



Advancing Collaboration with DonorsChoose

Approach to Collaboration

Our model creates ways for individuals to collaborate meaningfully with schools around America. We are unique in that we don't coordinate gifts, but instead, we enable our teachers to share their needs. If teachers request a class set of dictionaries or math games, donors can donate money, which we then utilize to purchase those specific supplies and ship them to the school.

We encourage our beneficiaries to connect with our funders directly – we stoke collaboration by giving our beneficiaries agency and a strong voice. In turn, our donors are engaged at a deeper level.

We allow our teachers to request their classroom needs in their own voices, so donors know exactly where their money is going. Through our model, we seek to ensure the bi-directional and collaborative spirit between the donor and the beneficiary.

Application of the 9 Considerations for Collaboration

Build Trust

Trust resonates throughout our work with donors and teachers. It's cultivated in our work through the transparency in all of our collaborations, which is maintained throughout the lifecycle of projects that require interaction between teachers and donors.

When a donor requests to fund a classroom project wherein a teacher needs dictionaries, we show the donor exactly how many dictionaries were requested, how much each one costs, and exactly who we'll be buying the dictionaries from. We allow our teachers to request their classroom needs in their own voices, so donors know exactly where their money is going. In facilitating collaborations almost entirely through digital means, we strive to establish a safe foundation for collaborating between the beneficiary and the donor.

Have a Vision

Our long-term vision is to reach teachers and schools in rural areas, on Native American reservations, or in communities where they may not have the best internet. We're in the process of enabling people to support classroom requests from underrepresented educators – from teachers of color to female STEM teachers.

We focus on areas within educational inequity – something we are passionate about and endeavor to continually make a difference through our work. Our initiative, ISeeMe, included research with over twenty other experts on racial equity in youth and education. The research presented showed that students benefit when the materials and teachers reflect their identities.

Seek to Assure the Success of Your Collaborators

When our donors give, they receive six photos of the students reading the books they bought and receive handwritten thank you notes from the students. When our donors give, many of

them feel they receive a lot in return. Likewise, many teachers share the unintended benefit of having strangers from across the country support their classroom – students feel more connected and appreciated. Through our model, we seek to ensure the bi-directional and collaborative spirit between the donor and the beneficiary.

Take Stock

We believe our greatest asset is the ability to represent teachers' voices from across the country. With over half a million teachers who've had classroom projects funded on our site, our reach has touched the classrooms of 15% of the US's teacher base. Taking stock allows us to realize that enabling teachers to speak about how they feel is an asset that may be under-utilized at the moment. Now and going forward, we hope to utilize this asset and employ it on a larger scale.

Start Small

Our model includes several integrity measures that protect our donors, teachers, school districts, and students. These measures differentiate us from for-profit crowdfunding organizations that are mostly cash pass-throughs.

We recently built a new type of project that entails shipping directly to a teacher or a student's home, which we began by piloting on a small scale. To maintain our integrity measures in this project, we added specific verification systems that confirm educators as public-school teachers. In our efforts, we started with an offline, small, and manual test with teachers that had used DonorsChoose for many years. Donors involved included 10-12 corporate partners or foundations that we've worked with for years, who were also familiar with our site and model. Once we addressed all the issues that arose during the pilot and ensured long-term sustainability, we expanded and opened the program to all public-school teachers.

Fail Fast, and Build Rigorous Feedback Loops

The aforementioned project included sending items to teachers and students as needed. Starting small, we piloted the plan with the most trusted members of our collaboration groups. We set timetables, identified responsibilities, and checked in to make sure we were learning from our mistakes, and then we were able to scale the project exponentially.

Take a Portfolio Approach

Our model is set up as a portfolio in how we collaborate based on immediate opportunities. At any given time, we have many collaborations occurring between donors, teachers, students, classrooms, and school systems. Within our portfolio, the level of success varies depending on the circumstances.

Consider Non-traditional Partners

Many of the donors who support DonorsChoose do so because they care about K-1 education, and many also have specific passions and hobbies.

One of our donors, a gentleman in Seattle, cared deeply about underwater exploration. He gave a gift to donorschoose.org, and connected us with a start-up that was building open-source underwater robots, called OpenROVs. We were able to take the foundation gift and then asked all of our teachers if they were interested in underwater exploration. Before you knew it, we had a science teacher off the coast of Alaska who was having his students help count the number of underwater species to help Alaska's wildlife reserves – teachers across the country are now using these underwater robots. Since many of our donors have specific interests, and we have a significant number of teachers, there's often a match.

Keep Your Donors Apprised of Your Collaborations

Our donors receive feedback and appreciation from students and teachers about how their gifts have made a positive difference in their education. We keep our donors apprised by sharing their impact, and it leads to them returning to give more.

Future Collaborations

During the coronavirus crisis, we thought about a market and exchange for goods. We've learned the benefits of collaborating to fill in needed gaps. We learned that BBB WGA created a tool to encourage groups to collaborate, reflecting what we envisioned – a platform for nonprofits to bring people together.



Katie Bisbee,
Chief Marketing Officer
& EVP, Partnerships,
DonorsChoose

About the Organization

We make it easy for anyone to help a teacher in need, moving us closer to a nation where students in every community have the tools and experiences they need for a great education.

Disclaimer: All participants were interviewed about past collaborations through the framework of the 9 Considerations for Collaboration. Naturally in some organizations, not every one of the considerations are applicable to their circumstances.