

Surge Donations for the Charitable Community

08.17.17 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



The events of November 8, 2016, were – not to put too fine a point on it – unexpected.

The sudden reality of a GOP-controlled Congress and White House caused jitters around the nation including in the philanthropy community. Many nonprofits rely financially on a generous federal budget and their charitable beneficiaries face catastrophic consequences if services and benefits are slashed.

Amidst this doom-and-gloom about the new political order, though, there's been a surprising flip-side: a burst of financial support for some “lucky” groups in the form of “rage” or “surge” donations. Suddenly, there were huge amounts of money falling from the sky on organizations, some of which previously had struggled even for bare-bones support.

The spigot opened on November 9, 2016, and started gushing on January 20, 2017. Remarkably, there seems to be little let-up on the horizon.

Donations Explode for Many Groups

“Donald Trump’s adversarial style during the election,” it has been said (over and over) “divided American voters like few campaigns in recent years.”

Even from across the pond, the phenomenon was already clear: “The president himself has referred to ‘my many enemies’ – but it seems they’re getting a substantial boost from the new president.” See [Trump presidency: Opponents boosted by ‘rage donation’](#) (February 9, 2017) *BBC News*.

“Organisations that investigate, oppose, or lampoon the commander-in-chief are seeing a surge in support, in what’s been dubbed ‘rage donation.’”

One high-profile category receiving media attention for this phenomenon is organizations that advocate and provide benefits for women’s reproductive rights.

Planned Parenthood has been a major “winner” in this outflow of dollars; The organization has long been targeted for extinction by GOP leaders but particularly during the 2016 campaign. President Cecile Richards reported that in the two months immediately following the election, PP has received “an unprecedented outpouring of support – ‘some of which has been given jokily in Mike Pence’s name.’”

She cautioned, though, that – “no level of donations would be able to match the federal funding the group receives – something which may now be under threat.” The organization says it “... will never back down, and ... will never stop providing the care our patients need. These doors stay open, no matter what.”

Similarly, The Centre for Reproductive Rights, which set a goal of raising \$1 million in the Administration’s first 100 days, had – by February – already seen success: “We’ve had thousands of new donors in the last three months” according to a spokeswoman, “many of whom have signed on to be monthly sustainers – donors who will be with us for the long haul.”

Of course, balancing out this phenomenon is that anti-abortion donors are showering their favorite nonprofits with new infusions of cash as well.

Conclusion

Other key groups that are wondering how to “cope” with all of this unexpected funding include civil rights organizations, justice and legal-defense groups, environmental advocacy coalitions, and a new breed of nonprofit media outlets.

In later posts, we’ll explore the effect of this surge-donation bonanza on the 501(c)(3)s that now have the new “problem” of managing and allocating this flood of money. In a separate series, we’ll discuss the philanthropic “losers” in the new order; that is, how groups not on the receiving end of public support are dealing with the financial calamity of losing sorely needed government funds.

– Linda J. Rosenthal, J.D., FPLG Information & Research Director