Better Ways to do Good:
Do-it-yourself fundraising, grassroots activism, and ways to keep your good intentions from paving the road to a personal Hell



# Summary:

Sharing a link or hitting the 'Like' button is good enough for cat memes, but making a difference in one’s community takes more work. This document outlines and highlights meaningful steps toward having an impact in your community, useful concepts to consider, and common pitfalls to avoid when organizing and fundraising. The organizer’s personal motivations, goals, and capabilities should be carefully considered, as these will have a direct bearing on any stresses and successes associated with such a project. A focus on the grassroots level and DIY ethic is maintained to help interested individuals determine if these methods are within their means.


# Problem:

In an era which civic and institutional support is faltering or unreliable, even urgent needs and prominent causes can be underfunded and undersupported. Communal bonds suffer as political and social tensions increase, leading to fractured communication. Prominent figures in these spaces are simultaneously praised and pilloried and have a tendency to burn out spectacularly. People feel a need for action but are unsure of what can be done or what steps could be taken.

# Solution:

A project with potential to deliver a quantifiable impact, to foster community bonds, and to provide a measure of personal satisfaction can be effected with the following steps:

1. Honestly examining one’s own desired goals and outcomes;
2. Frankly assessing one’s own capabilities and boundaries on personal investment;
3. Setting and sticking to a discrete, targeted, achievable goal;
4. Selectively tapping one’s social networks with a discrete engagement; and
5. Diligently managing the project and effectively responding to emergent issues.



# Audience:

Motivated individuals or small groups who feel a call to action and desire ‘square one’ orientation. Persons who have a chosen goal and are looking for ways to advance it more effectively. Persons who are participating in grassroots activism and find themselves overextended. Persons wishing to sustain an existing grassroots activist community.

# Nota Bene:

The speakers are relating their personal perspectives and lived experiences. Some have more or less specialized training that relates to their different fields and backgrounds, which has led to different pitfalls and successes. This is not intended as a lecture, but rather as a conversation among the panelists in the role of more experienced peers. These endeavours both assume and rely upon good faith among all parties, and are consciously and deliberately limited to local, neighborhood-level organization. Nothing here should be taken as legal or tax advice- we are not lawyers or tax professionals.

# Outline:

**Somebody should DO something! I… *I* should do something!**

* Easiest way is to start with yourself:
	+ ‘Step 1’ stuff: walk don’t drive; shop the grocery perimeter; volunteer; VOTE.
* Do a frank self-inventory and self-assessment first.
	+ Identify your communities first. Who is your community?
		- It will shape scope, language to be used, and effort needed to gain trust.
		- You might think you’re onto a good idea, but how will it be received?
	+ What are your communities’ needs?
		- Housing? Healthcare accessibility? Education?
	+ Assess what you *PERSONALLY* can put into - and want from - your project.
		- Know your boundaries, have support.
		- *Self-care*. Recognize when your mental health is at risk.
		- Be prepared for *all kinds* of reactions from *all directions*.
* Have clear bounds on your project’s *SCOPE*.
	+ Calibrate your scope to your resources, intent, and ego.
		- Set goals based on your self-assessments
		- Be methodical, be deliberate, and stay on target.
	+ Very different tactics for trying to raising money vs. trying change minds.
	+ Ego can be a factor, and can change what you want to do
		- If you just want to feel good, go volunteer for an evening at a soup kitchen.
		- Don’t reinvent the wheel if you’re looking to have the most impact
			* Grassroots fundraising is quick and easy, and has a defined end.
			* If you have a more broad scope (e.g. end hunger), partner with extant organizations. This is where you’re going to have to manage ego- don’t thin vital resources by duplicating effort.
* Be prepared for obstacles
	+ Combines your ‘durability’ and your community support.
	+ It might not look like what you’d imagined
		- The community might not receive you or your work like you’d expected
		- Your impact might not be as significant as you’d expected
		- For unforseen reasons, the work might just be harder than you’d expected
	+ Tax laws, local laws, loss of community support, loss of financial support
		- Growth and sustainability will require perseverance and dedication.
		- There are reasons charities can be large organizations with *overhead*.
* As you move along...
	+ Check every decision against your values and ask if it’s in service of your goals
	+ Connect with organizations and people who can support you or your goals



# Conclusions:

Do-Goodery is an ununglamorous project that needs *management,* and it should be treated appropriately. Organizers must have an idea of what they *personally* can put into - and want from - any project undertaken. Having clear bounds on the project’s *scope* is the best way to keep it from becoming overwhelming and unmanageable. Successfully organizing a community will make or break the project, and how the organizer interacts with that community will have a direct bearing on any longer-term sustainability of the group.

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# Bios:

**Michael McAtee** works in resource sharing in the University of Michigan libraries and is the infrastructure co-lead for Lakes of Fire, the Great Lakes regional Burning Man event. He has experience with volunteer-project organization, grassroots fundraising, and local and regional swseswsamarketing. He's a cyclist, hiker and camper, and is obsessed with Kerbal Space Program.

**Ila Coltas** specializes in communicating in technology-mediated environments. She is a digital marketing specialist who advises on UX and social engagement. She is also deeply concerned with reducing human suffering. Ila has led online fundraising campaigns, co-hosted grassroots fundraising, and volunteers her time and skills in various contexts. She also plays the violin very badly.

**Deanna Tartaglia** is a social worker (LLBSW, QIDP) supporting adults with developmental disabilities. She works at MORC, Inc. from her home in Ferndale. Deanna also serves as a Commissioner on the Ferndale Housing Authority Board. When she is not dedicating her time to her community, she can be found playing flat-track roller derby in the Detroit area or promoting wines to raise funds for charity.

**Elisabeth Gibbons** is a