

Fundraising

The easiest way to plan your event is to visit and support other Squadrons. Watch and learn from their event.

Every fundraiser has a team of volunteers making it a successful event. Who are these volunteers? What each event has in common is a leader who makes the necessary decisions early and a capable team willing to work hard to see the event has every opportunity to make money and see the participants have fun. While working hard on the event, those same volunteers are having fun, too. If you can't have fun while making money for your charity you will not be nearly as successful as you can be. What are the key areas of concern for a successful fundraising event?

A short overview of those areas:

Sometime ago, well before the event began, someone sold the idea to have the event and had the vision of how successful it could be towards raising money. The vision included friends, members and like-minded individuals, so that the event would be fun. They bought a ticket or registered for the event after someone from the Squadron approached them and informed them of the event. They took time out of their schedule to be there and paid for the tournament entry fee or dinner ticket and set the time aside. They attended and spent a little bit more and had a good time. So much of a good time they asked if this event was an annual event...They would consider putting it on their calendar again next year, buying another ticket or such and inviting more friends along. They may never know what or how the event came to be, but they do know where the money came from and who it will benefit.

For those of us that have attended a clam bake, polar plunge, gun show, golf tournament or you could name just about anything that has and will be used to raise money, one key element was always in abundance that caused us to wonder when they plan on doing this again. We

had fun and saw the event as a success. If we wanted to duplicate that same event at our post, what would be needed?

Volunteers were in abundance, a leader or two and the many others that were doing all sorts of leg work during the event (I counted at least nine or more). What was the lead-time to this event? What happened behind the scenes to accomplish this turnout? How did they promote it to reach out and make me aware of it some 45 miles away? Did I have fun? I must have if I am asking for next year's event dates, why else would I ask myself these questions in a quest to deconstruct what was needed to duplicate this event?

The common elements realized were: Time to accomplish all that was needed before the event could start, funding for up front expenses and the volunteers that believed and worked to make it a success. The other element that I witnessed was what a team effort! I knew who was in charge and the leader was making some decisions, but mostly all the volunteers knew their jobs and what to do and when to do it.

Promotion. They started early and spread the word. That meant they had certain details and decisions made and completed early so they could print these flyers two months ago. They promoted it by not only the flyer, but with their enthusiasm and covered a good distance to get the message out. They made themselves available to answer my questions six weeks ago when I was considering that flyer and wanted to know more. There were a good number of others attending from a greater distance than myself. That means they have reach. That means greater attendance, which in turns improves the success and makes the volunteers happier when they realize how many people came from such distances to attend this event. That is a compliment to the time and energy applied. They had fun because they

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started early and people were joining their passion for this event benefiting their cause. In this case it was American Legion Child Welfare Foundation benefiting from their efforts.

So I make a mental note...need people with a passion for a cause, generally good natured and they KNOW the event is going to be a success, because they believe it true and worked hard to make it so. They believed in themselves and their friends working every bit as hard as they were.

I am now back to my note card wondering if I could simplify this: People and their passion, wanting to show hospitality and find success. They had the necessary funding to start the event, pay for the food and the raffle event afterward. They printed tickets and flyers that were created by some one with the available talent to do so. They gave that person the lead-time to really work up some nice promotional materials. They thought of and planned for all the small and large details well before the deadline. The days before and during the event, the volunteers showed up and did as they had promised. I came with my ticket in hand hoping for and actually having a good time, so much so I wanted to help with the cleanup... but they had that covered before I could find a trash can and broom. And now they had the best promotional material anyone could ask for: They had word of mouth priming the pump for next year's repeat event.

Does this sound familiar? We've been at this long enough to know the required elements for success is... US. All of us. They knew this because they thanked me for coming. I knew this because I thanked them for hosting the event and I let them know by inquiry that I was interested in doing this again next year, should they do this same event again.

Everyone received thanks, the charity received funds, we had fun and we would like to do it again.

My short list: People, passion, money, funding, lead-time, event date and time and a location with facilities. That is what the key elements were.

One way to learn how to put on these events that are a success? Attend other events and get new ideas. Ask the squadron members that are having fun and enjoying the event right along with you, they'll share what it takes. Be careful though, this inquiry is usually an opportunity for them to put you to work for "on the job training!"

I say attend other events because the easy way to promote your event is to reciprocate with others. By doing so, you help make their event a success and they are likely to reciprocate with you on your events. That is a sure way to start an event rolling towards success, get involved and share their passion. Oh...and remember to say thank you!

