

# Saint Mary's College's 24-hour donor challenge





**Danielle Mason, director of annual giving, and Kayla Thomas, associate director of annual giving, at Saint Mary's College share how working with Bonterra Donor Engagement's Giving Days (formerly GiveGab) allowed them to grow their efforts in utilizing timely and reliable data, enhancing the ambassador and donor experience, and growing their even at scale during their annual Saint Mary's Donor Challenge.**



Saint Mary's College, located in Notre Dame, Indiana, has always been a leader in implementing creative alumnae engagement strategies. With approximately 1,400 students, this women's liberal arts college has fostered a close-knit community with a dedicated and passionate alumnae base. These strong bonds have allowed Saint Mary's to lead unified efforts to support the school.

Among those initiatives to drive alumnae engagement and philanthropy is their 24-hour Donor Challenge. Their first challenge was held in 2013, making Saint Mary's College one of the early adopters of the Giving Day fundraising model. The 24-hour Donor Challenge was conceptualized to encourage young alumnae participation, but once the College saw its impact, the event opened to a wider audience of those who had a strong connection with giving back to Saint Mary's fundraising efforts.

## **CUSTOMER**

Saint Mary's College

## **VERTICAL**

Education

## **PRODUCT**

Giving Days

“ The goals were set around young alumnae who hadn’t made a gift yet – it was very niche. And then it really took off the next year when we opened to any alumnae, and then later to anyone in the community. It is still a day where we see our alumnae participation increase significantly and has remained a way for us to encourage alumnae in giving to Saint Mary’s College.”

— Danielle Mason, Executive Director  
Saint Mary’s College

## Donor-centric giving:

From the start, The Saint Mary’s team understood the importance of fostering relationships with their alumnae and supporters. The 24-hour Donor Challenge remains dedicated to emphasizing the impact of the individual donor.

***“We want it to feel like it’s a day that anyone can participate in, it’s not limited to the number of gifts or dollar amount that someone is able to give. We want everyone to feel they can make an impact by making just one gift that helps secure our challenge gifts and shows support for the college.” - Danielle Mason***

Kayla echoed a similar sentiment about their dedication to their donors during the 24-hour Donor Challenge.

***“The donor focus really takes the pressure off in some ways for donors to feel like it doesn’t matter how much I give, it’s more important that I’m engaging with this institution and showing my support. That’s what it comes down to, we really need as many donors as possible to feel committed to our mission and to giving.” – Kayla Thomas, Associate Director of Annual Giving***





By having goals and incentives based on alumnae and donor participation, the Saint Mary's team could foster a community of supporters who were passionate about giving back. With an engaged and growing donor base, the college could grow its challenge resulting in substantial funding for their campus.

Saint Mary's donor-centric objectives allowed them to start thinking beyond their alumnae, with the Donor Challenge they could begin cultivating philanthropic relationships with current students.

“ When students are on campus, we start educating them on the importance of giving back. If we have students from their first year until they are seniors participating in Donor Challenges, each year it's going to be even easier when they graduate to continue to engage them as a donor. If they have already given all four years, they are already considered a faithful donor to us. It just becomes easier to encourage young alumnae participation when they are giving as students. We want our student donors to feel like they are making a difference no matter what they can give and understand the importance of their participation and support for Saint Mary's.”

— Danielle Mason, Executive Director  
Saint Mary's College



## The search for a Giving Day platform:

From 2013-2017, Saint Mary's College hosted their 24-hour Donor Challenge in-house without support from an outside technology provider. While this event grew in popularity over the years, so did the complexity of managing a project at this scale.

***“Up until 2018, we conducted the entire Giving Day in-house. We used our own giving form, and the coordination of the event was a lot more complicated of a process than partnering with a company that specializes in Giving Days.”***

The Saint Mary's team found that working with a dedicated Giving Day platform allowed them to allocate more of their time and efforts to the overall strategy of their challenge. Rather than spending most of their efforts on gift processing and administrative duties, Danielle and Kayla were able to focus on donor appreciation and celebration initiatives that were critical to the mission of their event.

While switching to a Giving Day platform was extremely impactful in growing the Giving Challenge, the College recognized they needed a sophisticated technology partner that would help take their event to the next level.

