

**GO BEYOND 24 HOURS:**  
Extend the impact of  
your Giving Day &  
create community

Innovate your fundraising  
strategy and turn  
one-time donors into  
powerhouse supporters

**DonorDrive®**



## INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are tasked with the challenge of consistently driving fundraising growth among their communities of students, alumni, faculty, and constituencies. Hosting an annual Giving Day is often a go-to strategy for many schools. During the one-day event, your community goes all-in to raise money for your institution during a focused time. At many schools, these Giving Days are a large source of annual campaign fundraising for vital programs to support causes and programs. In fact, charitable giving to U.S. higher education institutions totaled \$49.5 billion in 2020.

Understandably, many colleges and universities spend a large amount of time and money driving toward Giving Days. At the end of the 24 hours, it may result in a great fundraising total that everyone can celebrate. Short-term wins are always great, **but how do you know if your Giving Day is supporting your institution's long-term goals?**

When your Giving Day is only an annual 24-hour event, it might be limiting the fundraising potential of your supporters. More importantly, the format and execution strategy could be leaking potential donors — and shortening the lifespan of those donors — because the campaign is failing to meet their needs and expectations.

Think about your Giving Days and try to answer these questions:

- *What happens to the donors after the event? Do they ever come back? Do they ever become a different type of supporter like a recurring donor?*
- *Was there enough lead time to get adequate exposure to the campaign? Did you have enough “buzzworthy” noise on social media and on campus? How long did it last?*
- *Did your donors and promoters feel involved, valued, and engaged? Do you have a diverse body of supporters? Is this campaign the only connection point you have with them the entire year?*

Knowing the answers to these questions can help you evaluate your strategy to reach your long-term fundraising goals.

If a small percentage of your donors return each year and never donate in other campaigns, you're basically starting from the ground up every year. If your supporters are all highly-active campus students or faculty, but perhaps your alumni groups or minority student groups are underrepresented, your engagement strategies are not connecting with them.

If the buzz about your Giving Day faded as quickly as it came, you may be missing critical connection points to spur fundraising momentum. To meet the needs of your students, alumni, and school, the traditional Giving Day fundraising strategy needs to evolve.

## CHAPTER ONE

# HOW AMBASSADOR (PEER-TO-PEER) FUNDRAISING HELPS COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

Short-term fundraising strategies for Giving Days are no longer enough for higher education institutions. The fundraising world is changing and institutions are trying to change with it to avoid falling behind.

A simple social post or email that announces your Giving Day won't cut it in today's fundraising landscape. Neither will asking people to donate if that's the only time you ever reach out to them. You need to foster a community that's motivated to fundraise on your behalf.

Evolving your college or university's fundraising potential means following in the footsteps of many nonprofit organizations and thinking about long-term strategies.

Two nonprofit organizations that know the ins and outs of long-term ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising are [\*Four Diamonds\*](#) and the [\*American Foundation for Suicide Prevention\*](#) (AFSP).



Four Diamonds is well known for its work with **Penn State THON**, a student-run philanthropy that is committed to enhancing the lives of children and families impacted by childhood cancer. It's the largest event at Penn State.



