Objective: To raise funds for a school construction for the children at Bakhmal Basi School in Northern Afghanistan.

Challenge Target: £50,000 towards this goal.

Challenge Result: £60,707.75 (including gift aid). Total raised online through the Big Give: £62,435 (this includes funds that came in online post challenge)

Total raised as an outcome of the Big Give Christmas Challenge: £81,929 (this includes donations worth £19,494 from donors who were unable to donate online but who saw the campaign and still wanted to contribute).

49% of donors online NEW to Afghan Connection

We were thrilled to raise more than the target set during the challenge. Donations even continued to pour in after it had finished. In fact, the campaign was so successful, that as a result of our participation in the 2017 Big Give Christmas challenge, AC raised enough funds to complete 100% funding required for this project.

What factors contributed to the success of the campaign?

Careful Planning

• Pledger. As soon as we made the application in summer 2017, we began to plan for the possibility that we would be selected. We contacted a major donor to be our Big Give (BG) pledger so that we could respond quickly to the next stage of the process in case we were lucky enough to be selected. This donor really enjoyed the idea that his pledge would create the opportunity to leverage further donations.

• Big Give Resources. Once we were selected, using the resources from the Big Give website (general information, marketing guides and webinars), we organised a well thought through timeline to ensure that AC would get the best out of the campaign.

• Focused, targeted marketing materials were created - information that would be sent to our donor base, patrons, trustees, corporates, schools, local newspapers and also publicised on our website and social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram).

• Hootsuite – This was the first time that we used Hootsuite to plan our social media campaign and link it to #giving Tuesday.

• Donating options: Key to guaranteeing success was to ensure that our donating options were clear to use and easily accessed on multiple platforms (Mailchimp for our donor base plus website and social media platforms).

Execution

• Contacting major individual donors. We did this well in advance of the actual challenge week via a combination of email, phone calls and meetings. We explained the concept behind the challenge and kept donors updated up to and during the challenge week itself. Our previous experience suggests that current donors really enjoy the opportunity to support us at Christmas and crucially love the doubling element of the challenge. Getting them on board at an early stage was key.

• Contacting donors who have supported previous online campaigns: We emailed to thank them for past donations and to update them on finished school projects which their funding has helped to achieve.

• Dissemination of marketing materials on social media prior, during and post campaign. On 24th October, we announced our excitement about being selected for the BG Christmas Challenge on social media. Following this we divided the campaign into 3 sections: the run up, the challenge itself and post campaign.
Run up: we posted marketing information following the format of a countdown: 3 weeks to go, 2 weeks to go, 1 week to go and finally, 24 hours to go. Each time, we used different pictures/images to maintain interest and asked everyone to look out for links to donate. This was done across our social media platforms.

The challenge itself: Each day of the challenge, new images and messaging was posted with a sense of urgency built into the messaging as the week progressed. On one of the final days, we posted a picture of all the schools we had previously funded through online Christmas campaigns. See below

Post Campaign: Posts published to celebrate that fact that we had achieved our target, to thank the BG and all our donors for their support.

We also emailed donors (including our BG Champion) and thanked them individually for their support. Included in each email was a link to the following joyful video of our CEO arriving at the current Bakhmal Basi school, which has no building: Christmas thank you

- **Dialogue with donor base.** We contacted the vast majority of our donor base via Mailchimp using similar marketing materials as those posted on social media but with less frequency. They were emailed 3 times: 21st November (Save the date)- 1 week before the challenge, 28th November (Campaign Launch) and on 3rd December (Last Chance).

- **Afghan Connection patrons/trustees** – we contacted these groups, some of whom are well known to the general public, asking them to reach out via social media or personal approach to their own networks. **Those who tweeted or retweeted our campaign material included** the Afghan Embassy in London, various businesses (eg Euromoney), schools plus patrons including Sunday Times Correspondent Christina Lamb and War artist, George Butler. The Afghan Women’s’ Support Forum, led by one of our Patrons, also publicised the campaign on their website which was good for reaching out to the Afghan Diaspora. On the right: Retweet by Christina Lamb, Chief Foreign Correspondent, The Sunday Times – she has 56,000 followers.

- **Signature strips on all team emails** – this was changed to reflect our participation in the campaign with a direct link to the BG donate page.

- **Team effort** – there are 4-5 of us in the office and we pulled together to create the most effective and far reaching campaign that we could. We were particularly lucky as a young former student from one of our contact schools supported us by making a short film for the campaign.
Learning:

We have never been as organised for a Christmas campaign as we were for the 2017 challenge. Thanks in part to the BG support machine, we were able to put together a campaign which involved detailed planning, careful execution and a more dynamic social media campaign - all elements which contributed to making the 2017 campaign a huge success.

Creative Marketing:

• **Film:** We created a very short film directly for the campaign. This was for a first for AC and it was publicised across all platforms. [2017 Christmas Challenge Film](#). We made a 2nd film (mentioned above) to say thank you to donors [Christmas Thank you](#).

• **Schools campaign** AC has excellent relationships with over 50 UK schools and this kind of campaign really appeals to students who love the thrill of seeing their funds doubled. We contacted the schools to let them know about the campaign – efforts were rewarded and some of the highlights included:

  o Dr Fane, AC’s CEO went to talk to Year 10 students at Westminster School where she made a rallying call to them to support the challenge. As an outcome, students walked 4.5 miles from Kings Cross and other meeting points in London, to Westminster School in the early morning during the week of the challenge, to raise funds which were then donated to the challenge. The walk didn’t just raise money for a good cause, but also it raised awareness – the children were walking in solidarity with their Afghan peers, who make the journey over similar distances every day to get to school.

  o Activities by other schools included raising funds during book week for the appeal, a sponsored walk at another school and separately a university student raised £300 by selling pumpkins!

• **Social Media:** As well as being as creative as possible with choice of images and messages used in Social Media, we used one image of all the schools we have built as a result of online Christmas appeals to show donors what their funding has supported over the years. This includes 2 schools which have gained support in previous BG Challenges (this photo is above in the ‘execution’ section).

Thank you to the Big Give:

The Christmas Challenge was a huge success for Afghan Connection. The campaign inspired current donors to give, often more than they would do usually and we also benefitted from significant number of new donors as well. We are delighted with the outcome and very grateful to the BG for their support. Raising funds for Afghanistan is extremely challenging. The office team are passionate about the cause and this tremendous boost to our fundraising, via the Big Give, brought us great encouragement and joy. It also reinforced that we not only have loyal donors, but we can reach out successfully to new donors thanks to creative campaigns such as these. The funding raised will be transformational for the children at Bakhmal Basi school.

And most importantly...a big thank you from the children at Bakhmal Basi who will now have the chance to sit at desks in classrooms – a school building will transform their education!
Some of our tweets and retweets!