

The Propel Tracking Project

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BACKGROUND

THE PROJECT

This is a final report of the online presence of Propel: Nonprofits tracked over nine weeks in the Fall of 2020. Analysis of the data considered their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This produced an available objective and strategies to broaden their scope.

Propel: Nonprofits is also a nonprofit that helps others "find strategy, governance, and finance and to support nonprofits throughout their organizational lifecycle." (<https://www.propelnonprofits.org/our-story/>)

To provide the context in this nonprofit sector the following nonprofits were used: Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, Minneapolis Foundation, McKnight Foundation, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, Minnesota Council of Foundations, Minnesota Violence Free (supported by Propel), and Greater Twin Cities United Way (GTCUW) (as a competitor to Propel).



GOOGLE ALERTS

TRENDS

Three key observations were found.

- Propel has not been cited even once for funding a project or receiving funds for their programs.
- The vast majority of alerts in these nine weeks point to listings of funding mentions or board member activities.
- In the last two weeks, GTCUW has gained traction with four alerts within the last two weeks (a fourth appeared after taking this week's data). These are in-depth stories reporting about them.

Looking a little further into the GTCUW alerts, I think that some of the articles are part of a theme. Thursday, November 19th is Give to the Max Day. GTCUW is one of the most visible charities helping people and makes for relevant and timely articles on charities. I also found it interesting is that their coverage came through KARE 11, WCCO (not shown), Twin Cities Business Magazine, and the Star Tribune. The original Star Tribune articles are not shown as I was locked out from them.



GOOGLE ALERTS

TREND EXAMPLES

TCB Newsletters | Subscribe | Magazine | Podcast | Companies | Notable | TCB People & Co | TCB L
INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP STARTUPS WORKLIFE VIEW



NONPROFITS • PHILANTHROPY

Beyond The Numbers: Measuring United Way's Impact In 2019

Though the nonprofit's revenue fell again last year, CEO John Wilgers says the organization is continuing to diversify revenue sources as it broadens its services in the community.

By Dan Niepow
November 15, 2020



Greater Twin Cities United Way's revenue continues decline, dropping \$7 million in 2019

Minneapolis Star Tribune

The Greater Twin Cities United Way's revenue peaked in 2014 around when it celebrated its centennial. Since then, revenue has declined millions of ...

Flag as irrelevant

'It's not just a period or moment.' A look at the past, present and future of civil rights in the Twin Cities

KARE11.com

But for Acooa Ellis, Senior Vice President of Community Impact at the Greater Twin Cities United Way, the biggest systemic issues facing communities ...

Flag as irrelevant



Minnesota foundations are boosting racial justice work after George Floyd's death

Minneapolis Star Tribune

The Minneapolis Foundation also teamed up with the Greater Twin Cities United Way and the St. Paul & Minnesota Foundation on a new initiative to ...

Flag as irrelevant



GEORGE FLOYD

'It's not just a period or moment.' A look at the past, present and future of civil rights in the Twin Cities

Activist Dr. Josie Johnson and Twin Cities United Way VP Acooa Ellis talk about allyship, protesting and moving forward after George Floyd's death.

Discussing the past, present and future of civil rights in Min...



