



Boys & Girls Club of the Tri-County Area

The Boys & Girls Club of the Tri-County Area inspires and enables young people to reach their full potential as productive, responsible, and caring citizens. The Club serves youth ages 6 to 18, Monday through Friday, after school and during the summer. Currently they serve over 850 youth in the Tri-County Area. The Club provides a safe environment, excellent facilities, caring adults and engaging programs in the areas of healthy lifestyles, building good character and citizenship, and achieving academic success.



Challenge

The Boys & Girls Club of the Tri-County Area is a longtime Greater Giving client. They hold their largest annual fundraiser in March, which typically raises \$200,000 in funds for their important children’s programs and services. But in 2020—just three days before the gala—the onset of COVID-19 made an in-person gathering suddenly impossible. The special events team only had 72 hours to pivot to a purely virtual event.

Fortunately, the BGC already used [Greater Giving’s Event Software](#) to manage their in-person auction, so it was easy with [Online Bidding](#) to push all their auction items online. Items intended for the live auction also went up for bid online, and the event team kept the window for bidding open for an entire week. While the BGC couldn’t put together a livestream in just 72 hours, they did send out e-blasts to everyone and used social media, donors, and board members to get the word out. Luckily, no sponsors withdrew their sponsorships in the quick change to virtual, and most guests chose to turn their admission into a donation. Even with so little time to adjust, the 2020 event managed to raise \$165,000—only \$35,000 shy of their goal.

HIGHLIGHTS

The Boys & Girls Club of the Tri-County Area wanted to replicate the experience of a traditional, in-person gala for their virtual event, so they streamed a professionally-produced one-hour show with the look and feel of their typical annual fundraiser.

The event team even offered guests a pandemic-safe option to enjoy dinner, wine, and a special dessert during the stream.

To keep guests engaged while watching the show from behind a screen, the BGC held exciting raffles where the winner would only be announced on the livestream. This kept people tuned in all the way through the live auction.

The BGC’s 2020 virtual event raised just as much money as their past in-person events, and they reached their \$200,000 goal.

SERVICE. DRIVEN. FUNDRAISING

As soon as it was over, Special Events and Marketing Manager Ashley Bartol immediately began planning the BGC's 2021 fundraiser. But to reach their \$200,000 goal, Bartol wanted to create a virtual event that would look and feel as much like their traditional in-person event as possible—which brought some unique challenges.

In order to recruit the usual attendees of their big in-person gala, the event team needed an exciting promotion plan that would showcase the look and feel being offered at their virtual event. With the time to do it right, Bartol wanted to livestream a one-hour show—but they needed professional-quality production to truly recreate the gala atmosphere they were selling. Even then, keeping attendees' attention until the live auction at the end of the program was going to be a challenge. And to give sponsors and VIP guests that exclusive, in-person gala experience, Bartol and her team wanted to offer dinner and wine as well. But how could they do all of it in a pandemic environment?

Solution

Thanks to the funds raised in 2020, the Boys & Girls Club of the Tri-County Area kept their doors open to provide essential programs and childcare for first responders. In response to COVID-19, they also developed another event—the Holiday Telethon. But going into their 2021 "Around the World" event, the BGC needed to meet their \$200,000 fundraising goal to continue offering support to children in need of their services.

The first priority was to get the look and feel of the BGC's usual annual fundraiser onto the livestreamed show. Through a friend of the organization, Bartol found a professional in media production who could help with the stream and create pre-recorded video content—which saved the BGC thousands of dollars. During the months leading up to the event, the BGC put out small video segments to build hype and give guests a sneak peek into what the event would look and feel like.

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Bartol planned an hour-long program for their livestream, and used Vimeo for their streaming platform. The event kicked off with a fun, 15-minute pre-show that recognized sponsors and staff, and showcased the BGC's important work with good humor—setting the tone for the rest of the night. Their [Online Bidding](#) silent auction ran alongside the stream, and guests got in bidding wars on their mobile devices while they watched the show. In the interest of keeping guests engaged and tuned in for the full hour, the winner of the raffle would only be announced live on the stream.

To recreate the traditional ballroom dinner, Bartol's team partnered with local grocery stores to offer thermal "Gala Bags" for purchase that contained beautiful, plated charcuterie boards and wine for guests to enjoy while watching the stream, with additional snacks and activities for children. As icing on the cake, a local bakery provided a thematic miniature globe cake in every gala bag to give it that truly special event feel. Some guests picked up their bags from a set location on the day of the event, while volunteers delivered others. And the stage was set for an exciting and elegant fundraiser.

Results

The night's show featured moving, pre-recorded segments of youth and sponsors talking about their struggles and how the Boys & Girls Club has changed their lives. Their auctioneer and friend of the organization, Steve Wagner, held the live auction in real time on the livestream. It looked and felt just like their usual in-person event, with the auctioneer calling bids and jazzing up the audience at home.

Bartol says the BGC loves using [Greater Giving](#) for their fundraisers, whether online or in-person. "We can use it from start to finish to create a website, register people for the event, sell raffle tickets, and let people browse the auction early." And with [Online Bidding](#), the event team can close sections of the auction at different times to keep guests engaged and bidding throughout the program. "For our supporters, the guest experience is very user friendly," she says. It's easy for attendees to navigate the Online Bidding interface, and they know right away when they've been outbid so they can go place a higher bid. "It helps drive bidding up."

Since every guest registered online with a credit card on file, at the close of the event, the team simply pressed a button to submit all auction payments in a batch. "We don't have to chase people down anymore," Bartol says, "which is very helpful." Greater Giving instantly generated reports with their total revenue at the end of the night—and taking stock of all their sales, sponsorships and donations, the event team found they had met their \$200,000 goal! The virtual event was a huge success and brought in as much money as their usual in-person gala.

In 2022, the Boys & Girls Club of the Tri-County Area is looking to change it up once more. If everything goes well, the "Once Upon a Time" gala will be held in person, so their guests can once again enjoy the traditional gala experience they love.

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Tips from The Boys & Girls Club of the Tri-County Area

- Save costs by leaning on your committee members' unique talents. Do you know someone who can emcee, or do professional videography? Get creative and use what's in front of you.
- Plan, plan, plan! Create a detailed calendar with due dates for each task—scripts for content, videos for social blasts, and everything else that needs to be done for your event.
- Use social media as much as possible to get the word out, and tap donors and board members to be your ambassadors.
- Send out instructions for logging into the online bidding platform and placing a bid to all guests before the event.
- Include a contact phone number, so livestream viewers can call if they have a question or run into a problem.