

CREATIVE FUNDRAISING TACTICS

Engaging Volunteers in Grassroots Fundraising

COMPILED & ILLUSTRATED
BY SHA GROGAN-BROWN

This is a list of tactics that grassroots organizations in the US have used to successfully meet three important goals:

1. RAISE FUNDS for their work,
2. Get MORE PEOPLE involved, and
3. HAVE FUN doing it.

Some of these examples take a bit more time and planning, some require the efforts of a team of people, and some can be pulled off by one person on their own.

All of these tactics can result in hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars raised for social justice work!

Some General Tips to Remember:

* **Set a goal!** Fundraising is most successful when you have a concrete goal to work toward.



* **Ask for a RANGE and appreciate small as well as large gifts!** Some people think if they can't give \$100 then it's not worth giving anything – let them know that you will be excited about whatever amount they can contribute – even \$5 or \$10. You can make it a wide range too—how about \$5-\$100?



* **Ask as many people as possible** – the more asks you make, the more “YES” answers you’ll get!

* **Be sure to follow-up!** Successful fundraising is successful organizing. If someone pledged and hasn't given yet, get in touch and get that gift!

* **Thank Everyone who gives.** People like to know that they are appreciated.

Give some love! You can send thank you cards or make a personal call to thank them. Better yet, invite them out for coffee or host a small gathering to let them know what they helped make possible by donating.



GO TEAM!

These examples involve teamwork and collaboration, so they can also be great opportunities to develop the leadership of your volunteers and get them engaged in your work in new ways!

★ Art Auction

How It Works: Art auctions can be a great way to promote progressive artists and raise money for a good cause at the same time. Most times they are done as a silent auction, which is run by posting the art on tables, up on the wall or hanging in the space, and placing a bidding sheet by each piece of artwork. While bidding is open, guests can bid on the art by writing down their contact information and placing bids of increasing value. Once the bidding is closed, the person who bid the highest is the

winner and after paying for it, gets to take the art home with them from the event. Art auctions can also be done by having an auctioneer call out the starting bid, calling for bid increases and letting people outbid each other within a short timeframe (usually only a couple of minutes).

Real Life Example:

The *Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP)* is a collective organization based in New York City and founded on the understanding that gender self-determination is inextricably intertwined with racial, social and economic justice. SRLP hosts an annual art auction called Small Works for Big Change. Artists donate original artwork to a silent auction and guests bid on the artwork. In 2008, fabric artists also modified old school SRLP "Liberation is a Collective Process" t-shirts into fashionable limited edition shirts to be auctioned off at the event, and held an informal fashion show to showcase the modified shirts. This is SRLP's most successful fundraiser of the year, bringing together artists to support a law project that works to ensure that all people are free to self-determine their gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination or violence. The event costs very little since the art, the space, and the brochure printing are donated. Many of the artists have participated for a number of years and keep coming back because of how much fun it is. This event usually raises about \$10,000 total, and takes about 15 volunteers to run. The preparation time is about 5 months.

★ Beauty Parlor

How It Works: Ask someone you know to host an event in their home, or in a cozy community spot. Then find people to volunteer their beautification/pampering services (for example pedicures, manicures, haircuts, massages, etc.) and charge a low entry fee at the door. Set up the different services around the house, and posting a sign-up list at each station. Set up a makeshift bar and sell cheap drinks (be sure to have non-alcoholic as well as alcoholic options). Guests pay a flat fee to enter, and then have unlimited access to the services being provided. You can also incorporate a clothing swap, and then have an impromptu fashion show at the end of the night where guests can strut their stuff and shine in their newly made-over look!



Real Life Example:

In early 2008, a volunteer of the *Anti-Racism Working Group*, a national network to support a just reconstruction of New Orleans, held a Big Gay Beauty Parlor in Chicago to raise money for ally organizations in New Orleans, in which volunteers provided services such as haircuts, pedicures, manicures, massages, and facial hair application. The Big Gay Beauty Parlor was set up as a party where guests paid \$5-\$10 at the door to hang out at the beauty parlor and take advantage of the services being offered. The Beauty Parlor was set up at someone's home, all services were donated, and the only cost was purchasing the alcohol that was sold at the makeshift bar. The organizers set a goal of raising \$1,000 at the event, and also approached a few people directly to ask them to match the amount of money raised by the whole party. In the end they raised \$2,000!