SOCIAL MEDIA FOOTPRINT

THE GRID

Week of	Media	Followers	16-Sep	23-Sep	30-Sep	7-Oct	14-Oct	21-Oct	28-Oct	4-Nov	11-Nov	18-Nov
Propel												
	Alert		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Blog		last 7/10	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
	Newsletter		na	na	na	na	na	na	1	0	0	0
	LinkedIn	3,875	2	2	2	1	3	1	3	3	0	1
@PropelNP	Twitter	5,806	8	8	5	6	21	2	9	7	2	6
	Facebook	1,353	0	2	1	1	1	1	2	3	0	1
	Instagram	1,130	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
@KateSBarr	Barr-Tweets	3,680	8	9	8	9	14	13	11	11	13	5
	Barr-Linked	2,751	5	9	2	0	1	1	7	1, 193	5	4
MnCNP												
	Alert		na	1	2	2	0	2	0	1	0	1
	LinkedIn	3,937	5	2	2	3	1	5	2	4	2	2
@SmartNonprofits	Twitter	19.5K	33	24	20	20	26	23	22	36	25	21
McKnight												
	Alert			4	1	2	3	0	1	0	2	5
	LinkedIn		1	3	2	4	3	4	3	8	6	2
@McKnightFdn	Twitter	14.8K	10	4	7	9	13	15	9	18	11	3
MplsFdn												
	Alert			3	4	3	3	2	2	0	2	0
	LinkedIn	4,154	3	2	3	2	1	0	5	3	2	1
@mplsfoundation	Twitter	8,836	6	7	7	8	4	6	12	3	4	3
Wilder Fn												
	Alert			1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	LinkedIn	4,886	2	3	4	4	0	5	3	4	4	9
@WilderFdn	Twitter	4,386	0	1	3	7	3	5	6	6	13	12
Mn C Fdn												
	Alert				2	2	1	2	1	0	1	0
	LinkedIn	na	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
@FollowMCF	Twitter	8,334	4	7	2	3	5	4	2	7	5	5
Violence FreeMn												
	Alert		0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	LinkedIn	134	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
@ViolenceFreeMN	Twitter	1,422	55	48	35	45	98	69	31	23	24	16
United Way												
	Alert		na	na	na	na	na	na	0	0	2	4
	Blog		na	na	na	0	3	1	2	0	0	0
	LinkedIn	5,765	na	na	na	4	6	7	7	5	4	12
@UnitedWayTC	Twitter	9,521	na	na	4	3	11	10	6	10	5	8
	Facebook		na	na	na	4	8	8	4	8	2	3
	Instagram	1,615	0	1	1	1	1	3	0	1	0	0



SOCIAL MEDIA FOOTPRINT

TRACKING THEMES

There are many messages across all the organizations in this final two-week period. They generally fall into one of three categories: Give to the Max Day, some sort of support for the election process, and tweets about upcoming programming - training and conferences. GTCUW is hitting the Give to the Max Tweets the hardest as they are recipients in matching schemes. They are also providing a variety of looks to their Tweets making you pause to glance at the content.





SOCIAL MEDIA FOOTPRINT

BEING CHAMPIONS OF YOU

Propel also Tweeted once about Give to the Max Day. They were more about promoting the use of the site to support other nonprofits. The rest of their tweets were mostly about upcoming training opportunities or conferences.

They also had a Tweet about North Minneapolis' West Broadway resurgence in a Star Tribune article. While the article is behind a paywall, I can infer that this Tweet is an example of their "We are champions of you" philosophy that Andrea told me about. What this means is that they want the spotlight focused on their client while they are being supportive from the shadows.





SWOT ANALYSIS

BREAKING IT DOWN

Strengths

- Well established
- Connected to a large nonprofit network
- Online training system
- Strong relationships with lending institutions

Weaknesses

- Not very publicly known
- All marketing and PR go through one person
- Online training tends to be during banker hours

Opportunities

- Direct fundraising
- Increase public awareness
- Adding online training
- Well-positioned to work in the BIPOC community against systemic racism

Threats

- Losing training talent
- Substantial increase in loan requests
- Economy goes into a depression



TREND-LINE

THE GROWTH MARKERS

As a nonprofit, Propel does not have a product for sale. Instead, I looked at their annual reports from 2017-2019, noting their 2017 fiscal year started April, 1st, 2016, and ended on March 31st, 2017. They have not published their 2020 annual report at this time, and I lack that full data. The following is the consistent data that I could track over three years. I used 2017 as a baseline for 2018, and 2018 for 2019.

