



# AJWS Volunteer Corps Fundraising Tips

## CONTENTS

- Sample Letter
- A Few Fundraising Ideas
- Tips for Successful Fundraising
- “Troubleshooting Fundraising”
- Links to additional ideas and resources

## SAMPLE LETTER

Dear X,

I would like to share with you the exciting news that I will be volunteering with American Jewish World Service as part of AJWS Volunteer Corps. I will be traveling to **COUNTRY** to volunteer with a community-based non-profit organization. During my time abroad, I will be donating my time to assist a local organization working against poverty, hunger and disease. I anticipate a very challenging experience but I hope to make a contribution to advance the quality of life in the community where I will be living and working.

My volunteer work is being organized by American Jewish World Service (AJWS). AJWS is an international development organization motivated by Judaism’s imperative to pursue justice. AJWS is dedicated to alleviating poverty, hunger and disease among the people of the developing world regardless of race, religion or nationality. Through grants to grassroots organizations, volunteer service, advocacy and education, AJWS fosters civil society, sustainable development and human rights for all people, while promoting the values and responsibilities of global citizenship within the Jewish community.

As part of my assignment, I am working to educate people about the importance of global justice work by asking my friends and family to support my volunteer placement. If you could please make a gift of **\$50** to help make my volunteer service possible, I would be extremely grateful.

I will be following up with a phone call to encourage you to think about supporting me in my volunteer work.

I would be happy to provide you with any additional information about AJWS if you are interested. You can also visit their web site at [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org). Thank you very much for considering my request.

Warmest regards,  
**[YOUR NAME HERE]**

(It helps to personalize the letter with a short note at the end, such as: *“Please join me in supporting this important work of Tikkun Olam.”*)

*This is just one sample letter. There are many other possible ways to present your request; proceed in the way in which you feel most comfortable.*

## **A FEW FUNDRAISING IDEAS**

### **1) Letter to friends and relatives**

One of the most effective ways to do grassroots fundraising is a letter-writing campaign to as many people as possible, including friends, relatives, former teachers or professors and former co-workers. Make a list of everyone you know and then decide who you should remove from that list. You should try to send a letter to 100 or more people. Send a detailed letter explaining the program and what you hope to accomplish during your time abroad.

Ask for a specific amount of money - \$50 is a nice round figure; for older, more established relatives or friends, \$100 is not too much to ask; for peers and fellow students, perhaps \$25 to \$35 is all they can contribute. You may want to break your potential supporters into two, three or more groups, sending a custom letter to each group, based on your relationship with them or the amount of money you are asking for.

A very successful fundraising tool is a follow-up phone call. You can start by asking: "Have you received my letter about supporting the global justice work of AJWS?" If they have, ask them to consider supporting you. If they say yes, ask them how much they are planning to give so that you have a concrete sense of how close you are to reaching your goal.

If you send out 100 letters asking for \$50 on average and one-half respond, you have raised \$2,500. Often people will be very inspired by what you are doing and may want to contribute more.

### **2) Talk to EVERYONE**

In a similar vein, talk to \*everyone\* about what you are doing and your fundraising goals. People only give when they know you are fundraising, and you may be surprised who and how many people are excited to help out.

### **3) Form a support group and get your friends involved**

One of the best support structures is to have the people closest to you act as your fundraising committee. Have them write letters on your behalf and distribute pledge forms to their co-workers, immediate family and good friends.

### **4) The chain letter**

A variation on numbers 1 and 2 is to write special letters to close friends and relatives asking them to help you garner support. You should call them about this first, then send them a letter with a number of sponsorship forms and ask them to recruit five to ten other sponsors for you. You can also draft a letter from your parents, for example, to their friends. This makes it easy for them to act on your behalf. Make sure that those fundraising on your behalf have the necessary information about the program and AJWS.

### **5) Approach your synagogue**

Go to your synagogue directly and ask for a specific amount in exchange for an informative presentation about your experience when you return. All synagogue Rabbis have a discretionary fund for this purpose. You can also call other synagogues in your community and offer to speak with the congregation or Sunday school about your experience in exchange for an honorarium.

### **6) Community groups**

Civic groups such as the Jewish Federation, B'nai Brith, Rotary, certain unions and special interest groups (like the Sierra Club or Returned Peace Corps Volunteers) might be interested in sponsoring you, especially if you can give them a special presentation when you return from overseas. A good example of this was a Volunteer who offered to write for her local Jewish Federation's online newsletter while she was abroad. She submitted three articles throughout her volunteer service and the Federation in turn donated \$500.

