edutopia™

RAISE MONEY FOR YOUR SCHOOL USING CROWDFUNDING *

How to use online tools to generate funds for everything you need – including school supplies, events, special projects, and more.

* The funding of a project by a large number of supporters who each contribute a small amount

CROWDFUNDING
FOR
SCHOOLS

CROWDFUNDING?

"Become a part of Roger Sherman's History!" announced the elementary school's parent-teacher association on Fundly when they invited donors to raise money to buy six interactive whiteboards and multimedia projectors. Through corporate matching and crowdfunding, 228 donors helped them exceed their $34,000 goal by almost $6,000. Final total: $39,992.

Crowdfunding is a type of crowdsourcing in which projects are funded by collecting often small amounts of money from a large number of people, usually via a website that facilitates the process. Community leaders, PTAs, teachers, principals, parents, and students of all ages are using the crowdfunding model of Internet fund-raising for their schools. As a result of the economic climate and budget cuts, many critical education services and materials have been eliminated. So, community stakeholders have turned to crowdfunding services to connect classroom needs with multiple contributors.

According to "2013CF-The Crowdfunding Industry Report," crowdfunding services successfully supported more than one million projects, across 308 platforms, in 2012 (raising $2.7 billion) and are expected to raise more than $5 billion in 2013.

Each platform differs, but the fundamentals are the same: A campaign manager posts a page within a crowdfunding service that explains the school's needs and funding goals, she or he builds buzz with social media and encourages the community to contribute, and the crowdfunding site typically accepts credit card payments from contributors and allows campaign organizers to announce progress. Each platform strives to make the pitch and payment process frictionless.

In an article by Joe Garecht, founder of The Fundraising Authority (thefundraisingauthority.com), a website of resources for nonprofits, he cautions, "Crowdfunding sites work best for funding specific projects or campaigns, and do not work well for general fundraising or things like annual giving." Although there are notable exceptions to this maxim, concrete deliverables and novelty are critical for motivating a community to donate.

Crowdfunding campaigns are bonding events; they enhance school-community alliances. Through storytelling and community outreach, campaign organizers and funders can become emotionally invested in the same outcome, resulting in long-term support — financial and social — for schools. Moreover, accountability to the public helps educational initiatives stay on track. A campaign for the Academy for Global Citizenship, a Chicago public charter school wanting to build a "net-positive

campus," wrote on its Indiegogo crowdfunding page: "This campaign is about grassroots growth: spreading our vision to reimagine the role of the school in a community one passionate individual at a time. It is also about empowering advocacy in our current community. Every time you share this link, you are exponentially increasing the impact of this project." Over 630 donors helped them exceed their $50,000 goal. Final total: $53,780.

Yes, crowdfunding can yield big payoffs for schools, but only when a campaign is planned carefully and executed tenaciously. Many nonprofit groups "make the mistake of thinking that

Think of the different groups that might donate to your school — alumni, community members, parents, local business owners — and answer two questions: **"Why would group X want to contribute? What's in it for them?"**

these [crowdfunding] sites are magical cures for all of their revenue woes," Garecht warns on his website. "Crowdfunding sites can be a huge help, but they are not a fundraising panacea." In a *USA Today* article, Yancey Strickler, the cofounder and head of communications for crowdfunding platform Kickstarter (kickstarter.com), observes, "It takes work to get a project funded. You have to spread the word."

Crowdfunding is a powerful tool; it can bring dreams to life if done well. The tips below will improve your chances for success.

10 STEPS

FOR PLANNING AND MANAGING A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN

PLANNING

STEP 1: *Assemble Your Team*

Assign campaign members to roles based on their skills. For large financial goals, you could need as many as ten to 15 people to a) communicate with the local media; b) target your network with social media; c) compose a project description; d) write, design, copyedit, and send out newsletters, blog posts, and emails; e) script, storyboard, shoot, act in, edit, and publish videos; f) take campaign photos; g) set up a funding booth at local events; h) manage perks; and i) coordinate campaign "thank you" letters and celebrations. For smaller campaigns, you may be able to double up on some of these roles. Either way, you'll need an implementation plan and team ready to facilitate the project after funds are received.

STEP 2: *Identify Your School's Needs and Determine the Funding Timeline*

What are your school's or classroom's specific needs? You can always create several smaller consecutive campaigns (often called "progressive funding," in which you collect all funds raised, whether or not you reach your goal), rather than risking a massive "all-or-nothing" fund-raiser that is too ambitious to pull off.

Some experts advise that you run a shorter campaign — for example, 30 days — to keep interest high. A typical length is 45 days, though there are campaigns as short as ten days and some as long as 90. Depending on the platform, it may be okay to secure the majority of a project's funds and crowd-

fund the rest, as long as you keep this arrangement transparent.