	2017	2018	% Increase	2019	% Increase
Annual Operation Budget (in Millions)	\$4.2	\$4.1	98%	4.2	102
Total Loan Amount (in Millions)	\$15.4	\$18.8	122%	\$20.8	111%
Total # Loans	111	101	91%	113	112%
Total # People Trained	5,025	7,401	147%	6,725	91%
Total Training Events	149	192	128%	173	90%



TREND-LINE

THE GROWTH MARKERS

In 2018, there was substantial growth across three of the five markers. A small drop in their operations budget is a plus, but the drop in the number of loans indicates the average amount of a loan went up when comparing the total loan amounts.

Based on the Propel 1st Quarter Report: April – June 2021, we know that COVID-19 affected 1st quarter loans when compared to the previous year. 2020 originated 26 loans with a value of \$4.3M, while this year it dropped to 12 loans valued at \$2.8M.

Trend analysis will be slow to accumulate as it is quarterly based. Loan information is automatically reported quarterly, but the training information will need to be added to get better “real-time” tracking. From this data, some adjustments can be made to increase the percentages.



ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

SECONDARY & QUANTITATIVE

These are secondary and quantitative research points to be investigated. It is looking at the numbers that should already be collected by Propel and require a few hours of analysis.

- Objective numbers will need to be formulated/adjusted by collecting 2020 fiscal year information.
- Quarterly information will be needed for comparison and projections for post-COVID-19 goals.
- Research is needed to look for trends in program numbers by quarters between the fiscal years of 2018 and 2019. The reason for the drop in training in 2019 is not apparent.



ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

PRIMARY & QUALITATIVE

The bullets below need primary and qualitative research. These require studies to answer well. A team, a timeline, and a budget are needed to conduct these studies.

- Survey the needs of BIPOC organizations for needed training and resources.
- Research the informational channels used by BIPOC organizations.
- Environmental scan of the loss of nonprofits from the effects of COVID-19 and resulting economic situation. Include a breakdown of the sectors.



PROPEL PUBLIC RELATIONS OBJECTIVE

BIPOC OPPORTUNITY

Engage with developing and new BIPOC nonprofits and their leaders to create and present them with training and resources for their success.

This concentrated campaign would reach out to new and current leaders of BIPOC nonprofits. Systemic racism still blocks access to tools that many need to move ahead. Now, we have an additional obstacle of COVID-19 closures and the impacts of a slowing economy.

Spending one month to conduct the research listed earlier gives us the data for reaching new contacts. We can also pivot our training and resources for their specific needs. Using the COVID-19 modified baselines in our five key areas, we can measure data quarterly. We can also look at the number of contacts from phone, email, website, and social media to measure any increases driven by the campaign using earned, shared, and owned media.



PROPEL PUBLIC RELATIONS OBJECTIVE

THE STRATEGIES - #1

Develop relationships with media contacts in T.V., print, and web which is based on results from BIPOC information channels.

- **Tactic #1**

Use existing BIPOC focused case studies to write press releases for use by the media. Have the leaders from the case studies available for interviews and comments.

- **Tactic #2**

Partner with other foundations to create interconnected stories about what we do for the communities we serve.

- **Tactic #3**

Create a short video talking about “You are the champions of good, and we are champions of you.” It can be sent to the media, and then used on the website as a possible landing page and on LinkedIn.



PROPEL PUBLIC RELATIONS OBJECTIVE

THE STRATEGIES - #2

Create monthly online social hours based on the BIPOC training needs survey. Use one topic per event.

- **Tactic #1**

Send information to partner foundations and organizations. Challenge them to invite/bring someone unfamiliar with Propel. They can just hang out to find out more at their speed.

- **Tactic #2**

Use contact information from previous social hours to do a one to three-question survey to directly engage attendees. Take results and use them to shape future social hours.

- **Tactic #3**

When it is safe to meet people in public again, solicit happy hour sponsors for space, refreshments, and door prizes/gift bags.



PROPEL PUBLIC RELATIONS OBJECTIVE

THE STRATEGIES - #3

Create a BIPOC cohort to examine issues their nonprofits face.

- **Tactic #1**

Focus on a monthly topic and have the cohort brainstorm ideas to address the opportunity created. Then, they can work with the training team to create a training event.



