Grassroot Fundraising
Neighborhood Leadership Institute Workshop

For more information, visit citizensnyc.org
Contact Katie, kgrassle@citizensnyc.org | 212-822-9567
Grassroots fundraising is a strategy for obtaining small donations from your neighbors, community members, and other individuals. It is a decentralized, community driven way to support your group’s projects. And it allows your group more independence, creativity, and the ability to work on less traditional issues. Grassroots fundraising is different from grants and scholarships, which rely on one central source of funding – for example, a foundation or wealthy individual.
Grassroots fundraising is undertaken with a genuine desire to empower your community and increase its investment and participation in the project. It is also an educational opportunity – you get to share your passion with family, friends, and neighbors. When you grassroots fundraise, you still have deliverables (things you agree to do/produce for your donors in exchange for support), but instead of reporting back to a foundation on how you use their money, you must report back to your community, resulting in a cycle of mutual support and empowerment.
Attitudes about money vary from culture to culture, but in many, conversations about money are taboo. Our attitudes toward fundraising are part of our larger attitudes about money; it is normal to be anxious about asking for it. But remember that your groups’ purpose and work are bigger than what you are anxious about. Keep focused on your commitment to the cause and that will propel you past your doubts, fears, and anxieties.
• People Can (and Will) Say No

‘No’ happens. Life teaches us this in all kinds of ways. Sometimes universities will tell us ‘No’, potential employers will tell us ‘No’, and potential donors will tell us ‘No’ as well. We often say ‘No’ ourselves. The reason people decline to make a donation varies, but it is never something one should take personally. Finances might be tight this month, someone might be having a difficult day, or maybe someone donated to a worthy cause just last week. Regardless, when someone declines to make a donation, it is not a personal attack on you; if you don’t hear ‘No’ several times a week, you aren’t asking enough people!
• Practice Confidence

Successful grassroots fundraising is overcoming fears about asking for money. Practicing is a great way to prepare and build confidence! Start with potential funders with whom you feel most confident and comfortable and deliver your pitch to them. Confidence is an invaluable skill both in your personal and professional life. Take this as an opportunity to practice it!
• Fundraising is an Exchange

If you are doing good work, then you deserve to raise the money to do it. This is not begging. What groups must do is figure out how to articulate what they are doing so that the person hearing it will want to exchange their money for your work. Don’t think of fundraising as an imposition; think of it as a proposition. You are proposing an exchange (support for service) that provides benefits to both you and your donor and, most likely, your donor’s community. It is your responsibility to make sure your donor understands the ways in which supporting your work positively impacts their life as well.
Before you begin fundraising, you must have a clear understanding of the mission of your group and the project for which you’re seeking funding, and you must be able to articulate that. After all, how can you expect someone to give your group money if you can’t clearly and convincingly explain how you’ll use it?
1. Keep it Short and Sweet

Give yourself a time and/or word limit – 1 minute or about 200-250 words.

2. Keep it Simple and Straightforward

Do not get technical or go into specifics.

3. Practice your Pitch Out Loud

Practicing it in front of a mirror or with friends will help to keep it natural and easier for your audience to connect with you and what you are saying. This will also help you be more confident when delivering your pitch.
4. Show your Passion

Show your love for your cause or your community. A potential donor will remember you if you can show your dedication and energy for your community.

5. Mention Successes

Talk about some of your group’s major achievements and mention a couple organizations you’ve partnered with (if any).

6. Develop a Few Different Pitches

Once you’ve practiced and gotten your elevator pitch down, draft some different versions for different audiences (e.g., local elected representatives, community members, local businesses, etc.)
A clearly articulated and well-mapped out fundraising strategy will make it easier for your group to identify the financial requirements for achieving your group’s goals.
• Fundraising Goal

The best starting point for your plan is with the end point in mind: what is your overall fundraising goal? How much will you raise? This is a number that you come up with based on the needs of your group or your specific project.

• Justification

If the goal answers the question, “How much money do you need?” then the justification answers the question, “Why do you need it?” What will you do with the money you raise?
Methods

How will you achieve your fundraising goal? Go into detail here: identify ideas and methods of fundraising that your group will use and set a monetary goal for each.
• **Timeline**

Having a clear timeline will help you get things done! Create a detailed timeline that will list your overall goals and the smaller steps necessary to achieve them. For example, if you will be holding an art exhibit fundraiser, set dates by when: artists will be identified and confirmed; a venue will be secured; promotion and marketing will begin, etc.
Fundraising may look different based on whether your group is incorporated, a 501c3, or an “unofficial” group. Many of the grassroots groups that we work with are unofficial community groups that improve the quality of life in their neighborhood. These groups may seek funding by asking neighbors, using online fundraising campaigns, or organizing community events. If you are a group looking to grow and raise money from sources such as foundations, city agencies, etc., it may be valuable for your group to think about becoming incorporated or file for 501c3 (nonprofit) status in order to be eligible for this type of funding.
Fundraising for Your Grassroots Community Group

1. Online Crowd Funding

GoFundMe, Kickstarter, Indiegogo, ioby

2. Harvest Fair/Garden Event

If you’re a garden group, you can host a fundraising event where you ask for suggested donations in exchange for produce. If you compost, you can also sell small bags of finished compost for community members to use for their house plants!
3. Partner with a Local Restaurant or Store

A proceeds drive is a way for you to partner with a local business to get them to share their proceeds from a day of sales, a single product, or some other mechanism to support your cause. Talk to your local store manager or owner; this is also a way for the store or restaurant to get more publicity and customers.

4. Raffle

You can partner with a store, restaurant, car lot, or some other entity to obtain valuable prizes that you can raffle off. You would sell tickets and then pick one of the tickets to be the winner of the prize. You could raffle off books, electronic equipment, computers, etc.
5. Silent Auction

A silent auction is much like a raffle except that instead of selling tickets for each item you get people to bid on items – writing down what they are willing to pay for the item. Usually, you start the item at its real value and then people bid more money beyond the price of the item. This is often done at an event like a service fair or fish fry or dance.
6. **Panel Discussion**

This type of fundraiser involves inviting prominent experts to come talk about a topic of importance to your group or issue. You have the person(s) speak and then have a facilitated conversation. The fundraising piece would be to charge an entry fee and you could also charge for refreshments.

7. **Personal Appeal**

This involves asking your friends, neighbors, family members, and others for a contribution to your cause. You can do this in person, via mail, through email, or whatever creative way you think will generate the most money.

8. **Art/Photo Exhibit**

Your community may have local artists, young or seasoned who would love to exhibit their art or photography to help raise money for your cause. You would need to find a place to hold the exhibit and then charge people a nominal fee to attend and let visitors know how their money will help others.