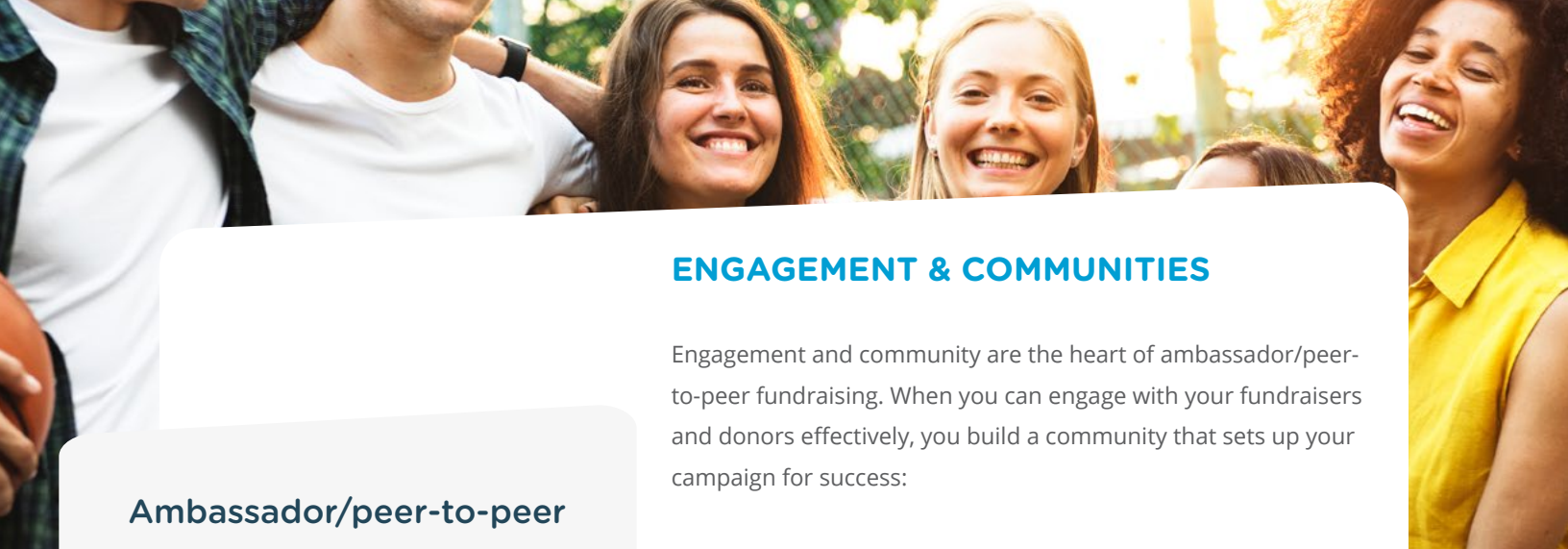
**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's mission is to save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide. They bring events like **Out of the Darkness Walks** to high schools, colleges, and universities.

Both Four Diamonds and AFSP are successful because they built strong communities around their causes through long-term initiatives that focus on ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising.

With ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising, students and alumni can set up their own personalized fundraising pages to collect money and gain support directly from their family, friends, colleagues, and other people who come across their campaigns and have a shared interest in the program's success.

This type of fundraising is a multi-pronged approach that empowers individuals to organize personal campaigns and receive donations from their peers. When it comes to extending Giving Day, long-term fundraising that involves an ambassador/peer-to-peer element makes all the difference for improving engagement and fostering communities.



## ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNITIES

Engagement and community are the heart of ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising. When you can engage with your fundraisers and donors effectively, you build a community that sets up your campaign for success:

**Ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising is a multi-pronged approach that empowers individuals to organize personal campaigns and receive donations from their peers.**

- Build communities, including people not directly connected with your institution.
- Reinforce your institutional branding and turn current students into more committed alumni.
- Improve marketing and bring in more donations by getting people talking about your institution's causes.

But you need to know how to engage with your community. In today's learning environment, students can be on campus full time, half of the time, or not at all. And, alumni engagement is just as critical. When you have poor alumni engagement, you end up with a lower response to traditional donation campaigns, lower attendance at alumni events, and a higher reliance on big donors.



### Scenario

Which of these strategies is most likely to engage more people and drive more donations?

**Option 1:** You mass mail a generic letter, checkbox form, and envelope to alumni informing them Giving Day is coming up and hope they send you a check.

**Option 2:** You digitally mass market your Giving Day and send every contact an email with a link to a single donation form requesting donations to make it to your fundraising goal.

**Option 3:** Months prior to Giving Day, you invite alumni, current students, faculty, and anyone connected to the institution's causes to set up a fundraising page. They could connect with a team of former classmates or student groups, or they could select which institutional fundraising initiative to support. As they fundraise, they can earn exclusive badges, branded apparel, or incentives for completing certain fundraising activities to spur fundraising motivation.