TIMELINE & BUDGET

TIMELINE

This timeline is set on a four-month rotation. The first month is spent on research and creating the video. Tactics will start to launch on week five. During the fourth month, an evaluation would take place, and adjustments can be made. Decisions are made at this point to continue the campaign with changes put in place. The rotation can start over at week five and repeat the process. Adaptability should be in place if changes are required in the mid-timeline.

Activity	First Month				Second Month				Third Month				Fourth Month				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Research	■	■	■	■					■	■	■	■	■				
Case study PR's					■	■			■	■	■	■	■	■			
Partner stories PR's							■				■	■	■			■	
Create Champion Video	■		■	■													
Champion video								■									■
Social hour invites					■				■	■	■	■	■	■			
Social hour						■				■	■	■	■		■		
Social hour surveys						■				■	■	■	■		■		
BIPOC cohort								■					■				■



TIMELINE & BUDGET

BUDGET

The only out-of-pocket cost at this time is for creating the video out of-house. Collaterals and assets may need to be created, but will not need to be printed at this time. The staff hours are a monthly total and correspond with the timeline. Research is a one-time expense for this campaign. I would recommend adding a part-time person or an intern to help absorb the additional hours created by the campaign. When in-person meetings resume an out-of-pocket (OOP) budget may be needed for social hour expenses.

Project	Staff hours per month	OOP
Research	20	\$0
Case study PR's	2	0
Partner stories PR's	1	0
Create Champion Video	1	\$5,000
Champion video	0	0
Social hour invites	1	0
Social hour	2	0
Social hour surveys	5	0
BIPOC cohort	2	0



FOLLOW-UP

EVALUATION

The campaign can be evaluated in the following ways.

- Measure an increase in numbers, after COVID-19 adjustments, of the five key areas listed in the trendline section.
- Track contacts from phone, email, website, and social media. Use native analytics when available.
- Track attendance at social hour.
- Survey social hour attendees.
- Count the participation in the BIPOC cohort, and track the progress of ideas generated.



FOLLOW-UP

SOCIAL MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media will be used in support of PR efforts in owned and earned media. New channels will be added as needed based on research findings. Current channels include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Owned media from the website include blogs, pieces of training, resources, newsletters, and case studies.

Social media will do the following:

- Drive traffic to the website with links to blogs, case studies, and training sessions.
- Retweet/repost stories relevant to Propel.
- Support partners and foundations with cross-posting.
- Slightly vary content between channels to reduce follower fatigue and maintain engagement.
- Social media channels will develop their personalities to vary the same message.
 - Videos will be uploaded on LinkedIn for the best visibility.
 - Instagram will have unique photos on stories.
 - Twitter will lead in training reminders.
 - Facebook will lean towards puffier pieces and have occasional polls.



FOLLOW-UP

RATIONAL FOR THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

We know that BIPOC people are behind a curtain of racism and often are cut off from things that can improve life for everyone. Doing a focused public campaign raises awareness of the work Propel does. While focused, a wider audience now has exposure to Propel that can create leads in volunteers, staff, participants, and donors.

Tapping into new uses of media and social media refreshes the Propel Brand. People familiar with Propel will take notice.



RESOURCES

INFORMATIONAL SOURCES

- Social Media: Twitter, Google Alerts, Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, Propel Website, GTC United Way website, Star Tribune website
- <https://tcbmag.com/beyond-the-numbers-measuring-united-ways-impact-in-2019/>
- <https://www.kare11.com/article/news/local/george-floyd/past-present-and-future-of-civil-rights-in-the-twin-cities/89-9f4ad017-ca84-42da-ab79-5afd4c950212>
- 2017-2019 Propel: Nonprofits Annual Reports, Propel 2017 990
- Propel 4th Quarter Report: January – March 2019
- Propel 1st Quarter Report: April – June 2020

Cover Photo

Image by Nattanan Kanchanaprat from pixabay.com

Layout Design

Canva: Dark Blue and Red Active Hype Personal Fitness Coach Business Proposal