



SERVICE
YEAR

SERVICE YEAR ALLIANCE

Service Year Crowdfunding Guide
For Host Organizations

February 2018



Welcome to the Service Year Alliance Crowdfunding Guide.

Within this guide you will learn what a crowdfunding campaign is, the benefits of crowdfunding as a Service Year Alliance host organization, and the tips and tricks to make your campaign successful. This step-by-step guide will help you plan, run, and close your crowdfunding campaign. Before you can host a live 30 day campaign, you will need to spend around a month beforehand planning to ensure success.

The most common explanation for unsuccessful campaigns is not enough planning ahead of time. While crowdfunding with Service Year Alliance, your organization can raise funds to go towards covering the cost of hosting a service year corps member, top off your match, or to fund supplies for service year corps member service projects!

What is Crowdfunding?

Crowdfunding is a method of gaining capital through the collective effort of raising small amounts of money from a large number of people. This approach taps into the shared efforts of friends, family, and supporters – primarily online through social media, email outreach, and crowdfunding platforms – leveraging these networks for greater reach and exposure.

Crowdfunding is a resource that nonprofits are starting to add to their fundraising strategy. While crowdfunding has been around since the 1700s, modern day crowdfunding started in 1997 and really burst onto the scene in 2009 with the development of well-known sites, such as Kickstarter, GoFundMe, and Indiegogo. There are now thousands of crowdfunding platforms to pick from. While some of these platforms are used to help fund a start-up concept or project, most of them are leveraged for personal and non-profit use.

Is Crowdfunding Right for my Organization?

Crowdfunding takes a lot of time, staff, and resources to be successful. Campaigns aren't guaranteed to reach their desired goal just because they were created. Leveraging your network and supporters is what will make your campaign a success. Your outreach is critical in persuading someone to support your cause by making a donation, both big or small. A campaign can take over a month to plan, and is typically live for 30 days. Due to the work involved to plan and run a campaign, it's recommended to have a couple staff members support to make it successful.

Components of a successful crowdfunding campaigns:

- video
- attainable goal
- robust outreach
- compelling story
- pledges secured
- donor retention

Crowdfunding with Service Year Alliance

Service Year Alliance is committed to making a year of service a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. To make this a reality, we need to unlock more funding from public and private sources. We are exploring creative strategies, such as crowdfunding, to complement the existing fundraising efforts of service year programs across the country. Crowdfunding isn't intended to be the major source of funding for any positions, and cannot replace current funding streams. However, there is value in engaging more Americans in supporting service year positions, and crowdfunding offers a new fundraising tool to augment existing resources.



Four-step Crowdfunding Model

Service Year Alliance has broken crowdfunding into a four-step model in order to secure the best odds for a successful campaign. The four steps are planning, creating, managing, and finishing your campaign. Crowdfunding campaigns can take up to a month of planning to ensure success and you should expect your campaign to be live for up to 30 days.

Step 1: Planning Your Campaign

To kick off your campaign planning process, you will need to determine the logistics of your campaign. This includes figuring out how much you need to raise, when you want to run your campaign, and who is going to help you plan and execute your campaign.

Step 2: Creating Your Campaign

Next, you will be doing all of the heavy lifting for your campaign. This includes creating your campaign page, outreach content, creating a video, and figuring out how your campaign can make the biggest impact

Step 3: Managing Your Campaign

The third stage is launching and managing your actual crowdfunding campaign. During this time, you will be busy sending out emails, posting on social media, and even making personal phone calls to potential donors to ask them to contribute.

Step 4: Finishing Your Campaign

During the final stage of your campaign, you will be sending out a final thank you to donors to reflect upon your experience. You'll also provide feedback on your experience to Service Year Alliance.

Step 1: Planning Your Campaign

Most crowdfunding campaigns that fail blame it on not doing enough work during the planning phase. The first stage in any campaign is determining the big picture and abstract goals of hosting a crowdfunding campaign. This includes developing your story, setting goals, designing your pitch, and determining campaign logistics.

