looking to put on fewer events, it is worth noting that most organisations (64.07%) are not looking to grow their events team. Yet, as we will discuss in more detail later in this report, lack of resources is cited as one of the main challenges in communicating with event participants.

Preferences over communication methods

Email (93.40%) and social media (72.04%) are the ways a large majority of charities choose to communicate with their event participants in the build-up to an event and to acknowledge efforts afterwards. The good news is that email is also the event participants’ preferred method of being contacted by charities. When asked to state their most preferred means of being contacted, 40.5% would prefer to be contacted by email and 29.8% by direct mail. 19.4% would prefer to be contacted by phone (vs 18.9% for social media).

There are some interesting age and gender-based findings when it comes to communications preferences. The 25-34 age group was the only group that didn’t have email as the most preferred form of contact (28.6% compared to 40.5% overall) and instead their favoured option was, perhaps surprisingly, direct mail (31.7%). Possibly less surprising is the fact that the preference for social media decreased with age (from 33.3% for 18-24s down to 3.7% for over 65s).

When it comes to gender differences, more women (20.3%) would prefer to be contacted via social media than men (13.3%) whereas more men prefer face-to-face contact with the charities (24.7% vs 16% of women). By phone was the least popular form of contact, cited by nearly half of respondents (46.7%). It was also the least popular method across all the different age groups and genders. By contrast, 62.98% of organisations questioned are using telephone to communicate with event participants, making it the third most popular method used behind social media.
So do the organisations’ responses on how they communicate with event participants correlate with the participants’ actual experiences? There would appear to be some discrepancies. For example, the social media percentages do not correlate at all. 72.04% of charities say they communicate with participants this way ahead of the event (compared to 18.2% of participants) and 62.08% after the event (compared to 15.1% of participants). One potential explanation is that social media is being used in some instances as more of a broadcast tool, rather than a way of having more personal conversations with participants.

On the whole, event participants seem to indicate that the amount of communication they are receiving from the charities that they are supporting is much lower than the charities would claim.

Q. Of those who take part in events that you organise, how do you communicate with them before the event?

Q. For those who take part in events that you organise, how do you acknowledge their efforts/communicate with them after the event?
Guy Aubertin is Commercial Director for grant making charity Walk the Walk. It organises power walking challenges including The MoonWalks in London, Edinburgh, Iceland and New York City, raising money in aid of breast cancer causes.

We aim to be as communicative as possible
"There is a fundamental difference between us and most other charities in that events are our main income stream. We rely solely on our fundraisers, whether they're taking part in one of our MoonWalk events or taking up one of our places at the London Marathon. Consequently, we are very mindful of the need to be as communicative as possible throughout their journey."

A ‘concierge service’ for event fundraisers
"While people might have done fundraising before, they might also be taking on a marathon for the first time. We need to help to overcome their nervousness about doing that. We try to strike a balance between messages about training and fundraising. We also ensure that everyone in the office has actually taken part in an event themselves. This means that they know what a serious undertaking it is and can empathise with them every step of the way. We see ourselves as almost offering a concierge service – giving them information about the event and being fully accessible for questions and concerns.”

Soft, subtle, friendly and accessible communications
"At Walk the Walk, on event day we view everyone in the office as part of a fundraising team and everyone as part of the events team. Primarily, we feel we have reaped the benefits of being a friendly and approachable organisation. We make sure we communicate with everyone the way that we would like to be communicated with ourselves, whether on the phone, via email or through the website. We are not hidden behind levels of bureaucracy and everyone answers the phone in the office. If you want to phone up and speak to our Founder, Nina, you can. You will also find her at as many of our events, in her bra alongside our fundraisers, as possible!"

A multi-channel approach
"We still believe that in today’s world of electronic communications, there is a place for actually speaking to our fundraisers. We use social media in a friendly way and respond to every post and comment. If someone seems genuinely aggrieved, we ring them up. As well as the information on our website, we also see great value in providing it on paper as well."

Personalising thank-yous
"Instead of just an automated email saying “thank you,” we send a letter to our fundraisers. Our volunteers also receive a certificate. Our founder Nina signs each one herself – such is the value that we place in them. Simple things like this can mean a lot and we know it makes us different. We have people who have volunteered for us for years, who frame these certificates and are very proud of what they’ve done."