★ Bike-A-Thon

How It Works: Bike rides and races are commonly used by larger organizations – like the AIDS ride or the Walk for the Cure to breast cancer. Those events require tons of energy and staff to run, corporate sponsorships, donations of food and services for participants along the way. For smaller grassroots organizations, it may seem daunting to organize something of that magnitude. However, while a volunteer-run bike ride or race probably won't bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars, it can certainly bring in hundreds OR thousands of dollars to small groups. Costs can be kept to a minimum by recruiting volunteers to take on the tasks, riders raise pledges for every mile they ride, and collect the money after the ride.



Real Life Example:

The Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) organizes a bi-annual 3-day bike ride called Solidarity Cyclers. CISPES organizes these bike rides in a low-cost way, planning the bike route themselves, recruiting volunteers to drive a support vehicle to carry food and personal gear for the cyclers, and requesting that each participant contribute \$20 a day to gas and food costs. Cyclers are required to provide their own gear, which many borrow from friends and neighbors, and are encouraged to raise \$500 each. Most participants meet that goal, some by holding a movie night, some by sending out an email request to 120 people and having 20 of those people respond with donations between \$15-\$40. There are usually three main organizers for this event, and 2-3 support vehicle drivers. Most Solidarity Cycler rides bring in an average of \$3,000.

★ Dance Party

How It Works: Secure a venue (could be a community center, someone's home, or even renting a boat!), organize food and music (either live entertainment or a DJ), and sell tickets! This can also be organized as a Dance-A-Thon, where participants raise pledges for every hour they dance.



Real Life Example

Centro Presente, a Latin American immigrant organization based Boston, holds an annual Crucero Bailable (Dance Cruise) where members sell tickets, they rent a boat, sell food made by members of the organization, and provide live entertainment in the form of mariachi music or local DJ's. The Crucero Bailable is the largest event that Centro Presente holds each year, and brings 300-400 people each year. It's such a popular event that one year, a member actually proposed to his girlfriend up on the stage! It usually takes about 2-3 months of publicity, selling tickets, and other planning. The costs are also high, although each year the event doubles what the event cost. They estimate spending \$4,000 and bringing in \$8,000. Tickets are usually \$25 per person, \$35 with food included. The event gets members engaged in doing outreach to sell tickets, provides an opportunity to connect with local latino businesses, and the event itself is a great community builder as well as a chance to promote Centro Presente's campaign, collect signatures for petitions or just get people excited about the organization's work.

★ Scavenger Hunt/Amazing Race

How It Works: Set up a scavenger hunt around the area you are based in. Put out a call for teams, and encourage each team to raise a certain amount of money for the organization. You can make this more like a scavenger hunt, where participants collect items along the way, or more like an "Amazing Race" where participants must take some sort of action at each stop. Get other groups and allies involved—ask an ally organization or a local business to host a stopping point on the race, or organize a group of kids from the neighborhood to make and sell lemonade at the finish line.

Real Life Example

Queers for Economic Justice (QEJ), based in New York City, organizes an annual Amazingly Queer Race for Economic Justice. This skill-based scavenger hunt sends 2-person teams racing from check-point to check-point throughout New York City. Teams are encouraged to raise \$500 for the organization. This city-wide event brings together a multitude of social justice organizations, celebrities, businesses and local and national community members to raise awareness of and gain support for QEJ and to further the necessary, unique and groundbreaking social and political work they do for low-income New Yorkers. The event is comprised of pairs competing in a skill-based/scavenger hunt throughout the city. Each team is encouraged to raise a minimum in pledges of \$250 per person (a minimum of \$500 in pledges per team – although there will be a special prize for the team that raises the most

donations) by recruiting family, friends, community members, organizations and businesses to sponsor their team in the race. While teams are encouraged to raise the minimum \$500, all teams are welcome to race. Q EJ received some sponsorships that allowed them to defray the cost of those who could not raise the full suggested amount.

