



Plain Language Edition

How To Make & Run A Fundraising Event

Words to Know

Fundraise

- To collect money from multiple resources to give to another group

Fundraising event

- An activity that brings together people to collect money

Introduction

What is this toolkit?

This toolkit will teach you how to make and run a **fundraising event**. A fundraising event is an activity that brings together people to collect money. Money from this event is donated to a cause. Causes can be supporting a non-profit organization or giving money to someone directly.

Who is this toolkit for?

We created this toolkit to help you host a fundraising event for the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN). You can use these skills for other fundraisers.

What is a fundraising event?

A fundraising event is an event that collects money for an organization or person. People give to organizations because they care about the organization's cause. A cause is a plan for action to make a change.

Anjali and Bex want to help the autistic community. They want to do this by collecting money for an organization with a related cause. The Autistic Self Advocacy Network's (ASAN) cause is for autistic people to live in a world where they are valued equally to non-autistic people.

ASAN uses funds raised to change policies that are unfair to autistic people. Policies are rules or laws that the government makes. Donating money to ASAN helps the organization work towards its cause.

Anjali and Bex agree that donating to ASAN will help the autistic community. They decide to put together an event fundraiser for ASAN.

How to raise funds

When raising money with an event, there are different ways you can get people to give money. Some ways you can raise money with your event include:

- Charging for tickets to enter the event
- Selling things like art, food, clothing, or crafts
- Charging artists and crafters to have tables to sell things at your event
- Holding a raffle where people can win prizes at your event
- Holding a **silent auction** where people can bid money on donated items.
 - A silent auction works like an in person “Ebay” page. Things in the auction are usually laid out on tables so guests can look at them and decide if they want to bid on them. A bid is how much money someone will pay for the item. The person who gives the highest bid at the auction wins that item. Auction items get a starting bid put on them by the event planners. The starting bid is lower than the cost of the item. The cheap starting bid encourages people to bid on the item and try and win it before it reaches its full price. Things in the auction can be donated jewelry, gift cards for small businesses, clothing items, gift baskets or other items. Each item has a clip board in front of it where guests can write down their name and bid. The silent auction ends before the event does, so the people running the event can announce who had the highest bid for each item. People can pick up the auction items they won at the end of the event.

When deciding how you want to raise money, think about what makes sense for the kind of event you are planning and the things you have to help you plan. For example, a silent auction will make more money for your event if the items are donated to the event instead of you buying them. Getting items for a silent auction can be one reason to talk to small businesses about your event. We will talk about reasons to talk with small businesses in the next section.

Think about businesses that might want to work with you.

Local businesses can be a good resource to talk to when planning your fundraising event. Local businesses might be able to donate raffle prizes or silent auction items, be a place where you can have your event, donate food or drinks for your event, or let you hang flyers for your event in their windows.

Keep in mind that not all businesses may have the money to donate things they sell for free. You may still be able to get a discount on items you buy for your fundraising event. If you mention your event is raising money for a nonprofit, the business may be willing to donate items or let you use their space for free.

Script for talking to businesses:

“Hello, my name is [YOUR NAME].

I am planning an event to raise money for the Autistic Self Advocacy Network. The Autistic Self Advocacy Network supports autistic self-advocates through legislative advocacy, education, and trainings. Our event will be on [DATE] at [PLACE] and we are hoping to have a crowd of [NUMBER] attend.

I wanted to reach out to you to see if [business name] would be interested in contributing to our event by [thing you would like them to do].

Example

Anjali and Bex decide to ask the coffee shop that Anjali's poetry group goes to if they can have the poetry night there. The coffee shop is open late enough to host the poetry night. The coffee shop says the poetry night can happen there on a Tuesday because it will help bring in customers. The coffee shop says they need to make \$300 in sales during the event. If they do not make \$300 in sales, Anjali and Bex will need to pay them whatever amount of money is needed to make up that amount.

Most drinks at the coffee shop cost at least \$7. That means that about 43 people will need to buy a drink during the poetry night in order to make the \$300. Anjali and Bex talk about this offer. They are not sure they will be able to give the coffee shop enough customers to cover the cost of the event and still raise money. Anjali and Bex explain this to the coffee shop. The coffee shop understands, but cannot lower their price. Instead, they offer to have a drink special for the month of the event. Any time someone buys this drink, some of the money will go to the fundraiser Anjali and Bex are doing. Anjali and Bex like this offer. They say yes and agree to share this deal as a part of their fundraiser promotion.

Anjali and Bex talk about other places they can hold their poetry night. Their local community center costs \$50 to book a room and another \$50 for a microphone and speakers. Other coffee shops give them offers similar to the first shop. The library where Bex works will let them book a community room for free. They can also rent the sound equipment they need from the library.

