

# How to Hold a Successful Giving Day for Your School



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Successful giving days aren't magic. Using the strategies and tools provided in this guide, every school—including yours—can run a supercharged giving day.

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# INTRODUCTION

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When done right, giving days are a powerful and profitable fundraising strategy for independent schools. Over the past decade, thousands of schools have hosted successful giving days, and advances in technology have made these events easier than ever. In my experience, every school (regardless of size) should run a giving day every year.

In this guide, we'll teach you how to run a successful giving day. We'll look at tips and strategies for stand-alone giving days, as well as #GivingTuesday. You'll also get first-hand feedback from three school fundraisers who ran successful giving days on what works, and what doesn't.

Like with other types of fundraising, there's a learning curve to running a supercharged giving day, but it isn't steep. With the help of this guide, any school—including yours—can successfully raise the money needed to help your school thrive from an annual giving day.



Giving days should build a sense of camaraderie on your team by making it feel like everyone is pulling in the same direction and toward the same worthy goal of supporting your school and the students you serve.



A young boy with dark hair, wearing a teal t-shirt, is sitting at a desk in a classroom. He is focused on writing in a notebook with a red pencil. His eyes are down, and his expression is one of concentration. In the background, another student is partially visible, and the classroom environment is softly blurred. The entire image has a green-to-blue gradient overlay.

CHAPTER

# 01

What a Giving Day is

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Simply put, a giving day is a one-day fundraising campaign to generate awareness, find new donors, and raise money. For your school, it's an all-hands-on-deck, 24-hour fundraising program. Of course, while the actual check writing and credit card swiping occur on a single day, successful giving days take months of planning to be successful.

Many schools run their campaigns on #GivingTuesday, but a giving day can occur on any day that your school chooses. These stand-alone events are like having your school's own #GivingTuesday—a day to generate buzz and revenue through a series of activities without having to compete with thousands of organizations asking for donations on the same day.

Regardless of whether you are running a giving day on #GivingTuesday or as a stand-alone event, the day typically includes various activities and lots of communication with your donor base to get them excited to give. We'll cover these strategies later in this eBook.

## Why Giving Days Are Such a Powerful Fundraising Strategy

Depending on the size of your school, your alumni base, and the capacity of the donors and prospects in your network, a successful giving day could raise \$25,000, \$100,000 or even \$500,000 in one fantastic day of fundraising. What makes giving days such a powerful fundraising strategy? And why do giving days work so well for schools?

Giving days work because they focus everyone at your organization on one task: raising as much money as possible in a single day. Giving days allow you to wrangle your board, faculty, administrators, donors, and volunteers to help connect your fundraising team to donors and spread the word about your giving day activities.

By holding a giving day for your school, you can leverage your team's work into massive buzz and attention for your institution, expand your capacity by finding new donors, and remind your donors, board, and other supporters about the importance of fundraising for the success of your school's mission and programs.

Plus, giving days are—or should be—fun. Giving days should build a sense of camaraderie on your team by making it feel like everyone is pulling in the same direction and toward the same worthy goal of supporting your school and the students you serve.





## GIVING DAY SNAPSHOT: THE DERRYFIELD SCHOOL

### **About the School:**

Located in Manchester, NH, The Derryfield School is a private day school with 390 students in grades 6–12. The school raises approximately \$650,000 in annual fund support each year.

### **About the Giving Day:**

Each year since 2015, The Derryfield School has run a stand-alone giving day (“The Day of Giving”) to support its annual fund.

### **The Results:**

In 2018, Derryfield’s Day of Giving raised \$100,000 from 403 donors, which included a \$30,000 matching challenge from a major donor.

### **What Worked:**

According to Mollie MacDearmid, Derryfield’s director of annual giving, donor match challenges have been the key to their success. “Matching challenges make the campaign exciting for the parents and alumni,” said Mollie, who works hard each year to identify major donors to support giving day donor matches. Mollie also credits the school’s giving day success to early planning, volunteer committee recruitment, and a team of 40 volunteers making calls throughout the day to solicit support.