Tell Your Story

Your story is the reason your audience turns into donors. Your story will frame the reason your campaign is necessary. Ultimately, your story should focus on an individual. Individual stories have a stronger impact on a potential donor than highlighting an entire group or population. Limit the number of statistics you include as it clutters your story and loses your viewers' attention. Brainstorm multiple stories that your campaign and video will focus on.

If you work with children, your story could focus on an individual child and how your organization has impacted her. Alternate story options could be about a staff member, a child and their family, etc. Your story can link back to the impact that having an additional service year corps member will have on your organization. Create these different options and test them with your team to determine which story is the strongest and most compelling.

The key items to include in your story are:

- Your organization
- The location of your organization
- The population that will benefit from this funding
- How these funds will be used and what the outcome of the use will be
- Your motivation to host a campaign right now

Make it a Pitch

Once you determine your story, turn it into your pitch.

This pitch is what will persuade donors to support to your organization. Your pitch should not necessarily include the anecdote shared as your story, but instead it should be a brief summary of your overall mission and motive behind running a campaign. It should highlight how having a service year corps member will make an impact on the population you serve.

Make sure that you are confident in your ability to pitch your campaign to anyone and everyone. This ability will help turn supporters into donors.

Determine Your Financial Goal

Telling your story will help frame your needed financial goal.

If your goal is to offset the cost of hosting a service year corps member, then your goal should range from \$12,000-\$25,000. For some organizations, this goal may be outside of their reach for their first crowdfunding campaign. Potentially funding a portion of the service year position may be more realistic.

| Amount raised | What can this fund? |
|---------------|--|
| \$1,000 | Supplies to aid in a corps member who is tutoring elementary aged students |
| \$5,000 | Covers remaining costs of hosting an AmeriCorps VISTA |
| \$8,000 | About half the cost of one service year corps member |

Is This Goal Realistic for Your Organization?

Since your campaign will last 30 days, divide your goal by 30 to see what you will have to average in donations every day to reach your goal. If your goal is \$15,000, that means you would have to bring in roughly \$500 a day. Is your network engaged and large enough to support those goals?

When to Launch

Picking the right day to launch your campaign is a crucial detail to figure out. When deciding on when to start your campaign, make sure no major holiday falls during the crowdfunding period. Having a longer length of campaign time doesn't yield more success. In fact, it often proves to be less successful because it removes the sense of urgency that a donor feels. When would be ideal to hold your 30-day campaign? Is there a marketing strategy that your campaign could be tied to?

Budget

A crowdfunding budget may not be necessary for all organizations, but if you are looking to spend money creating a video, mailers, or promoting the campaign in paid advertisements on social media, it is recommended to set a budget to make sure you are not spending too much money hosting your campaign.

It Takes a Team

It is less likely that a campaign will be as successful if it is run by a single person. Campaigns run by teams raise three times the amount raised by campaigns run solo. Having a team working on your campaign it opens you up to a larger personal network to leverage. This is critical, given that individuals are more likely to donate if they are being asked by someone they know. For this reason, anyone working for your organization, whether on the specific crowdfunding team or not, should be asked to push the campaign out to their networks.

Service Year Alliance understands that currently serving AmeriCorps members are not allowed to fundraise for their living allowance or for the living allowance needed for a future AmeriCorps member. **If you have service year corps members who are in need of raising funds for their relocation or a service project they are working on,** Service Year Alliance is happy to guide them through the process.

Step 2: Creating Your Campaign

The second step is the tangible items that need to be done in order to host a successful campaign. This includes assembling your team, finding your advocates, building your campaign page, creating your campaign video, and setting up your social media and outreach plan. While this section is the most laborious, it will set you up for success if done right.

Content Creation and Outreach

Outreach is a critical component to hosting a successful campaign. Create a content calendar, draft emails, campaign updates, and posts for social media should be done before your campaign launches.

Collect and Create Visual Content

During your digital outreach you will want to pair text with different kinds of digital media. Posts that contain pictures and videos are most likely to catch someone's eye over a post with just text. Pull together already created visuals: pictures, videos, infographics, and interviews with your staff, founders, or CEO. Take inventory of what you already have and work to supplement what you do not have. Consider pulling quotes from staff, service year corps members, or the population you serve to share on social media and in emails. What you collect can relate back to the story you are telling, but can also highlight other aspects of your organization as well.

