

5 Simple tips from one of the top union fundraisers in the nation

Fundraisers are great tools for union activists. They are excellent ways to raise awareness for a cause, and to establish your local lodge as one of “the good guys.” Spending time and effort helping support a worthwhile cause will improve the unique culture of your local, promote the values of your membership, and can provide a valuable networking opportunity for your local to connect with outside activists and community groups.

Chicago’s Local 1487 has established itself as a leader in the world of union fundraising. It’s Annual Golf Outing, for example, has become one of the largest and most successful charity sporting events in the IAM. Each year, they raise thousands of dollars in support of various charities, while simultaneously attracting the active participation of hundreds of members and dozens of business partners.

Here are some very simple tips from Greg Klujewski, the Recording Secretary of Chicago’s Local 1487, and the mastermind behind some of their most successful charity events.

1. Before you do anything else, make sure that you get help, and can get attention.

According to Greg Klujewski, the first step to organizing any successful charity event is to build a team. Any big event will need to be fun and engaging, but it will also be a lot of work. Having a team of event organizers that are dedicated to seeing the project through all the inevitable challenges that it will face will be critical. It helps if the team has at least one or two members that can make on the spot decisions. For example, Greg frequently works with the Secretary Treasurer Mike Finn and Tony Licciardi, the President of Local 1487. Together, the team has all the needed authority to make binding decisions about whatever project they are working on.

Once a team has been put together, it is important to ensure that your event has the support of the membership. Every charity project at 1487 tries to attract as much member support as possible. This is also an important part of advertising the event – activists at 1487 build up a “buzz” around their events as they allow the membership to see how much work goes into the charity events.

2. Partners are better than Donors.

It may seem obvious, but donor support is a two-way street. Good friends do not only come around when they need money. You need to develop and maintain healthy relationships with donors and sponsors – even when you aren't asking them for money. Greg Klujewski doesn't think of these businesses, individuals and organizations as "donors" that may help fund a project as much as "partners" that help make it happen in the first place.

Generally speaking, it is better to invite donors to participate in your event than it is to ask them for money. If they can't attend or participate directly at your event, then they may want to donate financially.

3. Set a budget based on Your level of support.

Once third party support has been determined, and organizers have a good idea of how much support the event will have, a solid budget can be set up. It's a little tricky to determine a budget before business partners and donors come on board, since they will be carrying a part of the financial workload.

4. Make it personal.

The President of Chicago's Local 1487, Tony Licciardi, is a 'people' person. He likes the people that he works with, and they like him back. He relies on healthy relationships with the membership, including personal friendships and networking to make sure that everyone is invited and feels welcome to charity events, and that nobody feels left out.

5. Give it time.

The biggest secret of success in charity fundraising, based on the amazing work being done at Local 1487 is...that there is no secret formula. If there is one single outstanding feature of Local 1487 fundraisers it is that they are very methodically planned out, and no shortcuts are taken. They are not planned out and executed quickly. It takes time for potential sponsors and business partners to be contacted in person. It takes time to make sure that everyone finds out about the event, gets properly invited, and for them to make plans to attend.

Does your local hold charity fundraisers? Do you have any tips or advice for union activists that wasn't on this list? We would love to hear about the important work that your local lodge is doing. Send your ideas and stories to us at Contact@IAM141.org.