# RAISE
## A Librarian

# A Crowdfunding Initiative for Professional Development

Richard Bee, Tanya Ball, Deanna Walker, Rachel Osolen, Taryn Hunchak, and Shane Allan

## Purpose

The purpose of this crowdfunding campaign was twofold:

1. To raise funds for student initiatives associated with two of the University of Alberta's School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) student groups: the Library and Information Studies Student Association (LISSA) and the Forum for Information Professionals (FIP).
2. To create a student run and student led professional development opportunity in order to provide real world experience in fundraising for SLIS students.

The intent was to raise $5,000 over a one month period in October that would be evenly divided between the two student groups for their specific purposes. This goal was considered to be both achievable, based on the scope of the campaign, and aspiring in the difficulty associated with raising this amount.

Crowdfunding was always intended to be the primary method for raising funds for the campaign. Since there are several pre-existing crowdfunding platforms that are popularly used, this provided the crowdfunding team with an easily accessible launch point for the campaign.

## Methodology

We conducted a comparative evaluation of 16 online platforms based on an agreed upon checklist:

- Is there a time frame for the lifespan of the campaign?
- Are there fees for using the site (for donors and for administrators)?
- How do we get the money transferred from the platform?
- How much control over the site do we have (Administrator Interface)?
- Do we still get the money if we don't meet the pledge target?
- Is it user friendly (for User and Administrator Interface)?
- Any additional features? (Included success and failure rates of platform, etc.)

Based upon this checklist, we created a shortlist of 3 major crowdfunding platforms: Indiegogo, GoFundMe, and YouCaring. Ultimately we found YouCaring to be the most appropriate given the content and the fees associated with the other platforms.

Once the platform was chosen we built a fundraising campaign that included multimedia resources such as videos and images. We also developed a pitch that told the story of our campaign to attract donors. For our fundraising we used a combination of methods from solicitation emails that targeted listservs and individuals, as well as social media marketing through Facebook.
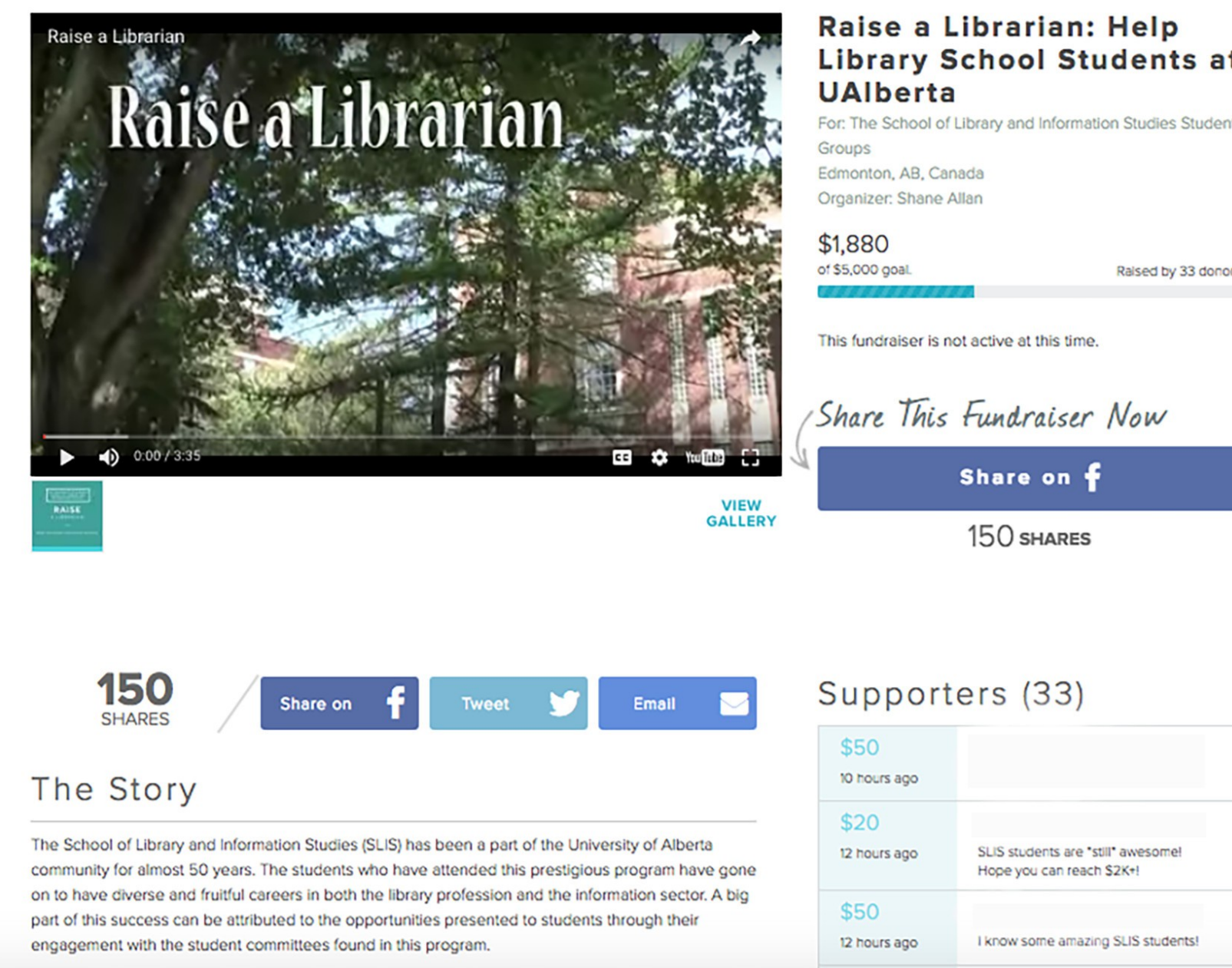
## Platform Page



