How University of Maryland Raised 301% of Their Fundraising Goal

About the University of Maryland (UMD)

The University of Maryland is the flagship campus of the state's higher educational system and a top-ranked public research institution. Located just outside Washington, D.C., UMD is a diverse community of 38,000 students, 9,000 faculty and staff, and 352,000 alumni. The university is committed to social entrepreneurship as the nation's first "Do Good" campus.

About RNL Crowdfunding *powered by ScaleFunder*

Over 200 colleges, universities, and other nonprofit organizations use RNL Crowdfunding *powered by ScaleFunder* to connect with donors, create compelling giving opportunities, launch robust crowdfunding campaigns, and empower supporters to easily follow, share, and donate to the projects that resonate with them—and to see the impact of their gifts.

Conservation through crowdfunding

The University of Maryland's department of entomology is home to significant research related to the health of honey bees. During the course of their active research, the opportunity arose to launch a pilot program that could monitor in real time the health of honey bee colonies through what are known as Sentinel Hives. The researchers' goal was to build at least eight of these Sentinel Hives near campus as well as throughout the state.

UMD started using the RNL Crowdfunding platform in spring 2014, recognizing the opportunity to match the funding needs of its campus to the passions of supporters. The campaign also benefited from tremendous partnership, collaboration, and support from area beekeeping associations and research collaboratives. The project leaders' direct knowledge about bee aficionados and their past giving patterns helped make this campaign so successful.

After initially setting a goal of $8,000 to fund eight Sentinel Hives, the campaign tripled that number with a final count of $24,105 from 156 donors. Not only did the campaign generate success with grassroots and corporate gifts, but one alumnus who heard about the campaign after its launch generously volunteered to do a matching gift challenge! The suggested giving levels for the campaign clearly had an impact, as 90 percent of gifts exactly matched those levels.

Opportunity

A few years earlier, the University of Maryland's department of entomology received a U.S. government grant for specific bee-related research. One finding was the need, and desire, to study the health of honey bees in real time through Sentinel Hives. Unfortunately, the financial resources to establish the hives and conduct that research were not part of the grant. Therefore, new funding had to be acquired.

Enter the university's new crowdfunding platform, branded "Launch UMD," which gave the project team a way to engage

the beekeeping community for the needed support. Conducting a crowdfunding campaign for Sentinel Hives during the fall was very advantageous for multiple reasons. Not only is that a preferred timing for giving by many bee enthusiasts, but acquiring the funding in the fall would enable all of the pieces to be in place to set up new hives when the weather returned to warmer temperatures come springtime. The crowdfunding campaign ran from late September through late October 2014, providing the perfect opportunity for funding to be turned into action.

Partnership

The RNL Crowdfunding platform gave the University of Maryland community an opportunity to match up the needs and interests of its students and faculty with the ability to generate funds that inspire innovation and social change. The Sentinel Hives crowdfunding campaign combined the efforts of not only the development team, but also faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, and a collaboration of bee-related researchers called "The Bee Informed Partnership."

Partnership with Bee Informed on the campaign better enabled outreach and gift solicitations to area beekeeping enthusiasts and associations, all of which have a vested and often deep, personal interest in honey bee health. These partnerships also played a role in securing media coverage of the campaign, including the local NPR station.

Results

The group started out with a modest goal of $8,000, but far surpassed those expectations, generating $24,105 from 156 donors. Those 156 donors represented a broad spectrum of donor types and ranges, as the median gift for this campaign was just $20.

Among the 156 donors was an alumnus who, upon receiving an alumni-targeted email about the new Sentinel Hives campaign from the College of Computer, Mathematical, & Natural Sciences, generously volunteered to issue a $5,000 matching gift challenge.

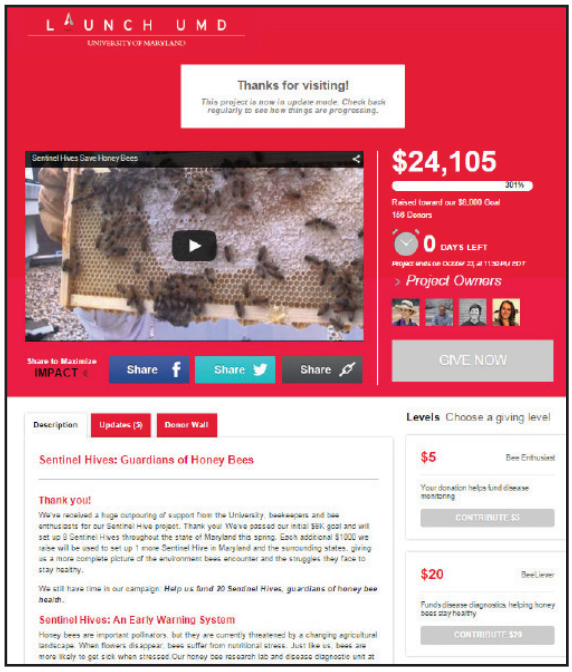
The updates tab within the crowdfunding platform was extremely beneficial during the second week of the campaign. That week, the project group made two updates, the first of which was to announce the challenge match. The other update answered

KEY RESULTS

$24,105
RAISED FROM 156 DONORS

301%
OF $8,000 GOAL MET

$5,000
MATCHING GIFT CHALLENGE AND MULTIPLE GIFTS OVER
$1,000



Launch UMD online crowdfunding platform

some direct questions about the benefits of these hives to beekeepers. The second week of the campaign averaged more than 10 gifts a day and yielded almost 50 percent of the total gifts received for the entire campaign.

Facebook was a significant factor in spreading the news as the campaign's homepage was directly shared on Facebook 61 times. By the end of the campaign, 651 visits to that homepage were directly attributable to a Facebook link. The video created as part of the crowdfunding effort was extremely popular with almost 900 views (which are in addition to the nearly 700 video views tracked separately on the YouTube channel where the video was posted).

Gamification was incredibly successful for this campaign, as nearly 90 percent of the gifts fell directly on one of the seven suggested amounts, almost all of which were on one of the $100 and under levels.

The most popular giving level for this campaign was just $20, which project leaders expected given their direct knowledge of charitable giving within the beekeeping community. That knowledge and pre-campaign preparation enabled the leaders to establish more attractive donor levels and goals. Only the four recommended levels of $100 and above included any direct donor perks; the three lowest levels ($5, $20, $50) were solely symbolic. The most popular of the donor perk levels was $100, where the perk was an invitation for donors to tour the university's bee lab.

The campaign not only succeeded at the lower individual levels, but also on leadership levels. Multiple gifts of $1,000 and above were made to the campaign by various beekeeping associations. This is in addition to the $5,000 matching gift challenge that materialized only after it launched.

Finally, project leaders incorporated remarkable stewardship within their campaign planning. Every donor to the Sentinel Hives crowdfunding campaign, regardless of giving level, received a personal, handwritten thank you letter for their generosity and support. This type of stewardship could undoubtedly pay dividends in future funding efforts.

> **"This project was so successful because the team had an outstanding marketing strategy and because of the newsworthy nature of the subject matter. The team knew exactly who to ask for support and was able to talk about the science of honey bee health in a way that everyone could understand."**
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> **Nora Pittmann**
> Manager, New Donor Strategies, University of Maryland, College Park