

BIGGER AND BETTER: HOW TO GROW YOUR RUN/WALK

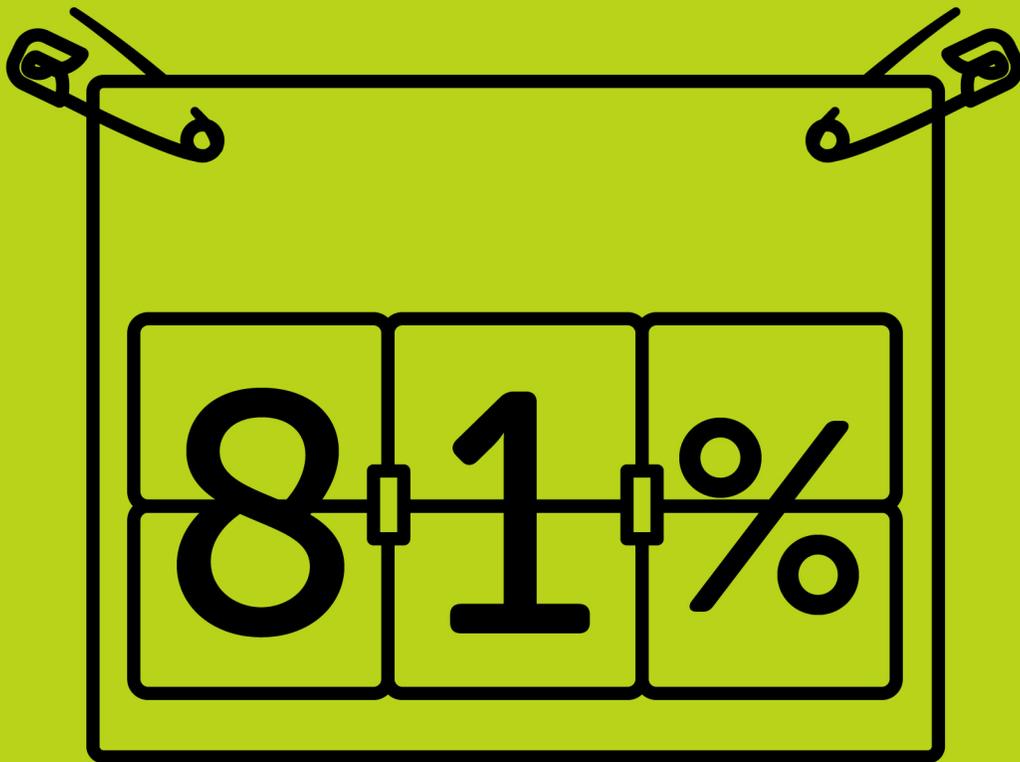


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Introduction

Run/walk events are an important nonprofit tradition, not just for fundraising but also for their ability to rally a community. When you get people together to learn about your cause and take action, it can pay lasting dividends long after runners cross the finish line.

With events like these, which often happen annually, it can be easy to fall into a routine that limits your growth. Growing a run/walk is a conscious choice that requires forethought and smart execution. This guide walks you through several important steps that can help increase your event's attendance, engagement, and revenue.

Read on to learn how to upgrade your event with purpose and planning.

1 | Planning and Goals

Define “Growth”

The first step to growing your run/walk event is identifying what exactly you want to grow. Events like these have value beyond the number of dollars they raise. Run/walks are an opportunity to discover new supporters and donors, partner with businesses, increase awareness in your community, and recruit volunteers. So “growth” may mean that you want to raise overall revenue by 20 percent. But it could also mean doubling the number of race participants, acquiring 50 new donors, or increasing your email list by 100 people.

Some metrics you can target for growth are...

- **Registration fee revenue**
- **Number of peer-to-peer fundraisers**
- **Peer-to-peer revenue**
- **Onsite donations**
- **Sponsorship revenue**
- **Number of participants**
- **Hashtag use and social impressions**
- **New contacts**

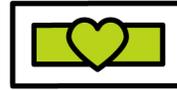
HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR AREAS FOR GROWTH

The metrics you focus on will depend on your event’s past performance and organization’s overall needs. You can begin by asking this high-level question:

What do you want to improve?

- **Fundraising**
- **Event participation**
- **Cause awareness**
- **Your base of supporters**

FUNDRAISING



EVENT PARTICIPATION



CAUSE AWARENESS



YOUR BASE OF SUPPORTERS



You may want to improve all of these areas, but it helps to focus on one or two. From there, you should ask yourself more specific questions to narrow down which metrics to target.