**Figure 1.** Raise a Librarian donation page sponsored by YouCaring.

## Marketing Materials

This is a sample of the wide variety of marketing materials created for the campaign.



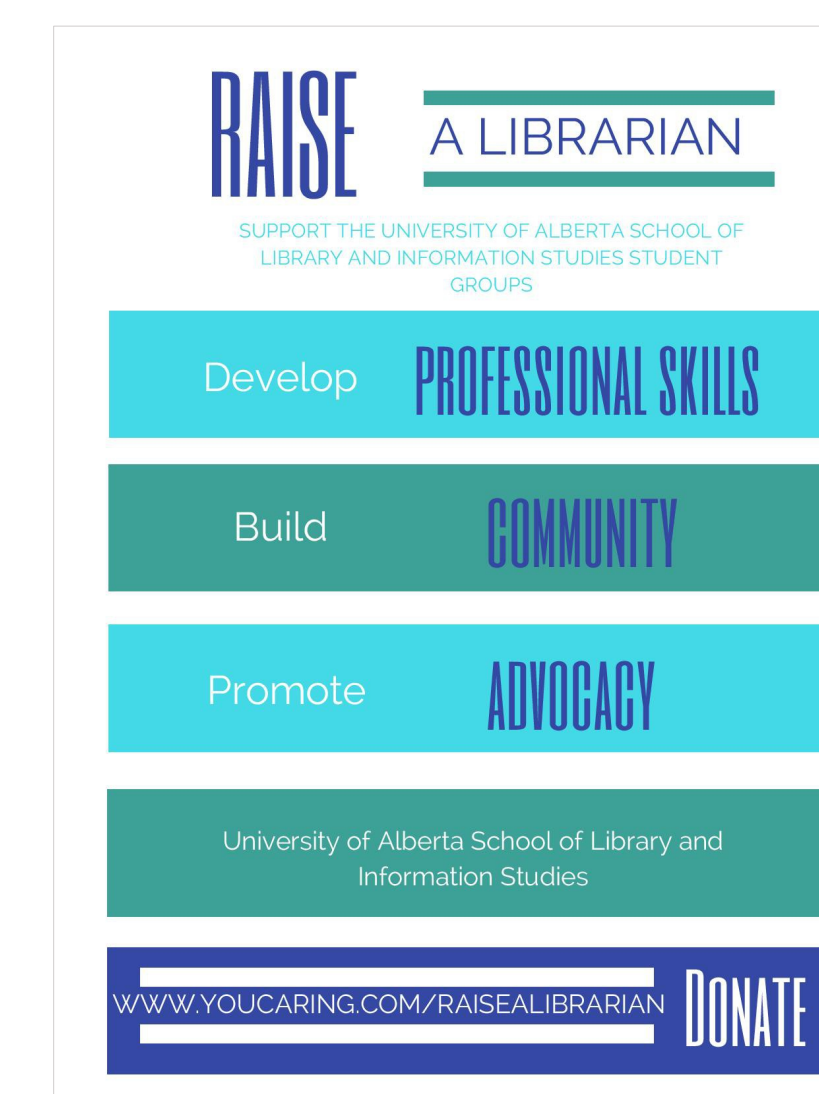**Figure 2.** Campaign update send through email and social media.