Encouraging word of mouth
"Walk the Walk started via word of mouth. We use simple things like a thank you video at the end of our online donation process, to connect with those donating to our fundraisers. A substantial amount of donors go on to request further information about the charity. Many then become supporters whether as volunteers, participants, or just spreading the word online.”
Case Study - Meningitis Research Foundation

Tom DeFraine looks after the student programme for Meningitis Research Foundation, who now primarily target students to take part in their challenge events.

A big shift to event fundraising
“As a charity we've only been running for 25 years but over the last 4-5 years, there has been a big shift in focus to event fundraising. There has been much medical progress on preventing and treating meningitis, but that means we don't naturally get new supporters every day. This means our supporter base is a fairly historic, mixed group of new and old supporter. So in Community Fundraising, we look at challenge events, both overseas and here in the UK. Many of our bigger donors and supporter families have been event supporters for over 10 years, but it's important for us to find new participants.”

A focus on students
“Over the last few years our primary function has been to look at student fundraising. We travel around the UK visiting Universities, recruiting them to do challenge events for us, such as Kilimanjaro Treks, which is quite a departure from traditional fundraising. Students are the 2nd most at risk group for Meningitis but probably 90% of the students we meet haven’t initially heard about our charity. Inviting them to do our challenge events raises awareness of Meningitis, gives them the opportunity to do something amazing and raises money.”

Unique donor journey
“The students do tend to be more temporary supporters than corporate ones. Only around 10-15% become interested supporters of the charity after they've done their event, although some do go on to be donors and supporters after they've entered the corporate world. As a result our focus is less on converting them to be long term supporters and more on making sure they have an amazing supporter journey while doing their event and enabling them to raise as much money as possible.”

Concerted communications programme
“We have 3 full time members of staff looking after our student fundraisers. The students tend to be very tech savvy and very communicative. We have to be on the ball as they want constant contact via mobile and the web, which can be a challenge. The content of the communications is a mix of event information and fundraising tips. Because of the types of events they do, they have high fundraising targets so need to do a lot of sub-events throughout the year and therefore are keen to learn about raising money. While social media and email are important, we actually find that face-to-face communications works best for this age group. We go back to each University once a term and hold fundraising workshops for them, which they really appreciate.”

Differentiating communications
“We do a lot of communications via email and have loads of Facebook groups for the different Universities. There are now so many people doing fundraising over social media that communications really need to stand out, which is where rich media content such as video and images can help. We create videos to explain about our charity and the challenge events, that students can use. We also encourage our students to share videos and images explaining what they’re doing, which helps them raise more money.”
Events participants – a committed and motivated audience

One of the most encouraging findings of the research is that event participants are potentially one of the most motivated and committed supporters for not-for-profit organisations – possibly because they take part in an event in support of an issue that affects them, a friend, or a relative personally. Blackbaud’s earlier Successful Fundraising Events report found that two thirds of respondents took part in a fundraising event because they cared about the cause. This survey also revealed a strong desire amongst event participants to continue to support the charities they fundraised for.

A staggering 92% of event participants would consider supporting the same charity again. Over a quarter (26.1%) would consider giving donations related to one-off appeals, and nearly 1 in 5 would consider volunteering or becoming a regular donor.

Are you likely to support the same charity in any of the following ways?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give one-off donation related to specific appeals</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become a regular donor</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a bequest in your will</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor someone else fundraising for the same charity</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

83.3% of participants said they would definitely (40%) or possibly (43.3%) take part in another event for the same charity.

What is the likelihood of taking part in another fundraising event for the same charity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would definitely participate in another event for them</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would consider participating in another event for them</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be reluctant to take part in another event for them</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would probably do an event for a different charity next time</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not plan on doing another charity event</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 9.3% would not like to be contacted again.
The Communications Gap – a missed opportunity?

On the positive side, 87.9% of event participants said that they were thanked by the charity after the event and only 7.7% said that they weren’t communicated with in the build-up to the event. However, the numbers then dip when looking at a more concerted and ongoing communications effort. As we have just stated, only 9.3% said they didn’t want to be contacted by the charity again, yet while 28.4% have been contacted monthly by the charity after the event, nearly a quarter (23.4%) haven’t been contacted since and 18.4% only sporadically with regard to specific events.

How often has the charity contacted you since your participation in the event?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They haven’t contacted me</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporadically with regard to specific events</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Equally, while 83.3% said they would definitely or possibly take part in another event for the same charity, 44.2% have not been asked to do so, which would seem to be a lost opportunity.