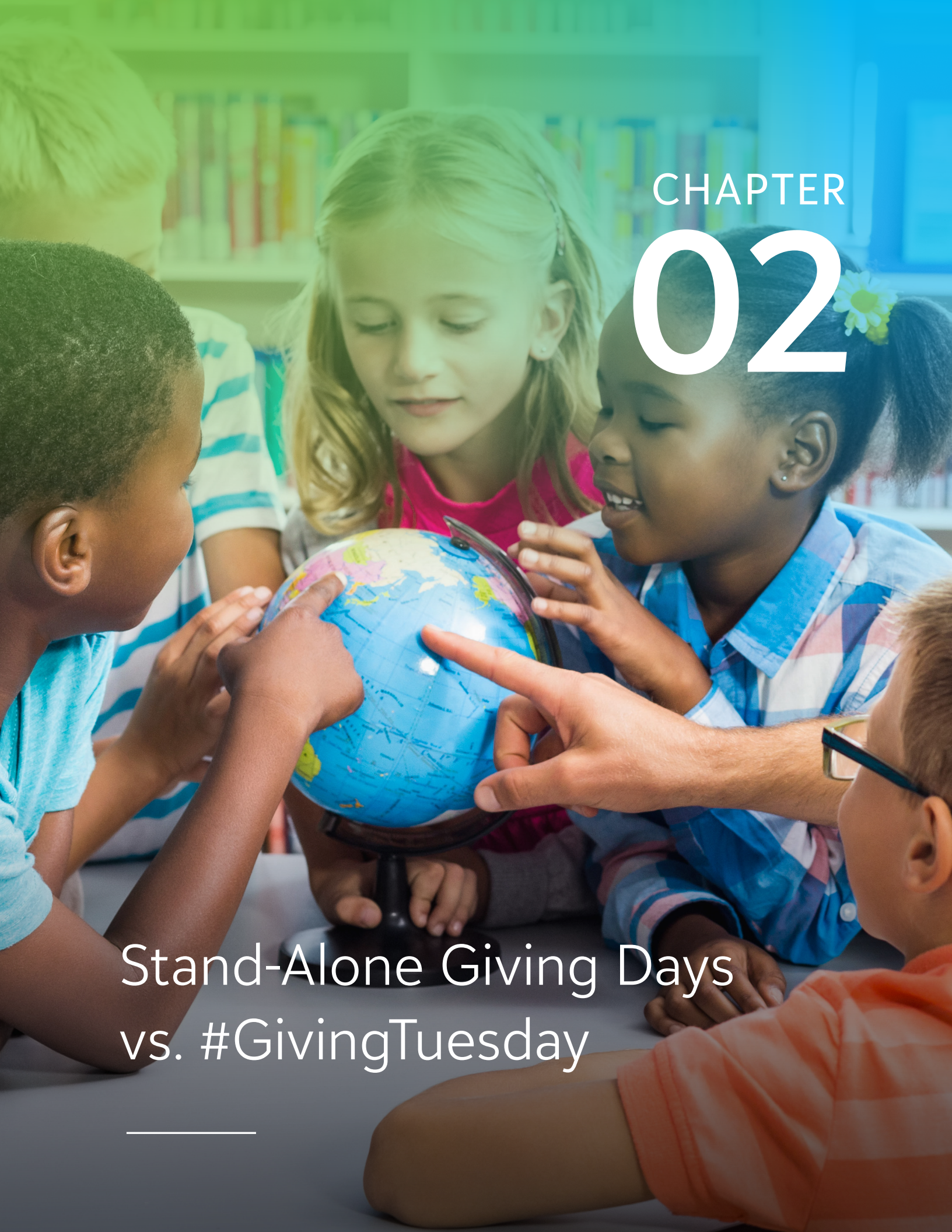
### **What They Would Change:**

They wouldn’t change much other than to adapt the program to bigger goals. After three years, the school is confident that it has a strong giving day plan from testing what works and what doesn’t over the previous years. “Giving days definitely build upon themselves,” said Mollie. “Keep refining your plan every year, and each year you will raise more than the last.”