**Figure 3.** Poster that was dispersed throughout the University campus.

## Results and Findings

There were numerous setbacks to the crowdfunding initiative:

- Initially, we planned on using USEED. We were unable to pursue this route, forcing us to look at alternative platforms. Initial plans were reliant on using USEED.
- We were unable to recruit the amount of volunteers we were originally hoping for (25). Instead, we only had a core team of 5 people and 3 volunteers.
- Using social media to spread our campaign was largely ineffectual for generating donations even though people were happy to share.

Due to these setbacks, we were forced to push back the launch into November, which likely affected the final numbers. We were successful in creating a unique crowd funding campaign. Among these success are:

- Developing the tools and skills necessary to create and implement a crowdfunding campaign.
- Preserving our efforts to benefit future students.
- Developing a method of evaluating crowdfunding platforms
- Increasing awareness of SLIS student groups.

Ultimately, we did not reach our $5,000 goal; however, we were successful in raising $1,880 (35% of the initial goal) for the student groups. In fact, the money raised for FIP paid for half their conference catering!
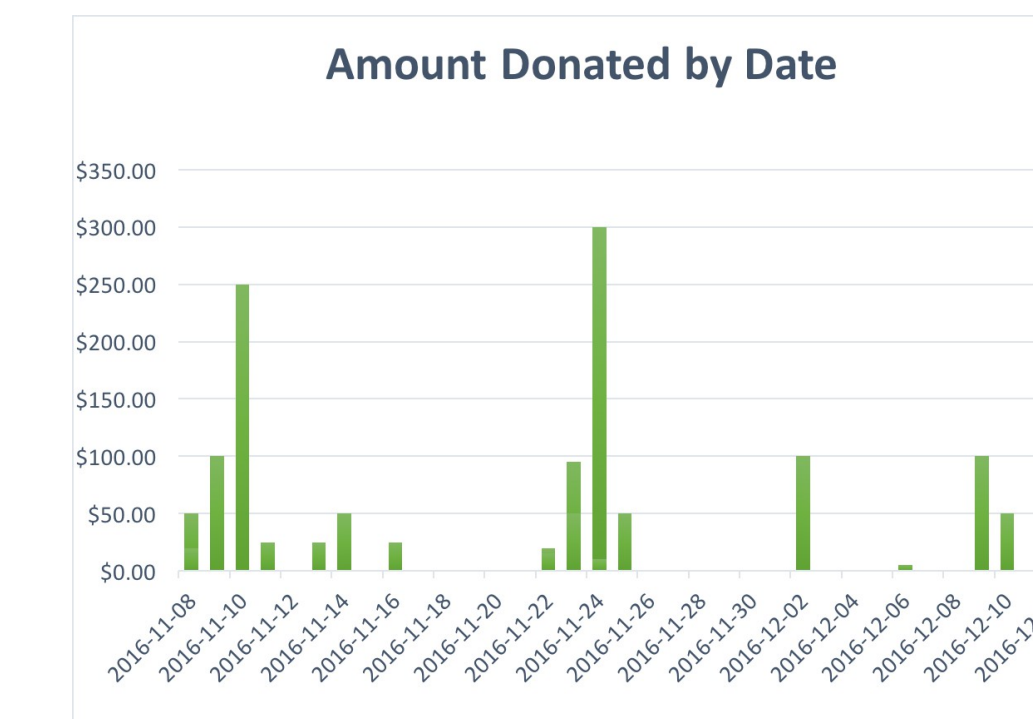


