'We gained new skills in technologies (which we thought of before was impossible 😊)'
Beata Hirt, Healthy City Community Foundation Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

Our digital transformation challenge

Due to pandemic rules, we were and still are not able to do our job the way we planned and were used to, including addressing and meeting donors or potential donors, organizing traditional donors’ events, supporting our grantees, supporting various local communities, volunteers, creating networks. All these activities are mostly based on personal contacts.

Without addressing this we would lose our essential reason to exist - if we wouldn’t be able to get connected with communities we serve. I am afraid we already lost some of connections that we have been building for a long time and will need to work on it from the beginning again. But not being able to address most of the issues in a new situation would be devastating not only for our foundation but for the community itself, mainly for most vulnerable groups.

Our solution

We transferred the majority of our activities in the “virtual world”. Regarding our grant making we were lucky to fit it in a short gap between two lockdowns, so we were able to provide some personal consultations and after that all process from evaluation of applications to final approval was done online. We also changed our regular monthly fundraising activities for donors to be only online and our live activities went into virtual events. Last year we have started a new program for local women, which was based on personal meetings, discussions and educational activities. We were able to manage all these activities online and for now it works quite well. The only big problem which we were not able to solve is how to keep going our activities with Roma communities living in segregated
locations without or with very limited online technologies. We were able to keep some contact while delivering material help, like masks, hygienic and medical supplies and food, but it was very limited.

It was a challenge for our staff, trying to learn about possible tools and then to learn how to use it and adopt them into our daily work. It was also related to our communication with the members of the Board of Trustees or other volunteers, not all of them are equipped or skilled enough to use tools we were suggesting. It meant more effort and more time needed to take in account in our communication within the organization as well as outside.

**Takeaways from the action learning process**

We experienced solidarity within our community highlighting the importance of local networks, which is an important element we can build on. It gave us an important argument why we need to support local groups and leaders. We were forced to be creative, especially in our fund-raising activities and used new tools (which we were avoiding till now), like for example we tried Peer2Peer online campaign, and it went very well. Also, our women network meetings seem to work online better than we expected, and it shows up as a more convenient way for many members to participate in meetings online, due to their other duties at home taking care of children. All people had an experience of isolation and we also want to use this fact in our work to remind that there are groups experiencing this feeling all their life and therefore we need to support equality and inclusion. Seeing a big inequality, we think about a new role for the community foundation, to participate in long term strategic planning processes of local government to advocate for equal access and support for the most vulnerable groups.

**Issues that remain unresolved**

As mentioned above, during the lockdown we have realized that there are several groups living in our city that we are not able to reach and involve into our activities only in online way. The gap between majority and minor Roma communities has even widened. It is a challenge for more systematic and strategic work requiring cooperation with local and regional government and other institutions. Also, we still need to think about the ways how to stay attractive and keep attention of our stake holders in virtual world, to evaluate what tools are the most effective for specific target groups.

We also miss the opportunity of personal public discussions, where would be the space for deep conversations on specific local issues, mutual learning, networking. The online forums do not seem to meet this requirement.

Find out more about the Healthy City Community Foundation Banská Bystrica here: [https://knzm.sk/](https://knzm.sk/)