For example, if you want to grow the fundraising arm of your run/walk event, you might ask...

- Do we want to **fundraise for a one-time project or need**?
- Do we want to **kick-start our monthly giving program**?
- What were our **biggest sources of event revenue last year**?
- What **channels of revenue** have the most potential for improvement?

To zero in on the right metrics to track and set goals around, you need to identify what you really want from the event and which areas have potential for growth and optimization.

Set SMART Goals

Whatever kind of growth you want to achieve, it's important to set concrete goals. They help guide your team throughout the event and help you hold yourself accountable and evaluate your efforts afterwards.

The SMART system, created by George Duran in 1981, helps individuals and teams create meaningful goals for real progress.¹

Specific – The goal should deal with a particular metric or area of performance.

Measurable – The goal should be measurable. In other words, success should not be subjective.

Ambitious/Attainable – The goal should push for higher performance while remaining within the realm of possibility.

Relevant – The goal should relate to the overall mission and objectives of the organization.

Time-Based – The goal should have a deadline.

Goals that meet all of these criteria have clear expectations and make it easy to judge whether you have succeeded or not. Here are some examples of SMART goals for a run/walk event.

EXAMPLE OF SMART RUN/WALK GOALS

Now let's look at an example set of goals for a run/walk. Awesome Organization, a fictional nonprofit, is holding their fourth annual 5K run/walk. Last year they raised \$14,000 from

¹ Project Smart, "A Brief History of SMART Goals." <https://www.projectsmart.co.uk/brief-history-of-smart-goals.php>

registrations and an additional \$9,500 in sponsorships. Although it wasn't a prominent goal last year, they also found that they acquired about 100 new contacts from the event.

This year, they want to raise more money and gain new supporters to follow up with later in the year.

Their goals are...

Goal 1: Raise \$20,000 in registration fee revenue.

- **Specific** in its type of revenue.
- **Measurable** in dollars.
- **Ambitious/Attainable**, based on past events.
- **Relevant** because the event is fundraising for programs.
- **Time-Based** because registration ends the day of the event.

Goal 2: Raise \$15,000 in cash sponsorships by the end of race day.

- **Specific** in the type and source of revenue.
- **Measurable** in dollars.
- **Ambitious/Attainable**, based on past events.
- **Relevant** because the event is fundraising for programs.
- **Time-Based** because there is a clear deadline.

Goal 3: Acquire 250 new contacts (first name, last name, and email address) by the end of race day.

- **Specific** in what qualifies as a contact.
- **Measurable** in complete contacts.
- **Ambitious/Attainable**, based on past events.
- **Relevant** because new contacts will help them grow their base of support and fundraise in the future.
- **Time-Based** because there is a clear deadline.

This set of SMART goals will help Awesome Organization as they plan and execute their event. Furthermore, the specificity, measurability, and deadlines of these goals will make it easy to see whether the organization has achieved them.

If you have the staff and resources, your organization may set a greater number and variety of goals. Whatever they are, take the time to define goals with these SMART qualities.

Make a Plan

The final, crucial step for event success is your plan of attack. To gain something more, you have to do something more.

For each of your goals, look at how you performed against this metric in the past and ask,

“ *What will we do differently to improve?*”

Identify the strategies that helped you accomplish what you did and brainstorm new ways to grow and progress.

For example, in order to achieve their new registration revenue goal, Awesome Organization might make these changes to their previous strategy:

- **Increase registration fee from \$30 to \$35.**
- **Send representatives to local events to register runners.**
- **Streamline and simplify the online registration process.**
- **Promote the registration form on social media.**

The bottom line is that each goal should push your organization to improve something that matters, and for each goal, you should outline actionable steps to help you achieve it.

Chapter 1 Takeaways

- **Begin by defining how you want to grow** your run/walk event.
- **Choose a few specific metrics** to grow and base your goals on past performance.
- **Set SMART goals** that clearly define what success looks like.
- **Outline action steps** to help your event reach each goal.

2 | Create a Can't-Miss Experience

Different nonprofits may choose to focus on different fundraising or engagement metrics, but there is one goal that every charity run/walk should share: to give participants a great experience that makes them want to come back.

