



Training Playbook: Fundraising for Municipal Shelters

Introduction

Nonprofit organizations have been raising money for decades, but the idea of fundraising is still new (and often scary) for many municipal shelters.

It shouldn't be. Pioneering shelters like [Pima County Animal Care Center](#) have proven the power of donors to supplement municipal budgets, maximize lifesaving and achieve animal care excellence. When donors include individuals, businesses and foundations, the whole community becomes engaged. Donors become ambassadors, advocates and activists as well.

If you're not fundraising because of concerns about legal or organizational hurdles, take the time to learn what obstacles you face and how to address them. Then consider using some of our easy-to-implement tactics given in the final section of this playbook. You can do fundraising for your municipal shelter, and you can be successful!

Program Overview

Effective fundraising begins with a clear understanding of your chain of command, along with state and federal laws. This is not something you have to decipher alone; your municipality's general counsel and chief financial officer can assist.

After that, the next crucial step is clearly identifying what you're raising money for, what outcomes you hope to achieve, why those outcomes matter and how potential donors can make a difference by giving. While the "why" may seem obvious to you, it is not obvious to many of the donors you will want to engage. Once you have the internal answers to those questions, build out the external versions of those answers. This becomes your "[case for support](#)."

Program Composition

As mentioned above, before you start fundraising, you'll need to know how state and federal laws apply. Here are some important points:

- In [Internal Revenue Code Section 170\(c\)\(1\)](#), the IRS makes provision for fundraising by government agencies and defines both the qualifications and the agency's responsibilities. Agencies that want proof of their status can seek a [governmental information letter](#).
- Agencies that have not yet decided whether to form a 501c3 (Friends) group can begin to raise funds while evaluating whether such a group supports their strategic plan. Both [Boardsource](#) and [the National Council of Nonprofits](#) provide information on starting a nonprofit. Check with your state Attorney General's Office to ensure that you are aligned with state as well as federal regulations.
- Your Secretary of State's website can provide information on any additional requirements for the handling of charitable contributions and solicitations.
- After reviewing your state and federal guidelines, make sure that you have the staffing, systems and processes to fulfill each requirement.

- Check out the [Donor Bill of Rights from the Association of Fundraising Professionals](#) to learn about donor rights and expectations so that you can fulfill those expectations.
- Discuss all legal and ethical requirements with your municipality's general counsel and chief financial officer and document these discussions in writing.

You will also need to have a clear understanding of your municipal chain of command. And you'll want to ensure alignment on issues such as authorizations, access to information and transparency. Here are some important points:

- Determine what authorizations you will need (initially and ongoing) to raise funds (or items or services) from your community and secure those authorizations.
- Talk openly with your chain of command about the importance of promising donors that funds go directly to the shelter (not the municipality's general fund). Obtain leadership buy-in for one broad shelter fund that you can draw from in order to meet your highest priority needs at the time. Try not to create multiple restricted funds, as this will generate more work for you and your finance people in the long-term.
- Who will have the authority to make decisions about your fundraising? Who can advise? Who must be kept informed? Document decision-making authority, roles and responsibilities.
- You will need to get donor, adopter, foster and volunteer information from your municipality's database or obtain (and maintain) your own database for these records. Our [webinar](#) on making database decisions may help you.
- Transparency in how gifts are used is essential to building trust and philanthropic relationships. Decide what information will be available to the [public](#), where it will live, and who will be accountable for preparing, approving and posting that information. You'll also need to keep it current.
- The flip side of the transparency coin is ensuring that donor information (hard copy and digital) is protected. Be transparent about the [privacy](#) and [cybersecurity](#) you provide to your donors. Build a strong relationship with your information technology team and have productive dialogue about donor needs and rights.
- Does your municipality have a gift acceptance policy? If not, propose one. This kind of document can save you many headaches and it also serves as a communications tool internally. [The National Council of Nonprofits has information on creating a policy, as well as links to sample documents.](#)
- Be sure to set up processes for receiving, processing and saying thank-you for contributions. It's not necessary to reinvent the wheel: Talk with other agencies reporting to your municipality (e.g., library, museum) to obtain their protocols for handling gifts.

Now let's talk about marketing. People who do not know a product cannot buy that product. Similarly, people who do not know about your lifesaving work cannot be

expected to give money to support that work. Your focus should be on inspiring prospective donors and nurturing their desire to make a difference.

As human beings, we're hard-wired to remember and respond to stories. That's great news for you, since barely a day goes by in animal care and control that we don't produce great stories: the shy dog who became more adoptable with enrichment, the next-to-hopeless medical case that triumphed with the help of stellar vet care and donor funds, the animal control officer who rescued a pup from an overflowing drainage ditch, the foster volunteer who has saved more kittens than anyone else.

When you choose to raise funds, you will be crafting and telling your best success stories, as well as listening to stories that will help you decide whether someone is a potential donor. Ultimately, you will be helping donors to make a difference in the story you are writing to save lives in your community. Check out our [direct mail webinar](#) to learn how to use storytelling in a request for funds.

You can get a head-start simply by building relationships with your jurisdiction's public information officer and/or media outlets (radio, TV, newspapers, social media) and getting your best stories out into the community. Check out our webinar [Community Awareness: The Foundation of Fundraising](#) for more information.

You'll want to choose fundraising tactics that reflect your community's sources of giving. In any community, money (or equipment and supplies) comes from one of three sources: individuals, foundations or businesses. In the U.S., individuals give far more than businesses or foundations, but foundations are often easier to find because they have easily accessible guidelines and application processes. Best Friends has an entire series of [resources](#) on how to build relationships with foundations. You can also get to know the program director at your nearest [community foundation](#) and ensure that your agency is on the radar of the foundation.

You can start raising funds from individuals through simple steps like these:

- Add a donation option on your adoption paperwork.
- Add a prominent donation button on every page of your website.
- If your municipality requires licensing or other fees, add an option to donate.
- Create an [Amazon](#) wish list.
- Put a [donate](#) button on your Facebook page. Ask your adopters, foster caregivers and other volunteers to make direct gifts to your agency or launch Facebook fundraisers for the agency.
- Start a [monthly giving](#) program. Monthly giving continues to rise as people become comfortable with "pay as you go."
- Pay attention to the philanthropic habits of individuals and families in your community. Does anyone associated with your agency have relationships with these individuals? If so, could they make an introduction?

- To supplement your municipality's current database of potential donors (adopters, licensees, etc.), collect email addresses, street addresses and phone numbers from community members who engage with you at community events. (Facebook is great, but it will not give you donor contact information.)

Choose the best [tactics](#) for the individuals, businesses and foundations that you have in your community, given what your time and budget allow you to invest. Track your results so that you can evaluate the return on your investment and adapt accordingly.

Conclusion

The charitable nature of American society and the host of fundraising tools and tips now available put successful fundraising within the reach of any municipal shelter. Start with small, manageable activities, get to know the sources of your community's wealth, and build and diversify over time. Don't forget that individuals are the best source of gifts.

Additional Resources

Our [fundraising fundamentals](#) and [fundraising process](#) webinars will provide you with a basic understanding of sources of charitable funds and ways to pursue them.

[Candid](#) (a consolidation of Foundation Center and GuideStar) provides a host of resources on nonprofit formation, performance and evaluation.

The [Lilly Family School of Philanthropy](#) is one of the nation's top resources on all things philanthropic, including courses to expand your understanding of every aspect of fundraising. Your local community or liberal arts college may also have short courses on nonprofit topics like fundraising.