# Joining Bonterra Giving Days:

## Project Management and Support

When the Saint Mary's team joined Bonterra Giving Days for their 2021 event, they were assigned a dedicated Project Manager to assist them throughout the planning and execution of their Donor Challenge. Danielle and Kayla had regular check-ins with their Project Manager to discuss best practices, important deadlines, and overall support of their event.

***"It was so nice to have that constant support and direct people to reach out to when we needed something. They did a fantastic job; we had a great experience with our Project Managers."*** - Kayla Thomas

In addition, the team also had access to Bonterra Giving Days' automated help center and educational database. Through this feature, Kayla and Danielle were able to direct Ambassadors and donors to a live chat feature and support article database to assist with any questions, leaving them more time to focus on strategy.

***"The customer support available through Bonterra Giving Days freed up a ton of time for our team. It used to be us answering any questions. We had chat functionality at one point right before we went over to Bonterra, but we were the ones answering the questions that came in. Having that support really made a huge difference in our time and capacity."*** - Danielle Mason



## Strategic Initiatives

After many discussions with Bonterra Giving Days' Engagement team and their Project Manager, Saint Mary's identified three areas that our platform could advance the success of their 24-hour Donor Challenge:

- Gain Access to Timely and Reliable Data
- Enhance the Ambassador & Donor Experience
- Grow the Donor Challenge at Scale



## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #1:

# Gain access to timely and reliable data

### The challenge

A significant challenge that Danielle and Kayla faced on their previous Giving Day platform was access to reliable, accurate, and quick data. Like other Giving Days, there is a sense of urgency created around the 24-hour Donor Challenge. It's a day when the entire Saint Mary's community is actively visiting the site to check the progress and see the impact of their collective gifts.

Additionally, donors and supporters are invested in seeing how close the school is to completing the challenge and there is a lot of excitement created around reaching those big milestones. The Saint Mary's team was often held up in sharing these big wins and announcements due to having to run a report, analyze the results, and verify their accuracy.

***"The timeliness of the data was something we had provided feedback [to our previous platform] for several years in a row and we just weren't seeing the kind of improvements that we needed. We send different communications throughout the day based on the number of donors that we have at a given time, and so it was important that we have the information that we need to strategize as best as we can."*** - Kayla Thomas

Kayla also noted that inaccurate data would appear on their website, causing confusion among their donors and supporters.

***"Our donor and school populations really care about the numbers. Before joining Bonterra Giving Days, our leaderboard would freeze in place at various times, sometimes for up to an hour! We would get a lot of phone calls and emails. Donors and school administrators were concerned that the gifts they made weren't represented and would ask if the site was down."*** - Kayla Thomas

It was a priority for Saint Mary's College to work with a technology platform that they could rely on to show the true impact of their Donor Challenge at any given time. They wanted to be confident in their ability to celebrate big wins and ensure that every donor could see the immediate impact of their gift.

## Solution

With Bonterra Giving Days' robust reporting tools and administrative dashboard, the Saint Mary's team always had a clear picture of how the 24-hour Donor Challenge was performing. They were able to gear up for special announcements and confidently celebrate with their audiences when the college reached any significant milestones.

***"With Bonterra, we no longer have to run a report to see the progress of our Giving Day. The numbers are updated in real-time and quick analysis makes a huge difference! We base our goals around where we are hitting milestones every year, and being able to create a plan based on accurate data has been a big improvement since moving to a platform that we love."*** - Danielle Mason

## Results

Knowing the numbers that donors were seeing on the 24-hour Donor Challenge site were true and accurate was a big win for the Saint Mary's team! It allowed Danielle and Kayla more opportunities to celebrate their successes as they were happening!

***"In previous years, we were getting numerous emails from college leadership and board chairs [regarding the accuracy of data]. Getting no questions was really awesome! That was a noticeable thing about moving to Bonterra Giving Days, we could focus completely on strategizing to communicate to donors and how we're going to announce updates rather than having to wonder where we actually were in terms of current donors and dollars."*** - Danielle Mason

When Saint Mary's College reached its noon goal of 1,844 donors (their founding year!), they announced this milestone in real-time on their social media accounts. The Saint Mary's team was able to connect with their supporters and donors when engagement was at its highest and really encourage more people to take part in the momentum that was building.





## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #2:

# Enhance the ambassador and donor experience



### The challenge

As the Donor Challenge grew, Danielle and Kayla were interested in new tools and features that would provide a better user experience for both their donors and their ambassadors. They wanted to create more opportunities to demonstrate the impact of each gift in fun and exciting ways. They also wanted to make it easier for the ambassadors to create robust fundraising pages and provide them with the tools to share their efforts with their wider networks.

Kayla noted a key trend in fundraising that development teams across the higher-ed space were currently facing.

***“Having worked in higher ed and now development, we are seeing as a trend across the board that fewer donors are giving more dollars. So, although a lot of schools are hitting their dollar goals, they are seeing a decrease in donor engagement. This is an unsustainable and unhealthy model. We need a large pool of donors, contributing to a wider variety of gifts coming in, it’s just healthier overall for fundraising. We really want to make sure we are aware of this and are making it really easy for every kind of donor to feel comfortable giving to Saint Mary’s.”***

Kayla Thomas

Ensuring that Saint Mary’s 24-hour Donor Challenge remained a great way to bring in new donors and provide them with fun and easy ways to give became an important strategy to combat this trend.

## Solution



### Ambassadors

Saint Mary's Ambassador program empowered the college's biggest supporters to use the power of peer-to-peer fundraising to reach a wider network of donors. These are individuals who are passionate about the 24-hour Donor Challenge and want to help get the word out about the importance of this event.

On Bonterra Giving Days, every Ambassador can create a customized profile to share the story of why they participate in the program. Since Peer-to-Peer fundraising is such an important piece in connecting Saint Mary's College with new donors, empowering these Ambassadors with the tools and knowledge to launch successful campaigns was essential to Danielle and Kayla.

Bonterra Giving Days provides extensive resources and tools that allowed Saint Mary's Ambassadors to flourish. Danielle shared with us that our ambassador toolkit was a lot more sophisticated than what they worked with in the past, which ultimately led to their success.

In preparation for their most recent event, Kayla and Danielle were able to work with their Project Manager to coordinate a webinar specifically for their Fundraising Ambassadors. In this 1-hour training, Ambassadors were shown how to create their profiles and implement best practices and strategies. Ambassadors were also able to use this time to ask any questions to the Bonterra Giving Days team regarding their fundraising page, which empowered them to connect successfully with their networks.

***"We were excited to have this training opportunity for Ambassadors to learn how easy it is. They were able to explore deeper into how they can use Bonterra's tools to better engage with their communities and encourage support for Donor Challenge."*** - Danielle Mason

## Solution continued

### Donors

The Saint Mary's Team wanted to ensure it was as easy as possible for their alumnae and community to Give Back. Through Bonterra Giving Days, the checkout process is simple, secure, and mobile-friendly allowing Danielle and Kayla to confidently provide more giving options to their donors.

The Saint Mary's Team also leveraged embeddable forms. They were able to add a snippet of code to the college's website that allowed donors to make a gift directly to the 24-Hour Donor Challenge without ever having to leave the site.

Additionally, Saint Mary's offered many challenges on the day that unlocked additional funds for the school. This particular strategy created excitement and urgency to better encourage their community to work together to release these challenge funds as quickly as they could!

The excitement around Donor Challenge was also amplified by creating some friendly competition among donor and alumnae groups. Custom leaderboards allowed supporters to check in on how their team's generosity ranked. Throughout the day alumnae could encourage their fellow class years to give more to raise their spot on the site!

***"We also have a pretty healthy population of alumnae who work at Saint Mary's so that always makes it more fun on campus to, they are pretty competitive and engaged"*** – Kayla Thomas

New this year, the Alumna and Student leaderboards included a participation percentage allowing donors to see the full picture of how their class was stacking up amongst others.

Besides a way to create some fun competition during the Giving Day, the leaderboards are a way to highlight the collective impact these donor groups have made on Saint Mary's College and demonstrate that every gift plays an important role in allowing Saint Mary's to reach their goal.

Another way that the Saint Mary's team has been able to highlight the efforts of their entire donor base is through a heat map proudly displayed on their site. When a gift comes in, the state it's from is shaded in blue. As more people from that state give, that blue becomes darker and more prominent. This heat map provides a visual representation of the impact that each donor has and allows supporters to see just how wide Saint Mary's network really is!

