

Client Stories

The Arc of San Antonio



The Arc of San Antonio is a 501(c)(3) non-profit agency, founded in 1954 by parents who needed support and services for their children with special needs. The Arc provides a continuum of services for individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) including direct-care programs such as Life Enrichment Program for Children and Life Enrichment Program for Adults—as well as case management programs, outreach, and support services. Each year, the Arc serves over 2,000 individuals with I/DD and their families.

Highlights

- The Arc was able to adopt Greater Giving at the last minute by easily bringing over and importing their supporter database.
- With Greater Giving Mobile Bidding in place, data entry at the event was non-existent. Volunteers were relaxed and stress-free, and guests had a great time.
- Since bidding was mobile and not on paper, guests could continue bidding through dinner, driving silent auction bids higher than ever.
- Adding Mobile Bidding increased the Arc's fundraising efforts by 20%.

Challenge

The Arc of San Antonio has held a gala every year for 26 years. It's their only annual fundraiser, so the gala's success has become key to the success of the organization.

Beth Green, the Director of Development and Communications, joined the Arc three years ago, and runs all aspects of the event with the help of staff and volunteers. Prior to Green joining the agency, The Arc had event management software that was buggy and difficult to use. The staff often had to call for customer support.

Their event contains a silent auction of about 200 packages, a live auction, a raffle and a Fund-A-Need—a big endeavor to run with software that required so much troubleshooting.

Green joined the Arc after working for another non-profit where she used Greater Giving for many years. She had compared several different software solutions, but found Greater Giving to have the most complete event management software available. With over 10 years of event planning experience she knew what she wanted and what would work for the Arc's event.

Solution

The first year Green used Greater Giving to run an event at the Arc; she had less than a month to make the transition. With help from Greater Giving's excellent support team, she was able to move her entire database from Excel to the Greater Giving platform and successfully execute her first event for the Arc. "I really like the overall package," said Green. She also likes how user friendly the online software is, making it easy to teach to new staff and volunteers. "It's just a great centralized database for event management."

Event management software is key to the Arc's robust solicitation process. They start planning only a month after the previous year's event is over. At six months out, the team starts soliciting items, mailing a solicitation letter to previous supporters from Greater Giving, and then adding any new businesses that have started up in town. Green's auction

committee, by now a twenty-person team, always follows up with a phone call or personal visit. Greater Giving helps them track where they are in the solicitation process with each supporter—as well as store their solicitation letters from year to year.

“Face time is the best way to get items,” said Green. “Not only does it put your organization’s mission out in front of more people, but it establishes a personal, reciprocal relationship with donors.” In the past, the face-to-face tactic has secured some incredibly unique items for the auction—items that often end up in bidding wars: signed helmets from rival superstars at Texas A&M University and the University of Texas, high end jewelry, and even a real Longhorn!

Green’s team doesn’t just solicit donors for the auction—they also ask big donors to commit in advance to donating during the Fund-A-Need. Then they track the donations they expect to come in using Greater Giving to get an idea of where they are in reaching their goals. “We have certain donors coming back every year who continually support our

mission through this event, so we ask them lead the way for us,” said Green. “Also, through our event, it is a great way to show how our programs impact the community through video and event materials.” This year, through a multi-media push, The Arc showcased some of their successful clients through a video and then brought them on stage to talk to the audience about the impact of The Arc’s programs.

For last year’s event, Green wanted to do something fun and interactive and the logical choice was to adopt Greater Giving Mobile Bidding. Promotion was the key to the success of their mobile event. The Arc promoted via newsletter, direct mail, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram—posting pictures to Instagram has been a great way to recruit younger volunteers, said Green. But in the end, face-to-face and phone invitations to repeat donors were still the best way to secure a good turnout at the event. It was also helpful in spreading the word about mobile bidding and preparing guests for the new technology.

Results

Green and her team announced Mobile Bidding to table sponsors in advance, asking for emails and phone numbers for guests to facilitate application of the technology. Once a guest arrived at the event, the staff asked if they had received a text or email about signing up—if they hadn’t, guests were given a QR code and taken to a “Tech Bar” to ease congestion at registration. Designated “bidding volunteers” were able to get them up and running within five minutes. These volunteers showed guests how to use the Mobile Bidding technology, and while other designated volunteers were scattered around the silent auction room with iPads ready to help anyone with placing bids.

With Greater Giving Mobile Bidding in place, data entry at the event was non-existent. Volunteers were relaxed and stress-free, and guests had a great time. And because bidding was mobile and not on paper, guests could continue bidding through dinner, driving silent auction bids higher than ever.

Best of all, adding Mobile Bidding increased the Arc’s fundraising efforts by 20%!

Tips from The Arc of San Antonio

- Promote your event everywhere—newsletters, local businesses, social media, and direct mailings. Don’t forget to get face time to secure those ticket purchases!
- If you’re using mobile bidding, prepare guests in advance by sending out reminder announcements. Also, leave the silent auction open through dinner to allow for more browsing and last-minute bidding.
- The key to managing all the moving parts for a big event is using great event management software.
- Be prepared; start working on next year’s event soon after this year’s event is over.