



Fundraising Ideas

Here are ideas to get you thinking about ways to raise team funds. Some you'll recognize as tried and-true fundraisers we've all done for our schools while others may be a bit less common. Some fundraisers piggyback on other events that draw a crowd as an additional way to raise cash. Be careful that you use these fundraisers judiciously. You don't want to tap the families of team members who are already being asked to donate funds in other ways. The idea is to draw cash in from outside sources.

The trustiest fundraisers don't require big money up front or much overhead at all, and they don't put team funds at risk if they don't work out. For instance, a car wash risks little except for the cost of soap and water, but raffling off a big screen TV requires risking big bucks for the cost of the TV.

10 Points of a Perfect Fundraiser:

1. Low overhead
2. Fun to do, not drudgery
3. Attractive and needed by people
4. Draws in money from outside the team
5. Something unique that captures attention
6. Something not done by other local groups
7. Someone excited to run it with enthusiasm
8. Medium to high return >50% of investment
9. One that doesn't absorb all your time and energy
10. Balances time and money invested vs. return gained

Some Other Things That Need To Be Said:

- ❖ Don't risk what you cannot afford to lose. Keep risk and costly outlays to a minimum. Balance risk against potential return, and remember the key word is "potential."
- ❖ Choose fundraisers that you have the people to support.
- ❖ The majority of your fundraising should be in the off-season.
- ❖ Coordinate your different fundraisers, but also have different people in charge. Reduce the overload and spread the responsibility and experience around.
- ❖ Get dependable volunteers in charge, but be careful not to overload any one person
- ❖ Form a Booster Club to organize and run fundraisers separate from the day-to-day team management. Involve the whole team family.
- ❖ Be receptive when someone volunteers to run a new and different fundraiser, particularly if they have prior experience with other organizations. People will really throw themselves into a project that they "own" and that appeals to them.
- ❖ Ask for fundraising ideas people are willing to run. A great idea becomes a great fundraiser only if you stand behind your idea.
- ❖ Don't neglect sales incentives. I'm sure a core group will work hard for the team, but incentives can bring greater involvement by marginal members.
- ❖ There is no reason fundraisers can't be fun to do!

Check out this short article on:

"Five Factors for Failure in Fundraising: Blocks and Barriers to Successful Fundraising"

by John G. Fike, CFRE

<http://www.philsol.com/ART-FFFF.html>

Grants

Be sure FIRST is a match for the guidelines of the grant you are applying for. Don't forget that sometimes your team's outreach efforts, separate from the competition, can qualify for a grant. Don't waste time and effort on a proposal that doesn't even come close to the grantor's funding initiatives. Governments (Federal and state - need I mention NASA) and Foundations are sources for grants. Ask for one or two very specific goals to be funded. They want to see the results of their largesse. What problem or need will be solved by this funding?

Here are some Grant writing tips:

<http://www.k12grants.org/tips.htm>

Lotto

Local and state laws governing gambling will apply. Most schools and students require these to be done only outside the school and by adult boosters not students or school representatives for the team. Lotto is based off a daily or weekly 3-number lottery drawn for a state lottery of your choice. Each month team adults "sell" the eligible numbers to people for \$1 (or more) each. The people holding numbers picked during the lotto drawings for that particular month win a cash prize. Each day's prize is ~1/60 of the money raised by selling the numbers for that month giving the team a nice profit and the subscribers a nice prize (typically 10x the cost). If sales don't go well, then the money can be returned.

Here are the Lotto Fundraiser Sheets we use for a 3-number lotto.

<http://team358.org/files/fundraising/Lotto.xls>

Battle-of-the-Bands

This requires auditorium or open space from your school, so you have to work with your administration. The greatest difficulty here is really crowd control and satisfying your administration that the crowds will be chaperoned and under control at all times. Then being sure that the crowds really are behaving and not working against you. If not done well this can have the potential for a PR disaster, but proper planning and preparation will pay off handsomely as a fundraiser. Ticket admission and refreshment sales bring in the money. Signup local bands made up of teachers, students and parents to play. Try mixing in some unusual bands playing Celtic or other ethnic music. You'll need judges and if not a grand prize for the winning band then at least free food and refreshments for all the band members.

