

THIS IS A MOMENT FOR MUSIC education funding. While we won't go so far as to say that the war against the arts in education is over, it's no longer making headlines the way it has in the past. There's some budget money out there, but more importantly, a recognition of the value of the arts in education. That said, for many programs, fundraising is still needed, but a new, modern approach is in order. The world has changed since the bake sale reigned as the driver of the band trip. There are things that we, and our students don't want to be doing. School admins are also conscious of all sorts of new societal norms and are more cautious when it comes to allowing certain activities.

Today, the greatest tool that exists for raising funds outside of non-institutional sources is communication, communication among peers and with administrators. Good communication provides safety for all and can pave the way for creativity. The second greatest tool is planning, which takes time and effort but is the secret sauce for any successful endeavor. In that way, communicating a well thought out, well-planned fundraising initiative to all stakeholders begins with a significant advantage. Forming a committee or working with a parent group can add a challenge as there will be a variety of perspectives to be accommodated. But, there's strength in numbers, and having the support of a motivated and engaged team should provide power and help with the heavy lifts.

The experts we contacted for this story agree that fundraising in the modern era focuses on four distinct activities: product sales and auctions, for-pay performances, dona-

tions or "work for hire," each which can be adapted for current constraints. Can't send kids door-to-door? Use the internet. Already using available bandwidth for in-school showcases? Go out into the community. Tired of the car wash (and getting blowback from local car wash companies?) See what other tasks students might be able to safely perform. This is where the creativity can come into play.

It's also important to carefully evaluate the latest from the professional fundraising companies. These enterprises wouldn't exist if their products weren't of interest to buyers, or if their programs didn't produce the desired result. Their employees are trained to help and have at their disposal, information about how to best accomplish your goals, as well as how others have done so in the past. It's their job to make you successful, so don't overlook the popcorn, cookies, and other professional programs.

A FUNDRAISING CHECKLIST

Before getting started, consider the following:

- Know how much money you need or want to raise and, specifically, and how that money will be used. If you are fundraising for a trip, talk about the educational benefits for the students taking the trip and also show appropriate high-resolution photos of the destinations, if you can on your website. Be prepared for answering how you will handle need-based students who may require supplemental financial help for part or all of the trip cost.
- Before proposing an independent fundraising project, first check to see



CREATIVE FUNDRAISING



String quartet: Students providing music at a fundraiser for local charity Hope and Light, in return for a donation to our program at Westlake High School (Westlake Village, CA)

FUNDRAISING

'Cinco de Mayo Celebration' at Roosevelt Elementary, where Mariachi and Folklorico ensembles perform



if there are any funds available at the school or the district level. There are many different accounts and budgets you might access with the support of your administrators.

- Be clear about what is allowed and what isn't allowed in your school district when it comes to fundraising activities.
- The health and safety of your students is critical when planning these activities, (which should be outlined in your district policies on fundraising). Make this information central to your plan.
- And, because something works in one community does not mean it will work in another. The opposite is also true. Consider the unique elements and qualities of your community and its members as these may enable uncommon opportunities for a local fundraising project.

PASSING THE HAT

That said, one of the easiest ways to raise money is to simply ask for donations. The catch is, how do you ask? One idea is to find something to celebrate, like the anniversary of an ensemble, or a drive for a specific goal, like a new tuba, or band room makeover. Asking for "per mile" donations for a walkathon could work. There are silent auctions and raffles where everything can be donated by parents, community members, and local businesses.

Karrie Willett, Music Director at Richardson MS in Torrance, CA works in a more affluent district where parents are

more than happy to just write a check instead of fundraising, but still has to organize the outreach and carefully orchestrate her program. "Fundraising is a necessary part of my yearly teaching. My fundraising has been most successful when the students want to participate towards meeting a goal. Our goals are music competitions and amusement park trips. I make sure to check with my parent group each year on how the various fundraisers we did the previous year went and which ones we want to do for the coming year. Being flexible and willing to change fundraisers (even mid-year), is necessary to running a successful fundraiser," says Willett. "(But) it's all about where you're teaching as to what kind of fundraiser will work. Every area is different. More urban locations with low-income families will be faced with different issues."

