

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA CENTER FOR EMERGING LATINO LEADERSHIP

Youth Fundraising

By Marco A. Davis

Throughout the country, opportunities exist for young people to gain experience and develop leadership skills. Many of these opportunities are conferences that require a registration fee or costs covered by the participant. Young leaders, youth groups, and student organizations have developed creative approaches to raising funds to participate in these opportunities. Grassroots fundraising can be challenging, but the rewards can be great, and the experience gained invaluable.

Fundraising is not a complicated process, but it requires time, information, and a carefully-developed strategy. Investing time in effective fundraising techniques develops a skill that can be useful in almost any setting and will be useful for the rest of your life. The following information provides an outline, guidelines, and ideas for effective and creative fundraising.

THE FRAMEWORK

Think of your message as a public service announcement (PSA), not a sales pitch, because your request for support should be conveyed not in terms of what you want to sell them, but what they should **want** to do, much like a public service announcement asks people to try to do something positive in their lives. PSAs convey the value of the activity, and seek to motivate the audience to make a donation voluntarily. The core of your successful fundraising approach depends on presenting three thoughts, which are related and combine to inspire a person to make a contribution.

1. The Effort is Important – You must convince the prospective sponsor, donor, or contributor of the value of the effort. You must explain to them how important the activity is, how you will benefit from the experience, how the community will gain from your development, etc.

2. The Donation is Valuable – You must convince the prospect of the need to support your effort. The person must feel that it is important that *they* give to your cause. In fact, you must convince the person that they *want* to give to you.

3. Giving is Easy – You must make it easy for the person to give to you. The activity should require little effort, thought, or time. Ideally, you should leave the conversation with a payment, a commitment, or a concrete next step.

Utilizing these three core concepts will lead you to a well-planned and well-executed fundraising strategy. Here are examples of the ideas put to use.

1. The Effort is Important

Describe the activity. Explain what is important about it. Put the event in context of other factors; for example, a leadership program for young people who are traditionally underrepresented in leadership roles in your community. Another example is a program to help educational outcomes in a community where the educational success rate is low. A third example is a program to teach mentoring skills in an area where many young people need mentors.

2. The Donation is Valuable

Connect the event or activity to the person. Explain why it is important for them to be associated with such an activity, or how the event relates to them in some way. The person should feel that you have approached them for a specific reason, and that it makes sense for them to contribute. Perhaps you remind the business owner of the need for networks, or the public official of the need for concrete leadership skills. Perhaps you are telling your boss this will help you become a more productive employee, or volunteer. Perhaps you were inspired by this community leader to set your goals higher.

3. Giving is Easy

Ask the person to write you a check, or give cash. Give them an easy, round sum to contribute. It is even better if you can give them some options to choose from. They can be a “major donor” with a high-level contribution, or a “friend” with a smaller gift amount. This way, they will be able to still support you if they do not wish to give as much as you are asking for. Always try to first ask for as much as you think they can give. Then, make it as easy as possible for them to provide you with the payment. Offer to pick it up from them, or to return to collect it when they are ready. When possible, also seek out persons who can support your effort in a direct way without necessarily giving you money. For example, if you work with or know a travel agency, ask them to give you a “discounted” fare by paying the difference of what you can afford. Finally, if the person cannot commit at that moment, give them time to think it over, but make sure to follow up with them (do not wait for them to contact you), and again, make it easy for them to contribute if they decide to do so.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

A critical component of your effort is identifying potential supporters to approach. Often people only focus on an obvious person, or a very wealthy person. In fundraising, there is a rule: every single person who is not asked to contribute won't contribute. The worst result of asking is that the person does not give, which is the same result as not asking. So ask everyone! And be creative in defining “everyone.”

Begin with key stakeholders:

- **Public officials** – your governor, U.S. senators, U.S. congresspeople, and as many state and local elected officials as you can contact – city council members, school board members, etc. This will usually be done through a letter, unless the public official has an office near you – then an appointment will be more persuasive.
- **College/university administrators** – Often the Dean and President of your school have discretionary funds from which they can draw at will to support their students. The chairs of each department may also have small sums to support supplemental activities of students. For example, if the activity includes political discussions, visit the political science department.
- **Local businesspeople** – First look around your community to see which businesses are doing well, and approach them. You can also go to chambers of commerce for lists of local businesses, and target the larger ones.
- **Civic organizations** – These groups often seek out opportunities to support young people. For example, the Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions Club often have a scholarship fund, and other resources to support participation in conferences and events.
- **Personal connections** – Include people with whom your family interacts, and has a relationship. Approach your family doctor, dentist, and lawyer. Approach the family mechanic, grocery store manager, or dry cleaner.
- **Family friends** – Remember that they are often the people most interested in your success.