Oldies Concert

This is a little more specialized and is very dependent both on the size of your school auditorium and on the accommodations the school and district administrations are willing to make. This must be organized through a promoter who has the connections and reputation to book the good bands. The promoter brings several other advantages: advance ticket sales to a broad region of oldies groupies, all the promotional advertising, band logistics, etc. An additional advantage since we've been doing these concerts for many years has been even if the promoter cannot schedule the bands for the weekend the school auditorium is available they've made good faith donations to the robotics team of several thousand dollars. Typically, we take in around \$10-12,000 dollars for a weekend event.

Team Booster Giveaways

Remember some of those neat little giveaways lots of teams have at competitions? Well if they have broad popular appeal they can be sold around school or the community to help raise money. Small toolsets, silly putty, flashlights, etc. You might make enough to pay for the trinkets you give away!

Refreshment Stand

Run a snack/refreshment stand anywhere there will be a crowd, such as at town parades and school sporting or social events. Accept donations for running a water station for a charity walk or race.

LAN Party

This is popular with the video gamers. You will need a large space with tables and chairs where you can put together game systems on loan from team members connecting them into one large multi-player event. You'll need to setup your own independent Local Area Network (LAN) with cabling, switch/routers, power, etc., but the kids usually have the experience necessary. Have several different style games that appeal to a broad range of players, both single-player and multi-player. Be mindful of any restriction on game ratings such as "Mature." Tickets are sold and refreshments become a large source of income.

Military Bridge

For those bridge enthusiasts. You sell places at playing tables, either partners or singles who can be assigned partners. You and your partner share a home table with another pair of players. Each table comes equipped with a set of flags for the evening. The two sets of partners take turns defending the home table while the other pair plays one hand against a different table. The winners of the hand capture a flag from the losing table and return with it to their own table. You play against every other table (or they play against you) once. At the end of the round the most flags win the four players at a home table prizes for 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and consolation prizes. Prizes are usually donated goods.

Mini-Robot Challenge

Use two to four Vex robots and invent a game, setup a playing field and charge to play a round. You'll need plenty of charging batteries to keep this going as well as a good heavily trafficked public space to draw spectators, casual onlookers and players.

Vending Machine

Vending machines can be leased, you just have to acquire permission to use a site (such as a school, maybe near the sports areas) and stock the machine periodically. Schools are more receptive to healthy drinks and snacks, so fruit juice sells as far as the administration is concerned.

Team Cookbook sale

Organize a team cookbook of selected recipes from team families, print and sell it. You can put together a standard appetizer-to-dessert style or specialize in 30-minute meals. Maybe create a robotics themed cookbook. Interview elementary aged children on their concept of how a Thanksgiving dinner is cooked and intersperse the more imaginative replies (cook at 4000 degrees for 10 minutes) to make your cookbook more appealing and memorable (the kids parents will buy a book too). This is something that can be built on year after year with updates published every so often as new team members bring in their favorite recipes. The finished cookbook can be printed professionally, less-expensively spiral-bound at a copy shop with a heavy duty decorative cover, or released in a simple very inexpensive report binder.

School Pocket Calendars

Get permission to publish the official school events calendar for all grades in a pocket edition for sale. This is very much in demand by busy parents of all school aged children. However, this can take two years to get established if you want to reduce your risk. The biggest problem starting out is estimating the right number of calendars to have printed in advance. A poor estimate can soak up all your profit when you're left with unsold calendars. The biggest mistake is over estimating the number of people who need or will purchase one, so target a smaller profit the first time. You want your most conservative team member running this one the first year and you want your supply of calendars to come up short of demand (keep a record of the people who missed out). In subsequent years you'll have established numbers to work from, and the people who missed out this year will be faster to buy next year. Try making a prototype of last year's calendar and taking advance orders. Cost will depend on your local print shop, but as with everything else try to get it at cost or wholesale. This is also an opportunity to sell booster ads with some payback to them for local businesses. As a final note: Be sure to include your robotics events in the calendar!