**Table 1.** Bar graph displaying the amount donated by date.

Table 1 represents the donations that we received over the course of the campaign. Emails were sent out to both the Jerome (Nov 22 and 29) and SLIS (Nov 8 and 29) listservs. This alludes to the fact that listservs were not the best method of generating donations, but were still effective.

According to Table 2, the majority of donations were received through personal contact between the student and the donor.
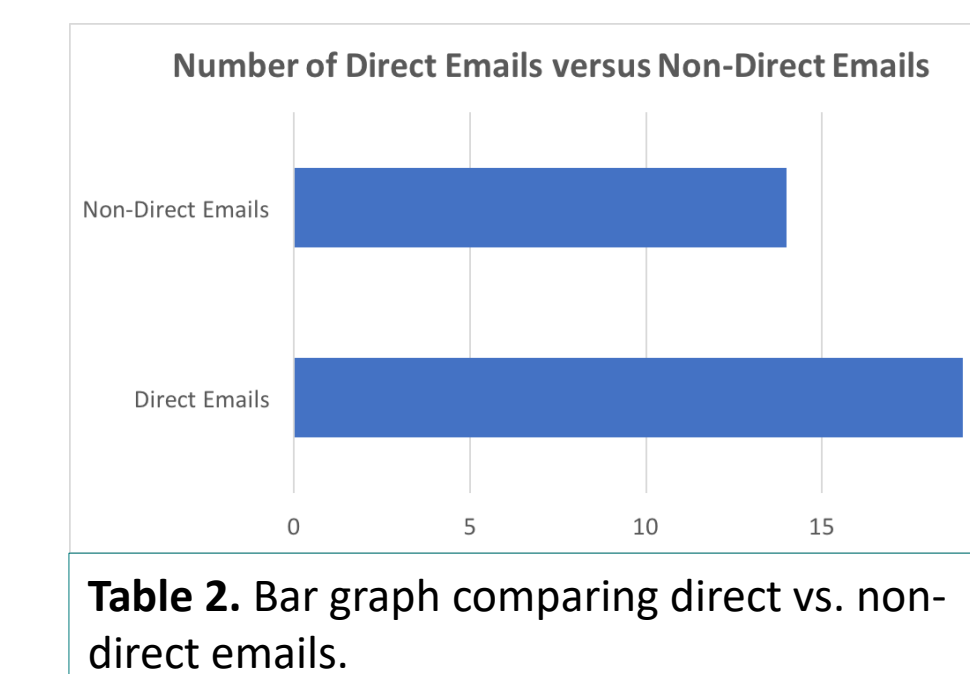


