

Program Takeaways & Links

Covid has disrupted many things, including some of the more traditional ways that nonprofits and corporations have come together -- like big special events and day of service volunteering.

As the social impact sector continues to navigate the pandemic, companies and nonprofits find themselves with both a challenge--and an opportunity--to rethink how we align our work and share our stories for greater equity, efficiency, and impact moving forward. Perhaps what started as a fear of change has transitioned to accepting new ways of doing the work!

Recently, a panel of experts from the Adler Planetarium, Chicago Cares, and Navy Pier shared their candid perspectives on events and volunteering with us. Read on for ideas to help shape your own planning, a link to the full session, and resources from our panelists!

Let's Be Honest

It's hard to have real conversations when philanthropic support is on the line. Hosting events and volunteering opportunities can be great ways for nonprofits to invite donors into their work, and show the impact of their support. But, they also take a lot of staff time and energy to do well and can quickly veer from the core mission. Nonprofits might consider some of the following as they make the most of limited resources.

Ask: What is our Why? Why are we holding this event or offering this volunteering opportunity? Is there a real need, do we have the capacity, is this telling our story in ways that support relationship-building and awareness?

Say: No. Really, it's ok! A partnership that isn't willing to consider a more on-mission alternative to say, a day of service, maybe isn't the partnership for your organization.

Consider: Now is the time to imagine new approaches. Covid has opened the door to more virtual events and volunteering opportunities, which can offer new storytelling and engagement possibilities while also expanding your audience. Maybe they are the right fit for your organization, even if others return to in-person!

For companies, remember that honest conversation is key to real change. Consider how best you can invite that kind of open feedback from your nonprofit partners.

As we move forward with a commitment to more candid communications, here are some trends our panelists are seeing in the world of galas and volunteering.

Galas

You're not imagining it; gala fatigue is a real thing, for both funders and nonprofits.

Virtual and hybrid events are here to stay! They are more accessible to people at every price point, they can get right to the mission, and they are more cost-effective—ensuring more donor dollars can go to the core work.

Getting people together in person is still valuable, but many events are now much less formal.

Volunteering

Lead with your need! "Servathons" are a big lift for many nonprofits and don't always drive greater engagement with the mission. Instead, nonprofits should consider what expertise and capacity is most needed and proactively offer these opportunities to partners. You may work with less people, but they will be more deeply engaged.

Nonprofits and their funding partners can also build stronger partnerships by co-designing skills-based service projects. By meaningfully matching volunteer skills with organizational needs, you will learn more about each other's work.

Our virtual world offers new opportunities for volunteering, like text banking, which can attract volunteers from near and far to your cause!

To watch the full event: [SRC Jan 2022 Program: Galas, Volunteering, and Auctions Oh My! Re Envisioning Engagement & Impact](#)

Panelist links:
[Adler Planetarium 2021 Look Back Report.pdf](#)
[Adler Zooniverse Overview](#)

Interested in going more in-depth? SR Chicago members are invited to join two small-group peer-to-peer workshops to delve into the challenges and opportunities of galas and volunteering.
Contact Mary Cummins at mcummins@srchicago.org for more information.