Murder Mystery Dinner

Organized with a local restaurant and theater troop this is typically promoted as an adult or couples evening out. It can be a fun experience for your older students too, but not to the point where adults are distracted from the mystery by chaperone duties. There are theater groups who specialize in producing participatory Murder Mystery events. The venue is important as clubs with an open bar may not allow children under 21 or 18. Tickets are sold on a dinner seat basis.

Cardboard Boat Race

Hey, you're an engineering concern, so sponsor a cardboard boat building contest finishing with a race across the school or community pool or local swimming hole. Limit the materials that must be used or leave it completely open-ended. You'll have fun and excitement either way. Charge to enter a boat, charge for a boat "kit", free admission, sell refreshments and souvenirs (cleverly disguised future event advertisements). Turn the event into a carnival with face painting, games for the little ones, etc.

Mini-Carnival

Organize a mini-carnival as a summer program or for elementary schools. Face painting, balloon tosses, even so far an expense as a moon walk and other rentable rides.

Bulb and Flower Sale

Bulbs are great to do in the fall. It's bulb planting time in many areas of the country and the team isn't completely absorbed by the FIRST competition season yet. Flower sales are good in the spring, but you do have to work around the FIRST competition schedule. I imagine you might be very busy right around then. There is no outlay. Orders are taken, bulbs are delivered, then you collect and pay for the order.

Booster Ads

Ask for donations or offer a no-team cost benefit such as selling advertising space to local businesses in a publication your team makes, or selling "shares" in your team and it's success for the season. Be sure to issue a "stock certificate" and "dividends" during the season to update them on your progress and accomplishments. Keep them involved and they'll come back if they can see the good their donations did.

Car Wash

This can be a good team building exercise as well as a fundraiser. All that's required is space off a busy roadway with a water supply. We've always been able to get the water and space donated either from a local business or the school itself. You'll need hoses, buckets, soap, sponges/rags, signs, publicity, and a hot sunny day.

Pasta Dinner/Pancake Breakfast

Look for donations of pasta and sauce, paper goods, drinks, etc. from local grocery stores. Find team families who can help organize the cooking. You'll need chafing dishes w/sterno to keep the sauce and pasta warm as it's being served. Large burners and pots to cook large amounts of pasta. Try your local firehouse for burners. Uncooked (untouched) pasta and sauce if still sealed can be donated to local food pantries afterwards.

Raffle

The standard raffle should always be mentioned when the topic of fundraising comes up. Buy or solicit donations for one or more large consumer items, tickets to the theater or a sports event, a weekend at a spa, anything that appeals to people. Selling expensive tickets is harder than selling lots of inexpensive ones. Print tickets describing the prize(s) as well as announcing the time and place of the drawing. Each ticket has a tear-off stub for the sellers to collect buyer's names and contact information (address, phone). It's best to use identifying ticket numbers to keep track of who sold the ticket in case the name is illegible. The prize will usually have to be delivered, but be sure to publicize the winner afterwards.

Car Raffle

An interesting no-risk extreme take on the standard raffle, depending on the community, is to contact a car dealer and arrange to raffle off a new car. There are a minimum number of tickets that must be sold to reimburse the car dealer and in our case a maximum of 600 tickets were sold for \$100 each. So a ticket holders odds of winning are 1 in 600. State a minimum number of tickets that must be sold or the raffle is transformed into a 50/50 instead. The high cost of these tickets and the limited number of people with disposable income willing to pay for such a chance means it must be promoted differently than the normal around school fundraiser. Sell tickets at business association meetings, for instance, rather than on the soccer field sidelines. With the limited number of tickets sold you must follow up with an announcement of the winner, so everyone knows their money didn't just disappear into a black hole.

