

STRONGER  
ROOTS

# The Stronger Roots Program

Case Study:  
INEX-SDA

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# INEX-SDA:

## Reactivating constituencies through storytelling and crowdfunding

The organization, focused on international volunteering, was able to wake its community of supporters in a successful crowdfunding campaign during the COVID-19 crisis, and strengthen its constituencies by sharing the Stories of Change of their volunteers.

*INEX-SDA: (Association of Voluntary Activities) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, founded in 1991, dedicated to international volunteering and intercultural education. They organize volunteer projects, educational programs and workcamps. Workcamp is the*

*name for an international volunteer project during which a group of volunteers from different parts of the world work and spend their free time together, sometime for a week, but other times even for a year. Their mission is to advocate the development of a tolerant and open society that respects cultural differences, and honors the principles of sustainable development. INEX-SDA's activities aim to create a group of active and responsible citizens who are interested in the world around them, and who engage in volunteer activities.*

## REVIVING OF THE SLEEPING SUPPORTERS

The COVID-19 lockdown caused INEX to lose its main source of income - the fees paid by volunteers going abroad. Since they were not getting financial support from the general public anymore, the wider impact INEX made was not as visible anymore. Their biggest financial support generally came from their alumni. However, in recent years, INEX had not actively maintained their constituencies and needed to wake the sleeping supporters up. The Stronger Roots Program enabled them to plan more strategically and take advantage of the opportunity to consult with PR, fundraising and communications experts and fund effective advertising.

## CROWDFUNDING WITH BLUE HEARTS

The name Blue Hearts was creatively used as a hashtag and an easily recognizable visual element INEX spread through their social networks. A major factor in building the campaign was asking their former volunteers to help them and share their authentic experiences (see Toolbox 1). This created a snowball effect, as some people were approached directly by INEX, and others were reached by these stories. Short messages from the

volunteers focused on their cherished memories and reasons why it is important to contribute right now. This was crucial, because most of their supporters, including potential donors, were not familiar with INEX's financial background and therefore did not realize how hard the pandemic hit them.

Subsequently, it was nice to see how a big wave of solidarity rose in the community around them. *"The first big fundraiser was a much-needed boost for us. We saw that our community was standing by us and saving workcamps was important to them."* INEX raised 6,800 Euros from 237 individual donors, mostly former volunteers. It also laid the groundwork for them to develop a strategy to communicate with their supporters throughout the year. Overall, it proved vital throughout their fundraising to communicate a lot, explain what they are doing and reaching out to those who have contributed and donated before.

## STORIES OF CHANGE

The key activity for fundraising and strengthening the circle of supporters was Stories of Change, the stories about people's experiences with INEX. They collected and post-produced 20 real stories from their volunteers, camp leaders, as well as Czech workcamp organizers and alumni.

They sought to make the whole shared ‘journey’ as authentic as possible: how the person found out about them, how they chose the topic and location, what obstacles they had to overcome if any, what relationships they made and how it enriched them for the future. INEX knew these people well and knew that they could express themselves clearly and were happy to share their experiences. The actual questions were sent in advance so they could prepare.

The format and platform of the stories varied, as the videos were primarily posted on Facebook and the articles were sent to media outlets. Articles also appeared on the INEX website and were translated into English, so in addition to strengthening INEX’s constituencies in the Czech Republic, they could also inspire foreign volunteers to participate in workcamps with them. This cooperation with constituencies proved to be fruitful. *“We feel that the collection of Stories of Change helped us renew our relationships with storytellers and gain new supporters through them. They have begun to engage more with the community, sharing articles, attending online events, or inviting new people to our activities and workcamps. We generally got very positive feedback from them, they enjoyed being helpful and keeping our mission alive.”* The storytelling also helped them create

multi-platform-friendly content that showed the public the impact of their work. Reaching out to alumni also brought unexpected opportunities, as one of the storytellers helped to organize a collaboration with a popular influencer, bringing a lot of Gen Z attention to INEX’s social media with the help of an “Instagram handover” (see Toolbox 2).

