

# Sage Nonprofit Solutions

## Five Tips for Race Fundraising Success

A participant's perspective



Charity races are a great way for nonprofits to amplify their cause to a wider community and to raise money. The community loves to participate in charity races—it makes people feel good emotionally and physically. During peak race season, it's a rare weekend where one cannot find a charity race in which to participate. In fact, it's getting more and more common for cities in every climate to have at least one holiday run.

From a participant's perspective, here are five key tips you can do to turn avid racers into fans for your cause.

## 1. Prepare, Prepare, Prepare: Start Planning Early

Racers love a well-organized event, and for some it's the first impression of your organization. From setting the course to counting down to the start, it's never too early to begin planning. Areas on which to focus include the anticipated number of participants, cost of the packets, advertising, weather conditions, and technology considerations for registration, communication, and tracking race time.

There are many things to consider when setting a date for your race. While weather is never completely predictable, the most comfortable and largest attended races are either in the Spring or Fall. Also, be sure to work backwards from the date you choose, giving your organization and your teams plenty of time to be successful. For example, four months is not too early to open registration, and many organizations which ask participants to raise money on their behalf have a six month registration window. What lead time would you need to ensure your participants have the best registration experience possible?

Many races hold a traditional Saturday morning race. Why not set yourself apart and potentially draw additional participants by holding your event on Friday or Saturday evening? Don't forget to check other events, including cycling, swimming, and triathlons as many racers participate in cross endurance activities. Your local run and cycle shops usually keep an active calendar.

## 2. Set a Course

Athletes love a good course—one that offers a challenge for a variety of fitness levels, good terrain, and nice scenery. A well-planned and enjoyable course will be used by many participants to train for your athletic event, so consider accessibility, traffic patterns, and overall appeal of your planned course. Select a course route that is not only convenient, but also a pleasure to run, walk, or ride anytime—not just during race day!

If your nonprofit can arrange it, cast a wide net for your participants. While the most popular charity races are 5Ks, consider adding a 10K and a Kids K. While managing multiple distance races may be more logistically challenging, catering to a variety of fitness levels will increase participation and encourage family engagement with your cause. Arrange all the different courses to have the same start and finish line, so supporters who are not racing will be able to cheer on all of the racers from one location.

For those athletes who'd like to use your charity event as training for more intense races, accuracy of the course distance is a real value. Do not use a car odometer because you'll only be accurate within 1/10 to 2/10 of the stated distance. You can be more precise by using an odometer designed for a bicycle, measuring down to 1/100's of miles. Better yet, get your course certified by the USA Track and Field (USATF, <http://www.usatf.org/events/courses/>). To do so, you must measure the course with a Jones-Oerth counter attached to the front wheel of a bicycle. Course certification is great for garnering the attention of serious, competitive athletes in your community and will raise the profile of your event in local media, increase participation, and raise more awareness for your cause.

Finally, pay attention to elevation gain, traffic, road conditions, and any other factors that could potentially make participating in your event strenuous for the less physically able. While athletes are a great group of participants to recruit, you will want to open the opportunity to your current constituency as well. You may also benefit from contacting a local running or walking club for suggestions of routes that may fit your participant's ability levels.

### 3. Choose Technology Wisely

Online registration is key to successful charity races, as it provides a quick and easy method for participants to make their commitment to your event. Consider a vendor that specializes in event management software and online event registration, as they should have pre-made templates you can modify to suit your own event, saving you time and effort. Your online registration form should be available from your website, your page on Facebook, or anywhere your supporters might find you online.

To ensure a great experience for your participants, remove as many barriers as possible to completing the registration process. Use forms that are simple to complete yet powerful enough to give your organization all the registration information you need. Collect not only contact data on your form, but other relevant information as well, such as t-shirt size. You also want to be sure your technology includes a merchant gateway so you can securely collect payment at the time of registration.

Additionally, you want to ensure you can capture the registration data in a database so you can run reports, email participants, and process cancellation refunds if needed. You also need to make sure you can email participants in the event your logistics change. Having email addresses also allows you to add participant information to your fundraising database.

### 4. Market, Market, Market

Get the word out! Many of the most effective places will run your race announcement for free. This includes local running stores, websites, and newspapers. Many television and radio news programs also offer the opportunity for local nonprofits to publicize their events. No matter where you advertise, be sure to include the name of the race, date, time, place, charitable beneficiary, directions for registering, and contact information.

Don't forget about social media. Facebook and Twitter can be your best friends for viral marketing. Donors are much more likely to give to a cause when asked by family or friends, so make sure links to registration forms are easy for participants to share directly in their own social networks. Allow supporters to monitor the success of their efforts with online thermometers or status bars that update automatically whenever a contribution is made.

It's true that runners love to run and cyclists love to cycle, but incentives are great motivators. Everyone loves to get the "stuff" that comes with organized events. From the souvenir shirt to the bib number, participants feel satisfaction of having proof of completion. Many participate in races year after year just because they enjoy collecting the unique, limited-edition t-shirt included in their "race packet!"

And don't forget to include interesting things in your race packet—discount coupons to local smoothie shops, athletic stores, health clubs, or spas are popular items. Many times the charity can get these items donated or at a reduced cost in return for the advertising. Make the packet a true "goodie bag" to entice the racer to register year after year, and remember to consider what you can do to make your packet unique.

## 5. Don't Forget Race Necessities

People love to feel a part of something special, and this is your chance to make each participant have a memorable experience. Generating excitement at the start of the race is a must. Make sure you have a clear starting line with a countdown clock, and have a bull horn so you can start your race on time. Also, consider providing entertainment and engaging with a local radio station to make announcements, as many participants enjoy the local touch of celebrities and activities for their families to partake outside of the race itself.

Along the race course, make sure you have plenty of water stations. High school cheerleaders and athletes make a great addition to cheer your racers on. Music is a great motivator and local musicians might want to join in the excitement. In addition, you want to ensure you have people monitoring the course to keep your racers safe.

After the race is celebration time! Make sure your finish line is appropriately marked and festive. Consider a finish chute consisting of a rope/flag border about six feet wide and long enough to accommodate the maximum number of runners you think will be finishing within any one minute period in your race. Keep the finish exciting for participants by having racers announced as they cross the finish line. Provide water bottles as people finish the race; don't make them search for water.

And don't forget that your participants are probably hungry. Most races will provide fruit (bananas, cut oranges), bagels sliced in half, or cookies. Many sports-food vendors like to test their latest products at events, so ask them! Additionally you might consider getting sponsorship from massage schools or chiropractic practices. Who doesn't like a good fifteen minute massage after a 5K run? These activities will help turn your race event into an after-race party!

## Conclusion

Holding a charity race can be daunting and rewarding. From start to finish, there are a million little details to which you must attend. However, these five steps will help you anticipate the needs of your participants and supporters and provide an excellent race experience to keep attendees coming back year after year.



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