Has the charity asked you to sign up to another event for them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What information do event participants want to receive

“Great support and interaction, tips for the race, useful merchandise to buy, and follow up emails to thank me for participation.”

What information would you prefer to receive from the charity you are event fundraising for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How the money raised for the event will be used</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much money was raised in total by the event I participated in</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips and tricks on fundraising</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips and tricks on preparing for the event</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other events I can take part in</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ways I can get involved with the charity (volunteering becoming regular donor etc.)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A wrap-up of the event including videos and photos</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transparency when it comes to funds raised

The importance of transparency when it comes to charity spending and fundraising is often in discussion in today’s media. Correspondingly, in this report, most event participants wanted to receive information about how much money was raised (59.8%) and how that money was used (44.5%). Most charities do actually provide this information, with 64.54% saying they always let participants know how much was raised and over half (53.58%) saying they always inform them how the money is spent. But there are still around 1 in 10 not providing this information.

Q. Do you let event participants know how much money was raised by the event in total?  

4.36% Not Always  
25.73% Yes, Sometimes  
64.59% Yes, Always

Q. Do you let event participants know how the money raised will be spent?  

4.36% Not Always  
25.73% Yes, Sometimes  
64.59% Yes, Always  
53.58% Yes, Always
Case Study - National Osteoporosis Society

Claire Dibben is currently Community & Events Fundraising Officer at the National Osteoporosis Society and prior to that managed events at a local hospice.

Ask previous participants to sign up again
“I am surprised that such a large proportion of the event participants in the survey weren’t asked to take part in another event. I have always presumed that those who have taken part in an event once are the most likely to do it again, particularly if you have stewarded them through the event and made it enjoyable for them.”

Know your audiences
“It’s vital to really understand your supporters’ demographics – their ages, what’s likely to interest them. Segmenting your supporters in this way helps ensure you are offering them the right products.”

Don’t be afraid to experiment with new events
“Monitor the sign-up numbers for your own flagship events and if they start dwindling, don’t be afraid to experiment. At the hospice I previously worked for, we noticed that the numbers had dropped significantly for sign-up to our Midnight Walk. I did my research into other types of events that were becoming popular and which ones might appeal to our audiences and ended up substituting the Midnight Walk for an Electric Run event instead, which achieved much greater sign-up. I’m constantly keeping an eye on what other types of events are on the rise, such as MOB Events like Tough Mudders or Colour Runs.

Make the process enjoyable and personal for your participant
“Stewardship is so important to ensure that event fundraisers enjoy the whole experience and are more likely to take part and fundraise for your charity again. In the past, the National Osteoporosis Society have used cultivation events to get to know the people who’ve signed up for a challenge. We also use phone, email and social media to recruit event participants and also support people with their fundraising journey. I’m the only person responsible for the community and challenge events at the National Osteoporosis Society so whilst I find it difficult to have the time to do much data segmentation, I’m always trying my best to personalise event communications to our fundraisers. For example, in the past the organisation has sent out letters of thanks to event participants along with a personalised certificate which includes a photo of them with their medal.”

One piece of advice for other event fundraisers in small-medium organisations?
“Personalise communications as much as you can, make it fun and let your fundraisers know how much money was raised and the difference they have made to the work that you do.”
Case Study - Macmillan Cancer Support

Scotty Dixon is Business Systems Manager for Challenge Events at Macmillan Cancer Support. Prior to that he worked on National Events for Macmillan.

Analysing our data
“We’re about to begin a huge piece of work on evaluating the supporter journeys for our event fundraisers – looking at what we’re doing now and how we can make improvements and streamline our processes for delivering a gold standard of supporter care. We have begun analysing everything from how we pull and manipulate our data to how we get information through to our supporters. It is encouraging to see from the research that such a high proportion of event participants want to support the charity in other ways, as these longer term supporter journeys is part of what we are looking at.”

Balancing engaging content vs. information
“We are at the beginning of rolling out our improvements, and there are two key areas for us – firstly, ensuring consistency of communications so everyone gets the same Team Macmillan experience and secondly, ensuring that we get our key asks in. When it comes to content, there is always the challenge of balancing engaging content with the more factual and practical information about the events.”

Diversifying communications
“There are now so many ways of reaching our supporters, we find that we’re constantly having to keep on top of developments and innovate to find new ways of talking with them.”