No matter what areas you want your event to improve in, a fun, enjoyable experience for your community will support your objectives. Not only does the event experience affect your outcomes this year, but it will also influence the kind of buzz and momentum you will have in future years.

Registration and Online Experience

The event experience begins long before the starting gun. Your community will start subconsciously evaluating your event from the moment you announce it. This is why it's a good idea to make your initial promotion as clear as possible.

Most organizations will promote their run/walk event through...

- **Their website**
- **Email**
- **Social media**
- **Local media outlets**



Your community should be able to easily know...

- **What** your event is
- **When** it will be
- **Where** it will take place

Make sure that as soon as you start promoting your event, you have an event page set up with specifics and a registration form.

REGISTRATION FORM

If you want people to go somewhere, you need to give them a clear path. For a run/walk event, that means making it simple to register. If you have an event page, create eye-catching CTAs that lead people to your registration form. You can also link directly to the form from email or social media.

The screenshot shows a fundraising event page for the Selamta Family Project. The page features a header with the organization's logo, social media links for Twitter and Facebook, and a search icon. The main content area has a dark background with a photo of a young girl and the text: "5 million Ethiopian children are orphaned. But when we #Realize5, we know hope is alive." To the right is a logo for the "Selamta Family 5K Worldwide Event, 2016". Below this, the event title "Anywhere Selamta Family 5K" is displayed with the dates "Oct. 5-22, 2016". A progress bar shows a goal of \$10,000 and a current amount of \$3,534 (35% complete). On the right, there are three prominent yellow buttons: "Participate as an Individual", "Join a team", and "Create a team", along with a "Donate Now" link.

When someone arrives at your registration form, make it easy to fill out and submit. While a 5K might require more information than simply making a donation, try to cut out any extraneous or unnecessary questions. Each action you ask people to take gives them another opportunity to lose interest or get distracted.

COMMUNICATE WITH PARTICIPANTS

One piece of information you absolutely must collect, however, is the participant's email address. Not only is this where you can send a confirmation of their registration, but it's also how you can keep them updated with important event information. To keep people excited about your run/walk and incite them to promote it or even fundraise, you need to stay in contact with them.

Consider creating a short email series for the month leading up to the event. Send registrants training tips, course details, and any changes or updates they need to know about. Here's an example of what one of your emails might share:

Hi Tara,

Thanks again for signing up for the Robert M. Jones Foundation 5K on May 24th! With just four weeks until the event, we wanted to send you some details for the big day.

Parking - *Participants and spectators can park in the public lot at Rocky River Park.*

Check-in - *Since you're already registered, just stop by the Check-in tent to pick up your race number and commemorative T-shirt. Check-in will begin at 6:30 A.M. Please check in at least 30 minutes before race time (8:30 A.M.).*

Personal Possessions - *Be sure to lock any personal items in your vehicle or leave them with a friend. We cannot be responsible for items or bags left unattended.*

We can't wait to see you on May 24th! If you want some training tips, check out the resources on our blog.

Sincerely,

Max Ramirez

Event Coordinator, Robert M. Jones Foundation

mramirez@RMJFoundation.org

(655) 555-2204

At the Event

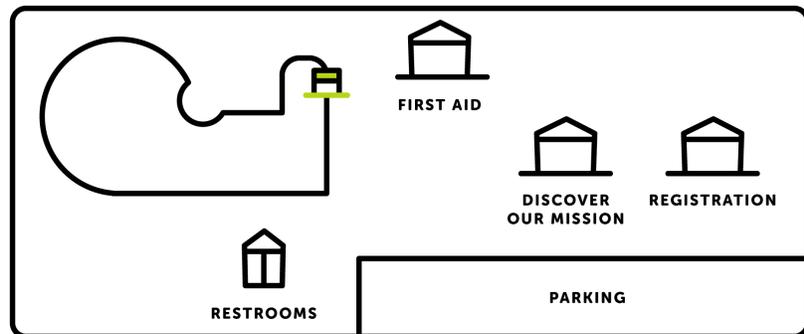
Of course, to create an outstanding event experience, you need to have your run/walk in order on the big day.

NAVIGATION AND INFORMATION

Make sure that your supporters not only know how to get to the event (by car, public transportation, or walking), but also where to go once they arrive. Tell participants ahead of time where they will need to register or pick up their race number.