12 Tips for Successful Fundraising

1. Give yourself and your team plenty of time to plan and execute your event. Make a schedule with clear “mile markers”, and stick to it. Adopt a campaign mentality and commit to win. Plan and announce the celebration lunch date for your committee at your first committee meeting and remind all of your volunteers about this as often as you can.
2. Set a dollar target for your fundraiser, commit to it, announce it and plan every element of the fundraising campaign with this target in mind.
3. Commit to raising funds, and avoid euphemisms like fun-raisers or friend-raisers. This is fund-raising. Euphemisms become alibis. Don't confuse motion with action, and don't allow your colleagues to dilly-dally either.
4. Determine the target audience for your fundraiser by name. Be specific about who you want to attend. Put people on your target attendance list who have a history of caring about the programs. Send volunteers to sell them tickets and sponsorships in person.
5. Articulate the importance of the cause in everything you say and do from a perspective that will move your target audience. Let your passion show. Show how past contributions have changed lives in your local community.
6. Pick a unique and doable theme for your event. Tie in the Legion Family. But remember -- each fundraising event is unique. Whatever your theme is, it's important in this day and age to have some sort of visual theme that will appeal to your targeted market.
7. Set up a realistic budget. Consider your budget when you are forming your steering committee - many goods and services can be donated, but manpower can't.
8. Build a strong steering committee. Remember the power of gilt (as in gold) by association. Make sure your committee is listed as “in formation” — you can add new leaders as you find them. Pick some people who know and can help with the logistics.
9. Package the event tickets, give a minimum number of tickets to each volunteer, and let them know you expect them to sell them (not just “get them out”.) Tickets don't sell tickets. People sell tickets.
10. Use your most experienced members and committee leaders to sell sponsorships to businesses that “need to be associated with the event.” Ask them to pair up with a new member so they may gain experience. Set targets and have weekly follow-up meetings in person or by phone.
11. If you pick an honoree, choose carefully. Choose someone with an established record of helping with children and Legion programs, someone with a rolodex and no skeletons in their closet.
12. Find sponsors who can be convinced that an association with our cause will bring goodwill and, eventually, business to them. Show them how their logos will be prominent in the event. Make heroes out of them. Give them a detailed report and a warm thank you after the event.

Now, pick a theme and do your best, no matter how big or small your goal. Your effort will remind everyone you touch how important it is that we all work to support the Legion's programs.

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Anonymous donors

Some donors ask that their gift remain anonymous, and are concerned that the nonprofit will sell their contact information to other nonprofits (which will increase the chance that they will be solicited by other nonprofits).

To address these concerns, the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) has developed a Donors' Bill of Rights that nonprofits are encouraged to adopt.

Ethical Fundraising

Transparency inspires confidence. Beyond what the law requires, nonprofits can demonstrate their commitment to ethical practices by being entirely transparent with financial information and fundraising practices.

A fundamental transparency practice is to make it easy for visitors to a nonprofit's website to find financial information, as well as information about board composition, programs, outcomes/impact, staffing, and donors.

What are other ethical fundraising practices?

How to Write a Donor-Centered Thank-You Letter

Donors are by and large generous and caring people who unselfishly give money to support your cause. They usually ask for nothing in return, but when they receive a well-written thank-you letter, it reminds them why they gave in the first place and that can often help secure continual gifts from them in the future.

A well-expressed thank-you is an art form. Most of us think we don't have the time or the talent to play the artist. Perhaps, we put off writing because it's not a habit we've cultivated. Or we feel awkward about finding the right words, or we don't have a convenient space to sit down and write.

Acknowledging donations

Donors expect a 'thank you' note to acknowledge their charitable gifts. It is not only ethical to be transparent with donors about the receipt of their gifts, but it is also a legal requirement for certain gifts.

Practices that demonstrate accountability and respect for donors include:

- Sending timely gift acknowledgements
- Respecting restrictions on donors' gifts
- Providing timely reports to foundations, as applicable
- Listing donors on a nonprofits' website in the manner in which the donor would like to be acknowledged
- Honoring donors' requests to remain anonymous

As with so many other creative acts, the secret of writing a successful thank-you lies in finding the right tools, learning a few simple rules to get started, and then getting into the swing of it (i.e. practice, practice, practice) until it becomes natural... even fun.

Let's take a few minutes and review the sample thank-you letter on the next page. Afterwards, we'll go part by part to explain and highlight the important aspects of each section.

A Sample Donor Thank-You Letter

*[Date] [Mr./Mrs. First and Last Name
of Donor or Name of Organization]
[Address] [City, State, Zip]*

Dear [Donor Name or Organization Name],

Thanks to you, our fundraiser surpassed our goal of \$XXXX. Your gift of \$XXX has helped to start the event off to a healthy start.

We look forward to sharing the program's success with you in our quarterly newsletter. In the meantime, if you would like to schedule a visit to see, firsthand, the difference your gift is making, please contact Alberto Einstein at 555.555.5555.

Again, we'd like to offer our sincere thanks for all your support throughout the years.

Warmly,

[Sign your name here]

*Johnny Q., Squadron Commander
Sons of the American Legion Squadron 999
Type your address]
[City, State, Zip]*

Sections of a Good Thank-You Letter

First off, the letter starts out with a strong opening focusing on the donor. Because of YOU! The key here is to make it about them! Make them feel special.

Secondly, it tells a story and tells the reader exactly what you'll be doing with their donation. After all, most everyone who donates to a cause wants to know that their money was put to good use!

Third, the letter tells the reader when they can expect to hear from you and offers a phone number and a contact person. Again, it's written in a very personal way and it gives them an open invitation to reach out to you if they have any questions.

Fourth, the donor's loyalty is acknowledged.

You could even take it one step further and note the exact number of years they've contributed. There's nothing more upsetting to a donor than getting a cookie-cutter letter that doesn't call this loyalty out.

Finally, someone from within the highest ranks of the organization signs the letter. Generic letters from your organization's administrator are no fun. Make your letter count with it being signed by the Commander.