Social media options like Kickstarter, GoFundMe and Donors Choose are worth exploring, and there's likely a young online expert in your midst (or a bevy of them) who can be assigned this task. Tapping into your alumni network is another way to go. You likely have many students who have graduated and who remember the incredible experiences that they had in your program, and who are now in a financial position to give back. Ask for \$10, and you will likely find that many will give more. Sometimes all it takes is letting parents within your program know there is a need. There may be those who can afford to provide funding for families that can't. Local businesses are sometimes willing to become sponsors, especially when receiving some acknowledgement in return.

Elizabeth Blake, Orchestra Director, Westlake High School, Thousand Oaks, CA, String Orchestra Director, Los



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Three Questions for Mrs. Fields

Homemade bake sales are great, and there are other cookie fundraisers, but a Mrs. Fields fundraiser is in another league. We asked Mrs. Fields Fundraising Manager Bryce Simons a few questions about his program: (And let us know when get your fundraiser set up. We'll take a tub! Yum!) – ed.

IT: How should teachers prepare for a call with Mrs. Fields? What information is needed for an efficient call?

Teachers should have a good understanding of what they will be fundraising for, and how much they need to fundraise and have a rough idea for how they would like to accomplish their goal. This could include the dates they'd like to run the sale, who will be helping (i.e., other teachers, parent volunteers, etc.), the total number of sellers, etc. With this information, Mrs. Fields fundraising specialists will be able to help develop an in-depth plan to help each group meet and exceed their goals!

IT: What should teachers know about working on a Mrs. Fields fundraiser?

Mrs. Fields' is the best-known retail cookie brand in the fundraising space. We pride ourselves on our top-quality products that we know your customers will love. The brand sells itself and makes fundraising easy for everyone! Our data shows that groups that used non-branded products (or are constantly switching their fundraising products year after year) and have switched to Mrs. Fields' have seen increased sales in their fundraisers and more profit for their group! Every year that the group stays with Mrs. Fields' Fundraisers, they see more growth in their profits and their communities love it!

Mrs. Fields' Fundraising has several programs designed to maximize fundraising profits. Our specialists are experts in motivating students, providing the best options for your groups, and helping ensure your fundraiser is successful! Our programs can be as hands-on or hands-off as the group leaders wish. We have the ability to run sales entirely virtually with no physical money collection, in-hand with brochures, or a hybrid of both.

IT: What's the latest and greatest in your program?

Starting in 2022, Mrs. Fields' Fundraising launched a Ship to Home Fundraising line. This program was designed to allow groups to reach friends and family anywhere in the continental U.S. with our top six flavors of cookie dough. You can run a Ship to Home as a stand-alone program or even add it to your traditional fundraiser! •

Cerritos Middle School, Thousand Oaks, CA and CSUN Symphony Youth Orchestra, Northridge, CA says, "Don't be afraid to ask. Look around for people or businesses best positioned to support your program, and ask!"

Whatever you decide to do, getting the word out is key. Contact local newspapers, radio, and TV stations (after getting permission from administration) who may see a story in your project. You need to have a cause and be willing to set up an explanation page on your website, but you'll be surprised by how many people will read, see, or hear about something, and simply contribute.

QUALITY PRODUCTS

If you do decide to sell products to raise money for your program, there is evidence that shows better success selling premium products, or products that are less available otherwise, so as to make them special.

Since 1991, Country Maid, Inc. and Butter Braid® Pastries have helped raise over \$320 million for thousands of great causes. Today, the company's products are sold in 45 states with many of their products available only through local fundraisers. "Selling our hand-braided pastries has impacted the lives of so many children, communities, and causes by helping them reach their fundraising goals every year," said Lynn Bouska, Country Maid's VP of Fundraising. "Post Pandemic fundraising has created an urgency for more quality products, offered through an online store that involves fewer volunteers."