The easiest way to irritate your audience is to confuse them. That's why it's so important to have clear signage and label important places, like the first aid tent. Try posting or emailing a simple map of your event's layout. Use easy-to-recognize landmarks to orient people.

Remember that volunteers will also need direction as they'll be approached for further information. Arm them with answers to frequently asked



questions and make sure they know whom to contact if they run into trouble.

SAFETY

No good event is unsafe. If you want people to enjoy your run/walk and come back, you need to show that you take care of participants and have thought through any emergencies. The first step is having a safe course for participants to run. Measure your route and test the conditions at the time you plan to start your event. You don't want to send runners on any dark or dangerous paths. And of course, if your event will take place on paved road, make sure you have approval and permits if necessary.

For larger events, you may need to have medical professionals or an ambulance standing by. No matter how big or small, your team members and volunteers should all know whom to contact in an emergency. They should also be able to direct people to the first aid station (although it should still be clearly marked with signage).

Finally, any athletic event like this should have plenty of water available. Place stations along the course and at the finish line.

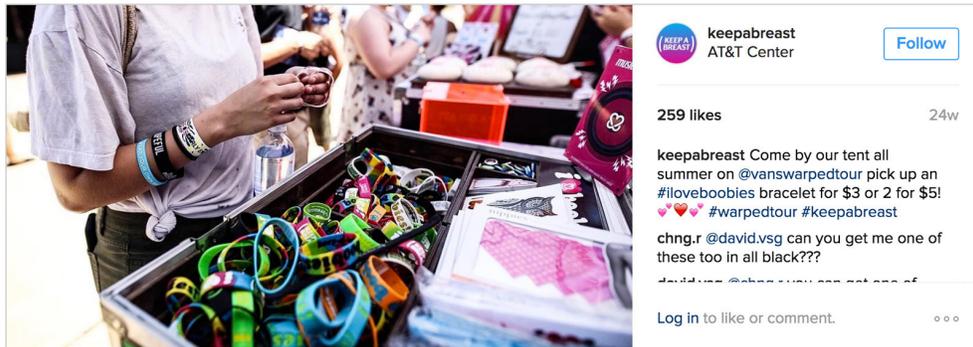
PROMOTE YOUR MISSION

You may choose to make your run/walk event focused on the race itself, but your event is also a chance to engage and educate your community. Have a table or area where people can learn about your cause and programs.

You will probably attract some people who are just looking for a race to run or coming to support a friend. Don't let these potential donors and volunteers slip away. Try to use visual aids or activities to get people engaged with your mission. For example, The Keep A Breast Foundation shows event attendees how to perform a self breast exam to detect masses and irregularities.



You can even sell branded merchandise at your run/walk.



Keep A Breast sells their signature wristbands.

DELIVER DELIGHT

With so many organizations hosting run/walk events, giving participants a little something extra can help you stand out. Ask your team how you can go above and beyond to “wow” your community.

Some ideas are...

- **Get a photographer** to take finish line pictures.
- **Offer a beer garden or food trucks** after the event.
- **Encourage participants to dress up** and give an award for the best costume.

After the Event

Don't forget to engage and communicate with participants afterward. If they had a good time at your run/walk, this is your opportunity to nurture that relationship.

SAY "THANK YOU" AND ASK FOR FEEDBACK

The simplest step to a good post-event experience is to just say "thank you" to your community. Email participants to express your gratitude and post on your social media and website about the event's success.

Within a couple days of your run/walk, send participants a short survey to find out what they liked and didn't like about the event. This doesn't just help you plan for next year, but it also sends your supporters the message that you care about their experience.

FOLLOW UP WITH IMPACT AND REENGAGE

Most charity run/walks have some element of fundraising to them, and an important part of fundraising is following up with your community to show how their support makes a difference. After your event, update participants on your fundraising results and show them the impact that money will create. This step is especially important for organizations who ask participants to fundraise for their cause.

Even those who just came for a good workout will appreciate knowing how they helped your mission. They may even want to get more involved. Make sure people who took part in your event know how else they can make a difference, whether it's through donating, fundraising, or volunteering.

Chapter 2 Summary

- **A great run/walk experience supports fundraising, continued engagement, and just about every other goal you might have.**
- **Make registration an easy process and send participants helpful information** in the weeks leading up to your event.
- **Prioritize organization and safety at your event.** Clearly mark important places and be prepared for any emergencies.
- **After the event, thank participants,** ask them for feedback, and reengage with impact updates and other ways to get involved.

