



10 Foolproof Ways to Fundraise

Want to help transform lives with mobility but hate the idea of hitting people up for cash? Smooth the way with these ten tips from real people who have been there, done that.

1. Pay Yourself First

Before asking others to donate, kick-start your fundraising page with a little of your own money to show your commitment. Kirsten Stearns, a 31-year-old Chicagoan and the National Field Staff Director for Team World Vision—an organization that recruits teams of runners to raise money at athletic events for children in poverty-stricken areas around the world—suggests making the first donation and then telling five friends: “I just donated \$100 to my fundraising page. Will you match that?”

Once you have a few donors, then move onto more casual acquaintances. As she explains, “Nobody wants to be the first to donate—they want to know that it’s a cause others believe in.” Stearns also practices what she preaches: Last December, the avid marathoner raised over \$13,000 for Team World Vision through the California International Marathon.

2. Play Up Your Own Connection

Whether you’re motivated by a relative’s medical battle or your own personal affiliation with a cause, highlighting that connection makes it more personal to you and others. Just ask Gabrielle Apollon, 25, an NYU law student who is part Haitian and whose relatives still live there. In 2010, she was actually doing graduate research in Haiti when the earthquake hit.

When Apollon ran the 5K New York for Haiti later that year, she raised nearly \$4,000 for relief efforts by sharing her experiences in the Caribbean nation through email (she estimates that she got 90% of her donations this way), blogging, phone calls and face-to-face conversations. “By just telling most of the people I knew that I was in Haiti, and how much my life had been focused on helping the country, they had a personal connection in terms of knowing me,” Apollon says. “Anytime I met somebody, I would tell them about the team and how it was easy to engage in the cause—even if they didn’t want to run.”

3. Send Personalized Emails or Letters

When Dylan Nelson, 27, of Washington, D.C., ran the 2011 Marine Corps Marathon for the Epilepsy Therapy Project, he raised about \$2,000, mainly by sending individual emails to friends and colleagues. Nelson and his father both have epilepsy, so like Apollon, he also emphasized his connection to the cause.

After kicking off his fundraising campaign with a mass email and Facebook update, Nelson then sent personal appeals to those who hadn’t donated. “I always stressed that it didn’t have to be a big donation,” he says. “I emailed people in my office and actually found out that a couple of them have ties to epilepsy. It’s an incredible way to learn people’s stories and connect with them.”



Nelson also made sure to send personalized thank-you notes to every donor. “I plan on running future marathons, so cultivating that donor base is really important,” he says. “I will tap those people again.”

Tip: Aim to send just one letter or email every day for a month. Take your time to really think about what you are writing, and tailor it to your recipient. People appreciate being approached in a careful and considerate way. You’ll be surprised by the amount of support you can get from within your current social circle.

4. Hone in on Your Social Network

New Yorker Matt Allyn, 29, a senior online editor at Bicycling Magazine, used Facebook to raise about \$3,000 for his chosen cause, ZERO—the End of Prostate Cancer. About three months before the marathon, he created an event page and invited people to join and track his progress.

At first, he posted a mix of training and fundraising updates about once a week, but as the day drew closer, he upped the frequency to twice a week. Friends and family members would like or comment on statuses without prompting—and he met his goal two weeks before the marathon.

His advice? “Keep [status updates] concise whenever possible,” he says. “Plus, post a picture from a run to give it a visual component.” And, he adds, make it low-pressure. “Try to keep it less about a plea for money and more of a ‘Hey, I’m doing this cool thing,’” he says.

Tip: Update your work and personal email signature with your website URL; use social networking like Facebook and Twitter to get the word out; be active in updating your fundraising page.

5. Host Intimate Fundraising Gatherings

When Cassie Johnson, 30, of San Marcos, Calif., walked the 2010 Susan G. Komen 3-Day for the Cure in honor of her friend Christine, Johnson raised a few hundred dollars by hosting a gourmet cooking class in her home. Several friends donated \$20 each to attend the two-hour class taught by Johnson’s friend Monica, a professional chef. At the party, Johnson also sold raffle tickets for \$1 each. The prizes: gift certificates for services, which were donated by more of her talented friends.

Johnson also raised money through an online jewelry party and fundraising nights at a local restaurant, but she says that the cooking class was her biggest success. “I had a really great turnout, and it was also a lot of fun,” she says. “It was so successful that a couple friends of mine have done similar fundraisers for charity events of their own.” Overall, Johnson raised \$2,300 for her cause.

6. Party with a Purpose

Throw a party with a charitable twist, asking friends to donate in lieu of birthday presents. For Yi Shun Lai’s thirtieth birthday, she hosted a party to benefit the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, since she had captained a team for their annual charity bike ride and a friend had been recently diagnosed with the disease. “We got alcoholic beverage sponsors, and the bar matched donations,” explains the 39-year-



old Southern Californian. She estimates that she raised about \$1,000 thanks to matching donations from the bar.

7. Give Your Campaign a Face

Your personal passion makes a difference! Make presentations to your church group, at work, or at school. Talk about what you are doing with your friends and family. When people see your passion, they will want to get involved.

8. Wheelchair Recipient Stories Are Your Strongest Tool – Use Friday Stories!

Nothing is as powerful as learning the story of an individual who has had their life completely changed for the better as a direct result of receiving one of our free wheelchairs. Share our weekly Friday stories with your donors, and check back on our website and Facebook pages for the newest stories. Learning about who the deserving people are who actually receive our chairs personalizes the entire experience for everyone involved. If you've been on a distribution trip with FWM, share about the recipients you got to meet!

9. Seek Out Matching Gifts

Check with your employer or your spouse's employer to find out whether they have a matching donation program and encourage your donors to do the same. Often the Human Resources Department will have this information. This is an easy way to double your impact!

10. Display Photos, Posters or a REAL FWM Wheelchair

Borrow (in Orange County only) or purchase a wheelchair to keep on display at work, or simply display a photo, poster, or flyer with a picture of a wheelchair and recipient where your co-workers, family members, and friends can see it. People will be curious about it, and will want to learn more about it. Besides that, it's interesting to get an up-close and personal look at the wheelchair design that has transformed the lives of so many.

References:

- *Free Wheelchair Mission Volunteer Ambassadors, Real Advice 2015*
- *LearnVest 2013* - <http://www.learnvest.com/2013/11/6-foolproof-ways-to-fundraise-for-charity-runs/3/>