

## Fundraisers

*Most youth leaders will agree that fundraising is the least fun part of their job.* It can be monotonous to go to your congregation year after year asking for money for camps, mission trips and events. Fundraising can be a true nightmare and a big producer of stress, especially when things get messy, disorganized, or worse; you lose money when your goal was to raise money. However, this does not have to be the case. Fundraising can be easy, fun, and purposeful. Wouldn't it have been nice if someone with lots of experience with fundraising had just told you from the start which fundraisers work and which ones do not? As can be expected, there are more losers when it comes to fundraising than there are winners. Below are fundraisers that will give you the most bang for your buck and the ones you should skip.

### Winners: The Ones That Work

1. **The Support Wall:** This fundraiser is amazing! There are not enough words to describe the magnitude of it. Plus, the amount of money donated with very little output from the youth leader is incredible. This fundraiser is adapted from the fundraiser deemed, "The greatest ever" (See Wall-O-Money on Google). The original premise of the fundraiser is simple. Place 200 brightly colored envelopes on a bulletin board marked \$1-\$200. Invite congregation members to support the youth based on what they can afford to give, anywhere from \$1 to \$200. Congregation members can remove the envelope from the bulletin board, insert cash or check in the envelope, seal it, and place it in the offering plate or in the appropriate staff person's box. (Remember to leave the envelopes unsealed when you hang them on the wall.) In order to make this fundraiser more special, put a little creativity into each envelope. Invite students to write stories about their experiences in youth group with camps, service projects, mission trips or Bible study. In addition, put a picture of the student who wrote the story in the envelope as well (bonus points if they are doing the activity they wrote about). You might want to get creative and stuff the envelopes with a photo magnet that says, "Please Pray for Youth Missions". Students can be invited to stand near the wall on Sunday mornings and cheer as people take envelopes. It is also a good idea to put a fun thank you banner behind the envelopes so that as they are removed, a message appears to the congregation. Be creative and intentional about how you handle this fundraiser so that anonymity can occur if your congregation wishes to keep amounts donated private. Be sure to include instructions in the envelope on how to turn it in. If your congregation cannot afford to give such large amounts, put up multiple envelopes with smaller amounts written on each. If done in its traditional form, this fundraiser can raise over \$20,000. The most we have raised is \$6,800, which was twice what we usually raised in a year of multiple fundraisers. We now do this fundraiser every other year as a staple. Here are some pictures of what this fundraiser looks like set up:

- a. **Give people an idea of what's inside each envelope!**



- b. **Decorative banner behind the wall giving thanks and showing total funds raised.**



- c. **Wall completely set up with 200 envelopes.**



- Brunches:** Brunches (or any other meal) are a great way to raise money and incorporate all facets of your congregation in one fell swoop. This fundraiser works excellently if you have a lot of willing parents. Start by sending out an email to all the parents of youth asking them to donate prepared breakfast casseroles, pastries, and fruit. Once you have enough food, invite the congregation to attend a brunch hosted by the youth group after a service on a Sunday morning. Youth can show up early to do any last-minute food preparations, make coffee and juice and serve food and drinks. An offering basket can be placed at the door with a couple cheery youth to collect donations. This can also be a great pre-mission trip fundraiser as you decorate according to the locations and themes of your mission trips!
- Geranium Sales:** The secret to flower sales is buying wholesale. A nice geranium at the grocery store can run a person \$4–5 dollars. A nice geranium wholesale can be under \$3. If church members are going to buy annuals for their garden for \$4-5 dollars, they might as well buy them from the youth group. Youth can pre-sell flowers to congregation members or you can order a large assortment and spontaneously sell them on a Sunday morning (with advanced advertising of course). Offer a price break when multiple flowers are bought. This is a great fundraiser to do in early May before or on Mother's Day.