This is a very labor intensive event, and takes at least 3-4 months of planning. It takes about 20 volunteers on the day of the race, plus a lot of prep work including soliciting prizes, registering teams, planning the scavenger hunt, reaching out to sponsors, and a practice run a week before the day of the race. However, it pays off by raising about \$12,000 to \$15,000! Other goals that are achieved by this event besides just raising money are outreach to new supporters, building and strengthening connections to the community they serve, and having fun!

★ Trivia Night

How It Works: Host a party for a suggested donation, sell drinks and postcards or t-shirts, and charge an entry fee into the Trivia contest. Teams of 4-5 people guess answers to questions about issues that are important to your organization. Events like this are fun social events and use friendly competition to engage people in learning more about the organizing work their entry fee is supporting. Set a low fee and include trivia questions about pop culture or local politics, to make it accessible to a broader group of people (and potential new members or organizers), and sell materials, food, drinks to raise more money.

Real Life Example

CommunitY Organizing Cooperative (CYOC), a former immigrant rights organization in Philadelphia, organized events like this called “Quizzo.” Quizzo nights cost \$5 per person, or \$25 per team, generally brought out 100 people and raised \$700. It took about 5 people to organize, and compiling the questions can take some time. Quizzo questions were framed around Philadelphia local politics, radical movement history, celebrity gossip, and safe sex tips.

Work-A-Thons

How It Works: Through work-a-thons, volunteers of Organization A pledge to volunteer their time for Organization B, offering some sort of service: renovating buildings, landscaping, knocking down walls, painting banners, helping in a soup kitchen, etc. Participants ask supporters to pledge a certain amount of money to Organization A for every hour that they work for Organization B. Participants spend a day working for Organization B, and then go collect their pledges for Organization A from supporters after their work day.

Real Life Example

Work-A-Thons were a common program run by the Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) throughout the 1980’s. Through this program, CISPES has historically gotten El Salvador solidarity activists to volunteer for queer youth centers, AIDS housing, women’s shelters, Latino community centers, and more to provide opportunities to connect activists from different organizations to support each other’s work. Volunteers did work for these organizations and raised pledges to CISPES for every hour they worked for the community organization. This can be a great way to strengthen relationships with other organizations you hope to build or strengthen an alliance with. Work-A-Thons require a lot of time and planning, getting pledges ahead of time, coordinating a day of service, and maintaining strong personal ties and communication between both organizations involved.

Even More Ideas!

Here are some additional examples of creative tactics you can incorporate into your longer-term fundraising efforts. Of course, all fundraising is best done in teams, so share these ideas with others and pick a few tactics that resonate most with your interests!

* **Brunch/house-party** - At your house or at a friend's, organize a brunch for people you know. Send invitations (post-card invitations are cheaper) 2-3 weeks before the event, and follow-up with a phone call. Let everyone know it's a fundraiser for this program you're participating in, and ask \$5 - \$20 per plate. Then, at the high point of the party, give a motivational pitch (a request for money), describing your personal reasons for being part of the organization. They'll probably give even more!

* **Car Wash** – Ask people you know to volunteers a few hours on a nice day. You can either charge drivers for washing their car, or car washers can raise pledges based on how many cars they wash. You can ask business to sponsor the car wash, and then thank them by putting their name on a sign at the car wash site. Engage the drivers that stop to get their car wash—have folks ready to talk to them about the work of your organization, offer them an informational flyer, and have a donation jar ready in case they are inspired to donate!



* **Fundraising letter** – A tried and true method! People are more likely to donate to a cause if they are asked by someone they know and trust. Make a list of people you know who might be interested in your organizing—your friends, co-workers, family, members of your place of worship, members of groups you once worked with, etc. Write them a letter explaining why you are participating in this work, including some information about the group, what you love about the work they do, and what you hope to learn from the experience. Ask for a range of contributions to help you reach your overall goal. (For example: if 10 people give \$20, you will raise \$200!) If possible, enclose a copy of a flyer or some piece of information about the group you are raising money for, and offer a way for them to get more involved if they are interested. Be sure to thank them!



* **Group sponsorships** – Some community groups, unions, or places of worship might be interested in supporting your effort, especially if you are one of their members and representing them in the program. Usually you'll need to write a letter to their board a month in advance, and/or make a presentation at one of their regular meetings to request funds.