What kind of event should you do?

Planning a fundraising event is kind of like planning a party. When planning a party you have to choose a date, a place to have the party, and decide what activities the party will have. You need to make the same choices for a fundraising event. It takes a lot of time and energy to plan an event. You might start planning your event months before the date it happens. It can be a good idea to choose an event that you would enjoy spending a lot of time thinking about and working on.

Here are some ideas for different kinds of events that can be used to raise money:

- **Poetry Night:** A night where people sign up to read poems they have written. People can sign up before the event, or during the event.
- **Art Show:** An event where people send in their artwork and the people running the event choose which art pieces they want to put in the show. People in the community then can come see the art and buy pieces if they are for sale.
- **Crawfish boil, Banquet, Potluck, or Dinner:** These are all events where people pay to eat a meal. The food can be bought from a restaurant or the place the event is, or can be brought by the group. These events may need special permits.
- **Bake sale:** This is an event where people make different types of baked goods like cookies, cupcakes, pies, brownies, and cakes, and sell them. This event may need a food permit.
- **Power Point Night/Special Interest Share/Learning Session:** An event where the host or hosts give a presentation on a topic they know about. Tickets can be sold to attend. This event can have multiple presentations, depending on how long the event is.
- **Drag shows/Drag brunch:** This is an event where Drag artists dress up and perform for an audience that tips them.
- **Bingo night**

These are not the only kinds of events that can be used to raise money. These are some ideas to help you decide what you want to do.

Here are some questions to answer when deciding whether an event idea will work:

- Is there a place where we can hold this event?
- Who can help you plan this event? Are there friends, classmates, or coworkers who might be interested in working together?
- How much money would it cost to make this event happen?
- What things do we need to make this event happen?
 - Do we already have these things?
 - Are there people we can borrow these things from?
 - How much will it cost to rent or buy these things?
- Are other people already doing events like this?
 - Could we work with those people to do our event?
 - Would we have a hard time getting people to come to our event because they have other options?
- How much time each week do we have to work on this event?
- Do you have to have your event happen before a certain date?

There may be events that you want to do, but do not have the time, money, or people to do them. The questions above can help you see what events are both exciting to you to plan and possible with the things you have.

Example

Anjali and Bex want to hold a fundraising event. They think drag shows are really fun, but have not put together a drag show before. They do not know any drag artists they could ask to perform. Anjali and Bex decide not to do a drag show.

Anjali and Bex talk more about things they both like to do. Both of them like poetry. Anjali is part of a poetry jam group. This group meets once a month in a local coffee shop to share their poems with each other. Bex works at the library. Bex meets English students and writers who use the library resources. Bex plans events for teens and for adults at the library. Anjali and Bex decide to do a poetry night. People can sign up to read their poems at the poetry night. People who come to the night can give a donation at the door to come in.

Anjali and Bex chose an event that focused on stuff they were already doing. They already know people who may want to join the poetry night.

What kind of event should you do?

Deciding where to do your event means thinking about questions like:

- How much money do we have to spend on an event space?
- What event spaces are accessible in our area?
- How big a space do we need? How many people do we think will come to our event?
- How can we reduce the changes of COVID spreading from our event?

Holding your event online or in person:

The cheapest way to hold your event may be online. Online events also are the best way to lower the chances of people getting COVID from your event. Online events also let people who do not live where you do come to your event. You might have to get creative when holding some kinds of events online. Drag shows or poetry nights can be done online, but you may have to practice setting up the performers on camera and doing sound checks for music.

Other events, like bake sales, potlucks, or lunches cannot be done online.

If you are doing an in person event, here are some places that might be good to ask:

- Coffee shop
- Restaurant
- Community Center
- University
- Library
- Art gallery
- Bar

Keep in mind that some of these places may need you to pay them to use their space. Restaurants, bars, and coffee shops may need to make a certain number of sales during your event. These spaces may say if they do not make enough money during your event, you will have to pay them to make up for the amount.

Some businesses may be willing to let you use their event space for free or a lower price if you are holding an event for a nonprofit organization that is a 501(c)3. ASAN is a 501(c)3, that means donations to ASAN are tax deductible. A tax deductible donation takes money off of a business or person's taxes. A business may let you use their space in exchange for getting a tax write off. If you plan an event to raise money for ASAN and a business will donate things or space

for your event for a tax receipt, you can have them email ASAN at donations@autisticadvocacy.org to get that tax receipt.

Other places like art galleries may have you pay to use their space.

Community centers and libraries may be free or cheaper to use than private businesses. Rooms at universities may also be free or cheaper to use for students that go to those schools.

You should also think about if your event makes sense to happen at the place you are thinking about. For example, a library may not let you do a band performance because that is too loud.