## CHAPTER TWO

# HOW TO CREATE POWERHOUSE FUNDRAISERS

*Institutions need to support their students and alumni in order to turn them into successful ambassadors/peer-to-peer fundraisers. For this to happen, institutions should focus on what their supporters need most:*

### The Hierarchy of a Supporter's Needs



- Awareness
- Trust
- Connectedness
- Ownership
- Promotion

## AWARENESS

Turning your institution's Giving Day into an ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising opportunity requires awareness. But it's more than just sending emails or posting on social media. It's about the cause.

Your Giving Day should support a cause that fundraisers and donors care about. Students and alumni need to become invested in your cause or they won't have an interest in fundraising.

"The students provide the energy, the positivity, and the early excitement about what our mission is and really make a big impact," said Logan Echard, Online Giving Coordinator at Four Diamonds - Penn State Thon. If you aren't sure what your fundraisers are passionate about, ask them. They will be happy to offer their input. But be sure to respond accordingly.

When students and alumni are passionate about a cause, they become invested. They recruit their peers. They tell their family and friends. They raise money.

However, making students and alumni aware of your campaign isn't enough to get them involved. You also need trust.



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## TRUST

Trust is crucial for getting students and alumni to advocate on your behalf. You earn it through transparency and empowerment.

### Transparency

Colleges and universities need to be candid about how the funds will be used. Students and alumni want to know how the money is being invested, and that they're supporting a worthy cause. This helps them feel confident that their fundraising efforts are working. Donors are also more likely to give if they know where the money is going and understand the impact it will make. *Two-thirds of donors* say that understanding the impact of their donation would encourage them to give more. Transparency among charities can *increase donations by 50 percent*, and that applies to colleges and universities as well.

### Empowerment

Colleges and universities can also build trust with their students and alumni by empowering them. One way is by putting students and alumni on council or advisory boards. This way, they can participate and make informed decisions on changes that impact their peers who will feel their voices are heard. It also creates a form of connectedness in the community.

## CONNECTEDNESS

Building a community that supports your fundraising efforts all year requires connectedness. When people come together for a worthy cause, powerful things happen.

### Penn State THON

THON is one of the largest higher education fundraising events in the United States. The entire community gets together to raise money for children and families affected by childhood cancer. It's also a time for people to reconnect and create new traditions. Students, alumni, family, friends, and others anticipate the dance marathon every year. In 2021, THON raised *more than \$10.6 million*.

### Out of the Darkness Walks

The AFSP's Out of the Darkness Walks raise awareness and funds for suicide prevention. The walks take place at campuses and communities across the nation. In 2020, the walks went virtual for the first time due to the pandemic. Despite the pivot, the organization raised more than \$1 million.

For 2021, the events went hybrid, and participants continued to send in videos about why they were walking and how it made them feel. And when people came together in person, they were able to build deep connections with each other.

"Because it's suicide prevention, they see a lot of kids and feel they can open up and bring in committee members that way," said Meredith Henning, Director of Out of the Darkness Walks & Charity Streaming at AFSP. "It's really great to see the connection the students have with each other." And after students feel connected with each other and the cause, they begin to take ownership of the fundraising journey.



## OWNERSHIP

To create a sense of ownership around a fundraiser, students and alumni need the ability to fundraise how they want.

“The worst thing a university [can do] is limit the students’ creativity. And you don’t want to limit their authenticity,” said Michael Ringenbach, Associate Director at Four Diamonds. “You have to let the students speak in their own voice ... and then they’ll bring in their networks and donors to the organization because they’re telling their story.”

One way to empower students is by giving them ownership of a personalized fundraising page. This allows students to tell their stories and makes them feel part of the campaign. It also helps with promoting the fundraiser to their personal network of friends and family.

## PROMOTION

Finally, you need to equip students and alumni with the ability to effectively communicate and promote their involvement with your campaign. There are two fundamental ways to ensure your participants are empowered to promote your cause. They need specific coaching and suggestions they can build from and a platform that allows them to raise money their way.