3 | Grow Participation and Engagement

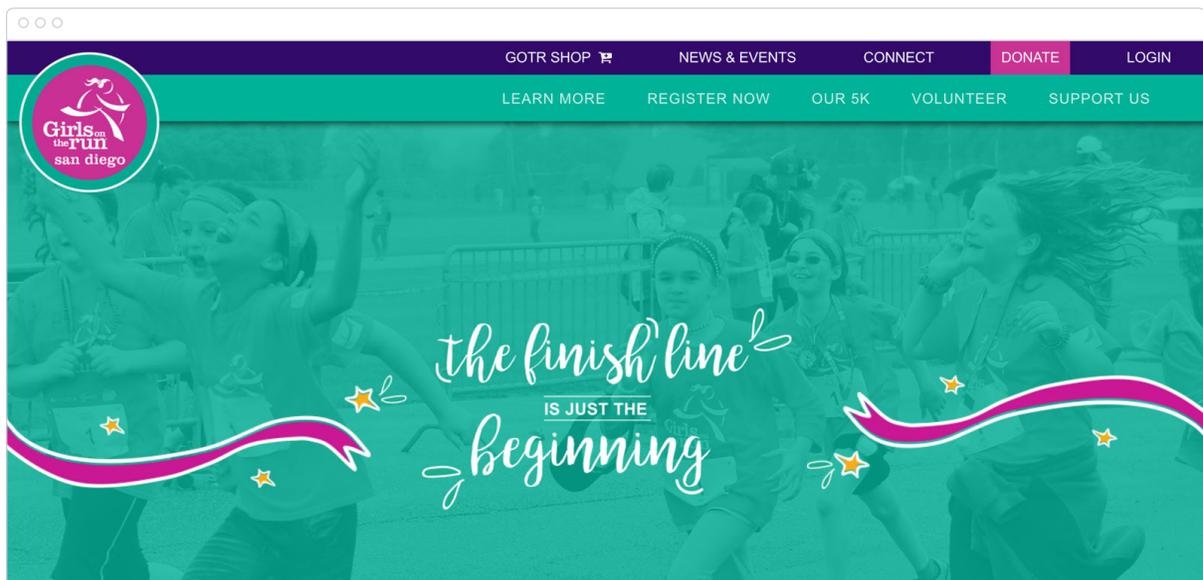
A big part of growing your run/walk event is maximizing participation and engagement within your community. By getting more people involved, you create word-of-mouth and can even raise more funds.

Marketing and PR

If you want people to attend your event, you need to make sure they know about it. In fact, marketing and PR can be nearly as important as the event experience.

CREATE A BRAND AND THEME

There are so many run/walks and endurance events out there that you need people to be able to tell yours apart from the rest. Your brand and theme can show your community what your nonprofit and event are all about.



Girls on the Run hosts 5K events to help empower and celebrate girls. The imagery and language of their event page reflects this mission.

Like any product or event, people form attachments and opinions about your run/walk's brand. Use the imagery, language, and personality of your marketing to remind people of the fun they had in the past. If your event is known for people running in outrageous costumes, for example, include pictures of them in your promotions.

If your run/walk has been around for several years, you may already have some brand recognition to fall back on. You can apply the event's branding to your emails, website, and social media profiles. By promoting the event across all your communication channels, you ensure that your supporters know about it, no matter how they engage with your organization.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media can be a powerful tool for spreading awareness and generating excitement for your event. One way to tap into this power is to create a fun hashtag for your run/walk. Start using the hashtag in the weeks before and encourage your supporters to post about their training or reasons for participating. This gets participants interested and excited, but because they are sharing your hashtag and event with their network, it can also recruit others to get involved.

Pay attention to which social media platforms your audience is active on and focus your efforts there. There's no need to invest a lot of time and effort into Snapchat if your community is much more active on Instagram and Facebook.





Feature fun moments and participants from past years of your run/walk on social media.

Before, during, and after your run/walk, engage with the people posting about your organization and event. When you share, like, and respond to posts, you strengthen your bond with participants and encourage them to keep posting.

GETTING PUBLISHED

Getting news outlets and community publications to promote your event is also a huge marketing asset. Just like you should promote your event across your organization's communication channels to reach different parts of your audience, coverage in other outlets helps you reach new audiences.