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One of the most common questions I get from schools looking to launch a giving day is whether they should participate in #GivingTuesday or hold a stand-alone giving day.



CHAPTER  
02

Stand-Alone Giving Days  
vs. #GivingTuesday

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Launched in 2012, #GivingTuesday takes place on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. The idea is that many people go shopping on Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving, for those of you not in the United States) and shop online on Cyber Monday (the Monday after Black Friday), so why not try to get people to give some of what they have left to nonprofits the following day?

Over the past several years, #GivingTuesday has grown exponentially. Tens of thousands of nonprofits, schools, churches, and other charities now participate, raising millions of dollars each year. Many news channels run special features on #GivingTuesday, and email inboxes are flooded with reminders to give.

One of the most common questions I get from schools looking to launch a giving day is whether they should participate in #GivingTuesday or hold a stand-alone giving day. There's no easy answer, as there are several pros and cons to each option. Let's examine those below.

## #GivingTuesday

Many schools participate in #GivingTuesday to leverage the buzz and excitement that already exists around #GivingTuesday—especially online. They feel that people recognize #GivingTuesday as an annual event and that many of their donors look forward to giving on this day. Some schools also think that their board members and donors expect them to do something on #GivingTuesday, and they don't want to do anything half-hearted, so they run their giving days on that day.

On the flip side, as #GivingTuesday has expanded and become more popular, many donors feel inundated by fundraising messages. Personally, I receive several dozen solicitation emails each #GivingTuesday from organizations I support. As a result of this oversaturation, it has become more difficult for schools—particularly smaller schools with limited fundraising resources—to cut through the clutter.

## Stand-Alone Giving Days

Schools that run stand-alone giving days, instead of (or in addition to) participating in #GivingTuesday, do so because they want to make sure that their donors and supporters are focused on their school, instead of competing with the tens of thousands of organizations trying to build buzz and excitement on the same day.

On the other hand, many schools that run stand-alone giving days also send out an email or two on #GivingTuesday because they feel like their donors, board members, and families expect it. While doing so won't hurt your other fundraising efforts, you should know that you aren't likely to raise a lot of money on #GivingTuesday unless you fully commit to the effort. Simply putting out an email or two on #GivingTuesday may mollify your board members and other supporters who expect you to do something on that day, but without a plan, weeks of prep work, and a full slate of marketing activities, you won't raise much from those efforts.

## My Recommendation

There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer in the choice between running a stand-alone giving day versus participating in #GivingTuesday. If your school has made #GivingTuesday a tradition and is having success with it, my advice is to continue growing your #GivingTuesday fundraising programs. If you are just starting out, and want to test the #GivingTuesday waters, by all means do so. There's no harm in trying, and you can always switch over to a solo giving day if your #GivingTuesday results don't match your expectations.

