



# Community Action Takes Action — Quarantine Style!

People living in poverty are unable to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, heat, utilities, clothing, transportation, health and childcare. Community Action (in Washington County, Oregon) addresses these needs through a variety of programs. They provide energy assistance for those without heat or electricity, and they offer programs in early childhood development, support for expecting parents and childcare resources. They also offer homelessness prevention programs, renter support and energy efficiency assistance. Founded in 1965, Community Action has been dedicated to helping people, changing lives and improving communities for 55 years.



## Challenge

This year, Community Action was on track to hold their annual fundraising event on April 17. Then, the coronavirus hit. By mid-March, a week before the Oregon governor's stay-at-home orders took effect, the organization started looking for alternatives to an in-person gathering. Fortunately, all their sponsors were in place, their videos were complete and most of their auction items had been procured. So, it was an easy decision to move their 2020 Kaleidoscope Gala to a virtual experience, guided by their valued partner [Swaim Strategies](#).

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## HIGHLIGHTS

By holding their fundraiser online, Community Action saved on costs and came close to last year's net revenue.

Using [Greater Giving Event Software](#) made it easy to transition to an online event.

To keep the energy high, they displayed a fundraising "thermometer" using Greater Giving's Appeal Board.

With [Online Bidding](#), Community Action was able to keep the silent auction and raffle open for two additional days.

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The first challenge was communication. Community Action staff contacted each partner and sponsor by phone and email to explain what they were planning and why. Then the organization followed up with supporters through email, social media (mainly Facebook) and website posts. Due to the ever-changing landscape, they ended up communicating with people even more than they would for a live event.

Normally ticket sales indicate how many attendees to expect. But with an online event, it's hard to know who will be there and for how long. However, holding the event virtually opened up new opportunities. Since there were no geographic or financial barriers to hosting a table, anyone could gather friends and attend together online. This also meant that board members faced no financial barrier to "filling a table" and all 350 staff members were able to attend.

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**Swaim Strategies** helped Community Action plan and execute the online fundraiser using Vimeo to broadcast while livestreaming to YouTube. They practiced ahead of time and adjusted the program to fit the attention span of online audiences.

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## Solution

Swaim Strategies helped Community Action plan and execute the online fundraiser using Vimeo to broadcast while livestreaming to YouTube. They practiced ahead of time and adjusted the program to fit the attention span of online audiences. They had 10 people supporting the event: the show producer, the auctioneer/host, two data folks, two tech support people to solve any guest technical questions, two AV technicians to handle streaming the event, a chat moderator to take questions from the audience and one extra person in case something unexpected happened.

Everything was prepared ahead of time; all the speakers and presenters pre-recorded their presentations from home. Executive Director Kemp Shuey gave an inspirational talk about Community Action's mission and how they were responding to COVID-19. The organization video demonstrated how Community Action provides a supportive and compassionate environment for people who need assistance.

During the appeal, they shared a video of a former client who told her story about all the ways that Community Action supported her during difficult times. She is now a nurse, serving on the front lines of the pandemic. She asked the donors to be heroes and step up to the challenge.

**151** 151 people logged in at the height of the evening.

**\$50k** They saved about \$50,000 in expenses by holding the event online. This meant that their net revenue was higher than last year's in-person event.

Auctioneer Kelly Russell of [Artisan Auctions](#) then opened up the appeal. With Greater Giving's Appeal Board, they were able to display a live "thermometer" that tracked donations as they came in. To add to the energy of the fund-a-need, Ms. Russell recognized donors by name and announced matching gifts.

The live auction was divided into three sections, each with a different theme. Each theme had three to four packages that did not compete with one another, so bidders did not have to worry about winning two items when they only had the budget for one. At the end of the evening, Community Action announced that its silent auction and raffle would stay open for two more days.

## Results

Community Action's first online fundraising event was a great success. They had 151 people logged in at the height of the evening. Their silent auction raised over 71% of value. Although they did not gross as much as they had the previous year with an in-person event, they saved about \$50,000 in expenses by holding the event online. This meant that their net revenue was higher than last year's in-person event. In the end, they were quite happy with the outcome.



### Tips from Community Action

- Provide a help line for people having technical difficulties.
- Avoid displaying the auction on full screen as it hides the chat window.
- Sports events and international travel did not perform as well as in past auctions.
- Wine and beer sold VERY well.