Next, pin down precisely how the money will be spent and what the results will look like. Elizabeth Monda, a fourth-grade teacher at Corning Achievement Elementary School in Memphis, used crowdfunding site PledgeCents to raise $3,500 for a school garden and in another campaign raised $505 for study carrels. "It could be a field trip or more pencils in the classroom," she told Memphis Business Journal. "You can put anything on PledgeCents."

STEP 3: *Identify Your Network*
Brainstorm a list of potential funders. Start with everyone in your team's network. They'll be contacted first. Then you'll want to identify who from that network would be able to activate other supporters. Think of the different groups that might donate to your school — alumni, community members, parents, local business owners — and answer two questions: "Why would group X want to contribute? What's in it for them?" Writer and researcher Erica Friedman, in a Quora crowdfunding exchange (quora.com/Crowdfunding/What-are-attributes-of-successful-crowdfunding-projects), writes, "Without that initial core of enough fanatics to make enough noise for it to go viral, no matter how compelling your story, it'll be a slog to reach your goal."

STEP 4: *Choose a Crowdfunding Platform*
Examine the sites listed below in this guide. Which service successfully matches your campaign style and funding needs?

Sites with *zero or low fees* allow your institution to keep more money, but restrict spending to items supplied by *approved vendors*. A site that *primarily benefits schools* attracts contributors who are interested in education

> ## "This isn't about a begging bowl!
> **Especially in case of small, community projects — you're trying to do something really incredible and by talking to potential donors, you're giving them the opportunity to be part of that."**
>
> Amy Cameron, **coordinator of the 10:10 Solar Schools Project in the UK**

causes. Sites that are *user-friendly for PTAs* tend to support schoolwide projects, rather than a few specific classroom items requested by an individual instructor. More unusual requests may find more support in a crowdfunding space where *campaign examples* include a wide assortment of materials, ideas, and events. Schools that intend to manage large and/or simultaneous campaigns (or want to select from tiered packages with corresponding price points) will benefit most from a site that *offers sophisticated systems and customization* — which may include more choices for logo and color branding, interaction with *social media*, real-time data analysis, marketing, assistance with events (like walk-a-thons), and greater control for the school over how and when they receive funds.

After identifying one or two favorite services, donate some money to campaigns hosted by each platform to understand how the site interacts with contributors.

STEP 5: *Write a Project Description and Tell Your Story*
The most successful pitches are carefully copyedited and typically run less than a page. They should link the funding goals to specific deliverables and be überpassionate. Create urgency in the title: "Help us raise $25,000 so our students will have a safe playground." One very successful education pitch on DonorsChoose raised $67,785 for the so called "Brooklyn Castle" chess team of New York City's public Intermediate School 318 (I.S. 318). It starts with a hook: "Imagine a school where the chess champs are the heroes of the entire community!" Convince readers that your students will benefit from their generosity. At the end of your pitch, thank your potential funders.

Your basic campaign story, according to the crowdfunding site IncitED, should strive to make an emotional connection to potential contributors by establishing a need, solution, and positive outcome that contributors can visualize. It should paint an appealing picture of the campaign team, and a rationale for why you are uniquely qualified to lead a project once funds are received.

Step 6: Craft a Project Video or Slideshow

Leon Lazarus, Director of Teacher Lee Play-To-Learn (teacherlee.com), a child development program in San Diego, warns campaigns not to create amateurish videos. "The American public responds to production values. Great camera work, coloring, and editing can mean the difference between success and failure." A clever video, like the trailer for Brooklyn Castle (vimeo.com/49483695), a documentary about I.S. 318's chess team, will be shared via email and social media. Shoot multiple short videos at one time in order to maximize your actors' time. Strike a balance between sincere and funny. Each video or slideshow should ask viewers to make a contribution. See EdTechTeacher's video production tips (edtechteacher.org/index.php/teaching-technology/presentation-multimedia/video) and the online article "Common Qualities of Insanely Successful Viral Videos" for inspiration.

Step 7: Brainstorm Perks

Determine if you will use giveaways to entice people to contribute at different levels. Perks can include t-shirts, pins, mugs, or "hall of fame" bulletin boards. Make prizes relate to the campaign and motivate people to support your cause. For example, top contributors to a chorus could receive a serenade-o-gram. A school literary magazine campaign could provide personal framed haikus. Stage bands that practice before school starts could give out breakfast cereal. Branding companies like Corporate Gear Promotions and MadeToOrder sell a variety of marketing merchandise and apparel. Or go goofy by offering virtual high-fives and odd screensavers.

Keep in mind that the higher the funding level, the more oomph there should be in the perk. Bigger perks could include invites and/or special access to events, one-of-a-kind expertise, or even a product that comes from your project.

