

FY 2019-2020 US Chess Development Report

Geoff Isaak - US Chess Director of Development

August 2020

US Chess is very fortunate to be serving an exceedingly generous and supportive constituency. Because of them, US Chess raised over \$1.2 million in fiscal year 2019-2020. This is particularly noteworthy because of the challenges presented this year by the Coronavirus pandemic and is a testament to the commitment of our donors. These are some of the highlights:

- The John D. Rockefeller III National Tournament of Elementary School State Champions was endowed.
- A Planned Gift was received via the estate of Herbert B. Jacklyn.
- An anonymous donation was made for FIDE governance.
- The Saint Louis Chess Club made a gift to benefit Women and Girls in Chess.
- We received several significant gifts to benefit our International Youth teams, Women and Girls in Chess, and Scholastic Chess programs.
- We received a scholastic gift the details of which will soon be announced.

Fundraising and COVID-19 – The Coronavirus pandemic has changed virtually every aspect of how we conduct business at US Chess, and fundraising has been no different. Travel and donor visitation have necessarily been put on hold, however, communication with our members is as important as ever, if not more so. In these uncertain times, it has been important to convey the clear message that in spite of the current health crisis, US Chess will continue to carry out its mission to *“Empower people, enrich lives, and enhance communities through chess.”* This message was disseminated through mailings, appeals, and personal communications.

Mailings and Appeals – Individual correspondence, appeals via direct mail, and appeals via email and social media contributed to the increase in funds raised in the past year. With donor visitation and face-to-face interaction on hold due to the pandemic, we are having to increasingly rely on the postal service, email, and social media to reach donors and potential donors.

- Mailing our recently produced *Case for Support* and *Planned Giving Guide* have been important tools in staying connected with stakeholders interested in supporting us. Our Case Statement provides an overview of the programs and events US Chess provides, and our Planned Giving Guide provides information on the many ways there are to give to these programs and events.
- Our end-of-year Annual Appeal continues to be a strategic way we not only increase funds raised, but also increase our base of support. After someone gives for the first

time, the likelihood is very good that they will give again. As more and more people respond to our Annual Appeal, our base of support continues to grow, as well.

- Another means of raising money has been through online fundraising campaigns like *Giving Tuesday*. This is an annual fundraiser conducted nationally on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving. People are encouraged to give to their favorite non-profit on this day. Historically, Giving Tuesday brings in a modest amount of donations to non-profits and is used primarily to raise awareness of non-profits and philanthropy in general. This year there was an additional Giving Tuesday conducted in May to provide financial relief to non-profits who have suffered as a result of the financial impact of COVID-19, and US Chess supporters stepped up in a big way. Over \$10,000 was raised to help mitigate some of the financial losses that US Chess suffered by having to cancel all of its major events that were scheduled to take place during the spring and summer months.

Our Growing Donor Base – Last year at this time, I reported to our Executive Board that our base of support is growing at an encouraging rate. That was recently confirmed when compiling information for this year’s Annual Report. We’ve had almost twice the number of donors give to US Chess this past year than in the year prior – from 422 donors last year, to 840 donors this year. While it is always exciting when US Chess receives a large gift, it is just as exciting when donations increase as a result of a growing broad base of support. Relying on the many, rather than the few, makes for a more stable fundraising program, overall.

Online Chess Tournaments – With the increase of online tournaments as a substitute for over-the-board play, we have an opportunity to find quality prospects for possible future giving. These online tournaments could potentially provide a revenue stream of both donor and sponsorship funds through the live streaming of these events. We are currently assessing how to make the donation process convenient for the donor and still maintain proper stewardship.

Summary – The challenges presented to US Chess and other nonprofits this past year due to the Coronavirus were unexpected and unprecedented. In spite of this – or maybe *because* of it – our donor base rose to the occasion and showed their support with extraordinary generosity. The message communicated between US Chess and its donors was twofold: 1) In these uncertain times, our donors are committed to helping US Chess carry out its mission, and 2) US Chess is as equally committed to providing important programs and events, even during the most difficult times.