

Case Study: Colorado Children's Chorale

Annual Fund Success: Right Patron, Right Ask, Right Time

THE SCENARIO:

Colorado Children's Chorale (CCC) had built an annual fund that played a critical part in sustaining their programs. The fund had hit a three-year high in 2006-2007 in large part because of revenue from a popular program that offered a childcare tax write-off benefit. CCC had also sent two rounds of donor solicitation mail that year instead of the one, as they had done in the past. This success was short-lived, as the Chorale saw a sharp drop-off in donations in the following season, 2007-2008, which concerned them greatly. How could the Chorale maintain fundraising success from year to year in the future?

The patrons. CCC has a small database, consisting mostly of choir members and their families. However, the records represented people who had a strong connection with the organization—prime prospects.

The ask. Appeal messaging was based on how a patron engaged with CCC. For example, parents of a current member were solicited differently than an alumnus or a grandparent of a member. This had worked well for the Chorale in the past and was in line with best practice. However, the Chorale didn't customize fundraising appeals by giving level, which means the amount requested was not tailored to level of donation that the patron had given historically or what the Chorale thought that the patron could give.

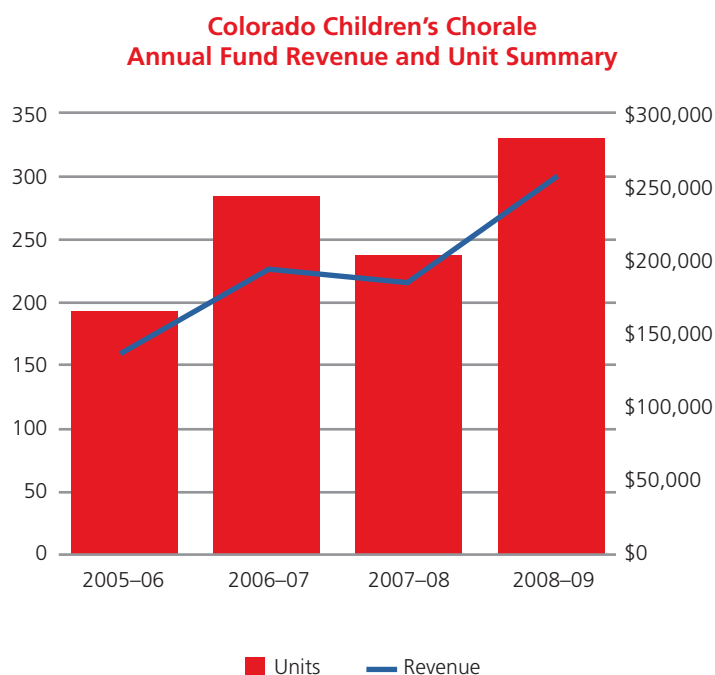
The timing. CCC implemented one or two campaigns a year. Consultants observed that even two campaigns Chorale was not enough to meet their goals. If the Chorale ramped up number of requests and timed them strategically, revenue had the potential to grow substantially.

THE RESULTS:

After one year working with TRG, Colorado Children's Chorale saw the following results in the 2008-09 season:

- 60% growth in NEW annual fund donors,
- double the number of family alumni and friends giving to the Chorale.

With the number of renewed gifts remaining consistent, this led to 37% growth in annual fund revenue.



HOW THE CHORALE DID IT:

TRG's counsel on fundraising campaigns is simple: make the **right ask** or donation request to the **right patron** at the **right time**. While CCC was doing a lot of things right, it was clear that the consultancy needed to fine-tune each of these elements.

Right Patron. Engaging the right patron starts with full and detailed segmentation. Consultants encouraged CCC to start looking at donors in terms of giving level, year, and engagement with institution. CCC started using this perspective to inform their renewal campaign and cultivate long-term donors. Additionally, TRG consultants advised donor acquisition campaigns that were more informed and refined by analytics, identifying the best segments by prior response and demographics matching. Finally, consultants outlined a retention and loyalty enhancement plan, in order for the Chorale to keep those "right patrons" and deepen the ties to the Chorale.

Right ask. TRG consultants also advised CCC on making the right offer. Consultants advised CCC to think about an ask with associated benefits the same way they would think about an offer to a prospective ticket-buyer. With donors, benefits are mainly experience enhancers. Consultants also advised CCC on the language to be used in offers, using benchmarking values and words that create urgency.

Right time. As much as direct response is about targeting the right people and presenting them with the right appeal, timing matters just as much. Consultants laid plans for annual fund campaigns at three specific times of year with multiple rounds of mail, with an eye toward important deadlines in the tax cycle and coordinating with marketing. Since the database was small, consultants planned ongoing efforts to get new donors. In order to inform the timing for the organization, consultants recommended monitoring the pacing of donations by giving level, as well as response and ROI tracking.

ABOUT COLORADO CHILDREN'S CHORALE: For more than three decades, the Colorado Children's Chorale has brought its artistry and charm to audiences throughout the world. With a diverse repertoire ranging from fully staged opera and musical theater to standard choral compositions, the Colorado Children's Chorale annually trains 500 members between the ages of 7 and 14 in the Denver metro area and beyond. For more information, visit childrenschorale.org.