

Help organizations succeed with these fundraising pointers

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Fundraising is an essential element of keeping charities and other nonprofit organizations afloat. In fact, for many schools, sports teams and nonprofit groups, fundraising is the single most effective way for these organizations to pay for the rising cost of their activities.

According to Fundraising Idea Companies, estimates suggest that more than 80 percent of individuals donate to nonprofit fundraising efforts. Most of the donations come by way of individuals and only a small percentage from foundations. Additionally, among those who donate, it is common for individuals to support more than one cause.

Understanding how fundraising works can help those looking to raise money develop successful strategies for instituting fundraising endeavors. Here are some pointers for those unaccustomed to fundraising.

—Start preparing early. It's never too early to start preparing for a fundraising operation. The more time devoted to planning and advertising the event, the greater the chance for widespread participation from donors. In addition to word of mouth, the group will want to include fundraiser information on calendars, ads and newsletters—basically anywhere they can reach the greatest amount of people.

—Choose the right fundraising company. There are many companies that specialize in fundraising events and will welcome the opportunity to help the group raise funds for the organization. There are different questions to ask potential fundraising companies, and the responses given should help people determine if they will be the right fit for the organization.

Examples of questions include: What is the percentage of sales given back to the nonprofit organization? What services are available to save the organization and volunteers time? How long has the company been in business? Is there an incentive prize program? If so, who pays for it? What are the ways to keep costs down?

—Avoid fundraising fatigue. When fundraising, the “less is more” approach is often applicable. Although this may seem counterintuitive, focusing on a few effective fundraising initiatives may prove more fruitful than presenting several smaller ones. Over time, individuals may feel less

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inclined to give when faced with many fundraising solicitations from the same organization. This makes finding the fundraising events that will be most profitable essential.

—Establish clear goals and deadlines. People are busy, and unless they are monitored and fundraiser organizers stay motivated throughout the event, it can be easy to lose the interest of normally willing participants. Set deadlines in the near future so events don't get lost in people's schedules.

—Enlist the help of reliable volunteers. Fundraising is often a large undertaking. It will require several motivated individuals all working toward a common goal. Interview prospects to see if they have the gumption and perseverance to see the fundraiser to the end. These may be people who want to help out but simply do not have the capacity to donate money.

—Keep donors in the loop. People often want to know where their funds will be going. If this is a school fundraiser, spell out specifically what programs will benefit or which items will be bought with the money raised through this fundraising event. Donors often feel more comfortable donating toward a tangible goal, such as a new smartboard for a classroom.

—Try to prevent mistakes. It is important to double-check orders and maintain good record-keeping so that mistakes can be minimized. Also, organizations want to be sure orders are correct and there are no product defects before distributing purchased merchandise. Every fundraiser held by the organization will serve as further reference to donors on how you handle fundraising initiatives.

—Keep it varied. Donors are continually looking for fun products or services, so it is important for the group to change up fundraising efforts to keep individuals interested.

Fundraising is an important part of keeping organizations afloat without requiring hefty dues and fees from parents or participants, and doing it right can mean financial success.

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