Jackie Hayslip, Director for Cash Cow Fundraising says, "Most of our customers have chosen to (stay with) the traditional quality products that have been successful for them year after year. We have had a lot of our groups raise more money than in the past and feel people are eager to help support arts education. We've seen a rise in donation-based fundraisers as well."

"Product-wise, the communities are generally wanting high-quality products due to the costs they are paying to

help support a fundraiser,” says Mrs. Fields’ Fundraising Manager Bryce Simons.

COVID AND FUNDRAISING

Further, and addressing COVID’s impact on fundraising, Simons continues, “The fundraising market has changed drastically since COVID. Due to the social distancing efforts during COVID, fundraising went nearly entirely digital or Ship to Consumer - it was a major adjustment for the large majority of the industry. Those practices have continued since, and fundraising companies are seeing a shift in their business to more Ship to End Customer programs rather than the traditional fundraiser that items ship to a location and the sellers distribute to whomever they sold to.”

In addition, “We have seen a shift (lately) in that communities are willing to support fundraising programs, but they now want something tangible for their money, rather than donating to the student’s fund. With the change in how consumers are purchasing (more online and desiring Ship to Home), products that can support home delivery have become the predominant sellers during fundraisers. These products have changed the music program’s ability to sell and market the fundraiser, allowing students to engage with family and friends around the country, rather than just their local community. When music teachers keep that concept in mind while planning and executing their fundraisers, they receive great community engagement and support.

Now that the country is transitioning back to a pre-COVID level, music teachers are getting much better responses from their communities to support fundraising efforts. Communities are beginning to accept that their students are going to travel again for events, competitions, etc. and are helping support those fundraising efforts.”



Kids having a great time at the annual Instrumental Music Lazertag Party, both fun and fundraiser for Westlake High School (Westlake Village, CA)

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RAISING THE CURTAIN

Your ensembles will perform in school concerts for friends and family, but performances in the community can raise funds, whether via hard ticket sales or requested donations. Samantha Theisen is Visual and Performing Arts Program Administrator in the San Gabriel Unified school district, San Gabriel, CA California. She was also a high school band director at Moorpark High School, so she sees the fundraising opportunity from both sides now, as an administrator and director. “Anything that enables students to perform or present their work in alignment with your curriculum, that also engages the community with a fun, valuable experience can be a fundraiser.”

At my former high school, we started a ‘Swing Night’, which was really a Jazz Band concert that we added dancing lessons and a spaghetti dinner to. Within a couple of years, the event became a tradition that the school community looked forward to and they’re still doing 10 years later.

In my current position, we do things like ‘Cinco de Mayo Celebration’ at Roosevelt Elementary, where our Mariachi and Folklorico ensembles perform, and volunteers help with food and festivities. We also have a dis-

trictwide Arts Fest, which features a lot of student artists and performers and brings in a large audience, along with sponsorships and donations. All of these things also provide easy ways to publicize our programs.”

So often community groups are looking for entertainment from local schools. These organizations may have budgets for donations or need a tax write-off. You just need to be willing to ask. If you’re asked to perform, say yes if you can, followed up with, “Is there any chance you could make some sort of a contribution to our program? We are currently trying to raise funds for (insert cause here).”

How about a concert with a big name or a performance by a magician? You’d need to build a budget and figure out what the event would cost, then sell tickets through one of the mobile ticket apps. A garage or rummage sale usually works. The key is always organization and PR/marketing. You need a place to store everything that is donated and then many tables and parents to help organize and work the event. Can you get hold of a pizza oven or two? Some of them are portable, or there could be parents with the skills (and hopefully materials) to build a couple. A local pizzeria might help kids make the pizzas, and a succession

of performances by small ensembles can make for a great pizza party with proceeds going to your program, of course.

Fundraising isn’t easy but you can make it enjoyable and create student excitement and teamwork along the way. It’s like that one good fundraiser each year can fit into your program, inevitably reaping long-term rewards for all involved. **T**

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