Reducing the risks of COVID

If you choose to do your event in person, there are some ways to lower the risks of spreading COVID at your event. If your area has low rates of COVID-19 per capita and high vaccination rates, as well as low community transmission, you may be able to hold an in-person event. Given the lower chance of spreading COVID outdoors, an outside event has less risks.

Making sure that people coming to your event:

- Test negative the day of the event
- Wear masks when not eating or drinking at your event
- Have enough room to stay six feet away from people they did not come with

Can all be ways to help lower the risks of spreading COVID at your event. Make sure the posts and advertisements about your event say what the rules about COVID precautions are. You can read more about how to lower the risks of spreading COVID [here](#).

When to start advertising your event

It is a good idea to start advertising your event as soon as you know:

- What your event is
- Where it will be happening
- When it will be happening
- How much it costs to go to your event

Once you have that information, you can start creating event pages online on event sites like Eventbrite, Meetup, and Facebook. You can also start posting about your event on social media like Bluesky, Instagram, and Facebook. You can use websites like Canva to make images for your social media posts about your event.

Whenever you post about your event, make sure those posts tell people:

- The day and time your event happens
- Where your event is
 - If your event is in person, the name and address where your event will be.
 - If you are holding your event online, where people can sign up to join your event.
- What will happen at your event
- How much your event will cost
- What your event is raising money for — in this case for ASAN

This information helps people know if they can go to your event and if they would be interested in going.

Other places you can advertise your event might be:

- Local newspapers
- Local magazines
- In person flyers at businesses

Keep in mind that newspapers and magazines may need you to send in your event information a month before your event happens in order to make it into print. Businesses that are close to your event can be good places to hang flyers in. Businesses where people who you think would like your event go can also be good places to put flyers.

Example

Anjali and Bex ask all the local bookstores in their area if they can hang up flyers for their poetry night. They also put flyers in all the public libraries and in the English buildings of all the local universities.

Finding Volunteers for your event

Planning events can take a lot of work. Sometimes you may need other people's help to get everything done. Asking friends, coworkers, classmates, and family members if they would help with the event can be one way to get volunteers. Asking them to talk to people they know and invite them to volunteer for your event can help you reach more people who might help.

Answering these questions can help you decide if you need volunteers and how many volunteers you might need:

- What are all the tasks we need to do to make this event happen?
- How much time do I have each week to work on this event?
- How much time does this event need each week?
- What skills are needed to make this event happen?
- Do I know anyone who has these skills and might want to help with this event?
- Does your event need guest speakers?
- Do you want someone to take pictures or record video of your event?

Deciding on how many volunteers you need should happen at the beginning of planning your event. This will give you more time to find volunteers.

Do I need a permit?

Events on Public Property

If your event will be on public property, check to see if you need a permit. Even if you are not legally required to get a permit for gathering, you should still get one if possible. There is often a wait to get a permit. Getting a permit can take anywhere from two weeks to over a month. Fundraising coordinators should apply for a permit as soon as possible after deciding on a venue.

Getting a permit is different in different places. Because of this, we cannot include very detailed instructions in this toolkit. To find out your city's permit policy, you can use a search engine on the web and search "[your city or town] + [gathering or assembly permit]". You can also call the local permitting office for help. Here is a sample script for this call:

“Hi, I’m planning an event at [PLACE] at [DAY/TIME]. It is a fundraiser for autistic people. We’ll be reading some statements and holding signs. I’m calling to ask how I can get a permit for this event.”

Remember to take your permit with you to the event. If you can, bring a physical copy of the permit. If this is not possible, have the phone number of the city office that issued the permit. You can call them to confirm that the event is permitted.

Events on Private Property

Events on private property may not require a permit to gather, just the permission of the property owner. It is still important to check with the owner for permit needs. Things that can need a permit include:

- Alcohol
- Fire
- Loud events
- Showing movies

The best way to check if your event needs a permit is to check with your local permitting office.

Private locations can only host so many people at one time. When deciding on your location, check with the owner or person in charge how many people can be in attendance at the event.

Example

Anjali and Bex have decided to host their event at a local coffee shop. The coffee shop is private property. Anjali describes the event to the owner of the coffee shop. The coffee shop owner confirms that they do not need any permits. The owner does say that they can only have 50 people in the location at a time. Anjali and Bex keep this limit considered in how many people they allow to come to the event.

Tips for A Successful Event

When planning an event, make sure:

- Everyone knows what work they need to do and who they are working with
- The time and place your event will happen makes sense for the kind of event you are planning
- Your event space and supplies are big enough for the number of guests you think you will have
- You give yourself at least one month to advertise your event
- You plan out the steps of what will happen during the event
- You know how you will get the donation money to ASAN

For more ideas and information on how to plan an event, please check out our [PADSA resource on event planning](#).