

DonorsChoose.org

DonorsChoose.org was pioneered by teachers at a Bronx, New York public high school in the spring of 2000. Charles Best, then a social studies teacher, saw first-hand the scarcity of materials in U.S. public school classrooms and the profound impact of this scarcity on kids' education. Looking for a way to address this problem, he sensed an untapped potential in people who were frustrated by their lack of influence over the use of their charitable donations. The solution was DonorsChoose.org—a website connecting classrooms in need with individuals who want to help.



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Jonathan Evans
Director of Vendor Relations

The Beginning

Back when he was a social studies teacher, Charles Best—founder and chief executive officer of DonorsChoose.org—and his colleagues often had the same conversation about the materials they needed, or the books that their kids wanted to read. While Best sometimes funded resources out of his own pocket, he and his colleagues saw their students generally going without the resources that they needed. Best suspected that there were people out there who wanted to help improve the public school system in some way, but he also believed that there was a lack of insight and trust into where most charity dollars went.

That’s when he decided to create DonorsChoose.org. The idea was to provide a website where a public school teacher could identify a student need—such as art supplies, books, or funding for a field trip—and write a short request, and then donors could review and choose classroom projects to support with a donation of any amount.

Best initially showed the website to his colleagues and asked them to create the first projects. Soon, word of mouth spread throughout the Bronx community that there was a website where teachers could realize their dreams for their students.

It wasn’t just Best’s colleagues who got involved with launching DonorsChoose.org back in 2000. His students helped as well. They volunteered after school for four months—writing letters to prospective donors about how even a \$5 contribution could make them an education philanthropist. And that is how DonorsChoose.org—the place where anyone can become a philanthropist—was born.

The Challenge

In the fall of 2007, DonorsChoose.org opened up to every public school in the U.S. While Best and his team were excited to go national, they also faced a ‘change or die’ challenge.

The method that the team had in place for ensuring the integrity of its philanthropic marketplace was very manual. The process involved the following: a teacher would submit a project request to the site and then the DonorsChoose.org team would spend approximately 30 minutes of human time cross-checking what had been entered. Once that project was checked and became fully funded, the DonorsChoose.org team would spend another 30 minutes creating the purchase order. The extensive PO-creation process involved recreating what the teacher had requested, sending it to the appropriate vendors, manually checking to see if the vendors had received the purchase order, manually checking to learn when certain materials were unavailable or materials had shipped, and then getting a paper invoice in the



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mail and handwriting a check to pay the invoice. In summary, it essentially took the DonorsChoose.org team more than an hour of human labor to perform quality control on just one classroom project alone.

Going national meant delivering more than \$40 million of resources to public school kids—three million kids, to be specific—from low-income families. “If you’re spending an hour of human labor on every project, you can see how treacherous the process was if it had remained the same,” said Best. As Director of Vendor Relations, Jonathan Evans put it, “It was literally change or die, either under a mountain of manual labor or in a sea of paper. Without change, DonorsChoose.org would have ultimately been crushed or drowned by our growth.”

The DonorsChoose.org team knew that it needed to make the approach and operations scalable for guaranteeing the integrity of its philanthropic marketplace on a national basis, and it undertook a search to address this challenge.

With a nonprofit staff that lacked any prior ERP experience, the team knew that it needed a system that was easy to navigate and one that would be user-friendly for teachers. It also needed to be flexible for DonorsChoose.org staff who were experiencing a workflow unlike any other before.

Based on the above criteria, DonorsChoose.org selected Ariba as the single system to help automate all of the labor performed for every classroom project.

The Benefits

“Everything that we used to do—from sending a PO manually, to manually checking to see if it arrived, to getting an invoice back in paper form and paying for it with a paper check—has been made electronic and automated,” said Best. “What used to take 30 minutes of human time to purchase materials on a single project now takes only two seconds to fulfill unlimited orders using the Ariba system.”

Not only has the DonorsChoose.org team been able to automate the help that it delivers to public schools, it has also been able to absorb big spikes in the volume through the website. And the spikes have been significant since celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and Steven Colbert have promoted DonorsChoose.org during their broadcasts. “We see huge spikes when we get media coverage like that,” said Best. “And those spikes translate into even bigger spikes in our workflow queues—in the number of classroom projects that need to be fulfilled and the number of resources that need to be delivered to students. With Ariba, we have been able to weather those spikes—sailing through those spikes—without any hiccups.”

With Ariba, DonorsChoose.org has been able to achieve operational efficiency—turning a charitable website into a truly scalable platform.

The increased visibility—from teachers, to donors, to staff members—has been one of the most important ways in which Ariba has

revolutionized this charity. “When a teacher puts together a project classroom request, they need to know exactly what materials they are going to get when their project is funded. In fact, they need to identify the exact materials that will best serve their students’ needs,” said Best. “When that project is posted at DonorsChoose.org, the prospective donor can see exactly how their donation would be spent. When they do make a donation, and when that project is fully funded, DonorsChoose.org staff members can see exactly what is going on with that project—no matter what stage in the cycle. With Ariba, we now

have total visibility into tens of thousands of classroom projects that we’re bringing to life every month.”

The scalability that Ariba has provided DonorsChoose.org has exceeded the team’s expectations. “Using Ariba, we have been able to create a model that is enabling every citizen to be a philanthropist on a huge scale,” commented Best. “We’re enabling any teacher to be an innovator—and we now have 120,000 public school teachers who have posted projects on our site, and we are delivering resources to over three million students from low-income families.”

About DonorsChoose.org

DonorsChoose.org is a simple way to fulfill needs and foster innovation in our public schools. At our website, teachers submit their best ideas for materials and experiences that their students need to learn. Any individual can search these projects, learn about classroom needs, and support the project they find most compelling.

Today, over 120,000 teachers are using DonorsChoose.org to help their students. Citizen philanthropists have funded more than 100,000 learning projects, channeling over \$47 million worth of books, art supplies, technology, and other resources to 3 million students from low-income families. National media such as Oprah Winfrey, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Times have hailed DonorsChoose.org as “the future of philanthropy.”

About Ariba Inc.

Ariba, Inc. is the leading provider of on-demand spend management solutions. Our mission is to transform the way companies of all sizes, across all industries, and geographies operate by delivering software, service, and network solutions that enable them to holistically source, contract, procure, pay, manage, and analyze their spend and supplier relationships. Delivered on demand, our enterprise-class offerings empower companies to achieve greater control of their spend and drive continuous improvements in financial and supply chain performance. More than 1,000 companies, including more than half of the companies on the Fortune 100, use Ariba solutions to manage their spend from sourcing and orders through invoicing and payment. For more information, visit www.ariba.com.

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