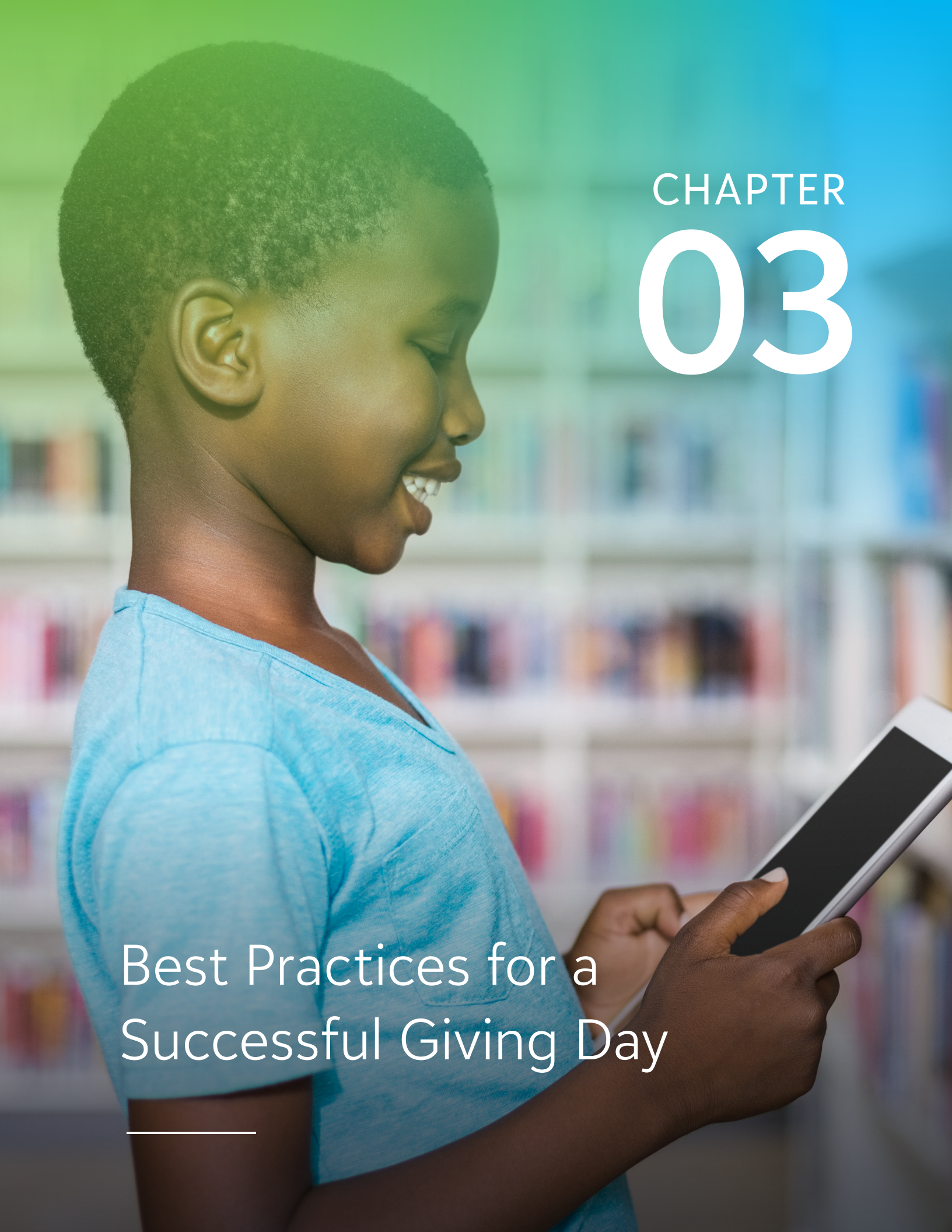
That being said, my recommendation for schools that haven't already established successful #GivingTuesday programs is to launch your own stand-alone giving day rather than jumping on the #GivingTuesday bandwagon. In my experience, it is far better to fundraise on a day where you are not competing with thousands of other nonprofits. Most of the schools and other nonprofits I work with have found that being the only organization running a giving day makes the experience far more interesting, exciting, and noteworthy for the donor.

The remainder of this book will delve into best practices, strategies, and tips for supercharging your school's giving days. Most of these strategies will apply whether you are running a stand-alone giving day or participating in #GivingTuesday.



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As more and more organizations run giving days, we collectively build our knowledge for what works and what doesn't.

A young girl with short hair, wearing a light blue t-shirt, is shown in profile from the chest up. She is smiling and looking at a tablet computer she is holding with both hands. The background is a blurred library with bookshelves filled with books. The overall lighting is bright and warm, with a green-to-blue gradient overlay on the right side of the image.

CHAPTER  
03

Best Practices for a  
Successful Giving Day

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Over the course of the past decade, hundreds of thousands of schools and other nonprofits have run successful giving days. As more and more organizations run giving days, we collectively build our knowledge for what works and what doesn't. These are the best practices you will need to understand in order to run a successful giving day at your school, whether it's a stand-alone giving day or a campaign on #GivingTuesday:

### **1. Plan ahead...way ahead.**

Planning a successful giving day that reaches its fundraising goals takes time and effort. For your first giving day, you'll want to make sure you start planning at least three months in advance. I recommend that you create a short, written plan for your giving day and treat it with the same care and forethought as any other fundraising campaign for the school.

