

CASE STUDY – DIVERSIFYING FUNDRAISING

GIRLS ON THE RUN SIERRAS

OVERVIEW

As we work towards our **marathon goal of having a network that is strong and positioned for growth**, it is critical councils focus on creating **diversified fundraising streams** to ensure sustainability and underwrite program expansion. With over 40% (62 councils) of councils in our network relying on one contributed income category for more than 50% of their revenue, focusing on diversifying fundraising efforts is top of mind.

Diversifying funding sources doesn't mean you need to overhaul your entire fundraising plan; instead, it means keeping up with your current funding streams while looking to add new, different sources of income. This can be done in small steps and by utilizing many of the toolkits from HQ or other resources available from sister councils. As you build new campaigns into your repertoire, you'll move the needle in income categories and leave your council less reliant on one source of income.

This case study showcases Girls on the Run Sierras efforts to **diversify their contributed income** starting in 2017, when current Council Director, Joy Heuer joined the team. The GOTR Sierras team worked intentionally over the years to launch new fundraising campaigns and have successfully diversified their contributed income.

COUNCIL QUICK FACTS – GOTR SIERRAS

FY2017	FY2023
<p>Age: 9 years Staff: 1 FTE Girls Served: 500 Board: 11 members (0 as donors) Contributed Income Concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 65% of all contributed income from grants• 39% from 1 single grant	<p>Age: 15 years Staff: 1 FTE Girls Served: 638 Board: 12 members (100% are donors) Contributed Income Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No single category makes up more than 24% of all contributed income• A more diversified and sustainable fundraising strategy

OPPORTUNITY

During an internal financial evaluation in 2017, it became apparent that GOTR Sierras was relying heavily on a small number of donors to fund operations. The timing was significant as it coincided with some of those funders changing their funding focus, leaving the council in a vulnerable position. With the desire to improve council sustainability, increase community awareness and investment and increase support for the council, Council Director Joy Heuer set out to **intentionally diversify funding streams**.

The ideal changes would result in a council that had buy-in, support and recognition from a broad swath of the community while simultaneously shoring up the council's finances by **reducing dependency on a handful of funders**.

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COURSE OF ACTION

#1 Assess the situation

The need to quickly create an action plan was apparent; funders were changing focus and the council needed contributed income to sustain operations. But, before any work could be done, the council needed to understand their current state. They examined their current and historic funding streams to understand the situation and the opportunity. With over 65% of contributed income coming from grants (one grant alone making up nearly 40%), it was clear that creating a strategy and focusing energy on other fundraising efforts was key.

The council also examined what activities had been done to generate contributed income and quickly found that they simply were not *making the ask* often enough or in multiple ways. They realized they were only targeting GOTR insiders with fundraising appeals and not attracting or reaching far enough into the community to share about the organization.

Historical financial data was the springboard for understanding the state of contributed income and revealed untapped opportunities for the council to activate.

#2 Create a vision:

While intentionally diversifying funding streams to fuel the mission was the goal, how this would come to life took intentional effort. The vision was to have an organization known and loved in the community, with opportunities to engage and support available to everyone.

The focus became generating funds through three primary streams:

- Grants: continue to invest time in writing and securing grants, a proven strategy for the council.
- Individuals: activate their current constituents, create opportunities for the board to invite their network to support the council, and share GOTR with new community members to acquire new donors.
- Community: look to community businesses to support and sponsor the program, host low-lift events that are open to the entire community (including participants and their families) and show up throughout the community to increase recognition.

By focusing on these three buckets, the council was able to create diverse opportunities to engage existing stakeholders while also attracting new investors to support their mission.

#3 Tactics:

Hunter vs. Gatherer – Early on, the council director and board decided they would work together to improve the diversification of their contributed income. It was decided that the board would be “gatherers” and focus their energy on gathering leads, providing connections, and reaching into their networks to expand the reach of the organization. The council director would then be the “hunter” and find new opportunities, reach out to new businesses and potential sponsors, and attend events where she could network heavily with new audiences. By taking this approach, the board was able to activate how and where they felt comfortable while

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simultaneously providing the council valuable leads while the council director worked to establish and cultivate new relationships with potential donors and sponsors.

