



# Fundraising Ideas

Grass roots ideas to raise money for your project and your group!



## Brainstorm and Borrow!

Brainstorm about ideas for potential fundraisers, and borrow successful fundraising ideas from other Renaissance groups. There are literally hundreds of grass-roots fundraisers that have a proven track record of success. Examples include:

- Adopt-a-Barrel or Planter
- Antique Show
- Art Show
- Bake Sale
- Battle of the Bands
- Book Fair
- Bottle Drive
- Bowl-a-thon
- Bulb Sales
- Calendar Sales
- Candy Sale
- Car Wash
- Chicken Barbeque
- Circus/Carnival
- Coin Toss
- Concert
- Craft Sale
- Dance/Ball
- Duck Derby
- Dunk Tank
- Fashion Show
- Golf Tournament
- Holiday Gift Baskets
- Ice Cream Social
- Lock-up
- Mailings/Appeals
- Memorial bricks/pavers
- Memorial Donations
- Mystery Dinner Theatre
- Newsletters
- Pancake Breakfast
- Penny Collection
- Postcard Sales
- Raffle/Lottery/Drawing
- Seasonal Plant Sales
- Silent Auction
- Tag Sales
- Talent Show
- Telethon
- Trash-n-Treasure Flea Market
- Trinket Sale
- T-shirt Sales
- Walk-a-thon
- Wine Tasting



# Take the time to plan!

When properly planned and implemented, grass-roots fundraisers can be an easy effective way to raise money locally. Hastily organized fundraisers without a well thought out plan can actually lose money and burn out volunteers. Here are some tips to follow:

1. People are more likely to support your fundraising plan if they feel a sense of ownership in it. Ask your group members for suggestions, opinions, insights and feedback. Let them know you truly value their opinion.
2. Before launching a fundraiser, make sure your idea maximizes your fundraising efficiency. In other words, are you raising money at the lowest cost-per-dollar raised?
3. Select a competent, committed person to chair the event – preferably someone with good connections in the community.
4. Set a specific goal for how much money the even should raise, and be attentive to cost control. Develop a budget and stick to it!
5. Try to find business sponsors to underwrite the major costs of putting on an event to maximize profits.
6. First-time events may do little more than break even. Keep in mind that doing an event the first time is much more time-consuming and often less profitable than a repeat performance, so don't give up!



# Consult the Experts!



For the most up to date information and advice on successful fundraising strategies, consider subscribing to the Fundraising for Small Groups Newsletter. This free newsletter contains fundraising ideas, tips and secrets designed specifically for small non-profits. Sign up on-line at [www.fundraising-newsletters.com](http://www.fundraising-newsletters.com).



## ***Holding a Fundraiser: Developing a Plan***

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Special events should be part of your strategy for developing a balanced, diversified base of funding. When properly planned and implemented, special events can accomplish several key objectives. They can:

- Involve volunteers productively with your program
- Raise the visibility and expand the constituency of your program—leading, in turn, to opportunities for additional fundraising and volunteer recruitment
- Bring in significant amounts of money

Do not, however, try to use special events as a quick fix for cash shortages. When hurriedly planned, special events can lead to disappointing results and disillusioned volunteers; produce a disappointing return on your investment of extensive time, effort, and money; and be all-consuming, distracting staff and volunteers from program activities and other, potentially more cost-effective fundraising efforts.

### The Planning Process

The key to a successful event is careful planning. For a major fundraiser, it is a good idea to begin at least 12 months in advance. To develop and implement a comprehensive plan, you can follow this process:

#### ***Select the event***

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1. Decide on your primary objectives for the event. Are they:
  - To gain publicity for your program?
  - To provide an opportunity for your current constituency to feel connected to the program?
  - To enlarge your constituency?
  - To raise significant amounts of money?
2. Brainstorm ideas for potential events that are likely to meet your objectives. To be successful, it is best to be original, or to be innovative with “borrowed” ideas.

Examples of kinds of events include:

Auctions	Marathons/walk-a-thons/bike-a-thons
Raffles	Tributes to community leaders
Haunted houses	Tributes to unsung heroes
Fashion shows	Dinners
Movie screenings or theater parties	Dances
Bowling or golf tournaments	Concerts/performances

3. Ask yourself these questions:

- Will the event appeal to the constituency you are trying to attract?
- Are the logistics of the event doable?
- Do you have the “people power” to plan the event and make it a success?
- Will the cost-benefit of the event be meaningful enough to motivate volunteers to participate in its planning and implementation?
- Is it the kind of event that can be repeated in the future? If it is repeated, are there opportunities for it to grow?

### ***Develop a formal plan***

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1. Select a competent, committed person to chair the event—preferably someone with great connections in the community.
2. Develop a full description of the event—how it should look and feel. (Be sure that donor and volunteer recognition is part of the event.)
3. Set a specific goal for how much money the event should raise.
4. Select a date for the event. Consult community calendars to learn what other events are planned around that date; your own organization’s calendar; and the availability of the event site. Consider travel patterns of the people you want to attend. For example, if you plan the event for a weekend afternoon in the summer, are people likely to be away at the beach?
5. Develop a master checklist of tasks and a calendar of when they have to be completed. Organize committees to complete the tasks. Be sure each committee has clear responsibilities and timelines. Recruit committee members from within and outside your organization.

6. Expect the unexpected. Prepare for it by developing a contingency plan. For example, if it is an outdoor event, what will you do if it rains? If you are honoring a community leader, what will you do if he or she cancels at the last minute?