Content Calendar

Creating a **content calendar** will aid in managing your campaign. Take the time to schedule all of your digital outreach for your live campaign period. This should be planned out with what emails and posts you will be doing each day and what exactly they should say. Doing this before your campaign launches will allow you to just push them out the day of and will save you time and stress in the long run. A content calendar should be set up to track scheduled tweets, facebook posts, and emails. Creating a content calendar can be as simple as creating a spreadsheet or group digital calendar.

Create Your Video

Videos make campaigns seven times more successful.

Creating a video does not need to involve taking a trip to Hollywood to hire a production team. It can be as simple as having a member of your staff record a heartfelt video about the impact that your organization has and how much more of an impact you can have by expanding your number of service year corps members. Viewers can tell when someone is passionate, and that will drive them to want to contribute. Repeating the amount of money you are trying to raise is irrelevant. If your video is done correctly, your donors will be compelled to donate without you asking.

Build Your Campaign Page

Service Year Alliance uses CrowdRise, a nonprofit fundraising platform, to host crowdfunding campaigns. All donations made on CrowdRise are tax deductible for your donors, which is a unique benefit that many other major crowdfunding sites don't offer. There are several pieces you will need to **create your public campaign page**: your video, call to action, and body content.

Test Your Impact

Once you have your story, pitch, and video, test it on everyone. Ask yourself: would it make sense to someone who knows nothing about your organization? It's better to find out before your campaign launches that your pitch and story isn't strong enough so you have time to revise it. While keeping the mission of your campaign the same, you can easily shift the specific focus of your story or video to strengthen your pull to draw in the audience and convince them that they should donate to your cause.

Scoping Your Audience

To find your target population, it is important to identify who your audience is, both in the digital world and in real life. One strategy to start this process is to look at your trends in previous one-time and recurring donors and individuals in your online network and email listings. You can target previous donors in hopes that they will donate again.

Strategically utilizing your audience will aid you in hosting a successful campaign. Consider who you know and how they could help you promote your effort. Ask them to help spread word about your campaign and your organization's mission. While they may not be able to donate a lot, it will help your campaign reach a larger network. It could be as simple as them retweeting or sharing a social media post, or sharing your campaign by word of mouth.

Advocate Support

Your **campaign advocates** are individuals who are willing to promote your cause to their networks. Ideally, these individuals will have different networks to avoid doubling up on the same population. The role of these individuals is to gain viewership from individuals who may not have even know your organization existed. They should care about your organization, communicate your story, and be someone you are comfortable reaching out to.

Step 3: Managing Your Campaign

Once your campaign is live, your work is not complete. You'll need to become active promoters of it. Recruit volunteers, donors, and others in your network to endorse and publicize your efforts within their own networks. You can promote your campaign digitally through facebook posts, tweets, and emails. Word of mouth is also a great way to spread the news of your campaign. This is an organic way for new people to learn about your organization and mission. Work on your sales pitch of both your organization and of your crowdfunding effort to make sure you do the best job selling your campaign.

Launch Day

This is the day you've been waiting for. Get ready to send out your pre-written tweets, facebook posts, and launch email. Consider updating your organization's home page to include that you are currently crowdfunding, so any traffic that comes to your website will also be alerted about the news that you have a crowdfunding campaign underway.

Now is the time to follow your content calendar. Use your plan to launch your email, tweets, and Facebook posts. Be aware of how you are reporting statistics about your campaign. Never round up numbers to say "We've raised about 50% of our goal," or "About 30 people have supported our campaign," or "We have raised about \$1000." Seeing specific numbers makes individual donors see how their donation will have made an actual difference. Phrases like: "We are 53% funded by 29 donors," or "We've raised \$1023 in 13 days" are a more compelling way to present your statistics.