Don't fall prey to the most common misconception about giving days, which is that they can be thrown together in a week or two. The most successful giving days—the ones where schools exceed their fundraising goals—are also the ones where the fundraising team spent the most time preparing before the launch.

### **2. Be transparent about what you are doing.**

Giving days work, in part, because everyone understands that you are running a special fundraising day to support the school. Don't try to hide the fact that you are running a day focused solely on fundraising.

Many nonprofits run a "secret" giving day by sending out tweets and emails about fundraising without ever actually announcing the giving day. Don't make that mistake. Be proud of the fact that you are running a 24-hour fundraising campaign.

Tell your community that you have a great school with meaningful outcomes. Share your vision for the future, and explain that it will cost money to get there, which is why you are running a giving day to support the school. Then, trust your donors and other supporters to partner with you by investing in your vision for the future.

### **3. Brand your giving day.**

The most successful organizations create a brand around their giving days to make it easier to spread the word and to convince more donors to give. To build a brand, you'll need to assign a name to your giving day that aligns with your school's mission. Some examples include:

- The St. William School One-Day Campaign
- 24 Scholarships in 24 Hours
- 3rd Annual Education Wednesday

Likewise, your team should create a short case for support that outlines why you are running the one-day campaign, how much you are trying to raise, and why it is essential to do so in a short period of time. This explanation will form the basis of your donor communications and should specifically target the need you are addressing by running a giving day.

#### 4. Create a goal and a donor pyramid.

Don't be nebulous with your giving day planning. Set a clear fundraising goal so that everyone on your team (including your donors) is on the same page when it comes to the day's activities. Instead of saying that you want to raise as much as possible that day to provide scholarships to inner-city students, tell your donors that you are raising \$48,000 in one day to provide 10 full scholarships for the coming year.

Create a donor pyramid that you can use internally to show how many donors are needed at the various levels to reach the goal. Remember, if you are setting an ambitious goal (And you should!), you will need to include major donors in your giving day fundraising mix.

As you create donor goals, it is important to include donors at various levels. Ideally, you will find a small number of people to make leadership gifts during the giving day, as well as a solid group of mid-level givers. Then, you can round out your donor pyramid with a large number of smaller donors. It is essential to create this giving pyramid during the planning stage so that you can target donor communications to the appropriate groups with the right level asks for each of your donors.

#### 5. Giving days are not a set-it-and-forget-it fundraising tactic.

Some schools think that giving days are a set-it-and-forget-it fundraising strategy. They plan out their giving day, develop a brand for it, and when the big day comes, they send out an email blast and post asks on social media. Then they go back to their regularly scheduled activities. Such efforts are doomed to fail. Successful giving days require constant activity for the entire day, and for your entire team.

***The most common activities that schools carry out on a successful giving day include:***

✓ **Events** such as giving day breakfasts, lunches, and rallies

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✓ **Letters** that arrive one to three days before the big day

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✓ **Email** blasts sent before and during the giving day

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✓ **Phone calls** asking people to donate during the day, including phone-a-thons hosted by volunteers

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✓ **Continuous social media** reminders about your giving day activities and asks

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✓ **Meetings** with affinity groups and other fundraising groups during the giving day

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✓ **PR** such as press releases, talk radio interviews, etc.

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The more activity on your giving day the better. Remember, the goal is to make sure that everyone in your network is donating as well as talking about the day and helping to spread the word. Your entire team should be involved in building buzz and excitement, in addition to making asks through social media, phone calls, in-person meetings, and more.

## 6. You need a team!

Speaking of your team—remember that you need one! In addition to your development staff, you'll need to get your board and your faculty involved in the fundraising efforts if you want to have the most successful giving day possible.