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     DURING
   THE CAMPAIGN
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Step 8: Kick Off Your Launch with a Bang and Keep Charging

Organize several of your key stakeholders to contribute in the first hours and even the first 30 minutes of the campaign to establish momentum. Some campaigns reach their goal in a few hours using this technique. Eight of Erin Morrison's second-grade classroom projects have been funded. On her blog, The Open Door Classroom, Erin writes that she's seen great success whenever she starts a campaign by donating some of her own money early on. "This shows donors that you believe the materials are needed enough to donate yourself — even a $5 donation will do!"

The campaign of Abril Vela, a student at Northside College Prep in Chicago, earned over $5,700 for her student organization, Chicago Girls in Computing. "There will be slow points in the process of fundraising," she reports on Edsurge. "No matter what happens to your levels of support, keep fighting and people will see that you deserve their support."

Step 9: Update Your Network

"Offer a 'shout out' through Facebook or Twitter to whomever donates $10 to your campaign," advises a Fundly tip sheet. Each update should include new information. The DonorsChoose.org blog post "Our Top 10 Email Subject Lines" suggests using an enticing title in the subject line: "Keep it vague and slightly mysterious to give readers that extra nudge (there's a reason why 'Cake, anyone?' was one of our most-opened emails)." Target special segments of your network: "Soccer Dads! Help us kick it!"

Besides maintaining a Facebook.com page, use HootSuite's AutoSchedule tool (blog.hootsuite.com/autoschedule) to distribute your messages when the largest audience is microblogging. Timing+ (timing.minimali.se) analyzes your post history on Google+ (plus.google.

"**People inherently don't have an itch to fund the unknown.** (But) if a friend, blogger you like, or an organization you're a part of funds a project and tells you about it, you're much more likely to fund it than if you stumbled upon it on your own."

Danae Ringelmann, cofounder of Indiegogo

com) to suggest the best days and times to send out updates.

To keep your network engaged, ask local companies to match offers at various intervals to excite contributors who are on the fence. Write a letter to your local paper. Post video updates on Instagram.com. Issue challenges. There is no silver bullet, but you have unlimited darts and targets all over the Internet. Keep firing.

AFTER THE CAMPAIGN CONCLUDES

10: Celebrate and Debrief Your Campaign

Whether or not your funding goal has been reached, your work continues. Tamara Doehring, the founder and executive director of an educational nonprofit called The English Teacher's Friend, recalls, "There was a lot of additional work after winning — [I] had to write letters and send pictures and reports — almost like a grant. I get the purpose, but it does tend to add lots more work." To sustain goodwill, you may want to do things like distribute any remaining campaign perks, then throw a pancake breakfast for your funders and show a campaign blooper slideshow. Email "thank you" digital postcards with photos of elated students.

Finally, meet with your team to diagnose what was successful about your campaign and what you would do differently. Be sure to keep in touch with your supporters as well. Alicia Li, an intern at Piggybackr, writes on their blog, "Whether it's the number of emails, users, or Facebook likes, there must always be a way to weigh your results, so you know how you're doing and how you can improve."

7 CROWDFUNDING MISTAKES

1 Even a hint of desperation in a project description will make potential contributors balk.

2 Don't post photos of teachers wearing casual Friday flip-flops and slouchy team sweatshirts. Successful crowdfunding pages depict teachers dressed like private wealth managers.

3 Don't use *help* and *donate* in a campaign title. RocketHub's Crowdfunding Success School (http://www.rockethub.com/education/launch) advises using *support* and *fund* instead.

4 Setting up a splashy page and waiting for people to donate won't work. According to the World Wide Web Foundation's 2012 Web Index, there are more than a trillion estimated public pages vying for attention. Marketing magic is necessary.

5 Don't set your funding goal too high. Failed campaigns can saddle your school with a bad reputation, effectively demoralizing your project team and discouraging future donors. Likewise, failing to complete a funded project as expected will alienate supporters. Project implementation should match the rigor of crowdfunding.

6 Don't spam groups you don't know. Use an email marketing service like MailChimp (mailchimp.com) and include an "unsubcribe" link.

7 Don't run a campaign in which you are locked in to a fixed amount in order to keep the money, unless your project requires the entire amount for it to happen.

COMPARING
EDUCATION CROWDFUNDING
PLATFORMS

Teachers, PTAs, administrators, and community leaders have many crowdfunding platforms from which to choose. The following list, although not comprehensive, offers a unique constellation of features to reach donors. (Please check with individual organizations for specifics and updates on fees.)