Building Momentum

It is important to establish a few large donations early. Securing these pledges before launching helps ensure a successful outcome. You should try to raise at least 20% of your funds in your first few days. If you raise 20% of your goal in the first week there is an 80% chance your campaign will be successful. But if you raise 30% of your goal in the first week there is an 90% chance your campaign will be successful. Finding pledges will start your campaign off on the right foot. You achieve this by reaching out to your audience to find individuals who are willing to donate on the day of your campaign launch. The sooner other potential donors see that your campaign is up and running and off to a strong start, the more willing they are to want to support you.

Another way to help your campaign gain momentum is with a soft release. Sending the link out to specific people can help you get your high-donation first day off to a quick start. It is important to make sure your pledges are able to donate as soon as your campaign goes live. You can send the link to your campaign specifically to collect these pledges before you publicly launch.

Psychology of Donations

The days you should expect to receive the most donations are the first and last day of your campaign. On average 9 out of 10 contributions to your crowdfunding campaign will come from your own efforts. The good news is that charitable giving is contagious. Donating to charities, especially online campaigns, becomes the social norm once an individual sees that their peer has donated. It's also a good idea to thank your donors in advance for covering the processing fees of their donation. This charges them a bit more money, but allows you to receive 100% of their contribution.

Step 4: Finishing Your Campaign

Congratulations! Your campaign period is over, and you're almost done your crowdfunding process. This section will help you navigate the final steps by looking at your results, sending out your final emails, and providing Service Year Alliance with feedback from your crowdfunding experience. Continue to update supporters on the impact of this campaign. Donors will want to see how their money benefited your organization before they are prompted to donate again.

Thanking donors

Thank early and thank often! Sending out your final thank yous is an important step in retaining donors and turning one-time donors into recurring donors. Think creatively about how you could thank your donors during and after this campaign. You could send out a final mailer or postcard talking about the success your campaign had and what you'll be able to accomplish with these donations.

Reflecting Upon Experience

Service Year Alliance continues to develop tools to streamline the process of building and running a crowdfunding campaign. Once your campaign is finished, Service Year Alliance will send you a feedback form to collect your final thoughts to help improve crowdfunding for future organizations.

Please reach out to support@serviceyear.org throughout your campaign if you have any problems, concerns, or need support along the way.

Thank you for crowdfunding with Service Year Alliance! We hope that through this experience your team is able to collaborate, build your donor base, and test out this creative funding strategy. We hope this guide will help you navigate through the process of setting up and running a successful crowdfunding campaign of your own. In order to help us better support other service year host organizations in the future, we would love to hear all about your experience.

A man and a woman are sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop screen. The man is wearing glasses and has a mustache, and the woman is smiling. They appear to be in a home office or a casual workspace. The background is slightly blurred, showing a desk with a speaker and some papers.

READY TO GET STARTED?

Start your campaign on
CrowdRise!

Questions? See our [FAQs](#)

Host Organization Crowdfunding Checklist

Step One: Planning

Figure out your story. This will shape the entire campaign.

Create your pitch. A 15 second elevator pitch will help bring in donors.

Pick a financial goal. This is how much funding is need to be raise.

Choose launch dates. Pick the 30 day period to run your campaign.

Determine a Budget. Sometimes spending money helps raise money.

Assemble crowdfunding team. Support is needed to make this a success.

Step Two: Creating Content

Collect and Create Content. Content to share is key for campaign outreach.

Develop a content calendar. Plan out what to share and when to share it.

Create your Video. The best marketing tool for a crowdfunding campaign.

Activate a CrowdRise Account. Claim your nonprofit on CrowdRise.

Build your campaign page. Don't wait until launch day to build this page.

Advocate Support. Engage alums and volunteers to help promote this campaign.

Get Media Attention. Draft some content, and see if it can get published.

Step Three: Managing Campaign

Launch Campaign. The campaign is planned, and its finally the big day.

Build Momentum. No one likes to be the first to donate to a campaign.

Follow Content Calendar. The work is done, and now it's time to publish it.

Step Four: Finishing Campaign

Send out thank yous. Show donors how much their support is appreciated.

Close campaign. 30 days have come and gone!



A BETTER YOU.
A GREATER US.