You can send out a press release about your run/walk, but you're more likely to receive a response if you reach out to people personally. By email or phone, get in touch with reporters and community leaders and ask them to plug your event. Promise to promote their story and offer an interview or images to use.

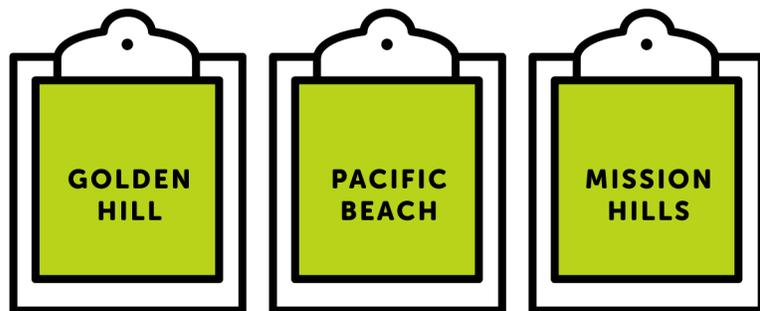
Some media outlets to approach are...

- **Local TV news stations**
- **Radio stations**
- **Community publications about athletics, families, or entertainment**
- **School and church newsletters**

Community Ambassadors and Teams

In order to recruit participants and spread your message, you will need a few dedicated community ambassadors. Reach out to your most dedicated volunteers and donors and ask them to be leaders in promoting your event. With helpful communications, encouragement, and clear expectations, a few of your die-hard supporters can make a big difference in the turnout and fundraising results of your event.

The YMCA of Central Maryland has successfully used this model to grow their annual 5K run/walk. Several weeks before the event, Y of Central Maryland recruits community ambassadors from different neighborhoods and asks them to register a certain number of people.



The organization stays in close contact with their ambassadors to help them succeed. These volunteers help the nonprofit generate new support and keep lots of people engaged in the weeks leading up to the run/walk.

Chapter 3 Summary

- **Maximizing participation and community engagement** is an important part of growing your run/walk and it starts with spreading awareness.
- **Create a brand or theme for your run/walk** and incorporate it into your communications across all channels. Use social media to interact with your audience and encourage engagement.
- **Reach out to community publications and news outlets** to reach new audiences.
- **Dedicated supporters can become community ambassadors**, who commit to recruiting participants and promoting the event.

4 | Peer-to-Peer Fundraising

Although run/walks can come with sizable operations costs, these events can still be effective revenue sources for your mission. Most events charge some kind of registration fee, but the advent of peer-to-peer fundraising allows nonprofits to do even more with their run/walks.

Peer-to-Peer Basics

Peer-to-peer fundraising allows your supporters to fundraise on your behalf. While an individual donor may have very limited giving potential, peer-to-peer allows them to mobilize their friends, family, and community.