Basket Raffle

Solicit donations of goods from small businesses and unused goods from families to make up theme baskets that are raffled off at a big party. 20 or 30 baskets are made up, the baskets are marked with an identifying tag that gives the collection of goodies a name and may also include a fuller description of the contents, a corresponding tag is attached to a nearby can or cup for people to drop raffle tickets into. Buy or get donated numbered two-part raffle tickets, one numbered half of a ticket goes in the cups, hold onto the other numbered half. You need a couple of ticket sellers to mingle with the crowd. Tickets, two for a dollar, are sold for an hour or two before the raffle begins. Bargains can be offered for buying large numbers of tickets, e.g., five free with \$20 purchase. The last half of the event is dedicated to blindly choosing a ticket from each cup and announcing each drawn number. It's easiest if winners or their representatives must be present to win and take the basket home. For little expense you can purchase cellophane wrap to give the tastefully arranged baskets of goodies a professional attractive look. Sometimes, depending on the donated goods, you may make small (inexpensive) purchases for additional goods that round-out the theme of a basket. The better the baskets look the more people will be tempted to purchase a raffle ticket and drop it into the cup.

This is one of those fundraisers that can be done with other crowded events (e.g., pasta dinner) as an excellent add-on fundraiser. This can also be combined with the raffling off of a single grand prize, such as a TV, requiring special (pricier) tickets.

50/50

This is another gambling endeavor common in our area and is done in conjunction with some other event or meeting with a large crowd. 50 percent of the proceeds go to the team and 50 percent go to the winner. One 50/50 netted us \$2400 and the winner took home \$2400 of their own. If you're lucky, the winner may donate some of their winnings back to the team. You can sell standard two-part raffle tickets for \$1 or \$5 or \$10 each. Instead of tickets people can optionally write their name on a bill and add it to the jar. A big clear jar is used to attract more attention as the money mounts up. Pick a size jar that will fill up nicely from the anticipated take. It's a big selling point when people see a jar full of cash, so keep that up-front and the center of attention. At the end of the event the winning ticket or bill is drawn blindly from the jar.

Solicit Donors

Okay, most of us do this without even thinking about it. Imagine how much more you can bring in if you do think about it! Putting a donation jar out at events, going door-to-door asking for donations from businesses, friends, neighbors are all examples of one shot donations. What we often do not do is spend some time planning ahead, plotting strategies to cultivate some of these sources of income into a dependable stream of cash year after year. Publicity ahead of time develops name recognition so potential donors already know who/what you and FIRST are, and especially know all the good you do in outreach programs. Thank you letters and tri-folds with background information that you distribute as donations are received, follow up notes of appreciation or signed team photographs to significant donors, help you develop a solid, repeatable donor base.

Selling Other Commercial Stuff

Look for sales that are worth your time and efforts, bringing in at least a 50% or greater profit. Candy, first-aid kits, discount coupon books, Tupperware, candles, soap, fruit, greeting cards, gift wrap, popcorn, coffees/teas, toys, cookie dough, you name it, some company will help you sell it.

Fundraising products on the web:

- ❖ <http://www.fundraising-ideas.org/listings/index.html>
- ❖ <http://www.fundraising-ideas.com/fundraisers/index.html>

Miscellaneous

Bake sale, sell quilt squares (quilt to be donated elsewhere), sell engraved bricks that you build a path for the school out of (built-in service project), team leaf raking/snow shoveling/yard work, seasonal events like: a holiday wreath sale or Halloween pumpkin picking-hayride, team garage sale (eBay the leftovers), bowling, silent auction, all the tried and true fundraisers we've all been through in elementary school and league sports. Staff concession booths at Homecoming or other school events and concerts. Organize a golf or mini-golf tournament. Sponsor a dance for a Middle or Elementary school. Go house-to-house collecting return bottles/cans or recycle metal/plastic/newspaper. Have a "celebrity" (teachers, administration, mentors) dunking booth, pie-in-the-face, or any of a hundred other ways to abuse those you respect and admire.

Web Links to Fundraising Informational Sites

(These turned up first with a search for "fundraising ideas")

- ❖ <http://www.fundraising-ideas.org/DIY/index.html>
- ❖ <http://www.fundraiserhelp.com/>