Tips for Chapter Fundraising

Planning
Nonprofit organizations often have limited to no resources, so it’s important to understand your operating costs before you try to implement a fundraising strategy. This guide will help prioritize the various elements of your plan and allow you to manage fundraising goals. Having a thoughtful plan, both short and long term, will help you determine what your fundraising goals should be. Ideally, you should focus first on covering operating cost and then shift to fundraising for specific projects and expanding your capacity.

Where to Start
Start with family, personal friends and close professional colleagues. These people are your personal support system so there’s an increased likelihood that they’ll donate. The next group should be composed of your organization’s members and volunteers. These are your strongest and most dedicated supporters. The last group should consist of those who support NORML’s mission of ending marijuana prohibition. They may not regularly attend meetings or volunteer, but more times than not, will donate if asked.

Asking for Donations
Before you start to ask for donations, you must have a strong case for support that reflects your organization’s work. The more specific the better. When speaking to potential donors and/or sponsors, it’s helpful to highlight past achievements as well as current and future progress, and always have a specific ask. You know the needs of your organization, so if you are asking for a specific amount, stick with it.

Social Media
With the average person spending close to three hours per day browsing Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others, social media can be a powerful fundraising tool. In addition to paying to promote specific posts, you can add a donate button and/or pin a fundraising link to the top of your homepage to increase the likelihood of receiving donations.

Email
Email is responsible for roughly one-third of nonprofits’ online fundraising revenue, so it’s a good idea to include a fundraising ask in all email communications. Regardless if it’s an email about an upcoming event or about pending legislation, consider including something like, “Thank you for your support! Please consider making a donation of $5, $10 or $25 to further our efforts.”

Transparency Attracts Donors
Transparency is a must. Disclosing financial records is a great way to build confidence with potential donors. Donors want to know that your impact, and their money, is being used for
more than a few incremental changes. Posting your organization’s 990N and treasurer’s report to your organization’s website is a great way to accomplish this.

 FAQs

1. Can a NORML chapter accept donations before Form 1023 is approved?
   a. Yes. As a charitable organization registered with the appropriate state agencies, a NORML chapter can solicit donations without a tax-exempt status. However you should inform donors that donations will not be tax-deductible and your application for tax-exempt status has been submitted and is pending approval.

2. What are the requirements for acknowledging charitable contributions?
   a. It’s good practice to thank your donors for any size gift, but surprisingly, a formal, written gift acknowledgement is only required by law for contributions over $250 and quid pro quo contributions. The IRS rules are explained in IRS Publication 1771.

3. How can Action Network increase chapter fundraising?
   a. There are lots of ways - from having the action takers from your links land on your donate pages after a successful message is sent to lawmakers to providing the ability to create fundraising pages, ticketed events, ladder emails, etc. More can be read about it in their Help and Videos section:

4. How much should a nonprofit spend on overhead?
   a. Whatever is necessary to advance the organization’s mission. There is no set percentage that would indicate that one nonprofit is run any more effectively than another. A better gauge of an efficient nonprofit is its impact in the community.