Post-event surveys
“Within the last few months we have started introducing some new elements to our post-event surveys, asking them about whether they would like to support us in other ways, such as volunteering or becoming a regular donor. Once we know those preferences, we can funnel them into another supporter journey. We have seen good results from this already.”

Segmenting data
“It can be a challenge to collect preferences and analyse data in order to segment and target communications. This year we have more of a standardised supporter journey for our challenge eventers so that we can use that as a foundation to build better communications on. Then we need to do a bit more work on the personalisation side. Technology can help with this though. For example, we currently deliver a lot of communications through an email provider, which has the capability to include more dynamic content.”

One piece of advice?
“Know your audiences and have the data you need in order to personalise your communications. With diverse means now of contacting people and having to send your brand out in so many different ways, you need to get on top of people’s preferences rather than using a ‘one size fits all’ approach. But at a more basic level, make sure you make an ask after the event – sometimes people just need to be asked.”
When asked what they found to be the biggest challenges when it came to completing their fundraising event, the most common challenge cited was that the fundraising target set was too high (27.1%) followed by not knowing how to start fundraising (21.2%). It therefore makes sense that following on from transparency about monies raised, fundraising tips was the next most popular piece of information participants would like to receive (23.3%). And yet only 57.72% of charities say that they offer fundraising tips to event participants with 15.21% saying they rarely or never do so.

Q. Do you give fundraising tips to event fundraisers in the build up to an event?

We asked those charities who did provide their participants with fundraising tips where they found the information. While the large majority called upon their own personal experience as fundraisers, over half gather tips from industry publications and websites and 39.17% use social media. Industry leaders and industry events were other sources.

Q. Where do you get your information for your tips?

Event Information
Around 1 in 5 (21.7%) of event participants were also interested in tips on how to prepare for the event itself and a similar percentage were interested in finding out about what other events they could take part in (21.6%).
Why is there a Communications Gap?

Q. If you do not let participants know how the money raised was spent, why not?

Q. What are the main challenges for you in communicating with event participants?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not having the internal resources/time</td>
<td>57.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting volunteers to support the event</td>
<td>35.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having all the data on who is taking part in the event</td>
<td>32.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having a robust database/CRM</td>
<td>27.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having the content to share with participants</td>
<td>16.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing where to prioritise efforts</td>
<td>14.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>13.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with third party event organisers</td>
<td>10.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many communication options</td>
<td>8.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
<td>4.38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it came to why charities were not always letting event participants know how money raised was being spent, the majority (67.42%) said they find it difficult to specify where money will go from different campaigns. But resourcing, planning and data were also cited as factors in both this and why they were finding communications with event participants in general challenging.
Resourcing was named by 14.89% of organisations as an issue when communicating how money will be spent. It was also identified as the main challenge in communicating with event participants. 57.37% cite not having the internal resources and 1 in 3 say it’s not being able to recruit enough volunteers to support the event. This could be even more of a challenge in the future if charities are intending to run more events, while not expanding their events team, as the earlier responses indicate.

Data

Data is clearly also a big contributor to the communications challenge. 32.60% of organisations who responded say they do not have access to the data of who has supported them and over a quarter say they do not have a robust enough CRM system.

Planning

Planning was named by 14.89% of organisations as an issue when communicating how money will be spent. Also, when it came to the challenges of communicating with event participants, around 1 in 7 charities did not know how to prioritise efforts.
Rosie Beattie is Major Events Fundraiser at Cornwall Hospice Care and organises events such as the Santa Series – a series of fancy dress fun runs, cycles and surfs.

Planned series of communications
“We do a few of our own events such as a Night of Neon and a Half Marathon but our main focus is on our Santa Series. For this we encourage sign up mainly through social media and online as well as through our media partners. We also always email previous participants. In the lead up to the event, those who have signed up will receive a series of email newsletters such as ‘Elf & Fitness’ and ‘Elf & Safety’ with information and instructions. After the event a newsletter will summarise the event with links to photos. Those who have raised money (beyond paying the event registration fee) will receive a thank you letter.”

Highlighting individual stories
“The Santa Series takes up a lot of focus so when it comes to those who fundraise for us in events such as the London Marathon, we tend to focus on a handful of individual stories and their connections to the hospice. This creates a personal touch to our communications – so that people can connect with their stories and see why fundraising for us is so important.”