Fund development plan – By creating a plan, the council had a north star guiding where to invest their time and talent and anticipated results. This plan mapped out the year to paint a clear picture of cash flow, gaps in the calendar where they could create an opportunity, and funding priorities (i.e.: EOY giving, birthdays, community events, etc.). Having a detailed reference document helped keep their activities organized and guided their work to ensure they were actively fundraising throughout the year. It also allowed them to measure ROI on each activity and understand where to focus their efforts.

Craft your pitch and practice it – Making *the ask* more frequent was a key strategy for growing their contributed income sources. For staff and board members to feel prepared and confident to do this on the fly, the council ensured everyone was ready with their elevator speech. This might seem like Fundraising 101 but to ask (and often!), they needed to know *what* they were asking for and what impact it would have on their mission. Being well-tuned boosted the confidence of both staff and board members so they were ready to make the ask when out in the community. It also ensured everyone was putting out consistent asks throughout the community.

Ask. Ask often and make it easy to give – Once key stakeholders were well versed with their elevator speech, the council focused on changing what they viewed as an opportunity to make the ask and how they were receiving donations. The first step was reframing when the right time was to make an ask – instead of waiting for a formal conversation with a donor, for a grant cycle to open or generally being reserved in their approach, they reframed their outlook to be inclusive of all activities. The activity started viewing every interaction with the community as an opportunity to gain support for their council. For someone to say “Yes, I’ll support Girls on the Run” they realize they first must ask them a question! They continually presented their case and gave people the opportunity to support their council. Additionally, they reviewed and simplified how people could donate to ensure it was easy for them to say yes; current and streamlined donation page, remit envelopes on hand, Square payment collectors, etc.

They also prepared to modify their ask on the spot, allowing potential supporters an alternative way to support the council. If a sponsor said, “We don’t have \$5,000 in our budget for a sponsorship this year.” They were prepared to say, “No problem! What can you do? We’d love to find a way to showcase your support this year.”

Get your board engaged – Getting the board to be active members of the fundraising team was a critical tactic of this effort. With each board member having differing comfort levels around raising funds, creating opportunities for everyone was important. The goal was to have all board members involved, so the council created a multi-prong approach to revamping how the board viewed and participated in the council’s contributed income.

- For example, create a board P2P campaign with a goal of # of new donors & total amount raised. Time this for when it makes sense on your calendar (the start of the season? The 5K? When you have a gap in cash flow).
- Fund Development Committee – the council reviewed their fund development plan with the board and figured out the best places for them to take ownership and support staff. They brainstormed creative ways to fundraise and activate in the community with the board.

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- Revamped and reviewed their Give-Get policy. Are board members aware of the requirements? Is it set at the appropriate level? How can they be held accountable for their commitment?
- Professional development – the council educated their board on the importance of fundraising, their goals for growth and the planned activities, hosted an elevator speech activity, watched short videos about a board’s role in fundraising and made fundraising part of each board meeting so it was top of mind!
- Recruited board members who were well connected and loved to network – this helped expand their reach and tap into their network. Having board members who loved to “mingle” and share their love for GOTR with the community helped create a buzz!
- Asked to be board member’s “dates” to business events – many board members attended events for their job or as professional development opportunities (Rotary, other nonprofit events, speaker series, etc.), so the council asked to be their +1 to these events. They met new people, got to share about GOTR and had a board member there for support.
- Spoon-fed the board what they needed to be successful! When the council launched its EOY P2P Campaign, they helped the board set up their pages during a board meeting, sent the board one email with everything they needed to ask their network for support (email, text, social media examples with links) and then kept them updated on the collective and individual progress towards the goal.

Everything is an opportunity – The council was eager to change the culture regarding philanthropy and knew an important part of that was to start finding new opportunities within their current network. They looked at the activities they were already doing and found many ways to create fundraising opportunities:

- Sent sponsorship packets to the grown-ups of participants.
- Allowed coaches the opportunity to support.
- Revamped and made prominent the registration donation opportunity.
- Launched a social media “sponsor a day” campaign for a month to give people a low entry point to make a big collective difference (30 days X \$25= \$750!)
- Celebrated milestones (council’s birthday, # of girls served, community impact projects, etc.)

Low-lift events – The council intentionally looked at community events as a tactic to both diversify funding and a marketing opportunity to expand its reach. They identified and created events that would build community while also raising money by finding fun, low-lift ways you can get their community engaged *and* raising money!