## CHAPTER THREE

# HOW TO PUT THIS STRATEGY INTO PRACTICE

*Now you're ready to build an ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising community, but **how do you make this tried and tested strategy work for your institution?***

*Take these key steps to jumpstart an ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising strategy:*

- Upgrade your digital fundraising experience
- Personalize your communication
- Create community with students and alumni
- Make giving easy for all
- Find the best fundraising tool for your organization

## Upgrade your fundraising digital fundraising experience

A new ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising program with 1,000s of supporters doesn't happen overnight. Start by integrating new strategies and building loyalty with your students and alumni.

A great place to start is your existing donation campaign pages. Use suggested donation amounts and a toggle button that allows people to easily become recurring donors. These simple changes can improve your donor's giving experience and increase your funds raised.

Then, offer DIY fundraising opportunities in which your community can set up personalized pages and recruit their network to donate. Continue building your digital fundraising program with engaging solutions like virtual events, livestreaming, and mobile app fundraising.

## Personalize your communication

Once you have your upgraded donation campaign site in place, it's time to communicate with your students and alumni. Impersonal mass marketing approaches, including generic mailers or emails, are no longer effective for today's donors.

Personalize your communication and meet your supporters where they are. People are mobile, on social media, and looking to find community. You should still use mailers and emails as it makes sense for certain demographics, of course, but adapting communication methods to more modern expectations will help you generate better results and encourage philanthropy with a new audience.

## Create community with students & alumni

Today's donors want to do more than open their wallet. They want to be part of a community and are willing to do more to support your cause. Instead of always asking for donations, engage your supporters to be champions of your cause. They will be more willing and receptive to making personalized fundraising pages and asking their networks to donate.

Encourage your supporters to tell their story (A great example is students who have been the benefactors of a scholarship program and encourage others to make that possible for a deserving student.) and use engagement tools like fundraising incentives, milestones, and badges to reward their efforts.

## Make giving easy for all

The best fundraising campaign will fall flat if your donors are met with a cumbersome giving experience. Make donating as easy as possible with digital wallet giving options including Apple Pay, PayPal, and Venmo. Then take your fundraising to the next level with Facebook fundraisers, streaming platforms, and other engagement tools that allow your donors to seamlessly give wherever they are.

## Find the best fundraising tool for your organization

With the right fundraising platform, you can embark on ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising with innovative functionality to further engage donors and fundraisers and take your Giving Days to the next level.

You need tools to make it easy for your team to create custom campaigns and show off your school pride. You should have access to everything you need right away to get started and utilize as many peer-to-peer strategies as you want to reach your fundraising goals.

With the right choice, you get more than just software. As you learn more about expanding your digital fundraising roadmap, you have access to a dedicated team that can coach your college or university throughout the entire journey.





## Make fundraising simple

### Personal fundraising pages

Empower your students and alumni with personalized fundraising pages they can share with their network of friends and family.

### Flexible donation forms

Use suggested donation amounts, recurring donation toggles, custom fields, digital wallet payment options like Venmo, and more to make giving easy for all donors.

### Mobile first

Allow fundraisers to advocate for your cause on the go. With a cohesive cross-channel experience, your supporters have the tools to raise more.

