

## Five Tips for Sponsorships and Fundraising in These Difficult Economic Times

By Justin L. Heather

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

—Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

The legal community, like the rest of the nation, faces an economic crisis. Lawyers across the nation are being laid off or let go, salaries are being slashed, and everyone’s belt is being cinched up a bit. With budgets, and especially marketing budgets, being reduced or even in some cases eliminated, affiliates face a daunting task in planning fundraisers and recruiting sponsors for events. The following strategies should help affiliates in those efforts.

### 1. Make It Personal

Lawyers are constantly bombarded with requests to make donations or support various causes. Making the “ask” a personal request is essential to successful fundraising. If the person making the request knows the target donor, the likelihood of success is much higher. Similarly, *noting past support* from an individual or organization while making the request and during the event are fundamental to obtaining continued support for future events.

“The key for me has been to send out the reminder e-mails a few months in advance and to target a golfer at each of the big firms,” said Darin Luneckas, current Chair of the Iowa State Bar Association’s YLD Justice for All Committee, who also serves as the Committee Chair for Justice for All Golf Ball, which hosts three different golf tournaments each year. “I always mention our records on their past generosity and our hope to have them continue in their support of the volunteer lawyers’ project,” he added. “I also make it a point to specifically recognize long-time partners for the event when announcing things at the event itself,”

In short, making a personal connection goes a long way in successful fundraising. “Contact people you know,” stated Lynlee Wells Palmer, ABA YLD Conference & Program Director and a member of the ABA YLD Fall Conference Host Committee. “They are less likely to say no if they have a personal connection with you.”

### 2. Make It Relevant

The solicitation must also be relevant to the person being asked to donate. In other words, make the “ask” something about which the person or organization cares. For example, the YLD Fall Conference Host Committee focused on the fact that Birmingham would host hundreds of young lawyers from across the country.

“For the Birmingham conference, we highlighted the fact that this will be the first exposure that many people have to the Birmingham legal community, and we want to make sure that our city and our lawyers shine,” Palmer explained. Making the donation relevant to the target donors will greatly enhance your fundraising efforts.

### 3. Use Your Rolodex

Lawyers receive hundreds of solicitations each year from various vendors, such as document management and discovery firms, deposition services, and potential experts. Just as these people rely on lawyers for their business, lawyers need these vendor services to serve their clients. By connecting these vendors with their select audience, affiliates may be able to enhance their fundraising potential.

### 4. Be Creative

Although beginning a new fundraising project in the current environment may be challenging, it may also serve to spur participation. Unique and exciting sponsorship and fundraising opportunities enhance interest in these events.

“The key to fundraising during these difficult economic times is to be creative and offer new and exciting events for people to participate in,” noted Gina Arquilla, Immediate Past Chair of the Illinois State Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and an ABA YLD District Representative. “The Summer Soiree was unique in that the ISBA YLD had never before done a formal event. The Summer Soiree was a black-tie optional event that consisted of a silent auction, cocktails and buffet dinner, and live band,” Arquilla explained. “The key was to offer sponsorship opportunities and tickets at a

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price-point that young lawyers could afford, with sponsorship opportunities available starting at \$25. Over 115 people attended the event and we were able raise over \$10,000 [net] for the Children's Assistance Fund!"

**5. Follow-up**

As a result of their busy practices, lawyers often fail to donate or sponsor activities simply because requests get lost in the shuffle. Following up with potential donors by e-mail, phone, or letter keeps the event fresh in their minds and increases fundraising dollars.

Although applying these five tips in your fundraising efforts will not guarantee success, they represent successful strategies for future events. Even with the current economic difficulties, affiliates have many opportunities for executing successful fundraising events.

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