A FEW HOW-TO TIPS

- ◆ For those of you who feel very nervous approaching funders by yourself, consider pairing up with another person, or forming a group, team, or “delegation,” and raising funds together.
- ◆ People are more inclined to support an effort when you demonstrate that you are taking it seriously. Create a one or two-page fact sheet explaining your plan. Describe the event, explain your interest in it and what you hope to gain from it, and present your needs in detail.
- ◆ Make sure to keep the fact sheet simple! Write a summary paragraph at the beginning, and provide the information in bullet-point format. Successful people are often too busy to read a lengthy request, so they will not be inspired to support you.
- ◆ Leave a copy of the fact sheet and any supporting material about the event with the prospect whenever possible. Copies of promotional brochures and flyers can help to be persuasive.

- ◆ When making a contact, it is always better to email, fax, or mail a letter first (depending on time), and then follow up with a phone call and/or visit. If you can, schedule an appointment, then send your materials a few days before the meeting. A face-to-face meeting is most important. People feel more compelled to give checks to a person, not to a name and address.
- ◆ Be persistent! If you cannot get through to the person on your first call, keep calling. State your name, leave a message, and take the name of the person with whom you speak. Keep leaving messages; keep trying to get a meeting. People often respond only as a result of numerous inquiries, just to be left alone. But of course, watch the fine line between persistent and annoying!
- ◆ One important aspect of the effort to remember is follow-up. Follow-up is absolutely necessary after the activity. Keep in mind that fundraising is usually not a one-shot deal. You generally want to develop relationships with supporters by maintaining contact with them and making them feel appreciated. One of the most essential parts of a fundraising effort is making sure you thank a supporter after participating in the activity. A way to follow up is to make contact after the event or activity. Provide supporters with information on the activity, describe the experience. This contact can range from a phone call to a printed report. Organizations or groups such as chambers of commerce, Rotary/Lions Clubs, and others that support your effort may want to see a more substantive presentation on the event and your experience; it is often helpful to write an essay, take photos, or document the activity in some other way.

THE BUDGET

Provide a detailed budget of what funds will be used for, list each expense, and include the total. Then, as previously mentioned, consider breaking it down into segments. Two examples of breaking a sum down are by expenses, asking people to “sponsor” a specific part of the activity, or by “donor level,” asking people to contribute different amounts. As you begin to raise money, add statements of how much you have raised and how much funding you still need. People are inclined to contribute when they know others have given.

Sample Expense Budget

EVENT: NCLR Annual Conference and *Líderes* Summit

Travel (usually airfare):	\$400 (estimate maximum cost)
Lodging (\$130 per night x 6 nights (\$780) divided by 4 people in the room):	\$195
Airport Shuttle (\$20 each way x 2)	\$ 40
Conference Registration:	\$250
4 Meals (at roughly \$10/breakfast, \$15/lunch, \$25/dinner):	\$100
Total:	\$985

It is better to keep the total as an exact number; for example, \$985 is better rather than rounding off. This seems more specific and compelling.

Funding Levels

- ★ Large donors – at \$100 each, only 10 people need to commit
- ★ Medium donors – at \$50 each, you need 20 people
- ★ Small donations – at \$25 each, you must persuade 40 people to write checks.

This can be done in a combination, through what is referred to as a pyramid.

3 Large donors at \$100	\$300	□□□
6 Medium donors at \$50	\$300	□□□□□□
9 Small donors at \$25	\$225	□□□□□□□□
16 Friends at \$10	\$160	□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
Total	\$985	

These are some basic elements of fundraising that should provide you with a good reference point for your efforts. With some time, effort, and persistence, you will discover that there are far more resources available than you thought, and that the process is not as difficult as it seemed. Finally, attached is a brief document outlining some typical fundraising ideas and methods to help you get started. Good luck, and happy fundraising!