### Conversion-focused design

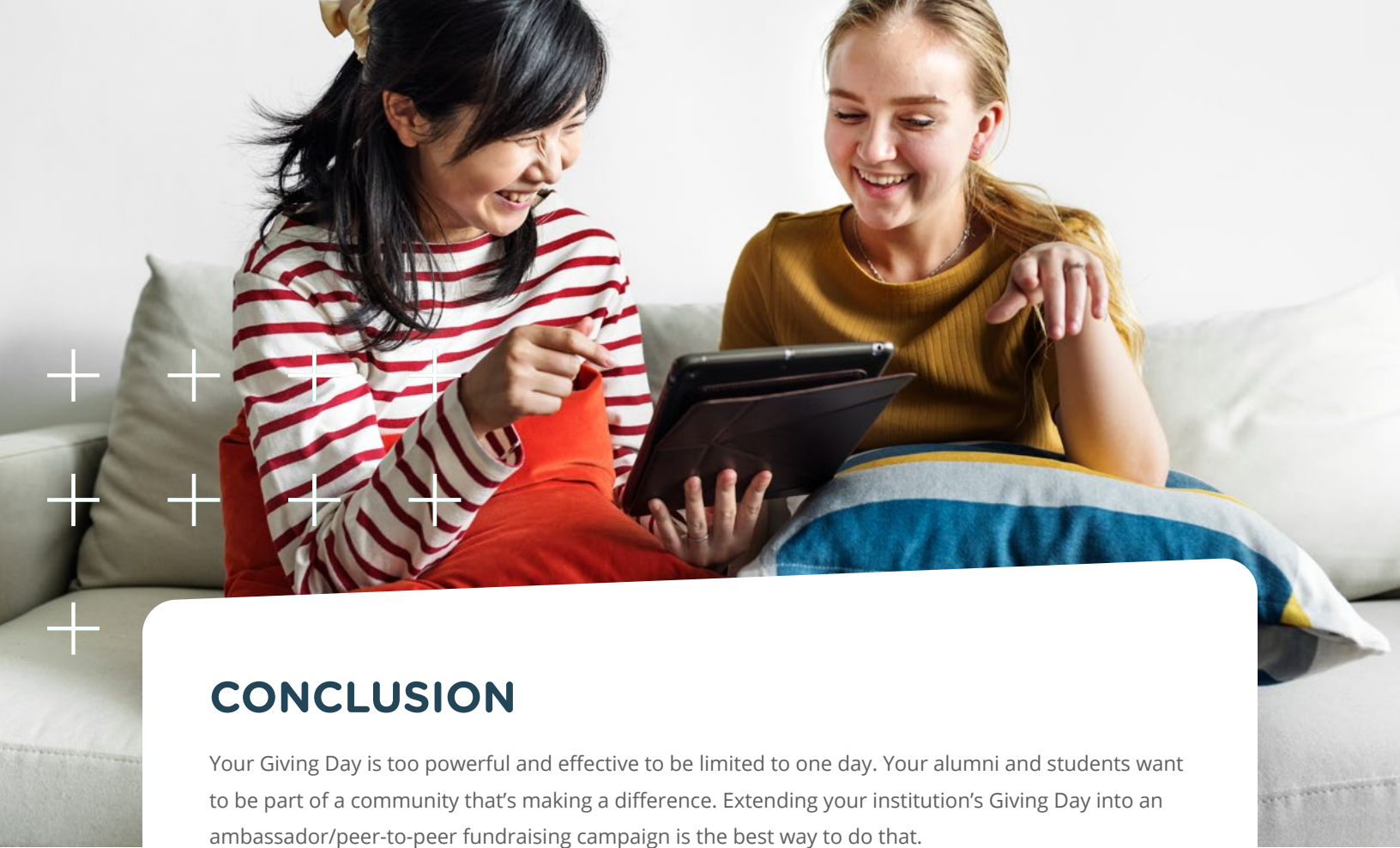
Launch secure campaigns and welcoming event pages to engage your community and increase conversions with easy-to-use setup tools.

### Organized data

Organize and track your donors and build a community of new supporters with real-time analytics and integrations with your existing CRM.

### Next-level engagement

Put the fun in fundraising with gamification tools like milestones, badges, incentives, activity tracking, livestreaming, and other innovations to increase engagement.



## CONCLUSION

Your Giving Day is too powerful and effective to be limited to one day. Your alumni and students want to be part of a community that's making a difference. Extending your institution's Giving Day into an ambassador/peer-to-peer fundraising campaign is the best way to do that.

To make this happen, invest in a sophisticated fundraising platform that can help you increase communication, hold hybrid events, and streamline your fundraising. This way, you can transform your current students and alumni lists into a thriving fundraising community.

**Drive engagement and loyalty with industry-leading tools and integrations and get your community involved with an experience centered around your institution's mission.**

## Turn one-time donors into powerhouse supporters.

Drive more revenue for your institution's mission and causes with the enterprise-level fundraising platform that has a proven track record of driving growth for organizations like yours. DonorDrive provides a better all-around experience for staff, fundraisers, and donors.

With DonorDrive, you have access to the widest range of fundraising capabilities and integrations for a centralized, well-connected, and compelling fundraising experience to help you connect with today's fundraiser and scale your campaigns.

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