

How to Organize a Walkathon:

Your Complete Guide to Hosting a Walkathon



For more information on our walk-a-thon software, contact us today.
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WHY HAVE A WALK-A-THON?

Organizations have long favored walk-a-thons and other similar pledge events because they offer great opportunities for raising money and spreading the word about your organization without high overhead costs. This allows organizations to apply more funds earned directly to their cause. In addition, walk-a-thons engage people of all ages and all abilities – offering a wonderful opportunity to connect with others.

Walk-a-thons can vary greatly in size and scope. Both the March of Dimes and Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation host widely popular and nationally recognized races based on the same format as the walk-a-thons seen in local communities.

ORGANIZING A WALK-A-THON

Walk-a-thons carry a reputation for fast, fun, and effective fundraising. Big results are entirely possible with careful planning and execution. The following steps are designed to keep the planning process on track, whether you are a first-timer or a seasoned professional.

Assemble a Leadership Team

Successful events hinge on the recruitment and action of a strong leadership team. The first step to creating a great event is to recruit help. Ideally, your team should be comprised of individuals with diverse skills and talents that share a common interest in the organization's success. When recruiting, consider who you know that may possess any or all of the following characteristics:

- Enjoys managing details
- Exhibits creativity and passion for your cause
- Feels comfortable asking for sponsorships, in-kind gifts, and/or donations
- Understands local laws and regulations and can work effectively with governing bodies
- Holds experience in the successful management of projects and events
- Knowledge of marketing, PR, and social media tactics to help spread the word

Design Your Course

Getting started requires the selection of a date, time, distance, and location for your event. In addition, working smart at this stage of the game requires delegation. Consider assigning a person (or team of people) to the following project areas:

- Legal/Logistics:
 - Contacts city and local government to obtain permits
 - Works with local police departments on issues such as traffic and police detail
 - Communicates with local government regarding liability issues and oversees the procurement of the proper insurance coverage
 - Secures materials to mark the course, such as traffic cones and or tape, as well as communication methods (i.e., walkie-talkies)
 - Checks into parking availability for event day
 - Recruits volunteers to manage set up, maintenance of and take down of course on the day of the event

- Works together with the Hospitality Team to plan for poor weather conditions
- Corporate Sponsorships and Donations:
 - Prospects and solicits sponsorship from members of the business community
 - Recruits in-kind donations, such as breakfast for walk-a-thon participants, beverages along the course, sunscreen and first aid products, tee-shirts, items for participant goodie bags, and any items needed for after-event activities
 - Works with the Public Relations Team to develop a donor/sponsorship information packet;
 - Organizes expo area for vendors and sponsors
 - Maintains records of sponsors and donors
 - Oversees the proper acknowledgment of all donations (i.e., thank you notes, receipts or documentation of the gift, and recognition at the event and in event literature)
- Public Relations & Marketing:
 - Recruits celebrity participants for roles such as a master of ceremony, team leader, judge, or prize presenter). Celebrity participation helps to boost participation, media attention, and corporate sponsorship
 - Works with Corporate Sponsorship and Donation group to develop a sponsorship and donation information packet
 - Designs and develops print media for the event (i.e., registration packet, signage, and the coordination of sponsor logos within printed materials)
 - Creates and distributes press releases
 - Contacts local media to obtain information for press release submissions, pitch stories, extend VIP invites to events, etc.
 - Sets up an event website with pledge and donation collection and tracking capacity
 - Utilizes social networking, email campaigns, blogs, and online marketing tactics to spread the word online
 - Coordinates event photography and/or video
- Hospitality:
 - Plans and coordinates the use of in-kind donations for walk participants
 - Sends periodic coaching cards to race participants prior to the event with helpful tips for finding additional pledges and training for a safe and healthy walk
 - Coordinates an after-walk event (Ideally an indoor event that could easily transition into a replacement activity in the event of rain or bad weather)
 - Recruits volunteers to serve breakfast before the event, beverages during the event, administer first aid along the walk course as needed, and for the after-walk event)
 - Plans and facilitates fun warm-up activities for people that arrive early
 - Organizes token items, like gift cards, to compensate on race day for inconveniences or unexpected problems
 - Facilitates participant check-in
 - Recruits walkers and teams
 - Coordinates entertainment, such as music, contests, and prizes to make the event day fun and enjoyable for everyone

