

Volunteer Fundraising Do's and Don'ts

by Joe Garecht

Many small and mid-sized charities rely on volunteers to do their fundraising for them. Whether through participatory fundraising like walk-a-thons and candy bar sales or through major donor groups or small volunteer-hosted events, many non-profits generate a significant portion of their revenue thanks to the efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers.

Using volunteer fundraising is vastly different than using paid staff or consultants. Volunteers have tons of enthusiasm and may have a wide network from which to draw, but they may not have as much understanding of fundraising techniques as your paid staff, and you generally exercise less control over volunteers than those whose paychecks you write. Today, we present 5 do's and don'ts when using volunteer fundraising campaigns:

1. DO Train Your Volunteers: The best way to make sure your volunteer fundraisers meet their goals is to offer them substantial training – teach them how to fundraise for your organization, show them the steps, let them practice and ask questions. The extra time you take with your team will pay off later with higher revenues and happier volunteers.

2. DO Provide Materials and Support: In addition to training, make sure your team has the materials and support it needs to be successful. Give your team printed copies of your training materials, along with a healthy supply of the items they will need to fundraise – including brochures, donor envelopes, annual reports, cookie order forms, walk-a-thon sheets... whatever your fundraising campaign requires. Also be sure to provide support when needed through a “volunteer fundraising hotline” or regular team meetings.

3. DON'T Stifle Enthusiasm or Creativity: Many small charities make the mistake of being so rigid in their guidelines that they miss real opportunities, and turn off their volunteers. While your organization should definitely have fundraising standards and protocols in place for your team, you should also be open to new ideas from enthusiastic volunteers.

4. DO Track Progress: Tracking is key to the success of a volunteer fundraising campaign. Keep an eye on what – and who – is working, and what/who is not. Provide help to volunteers who are faltering, and encouragement to your entire team.

5. DON'T Forget to Praise and Thank Your Team: Throughout the entire process, remember that volunteers need praise for their efforts, and a steady stream of thank you's from your organization. Remember, volunteers could be doing any number of things with their time, but instead have chosen to work – for free – as part of your volunteer fundraising effort. Give them the recognition they deserve.