



Big Brothers Big Sisters Houston

Big Brothers Big Sisters is the largest, one-to-one, professional supported, mentoring agency in the country. On an annual basis, BBBS Houston, serves over 2,000 children throughout the Greater Houston area, including Harris, Montgomery, Fort Bend, Baytown and Bay Area counties. The organization's day-to-day mission is to create and support one-on-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth.



Challenge

At the start of 2020, Big Brothers Big Sisters Houston—a long-time Greater Giving client—was working hard on their annual BIG Taste of Houston event. Now seven years old, it's one of their biggest annual fundraisers, attracting about 400 guests and raising \$160,000 for the organization.

Like many other nonprofits, their plans were derailed by the pandemic. But BBBS Houston still needed revenue to keep the programs running that served the children of the Greater Houston area—so they decided to take BIG Taste of Houston into a virtual event, BIG Taste at Home. Event organizers knew it would be tricky, given the event is based around food and supported by restaurants. The event features food and drink tastings, where guests browse more than a dozen different food and drink stations throughout the night. Guests are also engaged through the auction and donation appeals. How would they secure that engagement from behind a computer screen?

HIGHLIGHTS

BBBS Houston replicated the food and drink experience of their BIG Taste Event with BIG Taste at Home virtually—and raised \$170,000, far exceeding their goals.

Organizers opened their online silent auction early and kept it open another day after the stream, raising \$7,000 more than their goal.

Greater Giving's Virtual Professional Event Services handled most of the online auction setup, and managed the "Giving Board" during the appeal—which allowed staff to focus on fundraising.

A drawing scheduled for the end of the livestream kept guests interested and engaged throughout the stream, so BBBS Houston could raise more dollars in the appeal.

BBBS had a capable team, a terrific and experienced AV partner in their court, and of course, **Greater Giving**—a solid online platform capable of handling the transition. So they decided to move forward with taking their event online.

The majority of the event's revenue comes from sponsorships, auction sales, fundraising appeals and ticket sales. But things had changed in 2020, and local restaurants could no longer support the event the way they had in the past. Luckily, BBBS Houston managed to find a good mix of sponsors for this year's event—a traffic light manufacturer, a major local grocery store, an internet company, and a bank. There was concern that new sponsors might not stay on when they decided to go virtual.

But BBBS had a capable team, a terrific and experienced AV partner in their court, and of course, Greater Giving—a solid online platform capable of handling the transition. So they decided to move forward with taking their event online.

Solution

Tickets to the virtual BIG Taste at Home sold for \$250 per couple—which included “tastes” of seven different entrées and three different desserts with two bottles of wine packed into swag bags and delivered just before the event began. A drink sponsor also included a recipe for a signature cocktail along with mixers; guests were able to enjoy it all at home. To complete the interactive culinary experience, the chefs were filmed as they prepared the evening's meals—which were shown during the livestream while guests tried each entree and voted on their favorites. At the end of the night, the winning chef was given an award. BBBS Houston provided guests with the sophisticated food and drink experience they expected from the BIG Taste at BIG Taste at Home—in their own homes!

Hoping to keep their sponsors on board, BBBS Houston built their sponsorship benefits around recognition, just as they would at a live event. High-level sponsors were part of the live-streamed program; they thanked every sponsor on the stream, included their logos in event materials, and gave them the option to contribute to the swag bags. Sponsors were treated as if they had purchased a table at a live event, and all their guests received meals and swag bags. In the end, all of BBBS Houston's sponsors stayed on through the transition to a virtual event—and they even picked up a few more along the way.

The BBBS Signature Events team chose to stream the one-hour virtual event with Zoom, where they could manage and admit ticketed attendees. To encourage guests to stay on the stream all the way through the giving portion, a drawing was announced for a case of wine, which would be chosen at random from the households still on the stream at the very end.

BBBS Houston built their sponsorship benefits around recognition, just as they would at a live event. High-level sponsors were part of the live-streamed program; they thanked every sponsor on the stream, included their logos in event materials, and gave them the option to contribute to the swag bags. Sponsors were treated as if they had purchased a table at a live event.

BBBS Houston also hired a professional production company, Southern Sounds & Lighting to handle the technical side—and it went off without a hitch. The feed switched seamlessly from a live emcee to pre-recorded messages, and occasionally cut away to showcase photos that guests took of themselves in a “virtual” photo booth.

The virtual silent auction featured 25 auction packages that guests could bid on with their devices while they watched the stream. BBBS opened the auction before the event began so bidders could browse and familiarize themselves with what was available, and they highlighted a few packages throughout the livestream to encourage bidding.

Greater Giving's Virtual Professional Event Services were hired to run the Greater Giving software and send out event-related texts, making the auction smooth and seamless for both guests and organizers.

Near the end of the program, the CEO gave a heartfelt presentation and made the ask for donations.

The Greater Giving Virtual Assistant ran the Giving Board as donors made gifts, each receiving a shout-out for their generosity on the stream.

Greater Giving's Virtual Professional Event Services were hired to run the Greater Giving software and send out event-related texts, making the auction smooth and seamless for both guests and organizers.

Results

The BIG Taste at Home event turned out better than anyone could have hoped. By the end of the stream, 200 homes were still online and participating. The constantly-updating Giving Board kept guests engaged throughout the giving portion, driving even more donations. Their virtual silent auction was also a great success, making \$17,000—a lot more than the \$10,000 they had expected.

BBBS Lone Star's Signature Events Director and Manager had never run a 100% virtual auction before, and said that hiring Virtual Professional Event Services "was so valuable." Their Virtual Assistant helped them enter item descriptions, add appealing photos, and provided expert advice by recommending they open the auction early, and extend it a day after the event. BBBS Houston's event staff loved that

170k Overall, the BIG Taste at Home event raised \$170,000—more than their goal efforts.

they could call Greater Giving whenever they had a problem, and a helpful tech would walk them through what they were trying to do.

Overall, the BIG Taste at Home event raised \$170,000—more than their goal. And because the event took place online, costs were lower than ever, so even more of the total fundraising went to the cause. In their upcoming virtual gala, BBBS Houston said they planned to take what they learned and do even better.



Tips from Big Brothers Big Sisters Houston

- Tie giving levels to a specific need, and secure a committed gift for each level to encourage broader giving during the stream.
- Don't be afraid to ask just because it's virtual! Put the focus on giving on your livestream—as much (or even more than!) at a live event.
- Hire a professional production team. It may sound like a big investment, but consider how much you're saving on venues and catering. A/V professionals handle the tech stuff so you can have peace of mind.
- Practice, practice, practice. Do multiple dry runs of the event program so you know exactly how it works—BBBS Houston had three practice runs, and they learned something new each time. No one wants a surprise on event night!
- Record as much of the event as possible in advance to streamline the broadcast, letting you focus on fundraising