Implement Your Plan

Now that tasks are delegated, it's time to go to work. Timelines are essential for staying on track, so DoJiggy has also created a Walk-a-thon Timeline & Planner for your use. The leadership team should hold meetings and stay in regular contact throughout the event planning process, communicating and collaborating about shared accomplishments and challenges.

Excellent planning and event execution on your part will greatly impact your walk-a-thon event's success. Remember, outcomes also remain highly dependent on strong walker, media and sponsor participation. For this reason, consider focusing on the following areas to boost your fundraising potential.

RECRUITING WALKERS

Successful walker recruitment hinges on several carefully administered elements of your event. Getting the word out, creating and producing an event that is fun and memorable, and offering easy ways for people to participate will all be important in this process.

Getting the Word Out

When it comes time to recruit participants and volunteers, nothing will be more important than your network. Networks exist in all sizes and capacities. To use your organization's resources to their fullest potential, you must first assess and understand what strengths exist within your established connections and use them to develop areas that are not as strong.

Of course, drawing participants from your organization's constituents or benefiting party is natural. These people are likely not only to participate but to ask friends and family members to participate. Encourage this!

In addition, remember that an organization's number one recruiting tool is its Board of Directors, steering committee, or leadership branch. The people serving in these capacities are often well-established in the community. The relationships these people have in your community are important not only for recruiting sponsors but also for recruiting volunteers and participants. Companies value opportunities to engage their workforce in community activities. Therefore, it is important to ask companies not only for sponsorship but also for their participation. Team registrations offer a fun and easy way for companies to participate in your walk.

Walk-a-Thon Team Registrations

Many organizations find success in offering opportunities for team registration. Ask each member of your leadership team to head a team.

Energy and momentum are contagious, and it is natural to find fun and motivation in groups. People are more likely to register when they can do so with others that they know. Make sure to include information about team registration in your corporate sponsorship packet.

Harnessing the Competitive Spirit

People love opportunities to compete. Taking the time to plan fun and rewardable accomplishments can add significant value to your walk-a-thon by motivating pledges and participation. Consider different incentive points that can be incorporated into your event. Here are some ideas:

- **Head Start:** Participants raising a certain amount of money through pledges collected in advance receive a head start on race day.
- **Track Progress:** Your fundraising website allows you to track progress with a fundraising thermometer. Seeing how close you are to reaching your goal motivates participants and donors.
- **Highlight top-performing individuals and teams** on your fundraising website, giving others an incentive to step up their game.
- **Awards:**
 - **Team Recognition:** Honor the team with the highest amount raised. Give them exposure at the event through photo opportunities or by giving a special award on race day.
 - **Individual Prizes:** Honor the individual with the most donations at the event. Organize a special prize, and publicize this prize before the event.
 - **Social Award:** provide an award for the individual with the greatest effort to spread the word through social networks. Even though they may not have raised the most in donations, their efforts helped spread awareness for your cause.

Planning an Event that is Fun and Memorable

Perhaps the event you are planning is the first in your organization's history, and perhaps the event is one in a long line of events. When planning, remember to keep a long-term perspective. Successful events are best repeated annually and draw loyal participants. For this reason, it is helpful to build in elements that participants will find both fun and memorable, activities that will help maintain your participants' excitement for the event year after year.

Consider amplifying your event with pre-race and race day contests, photo opportunities, and souvenirs. We suggest identifying an event item, such as a bandana, tee-shirt, or snack pack, which people can collect from year to year to mark walk participation. Developing goody bags filled with donated items from sponsors such as sunblock, gift cards, energy bars, and other event-related items also encourages turnout. Make the goody bags and tee-shirts (or other items) available on race day only.

Walk-a-thon websites also help to produce fun and memorable events because they offer public forums for photos and personal testimonials. Now participants have a canvas to tell their story. With DoJiggy, participants create individual fundraising pages where they upload personal photos and videos, set fundraising goals, and post comments from supporters and donors. Not only are these pages fun to create, but they make collecting donations easy, as participants can share a link on their Facebook page or other social media outlets or send emails to their network of family and friends.

MARKETING YOUR WALK-A-THON

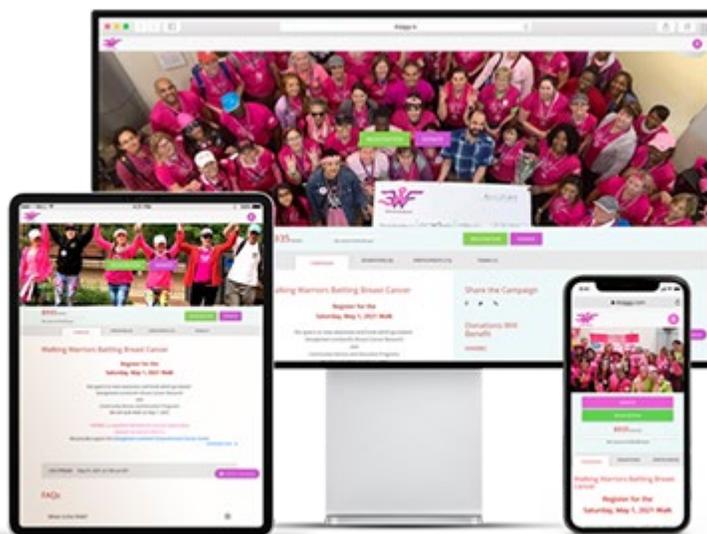
Depending on the size of your walk or Fun Run event, you may design marketing efforts for a small audience, such as a school or specific community organization, or create a communications plan to reach a larger national audience. Regardless of the size of your event, marketing will serve an important purpose in raising awareness, drawing participants, bringing in donations, and cultivating action. Most organizations utilize a variety of media for getting the word out.

Brand the Event

Good organizers must think long-term when planning marketing efforts. This means not only considering how your event can be marketed now but also about how the marketing tactics chosen will serve your organization and event in future years. Creating a brand, a logo, and slogan for the event is a great way to start. This brings familiarity to your event and helps people recognize your event now, and in the future.

Create a Walk-a-thon Crowdfunding Website and Engage Online

Online channels are one of the most cost-effective ways to promote your event. Creating a walk-a-thon crowdfunding website is essential to your fundraising success. Once you've created a fundraising website that explains the who, what, when, where, and how of your fundraising event, you have a great place to direct people for further action. Since so many people communicate through their computers and mobile devices, a fundraising website allows for easy promotion of your event by simply sharing a link to your site. Here people can learn more about the event, register and create their personal fundraising page, buy products, and make secure online donations.



Your organization can remind people of your upcoming fundraiser by sending an email blast or posting on Facebook, Twitter, or other Social Media outlets. Then you can ask your supporters to share the link to their fundraising website with their network. This opens up your campaign to a much even audience of potential donors. Be sure to look for online media opportunities, including event calendars, popular local events bloggers, and more.

Custom Printed Materials

Custom printed materials provide important exposure. They are an easy way to recognize sponsors while at the same time promoting the event. Many options exist for print materials. Tee shirts, flyers, brochures, posters, signage, stickers, and items specific to your event, like walking apparel, offer marketing opportunities. Utilize the resources available to develop graphics and logos that are visually appealing and can be used year after year. It's a good idea to provide participants with event items before the event, such as stickers, tee-shirts, posters, pens, and pencils. As participants use these items, your event will become more visible.