### **7) Have a rummage sale**

A rummage sale is a good way to sell your possessions and gather support for your cause. You may also want to hold a raffle or an auction at the site of the sale, especially if there is a group that would support you in this endeavor (fraternity, workplace, synagogue, club, etc.). You can get others to donate their possessions also. A bake sale is a similarly successful fundraising tool.

### **8) Local businesses**

Local businesses are far more likely than large corporations to support you. The key is to make a link between the owner of the business and you or someone close to you. You may want to approach the businesses with a letter first, enclosing all the relevant materials and a pledge form, and then follow up with a phone call. Asking for \$100 or more is not unusual.

### **9) Special collection**

Take up a special collection on campus, at a general meeting of a community group or at a synagogue function, coordinated with the meeting/event organizers. It is important to educate the community about AJWS before the collection is announced, through written materials in the bulletin or a personal appeal during the meeting event.

### **10) Have a fundraising party**

There are hundreds of ways to throw a fundraising party – just make sure you end up earning money, not losing. You may want to combine a raffle with the party to earn extra bucks. Sell raffle tickets ahead of time and insist that people show up in order to win. It is usually best to charge a flat fee for the party and provide free beverages and food. Consider having a theme that attracts people, hosting a speaker, showing a movie/documentary or holding a benefit dinner. Have people RSVP so that you have a good idea of how much you will make before the party starts.

### **11) Letters to alumni associations**

An announcement in a high school or college alumni newsletter with a pitch for contributions can be a good way to gain support and touch base with long lost friends.

### **12) Canvassing**

Canvassing is a nonprofit word for door-to-door solicitation. This is a tough one, but it is the backbone of groups such as SANE/Freeze and Greenpeace. If you are positive, likable, not easily discouraged and can identify a neighborhood that would identify closely with your request, this may be worth a try. Have something to show them, and at the very least leave them with information and the opportunity to send something to you later. The key here is to strike up a conversation first, get them interested in what you are doing, and ask for a specific amount of money (like \$20) last.

### **13) Sell something door-to-door**

The traditional candy sale can work if you mark everything up enough. Volunteers with artistic abilities can produce their own items to sell (T-shirts, mugs, pins, etc.), but should try to calculate appropriately the sale price in relation to the cost of the materials and the time spent making and selling the products. Such items could also be sold at a fair or similar event. Try getting the materials donated from a local business.

### **14) “Steal the gate” at a popular nightspot**

Try to get the owner of a hot night spot to give you a certain percentage – or even all – of the cover charges for the night in return for you guaranteeing a larger than usual crowd that will buy drinks, etc. at regular prices. This is best done on conjunction with a popular band, a guest speaker or something to convince the owner that there will indeed be a large turnout.

**15) Sell progressive T-shirts, buttons, etc.**

If you're into the promotion of peace, environmental or other causes and you can get a good deal on related T-shirts, buttons or bumper stickers, you could set up a stand at a busy place (on campus, at a mall, a rally) and accomplish four things at once: inform people about what you are doing, gain more sponsors and promote your favorite cause.

**16) Auction**

Hold an auction with goods donated by local retailers and organizations.

**17) BE CREATIVE!**

There are an endless number of possibilities based on who you are reaching out to. Look around and think about what makes the most sense for you. One volunteer raised over \$200 with friends by having a "Midnight Bake Sale" – baking cookies and selling them late on a Friday night in Washington, D.C. on a corner with a lot of pedestrian traffic. If you are in a large dorm, consider going door-to-door and asking people for loose change, even pennies – it's a great way to talk to a lot of fellow students about international development and students shouldn't have trouble parting with a handful of change.

## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL FUNDRAISERS

**Set a Goal:** How much money do you plan to fundraise?

**Be Creative:** Use this list of projects to get you started but don't feel limited by these suggestions.

**Make a Plan:** Think of different types of fundraisers that will appeal to different audiences and create specific targets for each group. Break down the various tasks of your projects. Create a timeline, remembering that many people will take some time to write and mail checks to you. Have a system for keeping track of donations, checking that checks are submitted correctly and tracking return addresses.

