

How Giving Days Can Work for Your Community Foundation:

10 Lessons From the Knight Foundation Giving Day Initiative

On November 20, 2013, 382 Miami nonprofits united to raise \$3.2 million, nearly tripling the previous year’s record for Give Miami Day, a 24-hour online giving campaign run by the Miami Foundation. The Silicon Valley Community Foundation was watching; less than six months later, it rallied 677 nonprofits to raise an astonishing \$11.4 million in one day through the first-ever Silicon Valley Gives.

Giving days such as Give Miami Day and Silicon Valley Gives are increasing in popularity across the country, and community foundations, as facilitators of philanthropic activity in their communities, are leading the charge. They do so because running giving days inspires the local community to support philanthropic causes, engages new donors, and empowers local nonprofits to fundraise online and use social media more effectively, among other worthy reasons.

But what about the community foundations—does hosting giving days also help them?

With this question in mind, Knight Foundation has experimented with online giving days by supporting community foundations in cities across the United States where brothers John S. and James L. Knight owned newspapers. Through the Giving Day Initiative, Knight sought to know whether giving days could be used to:

- Grow and democratize philanthropy in the participating communities.
- Increase community foundations’ visibility and credibility in their communities.
- Strengthen community foundations by fostering their capacity to raise funds and engage a broader set of donors online.

After a pilot program in 2012, Knight Foundation supported 17 community foundations to run 18 giving days in the fall of 2013 and spring of 2014. In total, these giving days raised \$31.8 million for 3,437 nonprofit organizations from 79,886 donors.

Observing that many community foundations have been grappling with the same types of questions about their giving days, Knight made it a priority to facilitate peer learning across communities and to aggregate tools and best practices through the Giving Day Playbook, an extensive online how-to guide for giving day organizers.

This report, “How Giving Days Can Work for Your Community Foundation: 10 Lessons from the Knight Foundation Giving Day Initiative,” distills findings from an analysis of the 2013 and 2014 giving days and is intended to help community foundations determine whether to run a giving day, how to run one effectively, and how to make it more sustainable for your institution.

While we believe the 10 lessons presented here are representative of broader giving day trends, they emanate from the 17 community foundations in the Knight Foundation Giving Day Initiative and should not be viewed as a definitive reflection of other communities’ giving day experiences.

Many questions remain about the long-term value of giving days. As you embark on your own giving day journey, we hope you will benefit from our findings and discover opportunities to create a campaign that best serves your community foundation and community at large.

Meanwhile, the learning about online giving days continues!

Be a part of the conversation by joining our [Giving Day Exchange](#) on Facebook, where community foundations can share insights and ask questions of fellow campaign organizers.

Join our Giving Day Exchange Facebook group for community foundations and swap insights with peers.

[Click Here!](#)

[View the Complete List of Giving Day Results](#)

Why Run a Giving Day

Giving days do provide some benefits to community foundations. Here are three top reasons that you may want to consider in running a giving day.

1 Increase your visibility in the community.

Giving days are not just about raising money; they're also about raising awareness. Community foundations in the Knight Giving Day Initiative used social media, paid and earned media, and word of mouth to communicate about their giving days. Partnerships with regional champions, such as United Ways, often brought in unique nonprofit and donor networks to which the community foundations did not have access. Through these approaches, community foundations effectively used giving days to increase their visibility in the communities.

Central Carolina Community Foundation reported that Midlands Gives put the community foundation at the forefront of people's minds and resulted in inquiries about its services and role in the community. Silicon Valley Community Foundation said that Silicon Valley Gives improved local perceptions about the community foundation and helped it connect with local issues, nonprofits and donors.

As a result of the giving days, all of the participating community foundations increased their use of social media and their Facebook and Twitter followings. The Miami Foundation had nearly 8 million impressions on Facebook and Twitter on Give Miami Day, while GiveMN generated over 11,000 tweets, 375 Facebook "likes" and 65,000 livestream viewers on Give to the Max Day. Silicon Valley Community Foundation had a 12 percent increase in the number of followers of its Twitter handle (@siliconvalleycf).