- Miniature golf event – free for families but raised money through sponsorships, auctions, and raffles.
- Limitless Potential Breakfast – the board committed to helping fill the room, they found a compelling speaker (professional development or connection to the organization), secured sponsorships and in-kind support, and made the ask out loud to get 100% giving in the room.
- Attended other community events to show your support and be seen in the community!
- 5K Fundraising – Found at least three ways to raise money through their 5K. Some ideas: donation-based photobooth, opening the race up to community runners, merchandise, “sell” shoutout opportunities to specific teams or to pick a warm-up song, a donation booth with pictures from the season.

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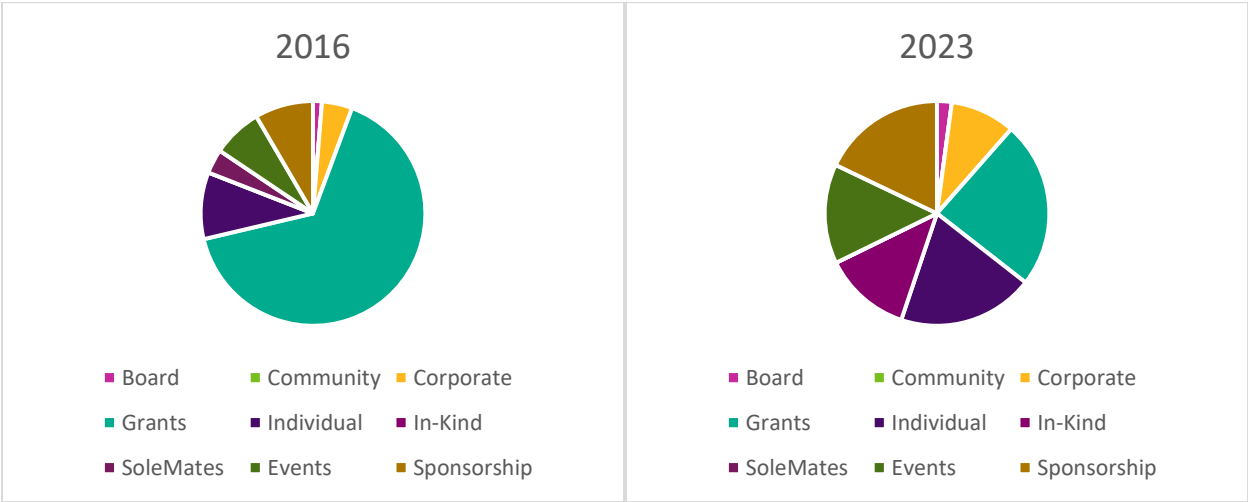
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- Asked local restaurants or breweries to host dine and donate nights to support the council and actively participated in chatting about GOTR with patrons.
- House Parties –board members and key supporters (coaches, donors, others) hosted small GOTR Gatherings in their homes to share about the organization and ask their network to help reach a specific goal (sponsoring a nearby team, providing 15 pairs of shoes, funding a special initiative).

Donor stewardship & cultivation – Finally, the council created a clear and actionable plan to steward donors. They worked to create genuine relationships and keep donors in the know, so they felt compelled to keep giving! They sent hand-written cards, personally invited them to events and the 5K and found ways to share updates about the organization in personalized ways. It proved so important to focus on retaining donors and not just acquiring new ones!

OUTCOMES

Girls on the Run Sierras now has diversified revenue (as seen in the chart above) to help ensure the long-term sustainability of the council, with **no more than 24% of contributed income coming from a single category**. Equally important is the brand recognition developed by actively showing up in the community, creating new partnerships and increasing the number of supporters they have in their community. Additionally, **the board is now engaged in fundraising and meets its commitments**.



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CHALLENGES

Creating a culture of philanthropy that relies heavily on board participation is a challenge and takes time. It won't change overnight, but by resetting expectations, setting people up for success and removing as many barriers as possible, it can be done!

SUCCESSSES & BEST PRACTICES

In addition to the data that indicates improved diversification, GOTR Sierras also has growing support from the community. They participate in 12+ community events a year where they are expanding their brand exposure and sharing the mission of Girls on the Run and are seen as a bright and active part of their community. Additionally, they are active throughout the year at their own and 3rd party events, keeping GOTR top of mind throughout the year. Finally, they have created a culture of philanthropy with staff and board that has changed the game. Joy Heuer, Council Director, shared that **“we’re all walking billboards for Girls on the Run, always sharing about our mission and giving people the opportunity to support us!”**