* **Honorariums and College funds** – Many Universities and colleges have money that both current students and alumni can apply for. They may give you a few hundred dollars in return for your giving (or arranging someone else to give) a presentation to their class about the work you are involved in.

* **Matching Gift Programs** – Some businesses or companies will match donations that their employees make. Find out if your workplace has such a program, and ask others you know if their employers have matching gift programs as well.

* **Mix CD** – Make a CD compilation of your favorite radical songs, design a cool CD cover, and sell it as a fundraiser! You can compile songs from the US labor movement, anti-war ballads, hip-hop critiques of imperialism, Nueva Canción music (popular Latin American music with revolutionary lyrics), local music, or anything else you want to share with your friends. For the cover, make a collage or include a poem. You can either send it to a bunch of friends and ask them to send back a donation if they can, or you can sell it at one of your events for \$5-\$10 each.



* **Movie night** – Invite people over to watch a documentary about movement building history in the US or elsewhere in the world. Find a film that will spur a discussion around why anti-racism is a crucial lens for movement building! You may be able to get a local alternative movie theater to host a screening of social justice related films and donate all, or a portion, of the proceeds to a cause they were raising money for. Or, borrow a projector from an organization, hang a sheet on the side of your building, and project a movie onto the sheet!

* **Original Artwork** – Make some original artwork and offer to send an original piece of artwork to anyone who donates \$50 or more (or whatever amount you choose to ask for). Prints work great because you can make a number of copies, but you can also make hand-made collage greeting cards, knit wristbands, earrings or other jewelry, or any other artsy thing you can make many of.

* **Raffle** – Ask local businesses and organizations to donate raffle items: a dinner for two from a restaurant, a massage from a massage therapist, a t-shirt from a community organization, a book from a local bookstore. Sell tickets for a couple of bucks, and the winners get the prizes. Or you can do it as a cash lottery (the winner wins half of the total pot/ up to \$250): sell 100 tickets at \$5 each, draw one name, and that person gets \$250 and you get \$250 (and the winner can always choose to donate the money back to you!). You can also do a Reverse Raffle, where every 10th person whose name is drawn wins a small prize and the person whose name is drawn LAST gets a big prize.



* **Tax Return Drive** – Encourage people you know who are against the way their tax money is being used to finance war and repression around the world, to donate their tax return money to people who are organizing to change the world. Using tax return money to make a political difference is a great statement.

* **Tips** – Ask folks you know in the service industry to split their night earnings or donate all tips to a cause. Even coffee shop workers who do not earn very much have been known to donate a day's tips to a good cause or for a good customer!



Resource List

* **Change Matters** works with arts, international, social change organizations, and social entrepreneurs to make breakthroughs in fundraising, capacity, and growth. www.changematters.com

* **Fundraising for Social Change** by Kim Klein -- a classic, extremely useful and easy to read book covering all the practical bases you need to consider when planning grassroots fundraising.

* **Grassroots Grants** by Andy Robinson will help you narrow in on the most important pieces of grant proposals, so you can spend more time building your grassroots fundraising programs!

* The **Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training (GIFT)** is a multiracial organization that promotes the connection between fundraising, social justice and movement-building. GIFT provides training, resources and analysis to strengthen organizations, with an emphasis on those focused on social justice and based in communities of color. GIFT also publishes the **Grassroots Fundraising Journal** 6 times a year, providing proven, practical strategies that will increase your income and diversify your sources of funding with special events, direct mail, major donor programs, membership campaigns, and more. www.grassrootsfundraising.org

* **On Point Consortium** is a team of consultants with history in grassroots and membership-based organizations, providing on point customized coaching, training, and technical assistance. www.onpointconsortium.org

* **Rise Fundraising** aims to strengthen the ability of members, staff and leaders to not only succeed but actually enjoy grassroots fundraising and financial planning. Trainings, planning, and coaching. www.infovisions.org/rise

* **You Can Do It: A Volunteer's Guide to Raising Money For Your Group** by Vicki Quatmann. Incredibly clear and inspiring popular education workbook on grassroots fundraising. Order from Appalachian Community Fund: www.appalachiancommunityfund.org

To contact Sha Grogan-Brown: sgroganb@onpointconsortium.org