CROWDFUNDING PLATFORM	PRIMARILY BENEFITS SCHOOLS	OFFERS SOPHISTICATED SYSTEMS AND CUSTOMIZATION	USER-FRIENDLY FOR PTAs	SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION	MUST PURCHASE FROM APPROVED VENDORS
Adopt-A-Classroom adoptaclassroom.org **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** Classroom supplies (e.g., art supplies, test prep materials, classroom tech, school uniforms) **FEATURES** Donors receive impact reports; site is easy to navigate. **FEES** None	✸			✸	✸
ClassWish classwish.org **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** Field trips, musical instruments, sports equipment, classroom tech, special needs equipment **FEATURES** Supplies are shipped to the school for free. **FEES** 2.9% + $0.30 per transaction	✸		✸		✸
Crowdtilt crowdtilt.com **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** Classroom tech, node chairs, dry erase boards, robotics club, science teacher's salary **FEATURES** K-12 school projects represent only a small portion of their campaigns. **FEES** 2.5% if goal is met; contributors pay 2.5% per transaction.		✸		✸	

CROWDFUNDING PLATFORM	PRIMARILY BENEFITS SCHOOLS	OFFERS SOPHISTICATED SYSTEMS AND CUSTOMIZATION	USER-FRIENDLY FOR PTAs	SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION	MUST PURCHASE FROM APPROVED VENDORS
DonorsChoose donorschoose.org **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** Classroom tech, field trips, sousaphone, money to send a student-created experiment to the International Space Station **FEATURES** Public schools only; campaigns can last up to four months. **FEES** None for teachers	●	●	○	●	●
Edbacker edbacker.com **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** Any school-related projects, events, or programs **FEATURES** Cost Builder tool helps calculate cost of campaign; optional weekly calls to discuss campaign statistics and strategy. **FEES** 10%, including PayPal processing fees	●	○	●	●	○
Fundly fundly.com **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** Furniture, libraries, Montessori programs, expansion and renovation, annual campaigns **FEATURES** Automated social media integration imports contacts and customizes email templates. **FEES** 2.9% to 4.9% of donations, depending on campaign type; 3% per transaction	○	●	○	●	○
GoFundMe gofundme.com **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** Events, yoga training and mats, tuition, wheelchair basketball equipment, professional-development costs **FEATURES** Offers campaigns that allow schools to spend funds as soon as received. **FEES** 5% on all donations; 2.9% + $0.30 per transaction	○	●	○	●	○
IncitED incited.org **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** School startups , summer programs, electric vehicle project, violin program, classroom makeover **FEATURES** Allows schools to collect money even if goals are not met; offers excellent guides for running successful campaigns. **FEES** 5% if goals met, 8% if not; 2.9% + $0.30 per transaction	●	○	●	●	○

CROWDFUNDING PLATFORM	PRIMARILY BENEFITS SCHOOLS	OFFERS SOPHISTICATED SYSTEMS AND CUSTOMIZATION	USER-FRIENDLY FOR PTAs	SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION	MUST PURCHASE FROM APPROVED VENDORS
Indiegogo indiegogo.com **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** School uniforms, music programs, K-8 scholarships, renovations, sustainable food program **FEATURES** Tools for social media integration and campaign statistics; active campaigns may be promoted and given press. **FEES** 4% if goals met, 9% if not; nonprofits receive 25% discount; 3% credit card processing fee	○	★	○	★	○
Piggybackr piggybackr.com **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** Sports, science, school supplies, student clubs, trips, charities, entrepreneurial ideas **FEATURES** COPPA-compliant (coppa.org); supports student teams working with or without adult leader; guides students through process. **FEES** 3.5% to 5% per transaction; 2.9% + $0.30 credit card fee	○	○	○	★ [FOR THOSE 13 AND OLDER]	○
PledgeCents pledgecents.com **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** Resources, operations costs, furniture, and even teacher salaries **FEATURES** Schools can spend money earned, even if goal not met; bracelets can be purchased for students and donors to promote campaigns. **FEES** 5% if goals met, 8% if not; transaction fee of 3% of total raised	★	○	★	○	○
Razoo razoo.com **CAMPAIGN EXAMPLES** PTA projects and annual giving, education funds and foundations, school districts **FEATURES** Supports public school PTAs with or without 501(c)(3) status; offers donation widget, Facebook.com donation app. **FEES** 4.9% for all nonprofits/501(c)(3) organizations	○	★	★	★	○

ABOUT EDUTOPIA

Edutopia is where The George Lucas Educational Foundation's vision to highlight what works in education comes to life. We are a private operating foundation dedicated to improving the K-12 learning process by documenting, disseminating, and advocating for innovative, replicable, and evidence-based strategies that prepare students to thrive in their future education, careers, and adult lives.

Through our award-winning website, videos, and growing online community, Edutopia supports and enables education reform by shining a spotlight on real-world solutions and providing proven strategies, tools, and resources that are successfully changing how our children learn.

To find and share solutions, visit Edutopia.org.

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