

How to help your nonprofit: powerful messages and online funding



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Jonathan Levitt has a long story of volunteering with homeless people and with children. He emphasizes how important powerful causes and messages are to attract donors.

Jonathan Levitt

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Description:

Foreign Policy Graduate, worker at the Spanish Embassy in Washington DC and volunteer.

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I've been volunteering at the homeless shelter at my synagogue in New York (when I'm home) for the last 10 years or so. By far the most significant thing I've gotten out of the experience **is realizing that anyone can be homeless**. The shelter pre-screens the guests so it's not drug addicts or any sort of crazy people. While some of them are a little strange, there is still plenty of normal people who do not look homeless at all. **Most have cell phones and are coming from a day of work**. While they tend to be minorities, there are all sorts of ages and stories. **Unfortunately many of them lack the social safety net** to help them out when things go bad. In the broader scheme of things, it essentially goes to show that any sort of problem can happen to anyone and we're not invincible. Additionally, I think it's really helped my social skills. At the shelter we serve the guests dinner and eat at the same table as them and chat.

While I can't remember the early years that well, I still have some trouble starting conversations with the guests. We obviously try and avoid religion and politics. But since we don't know if they have jobs, I find the easiest is to talk about sports or the weather. Additionally, I try and not talk about myself too much for fear of bragging. But on the other hand, I don't want to have them talk about their lives too much because they probably haven't been the easiest. Regarding working with kids, which I also did, there's definitely not one approach for how to handle them since they are all so different. You have to be respectful of each kid's wishes and interests, but you can still gently encourage them to try something new or help them out. Some people develop a little more slowly and occasionally need a extra boost, which isn't necessarily wrong or bad. I also have tremendous appreciation for people who work with kids because it is not easy but very important, of course.

I honestly don't know much about Catalan non profits and how they relate to other European ones. My only real experience with a Catalan nonprofit was with [iWith.org](#) , so I can't speak on general terms. However, iWith still gave me a decent look into the role they play in Catalonia and how important their role is, as well as the strength of Catalan civil society. **Definitely, one thing that all nonprofits from all over the world struggle with is obtaining funding**, the only questions is how to do it. **Focusing on how to get more online funding would enable local nonprofits to grow and to have a larger impact on the society they are working for**. It is hard for me to be specific: from an American perspective, Catalan, Spanish and European organizations seem the same. I've read that Americans donate more than Europeans as a whole, but that might partially be due to the fact that in Europe and many other parts of the world, there are more social services offered, thus less of a need for donations.

In general, I still believe Americans are less empathetic and caring than the rest of the world. For what I know, both

the European and American model have their benefits and drawbacks. However, be it in America or in Europe, one model **of nonprofit** that really stands out to me is focusing on causes that most people can relate to, such as climate change or child poverty. **By appealing to the public with powerful messages, nonprofits are able to effectively gain an audience that will hopefully join the cause, or at least give them brand recognition.**

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