## SHARING IS CARING

After the first shock of COVID-19 and the successful Blue Hearts campaign, INEX adapted their activities to fit the situation, held more workcamps in Czechia, and introduced different kinds of camps. They decided to keep the storytelling aspect of their communication and started doing streams directly from the workcamps’ locations. *“It’s interesting to see that the streams have reached outside our normal bubble, for example through sharing by local partners. Viewers like the fact that they are action-packed and are not broadcasted from the office, but authentically show what workcamps are really like.”* These live streams are not technologically demanding, current mobile phone types are sufficient, and they are recorded directly through the native Facebook app. They effectively show the impact, which participating in a workcamp has, not only for the volunteers, but for the locations where they help the wider community. Sharing the stories is a useful tool

for maintaining contact with their constituencies, who can relate to them and for introducing their mission to new stakeholders and supporters.

\*All quotations are by Lenka Kadeřábková, director of INEX-SDA

## Toolbox 1

### Getting the storytellers

They had individually reached out to the closest INEX community via shared channels such as Facebook or e-mail depending on how they communicated with that person in the past. They did not offer any external motivation, just presented the possibility of cooperation purely as a specific form of support for the fundraising campaign and the way to help INEX to survive the tough pandemic time.

The appeal was as follows: *“Since we know that unfortunately INEX often only seems to the public as a kind of volunteer travel agency, it is clear to us that some people would not understand the importance of our fundraising. Therefore, we want to show the educational aspect of volunteering to the public as much as possible. We found stories of people who participated in the volunteer experience to be the best way to do this. Could we make a short video with you to introduce your story and how volunteering has effected your life?”* There was no need for further persuasion and the communication almost always went straight to practical implementation issues.

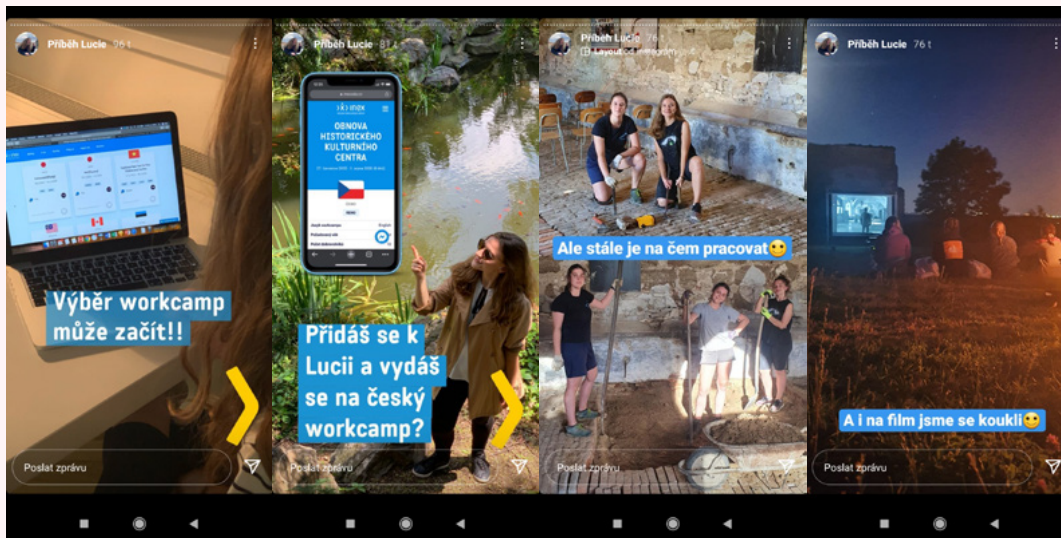
*Quote from a user: “A warning should be issued that it’s highly addictive, impossible to stop! It’s fantastic, we enjoyed it, thank you!”*

## Toolbox 2

### Instagram handover - Story of Change with Lucie

It is a popular way to refresh your content and get it out to a wider audience.

New volunteer Lucie had been sharing her journey with INEX for 20 weeks through their Instagram stories and hashtag **#LucieWorkcampuje**. For handovers INEX chooses people they trust. They agree on a framework of topics and time frequency and give them the password (which they can change after the collaboration is over). The subsequent content is in the hands of the influencer. Lucie freely documented the selection process of her first workcamp, subsequent travels, work challenges, leisure activities and friendships made. Her posts received positive feedback and INEX has since repeated the handover with seven other volunteers.



1. Choosing a workcamp can begin!
2. Will you join Lucie to workcamp in Czechia?
3. There's still a lot to work on...
4. We watched a movie too

This case study was written as a part of the Stronger Roots Program.

The Stronger Roots Program aims to increase the resilience of civil society organizations and their networks, strengthen their social capital and embed them in the communities and societies in which they operate. It is implemented by Open Society Fund Prague, the NIOK Foundation, Open Society Foundation Bratislava and Glopolis.

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