**Table 2.** Bar graph comparing direct vs. non-direct emails.

Interestingly, the analysis of this data reveled a correlation between those donors identifying as anonymous and those who have identified themselves. That is, identified donors tended to donate more. This could be an opportunity for further research.
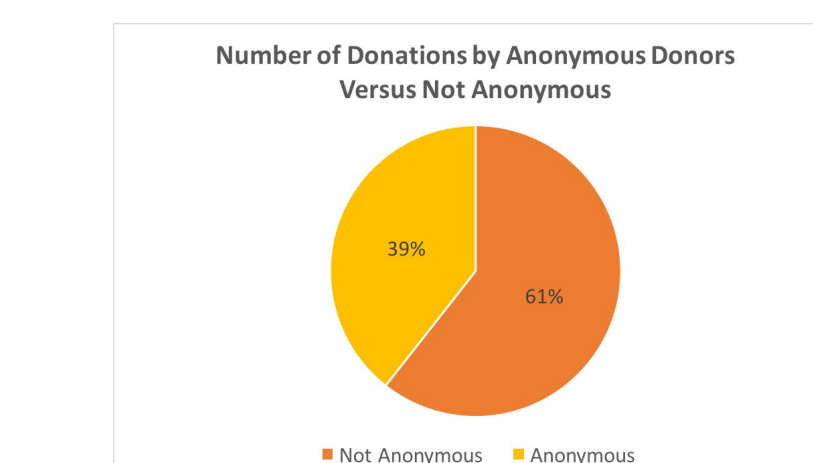


**Table 3.** Pie chart comparing anonymous vs. self identified donors.
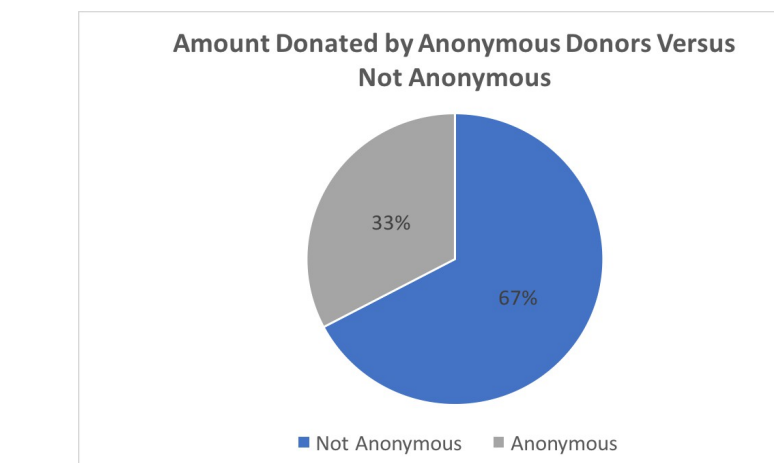
**Table 4.** Pie chart comparing the amount donated by Anonymous vs. Non.

## Recommendations

This was the first year we used crowdfunding to get donations to fund the SLIS student groups at UAlberta. The following is a list of recommendations:

- Start with a smaller funding goal that coincides with the needs of your organization.
- Establish a reasonable and clear purpose for the funds. You should be able to say specifically what you want to accomplish with the money to be able to pitch to potential donors.
- Aim for a timeframe that corresponds with the school semester, and set aside the appropriate time for prep work.
- Cast a larger net for marketing to reach a larger group for potential donors.
- Have a more defined marketing campaign in place at the beginning with well defined steps.
- Email solicitations were successful in the campaign. It would be a good idea to send out more emails on a regular basis. These should take the form of updates, how much we have raised, how the campaign is going, then a call for donors. This is a helpful, but hopefully a non intrusive method of prodding potential donors, thanking people who contributed and reminding people about the campaign.
- Email templates are a good way to ensure a consistent message and are easily adapted to various targeted audiences.
- Ensure there is a social media presence established before you start your campaign.
- Have a staff liaison within the department to help guide the group.

There is room for potential future research in crowdfunding for student groups. It would be interesting to discover how this sort of campaigning can be used in a professional LIS setting. It would also be beneficial to see how personal and group connections work for networking with potential donors.



Even though we did not meet our original funding goal we did end up with a substantial end amount. The campaign was a great learning experience that has laid the groundwork for future students to build upon.

*Thank you to those who contributed both time and funding towards this fundraising initiative.*

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES