

Keeping the Boat Afloat:

Tips on Fundraising Strategies for Your Chapter

by Michaela Connolly



From the outside, fundraising looks easy. If you sell items for more than you paid for them, you make a profit. But fundraising is not that simple. It involves planning and logistics, and is critical to covering the costs of running your chapter. Nearly every activity incurs expenses, from providing refreshments at meetings, to transportation to conventions. While schools may provide some monetary support, successful fundraising keeps the SNA's financial boat "afloat."

Selecting Items to Sell

When deciding on items to sell, first identify the financial goals of your chapter. How much money do you need to raise? How many sales will achieve this goal? What items will sell the best? Consider the following criteria in selecting your sale items: Are they useful and tasteful? Will they sell easily? Are they fun? Will you have to worry about the item becoming outdated or taking up too much space? What about food spoilage if you are selling perishable items? What other resources are needed to sell the items?

Start with inexpensive items, such as t-shirts. Consider a raffle for donated items, which do not require a lot of overhead. Other popular merchandise include shorts, sweatshirts, stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs, nursing shoes, and scrubs. When ordering these items in advance from the manufacturers, take advantage of "wholesale" or bulk discounts, but be sure not to order too much quantity, or you may have an excess of unsold goods.



Fundraising brings visibility to your group, so make sure the item conveys the message you intend, and keep a positive image of nursing in mind. Before you begin selling, check if your school has any fundraising policies or restrictions

related to fundraising. For example, some schools may require items to be “patented,” i.e., registered with student activities so that no other group may sell the item. Keep in mind that your merchandise should appeal to everyone.

The location of a fundraiser is always important. The nursing program is a great place to start. If your school has other academic programs, extend your sale to this larger market by setting up



shop in a visible area. Some of the best places to fundraise are at your state convention and NSNA's annual convention every April. Conventions draw great crowds who appreciate fun and unique merchandise. Another great place to fundraise is at community events such as local health fairs. Shopping malls attract large crowds too, but make sure you get permission.

It is important that you understand your market. While your peers are an expected market, sales to nursing students alone may not generate the income needed, particularly if your program is small, or you have sold to this group already. Think about expanding your sales to family members of nursing students, who are often willing to purchase items for a good cause. And don't forget about nursing faculty and staff.

Timing Your Event

The timing of sales is critical to the success of your fundraiser. Holding too many back-to-back events for the same

market will decrease your revenue, as college students often have limited budgets. The best times to sell are: late August as the new school year begins; November, before the winter holidays; February, before spring break; and in late April before summer. (See box on p.52) Take advantage of the back to school momentum. Include a letter of introduction and an order form with the school's welcome letter to incoming

students. Be sure to keep your prices reasonable and advertise as much as possible.

Selling Methods

There are two ways to sell: (1). **cash and carry**, in which you already have the items for sale and are selling right at your table; and (2). **pre-sale**, where customers order the items from you and you deliver them at a later date. Check with others experienced at fundraising, or with your faculty advisor, on which type of selling is right for you.

Delegate!

If you are the fundraising chair, be sure not to overcommit yourself, or you will be overworked and stressed, not to mention behind in your school work. The best way to delegate is to get organized. Form a fundraising committee, and communicate regularly with members to work together toward common fundraising goals. Ask other

board members to help you, and delegate tasks, with each member of the fundraising committee taking turns running an event. Follow up with written instructions, or better yet, prepare an information packet that can be handed down from one person to the next.

Advertising



Advertising is one of the most important factors in a successful sale, as you can't make money if you

don't have anyone at your event!

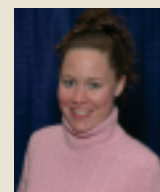
Advertise through: e-mail and regular mail, chapter or school publications, in-class announcements, bulletin boards, flyers, and online. Many sources of advertising are free, but some may have fees, so choose carefully. Ads should be simple, and easy to read.

Enjoy...

Fundraising is vital for the financial health of your chapter, but keep in mind that having fun is part of fundraising. If you find that one method is not working, try something else. If you need help, consult with your board members and advisor. Don't be afraid to try something new. Through selling and keeping your SNA's financial boat “afloat,” you will meet many people and develop business skills that will help you in your professional and personal life so enjoy the experience.☺

resources

NSNA Guidelines for Fundraising
www.nсна.org/pubs/guidelines/fundraising.pdf



Michaela Connolly, BSN, graduated in May, 2005, from Villanova University, Villanova, PA. This article was written as part of an independent study that met objectives for NSNA's Leadership

University Program. For more information, visit www.nснаleadershipu.org. The author acknowledges the guidance of her advisor, Carol Toussie Weingarten, PhD, RN.

Peak Selling Times and Suggested Items

Stethoscopes and Blood Pressure Cuffs	summer and fall
Tank Tops and Shorts	start of fall semester, middle of spring semester (before spring break)
Short-sleeved t-shirts	summer, start of fall semester, end of spring semester
Long-sleeved t-shirts	early winter
Nursing shoes	at least one month before clinicals

* note: remember you can sell all items year-round at conventions and special events

Typical Fundraising Problems and How to Avoid Them

Problem	Strategy
Doing all the work yourself	Form a committee early in the year and meet regularly. Appoint members to chair different projects. Mentor your committee members.
Not enough time to organize the fundraiser	Plan in advance. Keep in mind semester breaks and other times when students may be away. Make due dates early enough so merchandise is received before sale time.
Staffing the sale	Make sure everyone on your committee takes turns staffing the sale.
Handling money	Each organization handles money differently. Find out how your organization works and the specific role of the treasurer. Deposit money promptly in the SNA account. Do not leave money in dorm rooms, homes, etc. Do not mix SNA money with personal accounts!
Reimbursing vendors	Find out before placing an order if the vendor wants to be paid before or after the merchandise is received and make sure timely payments are made. Then, contact the appropriate person in order to receive the money. Always get receipts!
Distribution of items	Set a date, time, and location for merchandise pick-up, possibly leaving items labeled with the name of the customer at a convenient location. The nursing office works well if this is acceptable to staff. If items are to be mailed, include postage, packaging and handling in the costs. Work with committee members to prepare packages if the items are delivered to your school.