I also recommend that you put together a Giving Day Leadership Committee composed of some of your most dedicated volunteers, faculty, administrators, donors, and board members. This committee should be responsible for helping your team spread the word about your big day by being active on social media, sending out emails, attending events (if you have them), and of course, making a donation to support your giving day campaign.

## 7. Focus on your core donor universe.

As a school, you have a core built-in donor base. This includes your alumni, parents and grandparents of current students, parents and family of alumni, and the connections of your board members and faculty. Don't eschew this base. The success of your giving day will rely on getting your current donor base to donate and spread the word.

Ideally, you are asking the school's current supporters to do two things on the giving day: first, to make a gift, and second, to solicit donations from their network. Many schools make the mistake of focusing on finding new donors or alumni who don't currently give. Giving days can be a means for activating alumni and student families who don't give, but your primary focus should be on current supporters. Ask them to give and to spread the word, and stay in constant contact with them in the days leading up to your campaign.

## 8. Make it interesting and fun.

There are lots of ways to make your school's next giving day more interesting and fun. One of the best options is to offer donor match challenges, where larger donors match a specific number of donations or dollar amount that comes in over a specified period of time. Thus, you could offer a donor match challenge from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., and then another one from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. These challenges provide a reason to send urgent emails to your donor list.

Other ways to make your one-day campaign more exciting include pitting different alumni years against each other in a contest to see who gives more or offering incentives (similar to crowdfunding campaign perks) to donors who give at different levels. You can even challenge your rival school in a fun competition to see who can raise more on their giving day (this works particularly well if both schools are participating in #GivingTuesday or are running stand-alone giving days within a couple of weeks of each other). The losing school may have to post a video of the faculty singing the rival's fight song, or the headmaster of the losing school could wear the winning school's t-shirt for a day.

## **9. Go all in.**

If your school is planning to run a #GivingTuesday campaign, there are a couple of things to know in addition to the best practices listed above:

- To compete with the hundreds of thousands of other nonprofits that are sending out millions of fundraising messages on #GivingTuesday, you need to turn up the volume by putting your #GivingTuesday campaign in people's inboxes, voicemails, and social media feeds constantly throughout the day.
- If you're running a campaign on #GivingTuesday, chances are you are hoping to build off the #GivingTuesday buzz. Go all in and embrace the #GivingTuesday spirit of philanthropy and ethos of giving back during the holiday shopping season, and work that philosophy into your donor communications for the day.



## GIVING DAY SNAPSHOT: PROCTOR ACADEMY

### **About the School:**

Located in Andover, NH, Proctor Academy is a 170-year-old coed boarding high school with 370 students. The school raises approximately \$4 million in general support each year.

### **About the Giving Day:**

Each year, Proctor Academy runs a three-and-a-half-day immersion learning program called #Project370. This campaign is run like a giving day and is held during the school's annual student service projects. The goal of the giving campaign is to raise 370 gifts, which equals the number of students that attend the school.

### **The Results:**

In 2018, Proctor's #Project370 campaign raised \$115,000 from 411 individual donors.

### **What Worked:**

According to Bonny Morris, Proctor's director of annual giving, one of the most important factors for success is to start the process early and to have a plan in place well in advance of launching the campaign. Also, the school works hard to get its parents' association, board of trustees, and alumni association heavily involved.

### **What They Would Change:**

Underscoring her point that planning is critical, Bonny says that next year they're going to start planning even earlier. She also noted that the school plans to add more touch points for donors both before and during the giving day because these communications are crucial to building awareness and support.

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Planning a successful giving day that reaches its fundraising goals takes time and effort.



A photograph of a man and a young boy. The man, on the left, has short brown hair, wears black-rimmed glasses, and a blue button-down shirt. He is smiling broadly and leaning towards the boy. The boy, on the right, has short dark hair, is smiling, and wearing a grey backpack over a blue and white striped shirt. He is giving a thumbs-up gesture. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm yellow and green lighting. The text 'CHAPTER 04' is overlaid in the top right corner, and 'Planning a Giving Day' is overlaid in the bottom left corner.

CHAPTER  
04

Planning a Giving Day

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## Giving Day Tech: What do you need to be successful?

