

# Lincoln Park Community Services – Virtual Metamorphosis Live!

## General Summary, Lessons Learned & Tips for Nonprofits



### Event History & Overview:

Metamorphosis has served as Lincoln Park Community Services' signature spring gala, and primary fundraising event, for approximately 15 years. The in-person event was planned and advertised for April 24th at a venue in downtown Chicago. By mid-March, LPCS had secured all vendors along with multiple sponsorships and sold enough tables and tickets to have early confirmation of 150 Guests (out of a maximum 208 for the venue). We were well on our way to a successful, traditional in-person gala. As a result of the pandemic, **on March 19<sup>th</sup>, our Development Team & Board Development Committee elected to move to a virtual event to be held on the original April 24<sup>th</sup> event date, leaving us approximately 5 weeks to convert our program and engage supporters.**

Ultimately, we presented a 50-minute virtual program inclusive of:

- 5-minute, pre-recorded address from the Interim Executive Director,
- 12-minute COVID-19 video diary (featuring staff, Guests and supporters),
- 5-minute video review of our organization's history celebrating our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary,
- 15-minute LIVE toast and paddle raise (onsite at LPCS),
- 6-minute award presentation video,
- 1-minute LIVE thank you and goodnight (onsite at LPCS).

You can view our entire program on YouTube by [clicking here](#).

The program was preceded and proceeded by about 10 minutes of rolling photos and shout-outs via PowerPoint. We shot most of the video portions ourselves onsite with iPhones and Androids during March and April and then worked with [Free Spirit Media/Pro](#) on video editing.

We partnered with consultants Lorena Levy-Alonso and Jessenia Rodriguez of Chicago-based [LARC Group](#) who provided immensely helpful and strategic guidance as well as on-site support.

### Event Performance:

- Original Revenue Goal (for in-person event): \$190,000 Gross / \$155,000 Net (Budgeting for \$35,000 in expenses)
  - Event Capacity: 208
- Revised Virtual Revenue Goal: \$160,000 Gross / \$155,000 Net (Budgeting for \$5,000 in expenses; also taking into consideration recent gifts to LPCS COVID Relief Fund)
- **Actual Virtual Event Revenue (to date): \$189,086+ Gross / \$184,847+ Net** (\$4,239 in expenses)
  - **Number of Donors: 337**

*[Lincoln Park Community Services](#) brings communities together to empower individuals facing homelessness and poverty to secure stable housing and make sustainable life changes.*

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### KEY TAKEAWAYS, TIPS & LESSONS LEARNED:

- **Keep the program short – no more than one hour.** We watched other virtual events to determine what felt like a good fit for LPCS. Anything more than 50 minutes felt too long. **Keep your program segments short, too.** Having the same people talking or keeping on one topic for more than a few minutes makes it easy to lose interest.
- **Utilize this as an opportunity to engage supporters/volunteers who don't usually attend galas.** We heavily advertised this virtual event to our base of volunteers, many of whom do not attend our in-person galas likely due to time or ticket price. There was no "ticket" or sign-in required for our event. We simply streamed publicly. As a result, we almost doubled the number of "attendees" and donors in comparison to 2019's in-person event.
- **Keeping our original, in-person event date was advantageous** – supporters already had LPCS on their calendars for that date.
- **If applicable, establish a plan to retain revenue committed to your in-person event.** We were able to retain 98% of revenue committed to the original event (sponsorships, tables and individual tickets) by **reaching out by phone/email to offer a full refund or conversion to a 100% cash donation** (while also giving updates on how our org was handling COVID-19).
- **Heavily seed your paddle raise before the event.** We had more than \$50K in pledged paddle raise gifts committed before the event to ensure momentum. We gave those donors the option of donating in advance (for us to enter during the paddle raise) or donating themselves in real time during the paddle raise.
- **Communicate often via multiple methods (E-blasts, Social Media, Personal Emails, Personal Phone Calls) and utilize mixed media (text, photos and videos) to engage supporters. Make sure to give clear instructions, early and often, on how to attend your virtual event.** View our [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) to see examples of our pre-event communications (during April 2020).
- **Use creative engagement tactics.** We created a signature cocktail, the LPCS VML (with a purple hue like our logo color) and sent out a recipe card a week ahead of time. We also engaged Sam Kirk, the artist who created the mural on our building, in our event video and she introduced the LPCS Coloring Kit/Book during the event.
- **Recommended technology:**
  - **OneCause:** Event website and donation platform; Affordable, User-Friendly and Aesthetically Pleasing; \$995/year (basic virtual peer-to-peer platform)
  - **Switcher Studio:** App that facilitates the switch between pre-recorded video and live video, along with easy, attractive screen graphics. Affordable at \$39.99/month
  - **YouTube:** For livestreaming your event. Offers live chat option for viewers. NOTE: There is a bit of a lag for viewers depending upon your internet speed from where you are streaming. Be prepared to work with your internet provider to adjust upload speed if need be. Use new technology (computer or ipad) for optimal streaming.

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