Four questions to ask yourself before launching a crisis fundraising campaign

Blog, Fundraising, Ukraine

> When humanitarian crisis hits, it's not surprising that people want to help the best way they can. LGBTI activists' organisations are often at the forefront, often with fundraising campaigns, but sometimes this response can cause more harm than good. Here's why.

Sadly, the past few years in our world have been marked by major crises, be it the COVID pandemic, war, conflict, natural disasters or violent crackdowns. LGBTI communities are often impacted by crises in specific ways, as we've seen in our Annual Review, for example through exclusion and lack of safety in shelters, difficulty in accessing hormones and medications via mainstream humanitarian responses, and being specifically targeted and scapegoated.

During times of emergency, we often see people responding with generosity. Donating is a simple, easy and constructive way of showing solidarity in response to crisis or hostile developments. We saw a wave of generosity in 2017, for example, in response to purge of LGBTI people in Chechnya, or over the past year in support of LGBTI people caught up in the war in Ukraine.

As people ask themselves, 'How can I help?', it's understandable that LGBTI organisations see opportunities to set up fundraising campaigns, whether for their own needs or in support of others. But to raise money responsibly and without causing harm, there are some questions we should ask ourselves beforehand.

Humanitarian organisations with long experience of providing aid can jump into action immediately in the face of any crisis, but for organisations focused primarily on advancing LGBTI people's rights it's helpful to pause and think through a few key questions.

Should you be fundraising publicly?

Fundraising can be a constructive response and meet real needs, but it's not necessarily always the right response. Before going ahead with launching a fundraising campaign on social media and other public platforms, or sharing an appeal of others, ask yourself what your role in this situation should be and whether you have enough information about what kind of support is most helpful in this situation at this moment. Though always well intended, sometimes a fundraising campaign might not be the best response if the attention could potentially put LGBTI communities at risk, or if LGBTI activists in the affected region don't have the capacity to provide humanitarian support to their communities.

Do you know what the needs are?

If you're fundraising for your own community, it will of course be easier to assess needs and risks and how you can best use donations. But if you're fundraising in solidarity with communities in another country, or sharing a fundraiser started by others, it's especially important to assess LGBTI people specific needs. Is a fundraising ask coming from the local LGBTI movement, and from recognised and trusted groups? Do you know who to speak with

to learn about needs?

You'll need to decide whether you'll collect funds and disburse them yourself, share a fundraising appeal by other group(s), or invite donations directly to local groups on the ground. Whichever the route, it's important to consider who is the ultimate recipient of the funds, whether they're happy for you to fundraise on their behalf, and whether they're able to handle the funds.

Here, it's also important to be able to communicate to donors as accurately and clearly as possible, for transparency and trust. Of course, specific needs will not always be clear immediately, but you should be able to give donors a sense of where their money is going, and what happens if needs change or end.

A positive example of communicating about needs is Lambda Warsawa, who set up a successful fundraiser to support LGBTI refugees arriving from Ukraine, conveying both a sense of urgency and outlining concretely how money is spent on activities such as renting a shelter, setting up a support group and preparing sandwiches to hand out to new arrivals at the central railway station.

In Slovenia, eight LGBTI organisations came together to raise funds to support trans people in shelters in Western Ukraine, while COC Netherlands launched a fundraiser in support of LGBTI communities in Ukraine, raising money for local organisations on the ground and providing regular updates about amounts raised and where the money has been sent.

What are the risks?

An LGBTI specific fundraising ask may be perceived as jumping on the bandwagon. At worst it can be seen as profiteering from crisis, leading to backlash. If the decision is to fundraise publicly, how you communicate about needs (as described above) is important in avoiding these risks. If you are raising money in solidarity with others, it's paramount to consider whether there are risks related to LGBTI groups receiving money and whether publicity could lead to them being targeted.

What's your message and how will it be perceived?

To avoid risks and to foster trust, how you frame your fundraising message is vital.

While it's real stories that compel people to give, it's important not to victimise the beneficiaries you are fundraising for, or sensationalise their circumstances. Instead, give affected community members an active voice, as did *LGBT Asylum* in Denmark, who asked a former beneficiary of their services to talk about how the organisation had helped him as they prepared to welcome LGBTI refugees from Ukraine. Or the *Albert Kennedy Trust* in the UK who highlighted stories of young people their services have helped as part of their Winter Pathways emergency fundraising appeal to raise money in response to the cost of living crisis.

Be mindful of how your potential donors will be feeling, and avoid triggering further anxiety or distress, or pressure into giving. For example, in 2020, when Polish organisation *Fundusz dla Odmiany* set up a successful fundraising campaign in response to violent crackdown on peaceful protests in Warsaw, they took the decision to avoid using images of the consequences of the most severe police violence.

Do you want to know more? Here is some further reading

Fundraising during an Emergency, by Daniel Fluskey, Director of Policy at the UK Chartered Institute of Fundraising

The Fundraising section of ILGA-Europe's free resource centre, The Hub

It Shows that People Care – LGBTI organisations fundraising from individuals in Europe and Central Asia

SOFII – Crisis Fundraising