Recommendations

Use a variety of [marketing channels](#) to reach nonprofits and the general community. Emails or newsletters from the community foundation, word of mouth, and an email or newsletter from another nonprofit were the most effective means of promotion in our study.

Use a networked communications strategy to reach donors by providing participating nonprofits with [key language and distribution ideas](#) to spread the message about the giving days to their donor communities.



48% of nonprofit participants heard about the giving day through a community foundation email or newsletter.

2 Engage new and existing donors.

The donors who participate in online giving days tend to be demographically different—younger, less wealthy—than the donors typically engaged by community foundations. Giving days thus provide community foundations a chance to interact with a new audience of potential supporters.

The Community Foundation of Grand Forks, East Grand Forks and Region used Facebook and Twitter to connect with younger donors and link them to both Give Grand and other community foundation programs. The Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne ran a public campaign and online voting process to engage the general public in selecting which five organizations would participate in Let's Give Allen County. Yet these engagement opportunities were the exception to the rule, as very few of the other community foundations in the Knight Giving Day Initiative directly built relationships between new donors and the community foundation itself.

Community foundations were more successful at using the giving days to involve their existing donors, particularly donor-advised fund (DAF) holders and board members. Eleven community foundations in the Knight initiative engaged DAF holders in their giving days, enabling them to make contributions that counted toward giving day totals as well as prize and match opportunities.

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County reported that its Giving Challenge energized DAF holders and community foundation board members about philanthropy. They found that the DAF holders and board members were proud to be associated with the community foundation and the success of the giving day. The Miami Foundation had a similar experience with its board members, successfully asking them to dedicate their annual commitment to Give Miami Day and leverage their networks for the campaign. The result: multiple additional contributions to the match and prize pools.

Recommendations

Create specific opportunities for new donors to engage with the community foundation through your giving day by [targeting specific demographics](#), such as young professionals under 35.

Offer [fund holders](#) the ability to participate in the giving day planning and fundraising.



291 donor advised fund holders donated \$1,225,387 through the giving days.

3

Build and strengthen relationships with the nonprofit community.

The large number of nonprofits in most communities makes it difficult for community foundations to maintain strong ties to many local organizations. Giving days create an opportunity for community foundations to connect with numerous organizations, and in the process to develop and strengthen relations with their nonprofit community. This is particularly true during the outreach and training phases, which offer multiple chances for direct interaction.

The Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties credited the Great Give with strengthening its relationship with local nonprofits, especially those that are typically ineligible for community foundation grants.

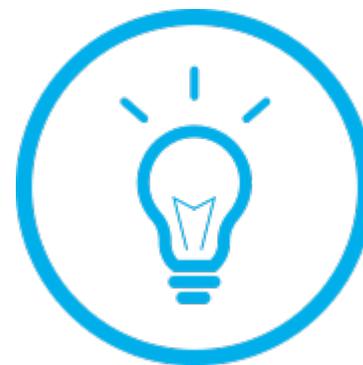
Giving days also require nonprofits to create online profiles, which can provide the community foundations with important information about local nonprofits. This information, paired with stronger and broader relationships in the nonprofit community, enables community foundations to make better donor advised fund holder recommendations and grantmaking decisions.

Silicon Valley Community Foundation leveraged its giving day for staff to learn more about local nonprofit activity, with the goal of improving the quality of donor advice and services. The foundation is currently exploring how to integrate giving day profiles into its own data management system so that it can use this information in its future grantmaking decisions.

Recommendations

Use nonprofit information gathered through the giving day to improve community foundation services and grantmaking strategies.

Leverage [strategic partnerships](#) to recruit and build relationships with nonprofits with which the community foundation does not already have strong ties.



73% of nonprofit participants reported having a better understanding after the giving days of what their local community foundation can offer their organization.

How to Run an Effective Giving Day

Giving days have a lot of moving parts. Here are the top lessons about what is most critical to running an effective giving day.

4 Plan ahead and be prepared for potential challenges.

Giving days require intense, time-consuming preparation. The planning process includes determining the goals and structure of your giving day, choosing a donation platform, identifying your target audience and key messages, developing training sessions, and securing nonprofit participants and prize and match sponsors.

In addition, every giving day should have a contingency plan in place in case of a crisis on the day-of. Potential issues include a site crash, payment processing failures, bad hyperlinks and leader-board delays.

Learning from the technical difficulties experienced by a number of the fall 2013 Knight Giving Day Initiative campaigns, community foundations that ran giving days in spring 2014 were well prepared in the event of a crisis. They developed contingency plans and arranged for additional technology support, using the [tips on how to prepare for and manage a crisis](#) and conversations with their peers for tips on how to prepare for and manage a crisis.

Central Carolina Community Foundation staff members stated they were “over-prepared” in the event of a crisis, creating and using what they coined the “Boy Scout Plan,” which had a crisis preparation and management plan as well as an emergency contact list, important phone numbers, and answers to FAQs for specific scenarios. In addition, the community foundation dedicated its entire staff to the giving day on the day-of, and asked its IT and phone companies to provide 24-hour support during the campaign.

Recommendations

Begin [planning](#) for your giving day at least six months in advance of the campaign.

Create a [crisis prevention and management plan](#) to try to avoid common issues and be prepared in case something goes wrong.



72% of giving days reported experiencing at least one technology issue during or leading up to their campaign.

5

Leverage prizes and matches to incentivize specific donor and nonprofit behaviors.

Matches and prizes are important elements of a giving day, as they create excitement for nonprofit and donor participants before, during and after the events. In the Knight Giving Day Initiative, all of the campaigns featured such prize and match pools.

The prizes that proved to be most effective—power hours and golden tickets—focused on driving specific donor behaviors. Power hours offered a monetary reward to the nonprofit that raised the most dollars or had the highest number of donations in a specific hour. These prizes were successful in motivating the desired behaviors and resulted in a higher amount of dollars and donations than during non-prize hours.

Golden tickets (monetary prizes added to a randomly selected donor's contribution in a specific hour) incentivized donors to give as many times as possible to increase their chances of getting selected for the prize; these hours garnered more donations and total dollars than non-prize hours.

Milestone prizes, which were often meaningful to community foundations and event organizers (such as giving a prize for the 1,950th donation to commemorate the community foundation's founding in 1950), did not influence specific donor behaviors and appear to have been unsuccessful at driving donations.

Direct 1-to-1 and 2-to-1 matches were successful at encouraging nonprofit and donor participation and served as incentives for community foundations and nonprofits to promote the giving days. During Silicon Valley Gives, hours that had matching incentives raised 153% more dollars and had 67% more donations on average than hours without a match. Across the board, however, these matches dried up rapidly as donors and nonprofits scrambled to get as many of the match dollars as quickly as possible.

Proportional matches, which award nonprofits a share of the match pool equal to the proportion they raise of the total amount donated, have less and less value as giving days grow. The amount awarded to each nonprofit is small and shrinking, as total giving outpaces the growth of the match pool. Some community foundations are considering not offering a match pool in the future (and offering only prizes) because the actual amounts received by each nonprofit are so low they reduce the traditional incentive power of a match.

Recommendations

Use [prizes that incentivize desired donor behaviors](#), such as power hours and golden tickets, and avoid milestone prizes that do not show an impact on desired donor behaviors.

Use numerous time-constrained 1-to-1 or 2-to-1 match pools to spread matching funds throughout the entirety of the campaign.



67% of nonprofits cited prize and match funds as important or very important to their participation.

6

Provide robust training to build nonprofit capacity.

Nonprofit training is critical to running an effective giving day, as it better prepares participating organizations to raise money and awareness through the campaign. Giving day training is also very time-intensive, however, and community foundations in the Knight Giving Day Initiative devoted considerable attention to it.

Every community foundation provided participating nonprofits with a giving day orientation that covered the basics of how to use their donation platforms and how to be effective with social media and online fundraising. Some giving day organizers implemented more advanced training programs focused on other valuable skills such as storytelling, mobile fundraising and media relations.

The Miami Foundation created a relatively sophisticated training program, providing support in areas such as how to construct press releases, how to generate effective tweets and posts, and how to create catchy messages. The communications and messaging training highlighted nonprofits that were successful the previous year, inviting them to come in and talk about the specific strategies that drove their accomplishments.

Some community foundations made their training sessions more accessible by filming and posting sessions online, running webinars, and creating online toolkits with tips and resources for nonprofits. Many of these resources continue to be available on the Web for nonprofits and other community foundations to use.

In addition to helping nonprofits be more effective on the giving day, running training sessions enabled community foundations to build stronger relationships with their nonprofit partners and to begin positioning themselves as vital capacity builders for their community's nonprofit sector. This could one day become a revenue-generating service for community foundations.

Recommendations

Start your [training program](#) early in the planning process and allow for brainstorming and collaboration among participating nonprofits.

Make your training program more accessible by running webinars, filming and posting training sessions online, and using a sequenced multi-session model.



Across all giving days that had 10 or more participating nonprofits, an average of 69% of organizations attended at least one training program.

How to Make Your Giving Day More Sustainable

Community foundations should consider the sustainability of the giving days in their planning if these campaigns are to be more than a passing fad. Here are four ways we believe your giving day can become more sustainable.

7 Make your giving day more cost-effective.

Giving days are exciting events that can significantly benefit the community, but executing them requires a lot of planning, time and resources. Community foundations should seek ways to reduce giving day costs.

Expenses primarily fall into the following three categories: hard costs, such as print materials, paid media and training expenses; staff time, one of the largest giving day costs; and donation fees, which a number of community foundations have opted to cover, fearing that donors and nonprofits would not otherwise participate.

Given these expenses, community foundations in the Knight Giving Day Initiative have begun assessing whether their giving days are sustainable. The good news is that community foundations have found a few opportunities to reduce costs.

Some community foundations ended the subsidization of donation processing fees. In 2013, the Blue Grass Community Foundation and the Legacy Foundation opted not to cover the fees. Despite this change in policy from 2012, both community foundations reported an increase in the number of nonprofit participants.

Some community foundations have charged nonprofit organizations a giving day participation fee. The Blue Grass Community Foundation levied a \$500 participation fee for the Good Giving Guide Challenge that helped cover the costs of nonprofit training sessions and produce the hard copy Good Giving Guide that profiled the organizations. The monetary investment from the nonprofits appears to have increased their commitment to the campaign, as the Good Giving Guide Challenge had one of the highest amounts raised per organization and an 86% attendance rate at the training sessions.

Other community foundations shared expenses and staff time with giving day partners, such as local United Ways and other community foundations in the area. The Community Foundation of Palm Beach and Martin Counties partnered with two local United Ways and the Martin County Community Foundation to host the Great Give. The four organizations split up their training sessions based on location and divided other responsibilities such as soliciting corporate donations, creating prize incentives and responding to donor inquiries.

Recommendations

Consider discontinuing [donor fee subsidies](#) to reduce the cost of running giving days.

Consider charging a nominal [participation fee](#) to nonprofits. This fee should be small enough not to deter organizations from participating, yet large enough to increase nonprofit buy-in and engagement with the program.



Among the community foundations that reported their giving day-related expenses, hard costs (including donation fee subsidies) ranged from \$3,728 to \$151,010.

8

Grow community foundation assets under management.

While the focus of most giving days is on raising money for local nonprofits, giving days can also be structured to financially benefit community foundations.

Seven community foundations in the Knight Giving Day Initiative increased their funds under management, raising money for endowment funds held by the community foundations, donor advised funds (DAFs) and the community foundations' general programs and operations.

Six of these community foundations specifically used their giving days to generate donations for nonprofit endowment funds they hold. Some limited giving day participation to nonprofits raising money for their endowments, while others leveraged prize and match pools to incentivize giving to endowment funds.

Blue Grass Community Foundation created the Endow the Blue Grass Challenge, a \$0.50 to the dollar matching pool exclusively available to nonprofits that raised \$5,000 for existing or new endowments held by the community foundation.

The giving days also generated interest in new donor advised funds at the community foundations. Central Carolina Community Foundation reported that Midlands Gives resulted in inquiries about how to open a DAF, while the Miami Foundation opened two new DAFs through Give Miami Day.

Recommendations

Structure your prize and/or match pools to incentivize giving to [endowment funds](#) or opening new DAFs at your community foundation.

Designate your community foundation as a potential [giving day recipient](#) and implement a campaign to raise funds through the giving day.



The giving days generated at least \$587,444 for nonprofit endowment funds at the community foundations, donor advised funds, and the community foundations' general programs and operations.

9

Connect to longer-term community foundation goals and programs.

Giving days are powerful in large measure because they harness communities' philanthropic energy and attention for a single, short-term campaign. But the benefits that giving day activities bring to the communities resonate beyond the events themselves, and community foundations will find it easier to continue running them if there is a strong programmatic rationale for doing so.

Rather than viewing giving days as discrete campaigns, community foundations should connect them to longer-term goals.

Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne based Let's Give Allen County on the results of the [Soul of the Community](#) project run by Knight Foundation, which found that single adults under age 40 did not feel attached to the Greater Fort Wayne community. In response, the giving day was developed to integrate young donors into the community. The campaign was successful in this effort, with one third of the donors under the age of 40, the creation of the Young Leaders of Northern Indiana donor advised fund at the community foundation, and a favorable impression of the community foundation on the target demographic. Community Foundation of Grand Forks, East Grand Forks and Region used Give Grand as a platform to engage the community to understand two issues and two opportunities facing the community. These focus areas were identified through a four-year community visioning project during which the community foundation got to know the needs of the community and learned about important grassroots initiatives.

Community foundations should also build giving day-related programming beyond the campaign so that community giving and engagement are not constrained to a single annual effort. The foundations can use skills and contacts gained through the giving days to benefit their other initiatives.

The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County has connected Colorado Gives to a longer-term campaign to build a "culture of giving" in the county by encouraging charitable giving and making it easy for people to find and support causes they are passionate about.

Recommendations

Design your giving day so that at least a portion of the campaign is focused on the community foundation's [strategic needs or long-term goals](#).

Develop programming that promotes [donor engagement](#) and general community building throughout the year.

10 Collaborate with and learn from your peers.

Giving days have been hosted by dozens of community foundations, each with valuable ideas and lessons learned. Throughout the Knight Giving Day Initiative, we have embraced the notion of peer learning to make the giving days more efficient and effective, establishing a Giving Day Exchange for our community foundation participants that includes regular conference calls, a Facebook group, coaching and training opportunities, and a wiki with additional giving day resources. Knight Foundation has also compiled tools, case studies and best practices that all community foundations can access on the [Giving Day Playbook](#).

The peer learning model is truly being embraced by giving day organizers. Eighteen community foundations have participated in the Knight [Giving Day Exchange](#), and the Community Foundation Serving Boulder County has established its own peer learning group for 2014 Colorado Gives nonprofit participants.

Community foundations are pioneers in the giving day field, and Knight Foundation is excited to learn even more about their experiences with these campaigns. We will continue using the [Giving Day Playbook](#) and [Giving Day Exchange](#) to promote learning and sharing of best practices about running effective and sustainable giving days.

Recommendations

Take advantage of giving day peer learning opportunities such as the [Giving Day Exchange](#) group on Facebook; your best resources are other giving day organizers in the field.

Use the [Giving Day Playbook](#) as a guide for your giving day; pull templates, timelines, checklists and other resources to help make planning and executing your giving day easier.



In a 2013 survey of Knight Giving Day Initiative community foundations, 100% of respondents rated the Giving Day Playbook as effective and 81% rated the Giving Day Exchange as effective.



Conclusion

Giving days have garnered extensive enthusiasm over the past five years by raising increasingly larger sums of money for community nonprofits within a short time frame. These campaigns have helped community foundations raise their public profiles in their communities, engage donors, strengthen relationships with local nonprofits, and even grow community foundation assets.

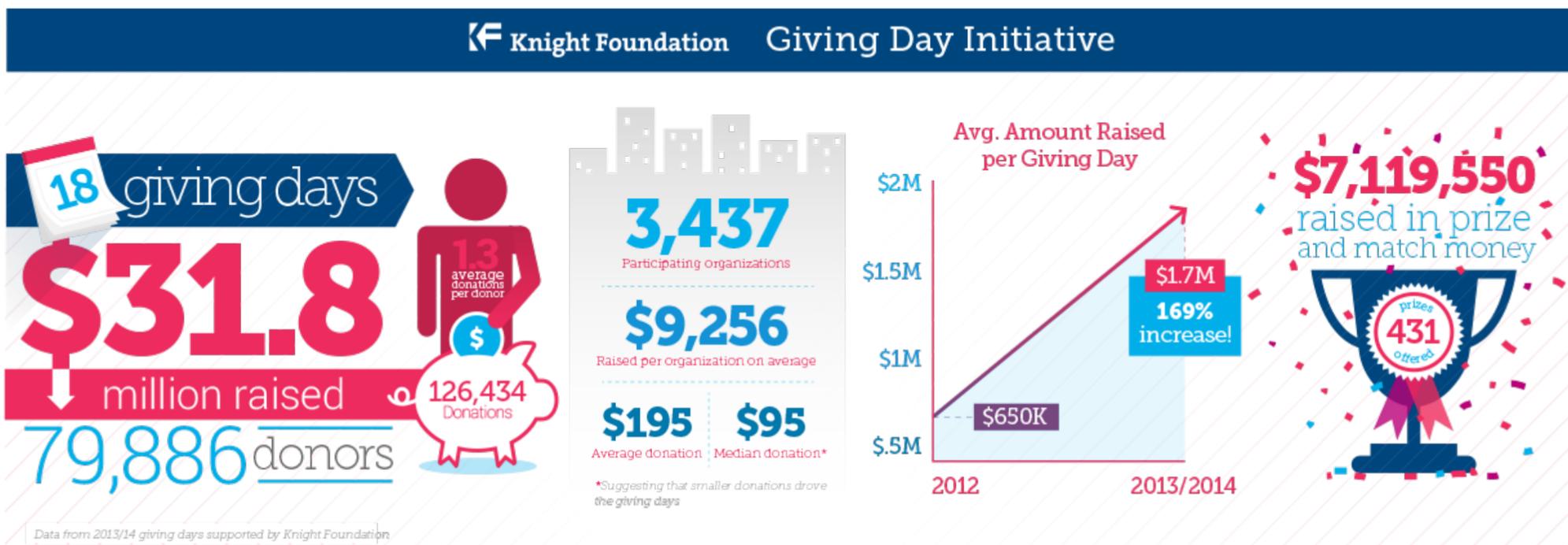
However, on the whole, giving days still have a ways to go to fully deliver these substantial benefits to community foundation organizers in a sustainable manner.

By sharing the lessons and recommendations presented in this report, we hope to help move giving days toward becoming more sustainable and effective events that have lasting impact in their communities and around the world.

As mentioned in the introduction, this report is not the definitive study on giving days. Rather, it is the start of a conversation that we invite you to engage in. What do you think about giving days? What has worked in your experience? What hasn't? What lessons are we missing?

Join our new [Giving Day Exchange](#) group on Facebook to participate in an ongoing dialogue with your colleagues about your Giving Day ideas and experiences. This group is for community foundation staff members - the boots-on-the-ground team members who can share their insights and ask questions of their peers in philanthropy. Make sure you have your place of work in your Facebook profile to join.

We will also continue to update the [Giving Day Playbook](#). Please share with us your best resources, ideas, stories, and findings for inclusion by emailing Anna Dilemia at dilemia@knightfoundation.org. Thank you in advance for helping make this tool valuable and relevant for every community foundation running—or thinking about running—a giving day.



Be a part of the Giving Day Exchange on Facebook. [Click Here!](#)