## Results

### Ambassadors

Saint Mary's Fundraising Ambassador program proved to be a success in bringing new donors to the site. During their 2021 Donor Challenge 23 Ambassadors raised funds, this grew to 27 in 2022! Over the past two years, ambassadors have connected 276 donors to the college, bringing in a total of \$72,725.

This influx of new donors is critical to the Saint Mary's team's engagement strategies beyond their Giving Day. This allows the team to bring in new donors, steward them over the next year, and encourage them to become repeat donors and supporters of the college.

### Donors

The Saint Mary's team continues to see high donor turnout during their Donor Challenge. During their most recent event, 4,559 donors supported the college, collectively raising over \$1.15 million.

Through the leaderboard, donors were able to see the most generous Alumnae class year; 2017 with 23% participation, and the most generous student class, 2023, with 24% participation.

Donors were also proud to have unlocked \$200,000 in match and challenge funds for the school and completed the donor heat map with at least one gift coming in from all 50 states.





### STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #3: Grow the Donor Challenge at scale

#### The challenge

With any fundraising event, there are administrative costs that need to be considered. While coordinating an online event can significantly reduce those costs when compared to hosting a luncheon or gala, or even processing and receipting checks received in the mail, they still play a role in how you can grow your efforts.

While both are necessary components of having a secure and reliable way to collect funds online—and can also reduce the upfront investment of the technology for the institution, some donors may not even know that every online transaction comes with these costs, and what the impact is to your bottom line.

The Saint Mary's team was interested in finding a solution that would help offset the cost of their Donor Challenge while also educating donors on the full impact of their gift.



## Solution

In an initial meeting with GiveGab, the Saint Mary's team was introduced to the idea of allowing donors to cover the processing fees attributed to their gifts. Like many other colleges, this is something that Saint Mary's hadn't considered before.

***"When we began researching Giving Day platforms, we weren't looking for fee coverage; however, when Bonterra introduced us to this feature [on the donation form], we could immediately see the benefits of implementing it on our Giving Day. Fee coverage had a tremendous impact in alleviating some of the financial strains that processing donations made by credit cards can have on our budget. It also allowed us to educate our donors on the overall impact of their gift from an operations standpoint."*** - Danielle Mason

During the checkout process, donors saw the option to cover any processing fees to further the impact of their gift and alleviate costs from Saint Mary's College's budget.

***"With support from Bonterra, we made a strategic decision to allow donors the opt-in to cover fees. When introducing this feature for the first time, we wanted to make it clear that it was not required for donors to cover fees. We created language around this in our FAQs. Bonterra Giving Days also provided a question bubble next to the fee coverage option on the donation form that explained how the fee coverage benefited our Donor Challenge."*** - Kayla Thomas

## Results

In both their 2021 and 2022 campaigns, 63% of donors selected the option to cover their fees. They were also proud to report 71% of all gifts made had fee coverage. Over the two years, this has equated to \$59,747 in fee coverage. These are costs that would have previously gone directly to Saint Mary's College.

***"We were very pleased and surprised with the results we saw in donors covering fees during the #24HourDonorChallenge. We even saw a lot of students that opted to cover the fees. This speaks a lot to the fact that our young donors are very tech-savvy and have a deeper understanding of the overall impact of online transactions."*** - Danielle Mason

By lowering the administrative cost of processing gifts, Saint Mary's College was able to activate more of the dollars raised for their intended causes. Meaning each gift could make an even greater impact on the school's ability to provide sponsorship, aid, and more!

When asked if Saint Mary's team had any final advice to similar-sized colleges considering hosting a Giving Day with Bonterra, Kayla shared:

***"Our advice to smaller colleges hoping to work with Bonterra is to be really transparent about the capacity of your school. With all that is offered, we first thought that working with Bonterra Giving Days would be outside of our budget and were disappointed because they were exactly what we were looking for. We were straightforward about what we were able to afford, and the Engagement Team was able to customize a contract and a package that worked for us and included everything we needed and more!"*** - Kayla Thomas



# Saint Mary's 24-hour Donor Challenge 2022 Results

**4,559**

Donors

**\$25,640**

Raised from fundraising ambassadors

**\$1.15 MILLION**

Raised

**63%**

Donors opted to cover processing fees

**4,837**

Gifts

**\$200,000**

Matching and challenge funds unlocked

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