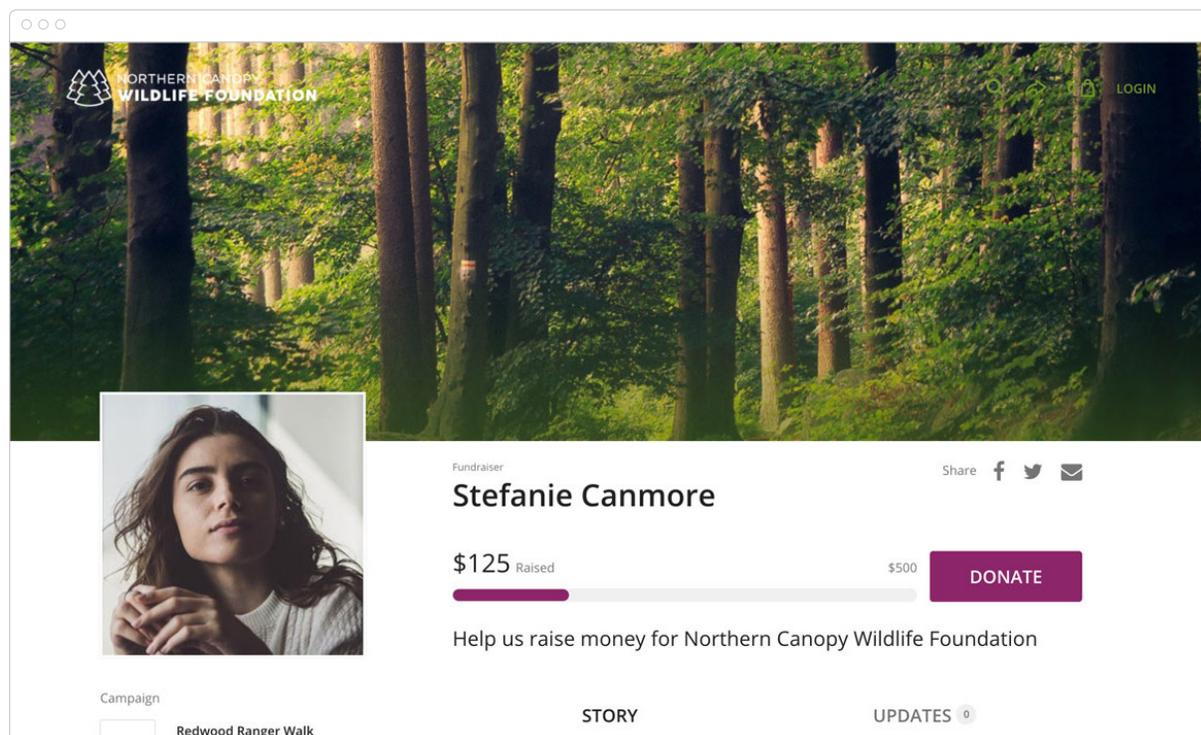
The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a fundraising page for 'Run For Hope'. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the event name 'RUN FOR HOPE' in an orange box, a search icon, a share icon, and a 'LOGIN' link. Below the navigation bar is a large banner image of runners at a marathon. The main content area features a profile for 'Danny Slavens', a fundraiser. To the left of the profile is a photo of a family. To the right, it shows '\$680 Raised' out of a '\$1,250' goal, with a progress bar and a 'DONATE' button. Below this is a text description: 'Help us raise money for The Dream Center's over 750+ residents. We provide food, housing, education, counseling, & medical for those less fortunate. Help me Help others!!'. At the bottom left, there is a 'Campaign' section for 'Run For Hope' with a goal of '\$2,327 / \$100,000'.

By appealing to their networks for donations, these fundraisers can often collect far more money for your cause than they could donate themselves. The individual gains the satisfaction and pride of making a difference in your mission, and your nonprofit receives more donations.

The long-term value of peer-to-peer, however, lies in its ability to expand your donor base. Most peer-to-peer fundraising is now done online, and the nonprofit not only receives the gifts, but also the contact information of the people who donated. You can apply peer-to-peer fundraising to all kinds of campaigns, but it's a particularly good fit for endurance and run/walk events.

Registration with Fundraising

You don't have to make peer-to-peer fundraising mandatory to reap some of the benefits, though. Classy's Registration with Fundraising campaign allows participants to register with a standard fee, but it also empowers them to fundraise if they wish. After registering, Classy automatically creates a fundraising page for supporters to ask their friends and family for donations.



The screenshot shows a fundraising page for Stefanie Canmore, a fundraiser for the Northern Canopy Wildlife Foundation. The page features a background image of a forest. The fundraiser's name, Stefanie Canmore, is prominently displayed. Below her name, it shows that \$125 has been raised out of a \$500 goal. A progress bar indicates the current amount raised. A purple 'DONATE' button is visible. The page also includes social media sharing options (Facebook, Twitter, Email) and a 'LOGIN' link in the top right corner. The campaign is identified as 'Redwood Ranger Walk'.

