

## **Holiday push: Nonprofits drive hard into critical holiday fundraising season**

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Heads of nonprofit agencies whose budgets depend heavily on holiday giving are counting on strong — and, in some cases, new — outreach to meet this season’s ambitious fundraising goals.

Among the Boston-area nonprofits that come quickly to mind during Thanksgiving and Christmas — Pine Street Inn, Rosie’s Place, The Home For Little Wanderers, Greater Boston Food Bank, The Salvation Army and Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston — upward of 75 percent of annual fundraising comes between mid-November and the first week of January.

“It’s huge. Not unlike the retail season, this is a big time for organizations,” said [Michael Durkin](#), CEO of United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley.

“And they have families and kids coming to them with needs.”

Going “gung ho” from now until the New Year to cover the organization’s annual operating budget is the way [Lisa Rowan-Gillis](#), vice president of The Home for Little Wanderers, described her approach.

The Home raises a total of about \$10 million a year from individuals, corporations, foundations and the like, she said, and three-quarters of it comes during the holidays.

For its part, The Salvation Army expects to raise \$14 million this fiscal year and about two-thirds of that — or \$10 million — should come during November through the end of January, said [Danielle Degan](#), director of community relations and development.

The Salvation Army is counting on its annual kettle campaign to produce about \$3.4 million.

Rosie’s Place has a goal this season to raise \$3 million of its \$5.7 million fundraising budget this year, said executive director [Sue Marsh](#), while the Pine Street Inn this holiday season expects to raise half of its annual fundraising goal.

The flip side of the holidays for nonprofits is, as Durkin pointed out, that the needs are as critical as the fundraising, especially with unemployment stretching long for many families.

Raising money on one hand, nonprofits also are aggressively running toy and coat drives, packaging turkey dinners, and trying to make children’s Christmas wishes come true.

To meet growing needs, the Greater Boston Food Bank, for one, has doubled its fundraising goals this year compared to three years ago, said [Suzanne Battit](#), vice president.

And Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston has long maintained a list of gifts requested by children who attend the clubs.

In the past, the staff has been able to fill the requests, but the list is so long this year, the organization is asking others to pitch in.

Nonprofits leaders can only hope holiday fundraising will turn out strong, but they are taking early cues.

Take the United Way's recent turkey dinner Thanksgiving Project, for example.

The cost of providing a turkey dinner increased 13-percent this year, but companies that participated in the United Way drive also increased their in-kind donations for the dinner, providing \$45 worth of food in each bag compared to last year's \$30.

Their organizations might be household names during the holidays, but nonprofit leaders are aggressively strategizing to get their message out.

To that end, The Home for Little Wanderers, Rosie's Place and others have partnered with local media organizations on public service announcements and high-profile fundraising initiatives.

The Salvation Army has placed scannable codes on kettle signs to capture donors who are handy with mobile devices, along with several fundraising events scheduled in December, including its annual luncheon and a concert performed by the band Honor Society, featuring Salvation Army kettles.

The Greater Boston Food Bank expects to grab attention with its new hunger awareness campaign — End Hunger Here — depicted in advertisements on buses and taxis, MBTA stations and billboards.

Further, Battit hopes to garner donor support around the organization's new strategic plan, which calls for providing one meal a day to those in need.

The Boys & Girls Clubs has changed messaging on its direct mail pieces this holiday season to clearly demonstrate the impact of dollars donated, instead of focusing messages about violence prevention.

The Pine Street Inn has developed a young professionals group, which has scheduled events for December to raise money for the organization's shelter guests and also for tenants in two new residential houses the organization opened this fall.

For its part, Rosie's Place is hoping to galvanize donors around about \$300,000 in program expansions, including later hours for its food pantry, women's education and others — and increased outreach to women in prisons, mental health facilities and other institutionalized settings.

But when it comes right down to it, Marsh said, an organization's mission is the most convincing appeal.

“Because the women we serve are really at the edge, many individual donors think of them at the holiday time,” said Marsh.