Many fundraisers ask me about the technology needed for a successful giving day. The good news is that you can be successful using very little technology. That being said, there are some great tools that can help make your giving day a resounding success. These include:

### PHONE

It doesn't get any more old-fashioned than picking up the phone to solicit financial support. Yet many schools assume that their giving day activities should be focused entirely online. Nothing could be further from the truth. Phone fundraising is an effective strategy that can benefit giving days.

In the days leading up to your giving day, get on the phone to let people know it is coming. Then, on the big day, work the phones for donations. Many schools have found that a volunteer-staffed phone-a-thon can provide a huge boost to the overall revenue from a one-day campaign.

### WEBSITE

The school's website is crucial to giving day success. Many people who hear about the giving day (or #GivingTuesday) campaign will go to the website to learn more. In the days leading up to the giving day, the event should be featured front and center on your school's home page with links for people to learn about participating.

Also, be sure to set up a dedicated page on the website to collect donations on the big day. This page should accept credit card payments and provide information on who to contact if someone wants to give by check or ask questions about the campaign. Many schools also include a fundraising thermometer on this page to show donors how much progress is being made toward the school's overall giving day goal.

When doing this, it is important to create a different page from your school's standard annual giving page/form. You want to make sure donors and alumni understand that this is a special campaign—one that is different (and hopefully more fun) than your other fundraising activities. A separate page also allows you to keep the giving day messaging consistent. Including a thermometer or another way to track the campaign's progress will help keep donors engaged, similar to the crowdfunding campaign page suggestion below.

### EMAIL NEWSLETTER

The backbone of the school's giving day communications plan should be your email list. Use your email newsletter provider (Blackbaud, AWeber, MailChimp®, Constant Contact®) to send mass emails several times over the course of the day asking for support. Since this is a one-day event, it's better to err on the side of sending too many emails than too few—don't leave any money on the table!

## MOBILE CREDIT CARD SCANNERS

Some schools have had success with having staff members stand outside during drop-off and pick-up times, reminding parents that it is giving day and allowing them to make donations from the car line. While this is not a necessity for a successful giving day, it can be a fun way to boost your bottom line, especially if the staff members wear costumes and make signage. Many credit card processing companies, including Stripe, PayPal®, and Square, offer cheap and easy-to-use credit card scanners that plug directly into your smartphone or tablet.

## CROWDFUNDING PAGE

Another option that many schools use successfully is a crowdfunding page—often directing website visitors to the crowdfunding site instead of supporting the campaign on the school’s site. Through a service such as [everydayhero®](#), these pages provide an easy way to create attractive campaign pages and accept donations. While using a crowdfunding page as the hub of your giving day activities can be a quick and easy way to set up a great-looking campaign page, keep in mind that these pages typically include a fundraising thermometer that only tracks donations made on the page.

This means that donations solicited elsewhere won’t appear by default. Thus, if your goal for the giving day is \$100,000, and you raise lots of money through checks, donor matches, and in-person giving that day, your crowdfunding page thermometer may only show \$20,000 in donations even though you are very close to hitting your \$100,000 goal. Weak results also tend to depress donations because people feel less enthusiastic about your school hitting its giving day goal.

Make sure that the crowdfunding service allows offline donations to be entered (This is a feature of everydayhero.) and that someone is responsible for updating this throughout the day so that the thermometer reflects the actual amount raised.



## GIVING DAY SNAPSHOT: NIGHTINGALE-BAMFORD SCHOOL

### **About the School:**

The Nightingale-Bamford School is an all-girl, K-12 school located in Manhattan's Upper East Side. The school raises approximately \$3.2 million in annual fund support each year.

### **About the Giving Day:**

Nightingale has participated in #GivingTuesday every year since it launched, and their donor base has grown accustomed to giving on this day.

### **The Results:**

In 2018, The Nightingale-Bamford School raised \$524,000 on #GivingTuesday, their most successful #GivingTuesday campaign to date. This amount does not include a \$350,000 matching gift for the #GivingTuesday campaign that was pledged by the board of trustees.