NORTHERN CANOPY WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

LOGIN

Fundraiser

Share   

Stefanie Canmore

\$125 Raised \$500

DONATE

Help us raise money for Northern Canopy Wildlife Foundation

Campaign

Redwood Ranger Walk

STORY

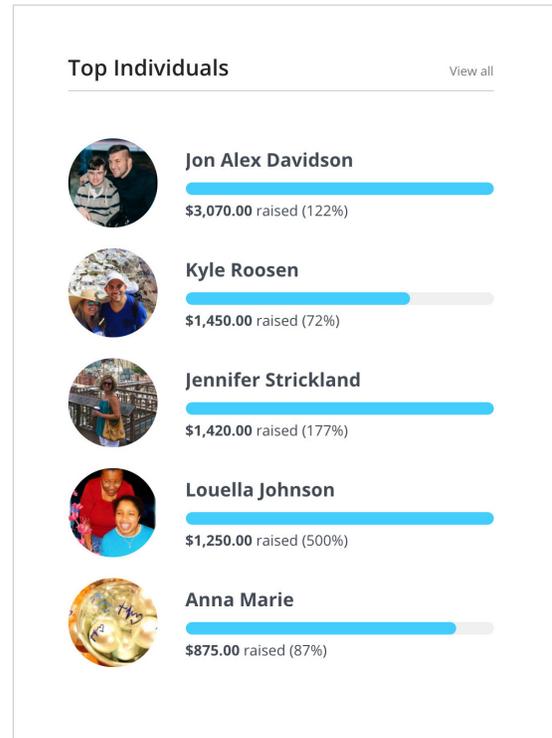
UPDATES ⁰

Registration with Fundraising makes it easy for your supporters to get started with peer-to-peer fundraising, but it's important to educate and encourage them throughout the campaign. Once someone sets up their fundraising page, send a series of emails with tips and tricks to help them reach their goal. You can even send sample text they can use in email and social media appeals.

To motivate people to fundraise up until the day of your run/walk, you can even offer a prize for the participant who raises the most.

Chapter 4 Summary

- **Peer-to-peer fundraising** is one of the most powerful tools to increase your run/walk's revenue.
- **Registration with Fundraising** makes it easy for anyone who registers for your event to customize their fundraising page and collect donations.
- **Remember to encourage fundraisers** with helpful tips and reminders in the weeks leading up to your event.



The Tim Tebow Foundation's campaign page highlights top fundraisers in real time.

Conclusion

A run/walk can activate your supporters, recruit new donors, and raise much-needed funds. To grow your event, you must set effective goals, create a great experience, and promote the run/walk within your community. And now, peer-to-peer fundraising empowers each participant to raise money and appeal to new audiences for your nonprofit.

Use the strategies in this guide to consistently grow your event each year. Even if your run/walk is already a tradition at your organization, you can still optimize and improve it.

The Right Person at the Right Time

The process of securing a sponsorship can span several months. The sooner you can identify the sponsorship decision maker at the corporation, the sooner you can move the process forward and secure the funding you need.

One technique to reach the decision maker is to cast your net and reach out to as many people as possible. Charina refers to this tactic as "the hustle."

"I sent the same deck, the same email with slight variation, to six people in the company—one in finance, one in marketing, one in product, etc. Eventually it landed on the decision maker's desk about four times and they're like, 'Okay, I have to call them back because it's landed on my desk so many different times.' You have to talk about everything all the time to everybody." — Charina, COO Movement

THE AVERAGE
\$100,000 SPONSORSHIP
CAN TAKE AROUND
6-9
MONTHS
TO ARRANGE.



Timing can also make or break your sponsorship opportunity. The average \$100,000 sponsorship can take around 6 to 9 months to arrange.³ Start nurturing your connections as soon as you've planned your campaign goals to avoid losing precious time.

The time of year, specifically, is also something you should keep in mind as you're reaching out. Many corporations make sponsorship decisions in the last quarter of the year. In fact, because they make decisions for their sponsorship plans for the next year at the end of the previous, you can use this to your advantage by offering a menu of sponsorship options.

For example, if you know your nonprofit will be running a spring 5K, hosting a fall gala, and running a #GivingTuesday campaign, present them with multiple options for engagement and sponsorships so that they can choose the events or campaigns most aligned with their marketing objectives.

How to Craft a Perfect Pitch* <http://www.bizbash.com/selling-sponsorships-nyork/story/6778/#.Yy1DuzNVh8c>

Outreach

While there exists no one "correct" method to communicate with corporations, standard conversations tend to evolve in the following order:



INITIAL CONTACT



PITCH DECK



PRESENTATION



PROPOSAL SUBMISSION



FOLLOW-UP

1. Initial email or call
2. Pitch deck/value proposition submission
3. In-person or virtual meeting/presentation
4. Submission of specific proposal, catered to potential partner's needs/objectives
5. Follow-up

The key to navigating interactions with your contacts at a company is to remember that them with a business opportunity. To sustain their attention, you need to create connections designed with their goals in mind.

 The Nonprofit's Guide to Pitching to

Classy

How to pitch corporate sponsors

Learn about different kinds of sponsorships, how to prospect ideal partners, and how to persuasively pitch.

[The Nonprofit's Guide to Pitching to Corporate Sponsors](#) →