**Budget:** Create a budget for everything you do. Make sure you are not spending more on an event than you will make.

**Know Your Audience:** Be sure to highlight the aspect of your trip that is interesting to prospective supporters. You may need to create a few versions of your pitch to ensure that it is well-received by all.

**Provide Information:** Always offer information about the organization you will be supporting. You may wish to refer people to the AJWS website.

**Be Specific:** Explain why it is important to you to participate in AJWS Volunteer Corps.

**Provide Instructions:** Be clear about where to send the check and to whom checks should be made out. Be sure prospective donors have the necessary information to donate on the AJWS website.

**Make It Easy:** If you are mailing requests, send self-addressed stamped envelopes. If someone expresses an interest in donating online, e-mail him or her the link.

**Follow Up:** Describe what you plan to do in your community upon your return. Be in touch regarding offers for speaking engagements shortly after your return home.

**Acknowledge Contributions:** Thank everyone immediately! Thank those who have made donations as well as anyone who helped you in your fundraising efforts. You may also wish to send another thank you note/e-mail after you start your volunteer placement so that you can share an anecdote from your experience.

## **TROUBLESHOOTING FUNDRAISING: COMMON MISTAKES AND HOW YOU CAN SOLVE THEM**

(Adapted from Training Materials for 3 Day Breast Cancer Foundation Walk, <http://www.the3day.org>)

### **Mistake #1: Not sending out enough letters/e-mails**

Solution: Figure out how many letters and e-mails you have sent out so far. Subtract that number from 100 and you will be left with the number of additional letters and e-mails that you need to send out. That's right: you should be sending out AT LEAST 100 letters and/or e-mails. Don't know 100 people? Of course you do. You're just not thinking outside of your inner circle of family and friends. What about your dentist? Your mechanic? The manager at your local grocery store? Still think you don't know 100 people? Send an e-mail to everyone in your e-mail address book and ask them to forward it to five or more of their friends. You will be pleasantly surprised to find out how many people you actually know.

### **Mistake #2: Not following up with potential donors**

Solution: Your first round of fundraising letters and e-mails resulted in a number of donations from generous supporters. However, there are still several people who have not yet responded. Oh well, they decided that they don't want to donate and are too embarrassed to tell you, right? WRONG. Just because you have not heard from a potential donor does not mean that he or she does not want to donate. Think about how busy your own life is and how many projects you put off until later. The fundraising letter you sent Aunt Mary might have gotten lost in her stack of bills. The e-mail you sent Cousin Larry might still be sitting in his inbox. Give each potential donor four to six weeks to respond and then follow up with a phone call, letter or e-mail. Give them an update on your fundraising progress and reiterate how much you would appreciate their support.

### **Mistake #3: Assuming who can afford to donate (and how much)**

Solution: People will give you what they can afford to give you. Never cross someone off your list because you think that he cannot afford to donate. By assuming that one person cannot afford to donate, you will lose out on valuable fundraising dollars that someone may be more than willing to give. Ask, ask, ask! The biggest donations often come when you least expect it.

### **Mistake #4: Ignoring your donors once their check has been cashed**

Solution: It's important to thank your donors and to keep them updated on your fundraising efforts. Not only are your donors supporting your personal commitment to participate in AJWS Volunteer Corps, they are also supporting AJWS' mission to eradicate poverty through grassroots change. Once you thank them, you may also find it beneficial to send your donors a monthly e-mail to keep them up to date on your progress. By keeping them informed, you'll make your donors feel more involved and your donors will have a stake in whether or not you achieve your fundraising goal. Perhaps they'll make a second donation later on if they see that you are struggling. Perhaps they'll pass your donation forms along to their friends and family members. You never know. So thank them and keep them involved.

## ADDITIONAL LINKS

If you are looking for more ideas, the sites have more specific fundraising ideas that you can adapt for your own use.

[www.pacificpridefoundation.org/AIDSWalk/topten.htm](http://www.pacificpridefoundation.org/AIDSWalk/topten.htm)

[www.aidswalk.net/sanfran/getinvolved/star\\_fundraising.html](http://www.aidswalk.net/sanfran/getinvolved/star_fundraising.html)

<http://www.the3day.org/site/apps/s/content.asp?c=ciKTLcPRLvF&b=963965&ct=1501691>

This site has a number of articles on fundraising tips for nonprofits

[www.grassrootsfundraising.org/howto/index.html](http://www.grassrootsfundraising.org/howto/index.html)

<http://www.idealists.org/tools/fundraising.html>