### ***Prepare a budget***

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1. Budget categories might include:
  - Facility rental
  - Food service
  - Decorations
  - Equipment rental
  - Entertainment
  - Publicity
  - Design and printing
  - Postage
  - Prizes and recognition items
  - Office expenses
  - Insurance
  - Miscellaneous
2. Be attentive to cost control. Set up budget controls and reporting procedures.
3. Be realistic. If this is a first-time event, it may do little more than break even. But it may be worth repeating if the response was positive and you can identify strategies for growth.
4. Try to have major costs underwritten. This is a key to maximizing profits. For example, look for business sponsorship to cover publicity and printing costs. When you approach a business to ask for sponsorship, be sure you can tell them what they will receive in return (for example, positive visibility in the community).

### ***Evaluate the outcomes of the event***

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The evaluation will serve at least three purposes. It will:

- Provide hard facts (for example, on attendance and money raised) that let you know if you made strong decisions in planning and implementing the event
- Help you determine whether you should hold the event again
- Provide a springboard for an improved event if you decide to hold it again

Keep in mind that doing an event the first time is much more time-consuming and often less profitable than a repeat performance.



## ***Attracting Individual Donors: Conducting a Fundraising Campaign***

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Most professional fundraisers believe that an annual campaign soliciting funds from individual donors should be an essential component of any fundraising plan. If thoughtfully planned and implemented, an annual campaign has two major benefits:

1. It provides regular infusions of cash (the short-term benefit). Most of this money will come in the form of small donations from a large number of people.
2. It establishes a base of donors (the long-term benefit). If carefully “cultivated,” at least some of these donors may ultimately contribute a major gift.

There are three major strategies for raising money from individual donors. They are:

- Personal solicitation
- Direct mail
- Telephone appeals

Because of the large number of sales and fundraising campaigns that are currently conducted over the telephone, many people tend to become annoyed at phone calls asking for donations. Thus, used alone as the only form of contact with potential donors, telephone appeals may be a less desirable strategy. The other two strategies are outlined below, but first it is useful to consider the reasons why individuals decide to contribute money.

### ***Why People Contribute***

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In a survey conducted in 1996 by the Independent Sector, people were asked, “How important is each of the following reasons to you for contributing to a charitable organization?” Respondents identified the following reasons as “very important” or “somewhat important”:

- 72.1 percent—someone I know well asked
- 60.7 percent—have volunteered at the organization
- 59.1 percent—asked by clergy
- 43.3 percent—read or heard a news story
- 38.2 percent—asked at work
- 36.2 percent—someone came to the door asking me to give

- 29.7 percent—asked in a telethon/radiothon
- 28.6 percent—received a letter asking me to give
- 17.1 percent—read a newspaper or magazine advertisement asking me to give
- 16.9 percent—saw a television commercial asking me to give

(Source: Independent Sector Web site < [www.indepsec.org](http://www.indepsec.org)> .)

### ***Combining Direct Mail Appeals with Personal Solicitation***

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As these reasons for giving make clear, people are far more likely to donate money to a nonprofit organization when they are asked by someone they know or they have a personal connection with the organization. Thus, mass mailings using purchased lists of names and addresses are generally not a good idea. They are expensive and promise little in the way of return—in fact, they generally have a return of under 2 percent.

Instead, consider a more personalized approach to a more limited audience. The return on your investment is likely to be much higher. While annual campaigns can become rather elaborate, you can use the following process to help you plan a straightforward initial annual giving campaign to solicit donations from individuals:

1. Decide when you want the campaign to take place. Some times of the year are likely to be more fruitful than others. From late October to mid-December is generally the best time to conduct annual campaigns. People are in a “spending mood” and are feeling generous. They are also thinking about end-of-the-year tax deductions. January and February are the worst times to conduct fundraising drives: people are paying off the debts from their holiday spending.
2. Identify prospects. This includes past donors (including anyone who has attended a fundraising event), board members, people identified by board members, past and current volunteers, and others who have expressed interest in your organization.
3. Decide if you want to suggest categories of giving: for example, \$25.00, \$35.00, \$50.00, \$100.00. One advantage of having categories is that, in future campaigns, you can say to people, “You generously contributed \$25.00 last year. Can you consider increasing your contribution this year?”

4. Develop a fundraising letter that can be mailed to each person on the list. Decide if you want to include other information about your program, such as a fact sheet or brochure, when you send out each letter. If so, you can keep the letter relatively short (one page). If not, you may want to make the letter as long as two pages so you can include more information.
5. Wherever possible, include a brief handwritten note on the letter. For example, if the letter is being sent to a current or former volunteer, the program director should write and sign a personal note. If the letter is going to someone identified as a prospect by a board member, that board member should write and sign a note. In addition, you can use a “mail merge” feature in your wordprocessing software to personalize every letter so that each recipient is addressed by name.
6. Include a return envelope, preferably postage paid.
7. Wherever possible, have a staff member, board member, or volunteer personally ask the prospect for a donation, along with sending a letter. (This can be done in person or by telephone.)
8. Prepare in advance the thank-you letter you will send to each donor.
9. Keep track of each donation in a master log.
10. Send the thank-you letter immediately.
11. Update your mailing list, noting donations.
12. Evaluate the results of your direct mail campaign. Identify the percentage of letters or personal requests that resulted in donations, the total amount raised, and the total cost.
13. Use the results of the evaluation to identify strengths you should build on for next year’s campaign, what you should change, and reasonable goals.
14. Be sure your donors feel connected to your organization throughout the year. Send them invitations to special events. If possible, produce a newsletter at least once during each year that updates your donors on the organization’s most recent activities and successes.