### **What Worked:**

Erica Lee, Nightingale's director of annual giving and constituent relations, noted that challenge gifts have worked very well for the school on #GivingTuesday, as have volunteer fundraising committees. "We make it a priority to plan our #GivingTuesday message and theme early each year," she said. "It's also important to start prepping your donors early by communicating with them through all media. That gets them ready to give!"

### **What They Would Change:**

This past year, the school spent some of its #GivingTuesday fundraising budget on creating professional videos to promote the giving day. "No one watched them," Erica said, "even though we pushed them out through many different channels. The return on our investment just wasn't there."



## A Sample Calendar for Running a Successful Giving Day for Your School

Okay, now that you know which strategies and tactics will help make your school's giving day a resounding success, let's review a step-by-step calendar to help you prioritize.

Remember that every school is different, so while this calendar will work for the majority of schools, your school may need to start earlier, move things around, or add/subtract some of the items that are included in this guide. In other words, use this calendar as a template for your own giving day schedule, but be sure to customize it based on your school's unique needs and resources!

### ✓ 12 Weeks Before Your Giving Day...

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- Put your giving day on the calendar
- Develop the fundraising goal, theme, and branding for the giving day, as well as the case for support (what the money will be used for and why people should give)
- Develop a prospect list for the Giving Day Leadership Committee

### ✓ 10 Weeks Out...

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- Develop the collateral materials for the giving day, including the giving day webpage, two flyers to send home with students, and a handout to give to parents arriving at school on the big day
- Invite people to join the Giving Day Leadership Committee

### ✓ 8 Weeks Out...

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- Hold a Giving Day Leadership Committee meeting
- Introduce this year's giving day date, theme, and message to your faculty, staff, and volunteers
- Find at least two donors to offer donor matches on the big day
- Start getting the board excited about the giving day

### ✓ 6 Weeks Out...

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- Send a snail mail letter to your top donors to let them know about the upcoming giving day
- Assemble a team of volunteers to make calls during the giving day

#### ✓ **4 Weeks Out...**

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- Hold a Giving Day Leadership Committee meeting
- Send an email blast to start building buzz for this year's giving day

#### ✓ **2 Weeks Out...**

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- Send a follow-up email blast about the upcoming giving day
- Start touting the giving day on social media
- Develop the call list for the big day

#### ✓ **1 Week Out...**

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- Hold a Giving Day Leadership Committee meeting
- Send an email reminder about the upcoming giving day
- Keep touting the giving day on social media
- Send a giving day flyer home to parents

#### ✓ **The Week of Your Giving Day...**

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- Send a second email reminder about the upcoming giving day
- Ramp up social media efforts for the upcoming giving day
- Hold a giving day rally for students
- Send a second giving day flyer home to parents

#### ✓ **On the Giving Day...**

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- Send at least four email blasts during the day
- Post on each social media channel at least once per hour
- Have your volunteer team make calls to your call list
- Be active at drop-off and pick-up times reminding parents about the giving day
- Announce your donor match challenges and any other fun activities you have planned for the day

- Make sure the fundraising thermometer is being updated with all donations

### ✓ **After the Giving Day...**

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- Announce the results
- Fulfill any promised donor benefits
- Thank the donors, Giving Day Leadership Committee, faculty, staff, volunteers, parents, and students for a successful giving day

It's a lot of work, but it's worth it. As your school runs several annual (or biannual) giving days, you'll start to learn what works and what doesn't for your donor universe. Don't be afraid to test new things, cut out aspects that didn't work, and focus more resources on the successful elements. Your goal should be to raise an increasing amount each year while decreasing the level of hassle and stress.

## You can do this!

Successful giving days aren't magic. Using the strategies and tools provided in this guide, every school—including yours—can run a supercharged giving day. Remember, your school does great work. You need to raise more money to carry out that work. Giving days (whether stand-alone or as part of #GivingTuesday) are a great way to boost your revenue, energize your current donors, and bring new donors onto your team.

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