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HINTS FOR FUNDRAISING  
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**NOTE:**

*I posted this a while back to the IRTRAD list (now sadly more or less defunct). The basic ideas remain valid.*

After my IRTRAD post in early December concerning our local "Afternoon of Music" fundraiser on behalf of the local homeless prevention fund, a number of people contacted me for ideas on how to implement such a program in their community.

The basic concept is very simple but once you see that it works, you can expand outwards from it as you see fit. I'm sure that what works well in Falmouth MA might not be as successful in Wichita or Boise or Ballinasloe, so keep in mind that the following are suggestions based on our experience and not carved-in-stone directives!

Looking back over the years that we've done this, I can list the steps as follows:

[1] identify a local charity that can use the help. I say "local" because, as worthy as the March of Dimes, American Lung Association, Cancer Society, United Way, and the like are, they have other sources of revenue because of their size. We chose the local homeless prevention fund because there is a real need associated with it and because it "flies under the radar" in the sense that some folks are unaware of the problem - homelessness on wealthy Cape Cod? - and therefore less likely to include it in their charitable giving thought process.

It would take a minimal amount of investigation on your part to determine which grass-roots charity in your area could use a few extra dollars - you might have a similar problem with homelessness, or maybe there's a soup kitchen or food bank that you know of who would benefit.

[2] after you identify the charity and have advised the folks in charge of your good intentions, select a date for the fundraiser. The charity might have some preference in this regard, e.g. you could be part of a matching funds campaign that they're already working on. We do our fundraiser in early December because it ties in neatly with other local pre-holiday activities that increase our chances of having a good crowd in attendance. In this case, it doesn't hurt to be an opportunist.

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[3] Once you've indentified the possible recipient and chosen a date (or a range of possible dates), the next step is to sell the fundraising idea to your local musical community. We are very fortunate here in Falmouth to have a number of musicians of all genres who have always been willing to give up a few minutes on a Saturday afternoon to donate their talents. Some of the performers play Irish music, most do not - we've had cajun, blues, pop-rock, women's a cappella, American traditional, and other types of music represented. The nature of the music is really unimportant as long as everyone feels included (we could have twice the number of performers if we had twice the amount of time, but the five hours we did this year is about enough!)

**NOTE: NO ONE IS PAID; EVERY PENNY WE MAKE ON THE DAY GOES TO THE HOMELESS PREVENTION FUND.**

We have never had a problem with this because it's clear to all the performers involved what the conditions are, and no one has any expectations of reward beyond the great feeling of helping those who really need the help.

[4] You've got the beneficiary, a date range, and hopefully the musicians, so now you need to select the venue. We're fortunate here in Falmouth to have a very popular Irish pub on Main Street whose owners have been supporters of this idea from Year One, so our taking over their place on a Saturday afternoon presents zero problems for them (especially in light of the fact that their place is filled with a happy thirsty/hungry crowd most of the day!)

You might have some other kind of spot in your area that has a reputation as a good place to get together, some place known to be musician-friendly, whose management you might be able to persuade to help in your worthy endeavor (our nice pub owners help with a sizeable donation of their own to the cause).

A local school hall, the Elks or Rotary or VFW hall, a church parish hall - all might be possibilities. If you're very lucky and very persuasive, you won't have to pay anything for the use of the place, given the fact that it's a fundraising effort on behalf of a recognized local charity.

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[5] Good cause, players, place to do it - now firm up a date that everyone likes (good luck!) and figure out the format. We run our Afternoon of Music as a concert, not a session; each of our volunteer groups gets to do a thirty-minute set.

If you have fewer groups available, you might want to allot more time (or if the venue has set a time limit, you can adjust downwards if you have to). Our experience has been that asking the performers for maximum flexibility helps, since things rarely will go with clock-work precision on the day; group 1 might get their full time allotment, while group 2 is shorted a few minutes and group 3 gets a few more, etc etc. If everyone is mellow and focused on the good work of the afternoon, friction should be minimized.

[6] Once everything is in place, you'll need all the publicity you can get. Local newspapers and electronic media are great; flyers in libraries and churches (and mentions in church bulletins) are very effective; flyers on the bulletin boards at your local shopping centers are probably less effective but then again you never know.

*(UPDATE: when I wrote this, nobody had ever heard of "social media"!)*

The charitable beneficiary can also help, as some of them have mailing lists of their own of folks they can let know about the big event. The venue owners should also get involved, and the performers too should be encouraged to get the word out to their "fan base".

Since this would be your first event, you should allow plenty of time for the word to get out; three to four weeks of fairly intense publicity would be ideal. Note however that some printed media require a longer notification period, so you might want to get started with your inquiries on this aspect of the publicity campaign right up front. If you aren't too certain about your own communications skills, someone in your group might be capable of handling this.

[7] As for the actual raising of revenue, you can use either the "admission at the door" concept or the "free will" donation idea. We started with the former and moved to the latter because we found it to be less intrusive and ultimately more productive.

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Basically we keep a large receptacle - this year, a Dr. Seuss cat hat - in plain view, and it is identified to the audience frequently in the course of the afternoon as the "magic hat", i.e. it can accommodate any amounts of money and still have room for more!

We don't "pass the hat" but we keep it near the stage and I as the MC for the afternoon frequently (some might say annoyingly) allude to its presence and purpose.

A few years back we also started doing a raffle and silent auction, using goods and services donated by local merchants. The pub owners have been instrumental in setting this procedure in motion, since in their business capacity they are involved in the local Chamber of Commerce and hence well connected to the "Main Street" shopping community. The raffle/auction has been very successful, but it might be something you could put off at the beginning of your fundraising career (or not - depends on what kind of help you have; it would never have happened for us if it had depended solely on me).

As you progress and accumulate a track record of sorts, you might find it worthwhile to contact local banks, major stores (we got a lovely check from our local Wal-Mart this year), and other places that have budget allotments for local charitable endeavors. Again, if you manage to be fortunate enough to assemble a group of helpers in this endeavor, one of them might know of some organization - a foundation, perhaps - that would be willing to help your grass-roots effort financially or in kind (for example, with publicity).

[8] That's about it for helpful hints! It's really pretty easy getting something going once the basic elements are identified and in place; the important thing is to enjoy doing it - regardless of how much work is involved or how many frustrations you experience, keep in mind that you're doing it for a good cause!

If you actually decide to try this idea, please let me know how you did. Let me know if and how you adapted my suggestions to fit your local conditions; let me know if my suggestions helped or hindered your activities; let me have your own recommendations for others who might want to try fundraising.

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All comments and suggestions are welcome. My contact info is below.

Good luck and bail ó Dhia ar an obair (God bless the work)!

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