Simplifying the technology for sign-up and fundraising
“The Santa Series is very successful for us, but can be quite labour-intensive. We want to make it as easy as possible for people to sign up and fundraise for us. Previously people signed up via our website but it was quite a clunky process and we wanted to improve their online user journey. We now use a platform for sign up and fundraising which makes it much easier for people to register and because they can now automatically activate their personal fundraising page as part of the sign-up, we hope that this will have a knock-on effect on the amounts they raise.”

Keep it simple
“If I could offer one piece of advice to someone in a similar-sized organisation, it would be to keep things simple. We have culled a lot of things that we used to do to focus on the two things that really matter – the event itself to make it enjoyable and on the fundraising side, to make sure it’s easy for people to raise money.”
CLOSING THE LOOP

So, as we have seen in this research, event fundraising continues to be an important part of contributing to voluntary income and event participants are potentially very committed and motivated supporters. So against a backdrop of squeezed resources and the continuing popularity of peer-to-peer fundraising, how can organisations take some simple, practical steps to turn one-off event participants into long term, valuable donors, volunteers and advocates?

Some immediate, practical tips

- If nothing else, always acknowledge efforts and ask event participants if they would be prepared to sign up to another event.
- Let people know how much their event raised and if possible, how that money is being spent.
- Look out for event fundraising income spikes. If one of your supporters has created a video that is starting to go viral, jump on it and support them as much as you can.
- Use social media as a way to engage in two-way conversation with event participants, not just as a broadcast medium. Use free social media monitoring tools to look at who’s using your event hashtag, tweet them encouragement and congratulations.
- Phone has been identified by event participants as the least popular means of being contacted by charities so consider diverting resources from this activity to coming up with a simple and planned on-going email campaign.
- 17.86% of those charities surveyed do no data segmentation. Start some simple segmentation – e.g. those who have fundraised for you before vs those who haven’t; those who have nearly reached their target vs those who haven’t. If in doubt, ask event participants as part of the registration process what information they want to receive, how and how often.
- You could even experiment with some gender segmentation. Our survey found that men were much more likely to sign up via the event rather than via the charity website and this is then reflected in their responses to the biggest challenge in taking part in their charity event. Women named the fundraising target set as the biggest challenge (31.9%) whereas men named the training for the actual event (22.7%). So maybe try more fundraising tips for one segment and training tips for the other.
- Consider implementing a Champions Programme, which is typically a small community of high-achieving or highly-active supporters. Using your fundraising data, segment who your top event fundraisers or most vocal supporters are and devise a plan specifically for them. This could include tailored communications, free branded t-shirts, special reception/tour of the charity HQ, being featured on the charity blog etc.
Longer term strategic considerations

• Consider the value of investing in your events team – if you can’t afford more staff members, how can you capitalise on your volunteer base or past event participants? Our research indicated that the 18-24 group were most likely to volunteer in support of same charity (38.9% compared to 21.9% overall), possibly because they’re at a stage of life when they have more time than money.

• Assess whether you need to invest in your technology and data – whether a new email system, a better database or more robust CRM. Make sure you have access to your event fundraiser’s data – this is key to growing an engaged and long-term relationship with those who raise money for your cause.

• Consider a well-planned (segmentation, timing, execution) acknowledgement effort post-event. While your charity may be acknowledging by multiple channels already, the discrepancy between what charities say they do versus what event participants say they see is large (86.8% email acknowledgement by charities versus 44.4% email acknowledgment recognised by fundraisers, 62.8% to 15.1% via social media respectively, 51.45% to 22.1% via direct mail respectively, etc.). This means efforts are not being recognised by a large proportion of event participants, or the messaging doesn’t come across as acknowledgement.

• Because the main challenge with communications pre-event is internal resources/time, use the off-season to build a 12-week communication plan that includes fundraising and training tips. Also consider building a 4-week post-event communication plan with acknowledgements and follow-up actions that participants can take.
Survey Methodology

About the charity organisations who took part
1114 charity respondents took part in the online survey from at least 600 different organisations. They represented a mix of charity sectors and sizes and a range of different job titles.

Q. How would you categorise your charity?

- Cause and cure
- Animal welfare
- Education
- International aid/relief
- Faith-based
- Social and Human Services
- Arts and culture
- Other

Q. What is the size of your charity?

- LARGE (£5M+)
  - 19.88%
- SMALL (LESS THAN £1M)
  - 32.62%
- MEDIUM (£1M - £5M)
  - 37.50%

About the event participants who took part
TLF Research conducted the research via an online survey with 1008 Fundraisers who had taken part in a fundraising event in the last year.