



# Woodland Park Zoo— Moving from Virtual to Hybrid Event

Founded in 1899, Woodland Park Zoo has sparked delight, discovery and unforgettable memories for generations of Northwest families. People who experience the wonders of the natural world are inspired to protect it. That's why every year the Woodland Park Zoo leads more than 1 million people on a journey that inspires a lifelong love of animals, makes science come alive, and gives people the tools to take conservation action.



## Challenge

The Jungle Party is Woodland Park Zoo's largest annual fundraiser—a lively event that typically draws more than 800 guests, with a party-style reception, sit-down dinner, and live auction. Then in 2020, when most of the event vendors had already been scheduled and deposits paid, the sudden onset of the pandemic meant this typical celebration of wilderness had to be tamed into a completely virtual event. But Woodland Park Zoo persevered, and their 2020 Jungle Party was a lucrative, online-only fundraiser that saw 350 virtual attendees and raised \$1.2 million—despite the cost unused vendor services.

Their 2021 Jungle Party would bring even more unique challenges. Some COVID restrictions had lifted, but limitations remained on in-person gatherings; and while many of their donors were excited at the prospect of getting to socialize again, others wouldn't feel comfortable attending a live event yet. Woodland Park Zoo wanted to provide the atmosphere and activities their guests expected, and at the same time comply with local COVID-19 guidelines. They could go with a "hybrid" version of the event that would include a limited number of in-person guests alongside the stream to online viewers—but they'd have to decide quickly in order to reserve vendors and give themselves plenty of time to organize a fundraiser in a new format, when violating safety protocols could carry severe penalties.

## HIGHLIGHTS

Deciding to go hybrid with their fundraiser early on in the planning process played a big part in the Woodland Park Zoo's success. Committing so soon gave them plenty of time to plan the important details.

Choosing the "hybrid" format for their annual event brought higher overall attendance, gave guests flexibility in how to participate, and saved on vendor costs.

The event team prioritized providing a great experience for both in-person and virtual guests, resulting in much greater engagement and higher overall fundraising.

The zoo leaned heavily on its experienced auctioneers, vendor partners including D&K Events and Greater Giving's software package to curate a unified experience for both online and offline participants. Auctioneers artfully handled latency issues, and vendor partners utilized Greater Giving's mobile bidding software to provide a consistent bidding experience across the board.

The Woodland Park Zoo utilized many audience participation tools, like the donation thermometer, which recognized donors in real time and even displayed all current bids to create lively bidding wars.

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It would also mean Woodland Park Zoo needed innovative, technological solutions to help run such a complex fundraiser in the face of so much uncertainty.

## Solution

Woodland Park Zoo decided to turn their annual Jungle Party into a hybrid event for 2021. Despite the success of their 2020 event and its 60-minute program, recreating that simply wouldn't work for the hybrid format; they needed to create two separate experiences for in-person and online guests, with both participating in the same live auction in a way that was fair to each. To Steven Freygang and Cate Tambeaux, Donor Relations Manager, it was critical to provide the same bidding experience to both virtual and in-person attendees. "We wanted one source where we could tally all the numbers," Cate said.

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To meet the complex demands of such an event, the zoo chose Greater Giving once more to help run the 2021 Jungle Party, because [Online Bidding](#) handled all bids from in-person and virtual bidders alike in a single place.

When the Jungle Party went fully virtual in 2020, Steven says Woodland Park Zoo leaned heavily on its partners to pull off the event, like auctioneers Fred Northup, Jr. and emcee Matt Lorch, as well as their [Greater Giving Event Software](#). The week before the event, they marketed it with fun videos of animal keepers and other zoo attractions.

Hoping to retain the most popular elements of previous in-person events, the zoo featured special appearances from some of the animals, a chef making a special cocktail, and a live auction. They also offered meals for delivery from a local restaurant to emulate the in-person dining experience.

In 2021, Woodland Park Zoo settled on hosting no more than 400 in-person attendees—about half of the guests they would normally welcome. Whether a guest was attending the event in-person or from home, the team wanted to make their Jungle Party experience as fun and familiar as possible—so they utilized their 2020 strategy of sending out fun, zoo-related video content to build up excitement for the event. The reception was held in the North Meadow with the dinner being held in a large tent. The sit-down dinner and live auction that resembled previous Jungle Parties. These in-person festivities were streamed live for those watching from home, creating a great energy and nostalgia for celebrating together again.

When it came to the auction, Woodland Park Zoo's greatest concern was creating a seamless experience for all participants, whether bidding from the tent or from home. Using [Greater Giving's Online Bidding platform](#) gave everyone a fair, equal chance to bid in the auction. Knowing engagement was one of the biggest hurdles in conducting an event with purely online participants, the zoo's fundraising team used every tool at their disposal to keep guests excited. At the in-person event, every bid appeared on a big screen so guests could see right away when they were outbid, fueling lively bidding wars. Donors felt recognized and appreciated for their gifts as their names appeared on the screen. And finally, a thermometer displaying the current fundraising total kept more than 400 households tuned into the event stream.

## Results

In 2020, the Woodland Park Zoo saw 1,100 attendees tune into their virtual event stream, and they raised \$1.2 million. But going hybrid in 2021 yielded even better results, and the Woodland Park Zoo raised \$1.9 million—the same as their previous in-person event average!

The live portion of the fundraiser only ran for two hours instead of the usual four or five, which also better accommodated those watching from home. The hybrid event also allowed the Woodland Park Zoo to reach an even wider audience than ever before, with 200 participants tuned in remotely to the event stream in addition to the 400 in-person guests. And thanks to all the event team's careful planning, adhering to safety precautions was smooth and painless enough that it went unnoticed by in-person attendees.

Of the virtual guests, more than 300 remained on the stream for the full two hours of the program. Engagement and participation was higher among virtual guests, likely due to ease of bidding with [Greater Giving's Online Bidding software](#), and the fundraising thermometer, which kept guests excited to meet the goal and competing with one another to reach it. And on top of it all, the zoo was able to save money on typical event costs, like catering, because they only hosted half the usual number of guests.

Overall, the 2021 Jungle Party was rewarding enough that Woodland Park Zoo is considering it again for 2022. The ease of bidding combined with no limit on the number of virtual attendees may turn hybrid events into a staple in the future.

**200** Participants tuned in remotely to the event stream

**400** Guests attended in-person

**\$1.9m** Raised at the hybrid event



### Tips from Woodland Park Zoo

- Hosting a hybrid event saves money, because fewer in-person attendees means lower overall event costs.
- No attendance cap with the virtual portion of the event means you can welcome more guests and the accessibility of an online fundraiser brings in new donors easily.
- When hosting a hybrid event, simplify anything you can! You'll be running two events simultaneously, so streamlining wherever possible will make planning easier.
- Bring in on-site vendor support to handle the technology side, and make sure you know exactly which features you need in your auction software to make it all work. Hire experienced auctioneers who can help manage any latency issues, which are common in virtual events.