4. **Threads of Hope:** This fundraiser was discovered at a Youth Specialties convention in 2010. Threads of Hope exists to support at risk women and children around the world (<http://www.threadsofhope.com.ph/>). Beneficiaries make beautiful friendship bracelets that are donated to Threads of Hope to sell. Threads of Hope, then distributes the bracelets to youth groups for fundraising. Youth can sell the bracelet for whatever price wanted but agree to give \$1 for every bracelet sold back to Threads of Hope. In other words, for every bracelet sold, \$1 goes back to the women and children in need. Students can do this as an individual fundraiser or as a group effort. It's a worthy cause and a big hit! Once a few kids at school have one of the handmade wonders, everyone in school will want to buy one from your students!

## Losers: The Ones You Should Skip

1. **Discount Cards:** Any fundraiser that requires you to pay a percentage of your profits to a parent company is a bad idea. These fundraisers can be specifically awful if you are required to pay for the cards BEFORE you sell them. This is a fundraiser with little pay off, little incentive to customers and a big opportunity to lose money.
2. **Car Washes:** The point of a fundraiser is to do something creative to set yourself apart. On any given sunny Saturday there will be 2–10 car washes on busy streets in your city. Your potential profits automatically go down with every additional car wash happening simultaneously. You also have to find a prime location to use and get permission from the business to use their water source for the day. Car washes can make decent money, but it's not the most effective method.
3. **Rummage Sales:** Rummage sales are similar to car washes as they have the potential to make money. However, they are not the most efficient route. Rummage sales require gathering many donated items, sorting junk from keepers and many hours of labeling items for purchase. In addition, the day or weekend of the sale must be stocked with many volunteers for organizing and serving as cashier. And then comes the question of what do you do with all the stuff that doesn't sell? Then you could have the nightmare of transporting leftover items to a donation center. Unless your congregation has a strong history of running rummage sales, don't start a new tradition.
4. **Flamingo-ing:** At first glance the flamingo fundraiser sounds awesome. It looks pretty cool too. The basic premise is that you sell congregation members flamingos that will be placed on anyone's lawn of their choosing for \$25. For \$35, anyone can buy insurance that will guarantee the flamingos never end up on their lawn. When someone pays to have flamingos put on a person's lawn, but the target person also purchases insurance, the youth make \$60, and you do nothing. The fundraiser starts to become a headache when nobody buys insurance. Every couple of days the flamingos must be moved from one house to the next. The sooner the flamingos get moved, the better, as it prevents theft. You have to find volunteers to move the flamingos, or you have to do so yourself. You also have to figure out the best route possible for the flamingos to migrate, otherwise you will be wasting a lot of gas driving all over town for a couple of weeks. Getting the youth involved in this fundraiser beyond selling the flamingos at church is a hassle due to their busy school and activity schedules during the week. When you take into consideration the cost of acquiring the flamingos (\$25 per 2 birds) and the amount of money that can be made off this fundraiser, it requires way more effort than it does rewards.
5. **Can Drives:** A can drive can be a winner or a loser. If you live in a state that offers redemption value for cans and bottles, it is possible to make a lot of money gathering donated containers. That is, if you are willing to load up your car with cans and bottles, drive to a recycling center and feed the cans one at a time into the machine. In addition, you must be willing to put up with the occasional jammed machine and the daily can limit per person. Also, after you think you've turned in the last of the cans, one more congregation member will show up with a truckload of donations and ask, "Is it too late to turn in cans for the youth?"

This fundraiser generally works better for individuals, except if you live in Oregon. Oregon now has several facilities called, Bottle Drop (<http://www.bottledropcenters.com/home>), which make this fundraiser exceptional. For a 45-cent processing fee per bag, Bottle Drop will do all the counting and sorting for you. All you have to do is open a Bottle Drop account, fill up your bags with bottles and cans and turn the min (up to 2 bags per day or 10 bags per day with an appointment). All the money is placed into your account. You just swipe your Bottle Drop card and walk out with your money. The processing fees are even debited from the account, so there is no financial obligation on your end. The bottom line, before you do a can drive; evaluate the commitment you are willing to make.

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