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ACM LEADERSHIP CALL NOTES

Annual Fund Idea Swap

Tuesday, November 30, 2010, 2:00 p.m. ET

Moderator: Jennifer Oatess, Director of Development, Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago (Glenview, IL)

I. Funding Practices at Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago

Oatess provided information about Kohl's efforts around sustaining donors and building the museum's annual fund. Kohl was founded more than 25 years ago and moved to its current location in 2005. The museum currently hosts approximately 340,000 visitors annually, including nearly 8,000 member families, 30,000 field trip students and 10,000 outreach program participants.

Most recently, the museum has begun exploring how social media, beyond Facebook and Twitter, may increase funding support. The museum is specifically focusing on crowd sourcing (the act of outsourcing tasks, traditionally performed by an employee or contractor, to an undefined, large group of people or community, through an open call).

Oatess shared both the successes and the challenges that the museum has faced.

Successes

- In 2008, the museum adopted the online fundraising models used by the Obama campaign to solicit \$25 gifts via email. The museum successfully raised nearly \$10,000 from its membership base.
- The museum has had marginal success with online and direct mail campaigns and continue to work on ways to re-engage past donors and acquire new ones.
- Kohl is working with an annual fund consultant from Campbell & Company and is in the process of testing different audience segments and developing proper messaging.

Challenges

- Earned revenue makes up less than half of Kohl's annual operating budget.
- It has been a challenge getting members to deepen their involvement to the donor level. Members have indicated in no uncertain terms that their membership is their donation to the museum.
- While the museum has been very successful attracting and sustaining thousands of visitors per week, it has been a challenge to manage a message of success with a message of need. The economy has impacted the level of giving over the past two years. Kohl's development team is working closely with the museum's marketing team to avoid communicating conflicting information regarding success versus need.

Oatess opened the floor and invited call participants to share ideas, challenges, best practices and questions.

II. Idea Swap: Strategies for Maximizing Annual Fund Giving

A. Board Assistance

- Kohl Children's Museum (Glenview, IL) reported that it is trying to engage board members to give personally and/or provide support through their contacts.
- Imagine It! The Children's Museum of Atlanta (GA) uses its executive committee members to solicit annual funds from board members. The committee divides the list of board members between them and makes individual calls. The museum shared that on average, the individual board gift amount is \$2,500.
- Madison Children's Museum (WI) shared two ideas for energizing board assistance in the annual giving process.
 - Information about a local organization that requires board members to commit to serving from a list of opportunities (including giving) that they are given at the start of every board cycle. Organization strives for 100 percent board participation and the list covers opportunities throughout the year.
 - Suggested inviting board members to write handwritten notes that are then included in annual fund letters.

B. Phone Tree/Mail Campaigns

- Kohl Children's Museum (Glenview, IL) shared the following regarding using phone trees to solicit funds.
 - In the past, Kohl has used a professional telemarketing service to solicit donations. This action proved to be costly and time intensive. The museum instructed the company to call between the hours of 7:00 p.m. and 9:00p.m (suggested time for parents with school-aged children).
 - The museum is considering directing targeted calls to members who attend the museum frequently and have established a rapport with floor staff. The object is to touch those members that have an affinity for the museum and who understand its value in their lives.
 - Kohl has had more success using mail campaigns rather than phone trees, to generate member renewals.

C. Special Events

- KidsQuest Children's Museum (Bellevue, WA) conducted an assessment of its special events. The museum typically hosts three major events — including an adult carnival, donor cocktail party and a donor appreciation event to generate funds. The museum provided information about the challenges they faced with each event and the successful solutions resulting from the assessment. Since implementing changes to the events, the museum has received positive feedback from donors, who are now more receptive to giving.
 - **Adult Carnival**
Challenge: Museum unable to grow this unique and successful event due to lack of space.
Solution: Carnival has been moved offsite to allow for increased growth.
 - **Donor Cocktail Party**
Challenge: The annual event held at the same location experienced decreasing popularity.
Solution: Shook things up by hosting smaller gatherings at varied donor homes.
 - **Donor Appreciation Event**
Challenge: Decreasing attendance for this fall event.
Solution: Since moving the event to the summer, attendance has increased.

- Bay Area Discovery Museum (Sausalito, CA) holds bimonthly breakfasts for members. The museum opens one hour early to accommodate this event, which usually focuses on a new program, exhibit or opportunity at the museum. It provides an increased level of intimacy between the museum and members. The museum does not have hard information about the number of new donors created from this popular member event.

D. Unique Ways to Create Donors

- Portland Children's Museum (WA) has created a specific membership level, of which a portion of the membership is considered a contribution and tax write-off. This gives members the added benefit of being recognized as donors.
- Kohl Children's Museum (Glenview, IL) has added a gift option to their membership renewal category with the hope that members will give above and beyond the membership rate. The museum works to educate members about the work that the museum does, thereby creating value and appreciation for the museum and a mindset and culture around giving to the museum. Additionally, the museum incorporated challenge grant language into its renewal letters to inspire members to give more to the museum as well as make it possible for the museum to raise funds from other resources.
- Madison Children's Museum (WI) has created a mechanism to engage past board members so that they will continue to support museum activities. The Star Society honors past board members who have shown a consistent commitment and contribution to the museum after rotating off of the board. Once a board member rotates off, they receive a silver star and are inducted into the society. This group receives special mailings and attends receptions at the museum. These former board members have proven to be generous donors, making it essential to continue their involvement.

Question: Delaware Children's Museum (Wilmington) asked if call participants would share their timeline for sending appeals for funding.

Answer: Bay Area Discovery Museum (Sausalito, CA) sends an appeal letter in October and a follow-up email at the end of the year. The museum sends another mailing in March of the new year and a follow-up email in April.

Answer: Madison Children's Museum (WI) makes the initial ask before the Thanksgiving and once more before December 1. The museum follows up with a spring appeal in May before the close of its fiscal year (June 30).

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