Utilizing and Engaging Media Sources

The media plays a big part in reaching prospective participants and creating positive buzz about your event. Consider recruiting someone with media connections to your leadership team. If this is not possible, seek sponsorship from the local newspaper, television station, and/or radio station. Often, these media sources will donate ad time or space in exchange for sponsorship.

Writing a Press Release

If media connections are not readily available within your leadership team, you will need to do a little more legwork to get the word out. In many cases, this means communicating information to the media clearly and concisely and in a format that can be easily used. In other words, your goal is to make it as easy as possible for the media source to publish, attend or announce your event with the least amount of work.

Press releases are perhaps the most common method of communicating with the press. Normally press releases go out several days before an event. These releases communicate all the details of your event.

Basic Guidelines for Writing a Press Release:

- Include a concise, catchy headline to introduce the event
- Are not more than one page in length (single-spaced)
- Communicate the who, what, when, where, and why of your event
 - This will include mandatory details such as event name, date, time, information about your organization and the benefiting cause, and possible mention of sponsors and entertainers.
- Include your contact information (name, telephone, and email address)
- Provide a link to your fundraising website, so media may obtain more information about the event and send readers to your site

If your press release reads like a short news article, with no grammatical errors or unexplained technical terms or jargon, and effectively draws a reader's interest, you have succeeded. Contact your local media outlets to find out how you may submit your press release for review.

RECRUITING RACE SPONSORS

Race sponsors fulfill a critical role in any successful walk-a-thon. Most importantly, race sponsors create a financial backbone for your event. When organizations successfully recruit sponsors, each walk-a-thon donation can go further because sponsorships help to immediately offset event costs. Sponsorships can often increase community exposure, which is helpful when it is time to attract the attention of the local media and recruit volunteers.

Soliciting sponsorships can be an intimidating task. It may be helpful to remember the following items.

Companies Benefit From Sponsorship

Understanding and articulating how prospective sponsors benefit from working with your organization is crucial. Everyone likes to help out a great cause; however, companies are looking for a win-win relationship. Be able to articulate exactly what your event will do for the companies you seek sponsorship from *before* you speak with them. When speaking with companies, stay open to possible benefits you may have missed and look for opportunities to create more value.

For example, companies located along the walk-a-thon course are great prospects, especially if they sell products for exercise or walking. Beverage companies and grocery stores are great potential sponsors, especially for in-kind donations. Insurance companies may be able to create special slogans pertaining to health and safety. Perhaps you offer an event expo area before and after the event where sponsors receive a free booth to sell or promote their product or company.

Be creative and have fun! For example, if a mattress or furniture store is along the route, maybe they can create a special “rest stop” for your walkers as part of their sponsorship. This would certainly attract more eyes to their products come race day while at the same time helping further your fundraising mission. The possibilities are endless. Don’t be afraid to think outside the box.

Don’t Forget the Basics

In addition to pairing the mission of your potential sponsors with your event’s activity or mission, remember that other general benefits exist for lending sponsorship. These benefits may include the following:

- Increased exposure in the community
- Tax deductions (check with your organization’s tax advisor for details)
- Opportunities for team building and employee development

Tailor Opportunities and Offer Options

The best sponsorship opportunity is one that fits the capacity of the sponsor perfectly. For this reason, it is important to remain flexible and allow many options for sponsorship. Examples include:

- In-kind donations (such as tee-shirts, beverages, snacks, sunscreen, and/or signage)
- Sponsorships with varying levels of financial support (such as starting line or finishing line sponsors, mile sponsors, team sponsors, and pit stop sponsors)
- Develop sponsorship levels corresponding to sponsorship size. Select race-related names for the levels of sponsorship (such as platinum, gold, silver, and bronze or marathon, half-marathon, 10K, and 5K)

Utilize Your Network

You've considered your network for recruiting volunteers and participants. Have you considered your network for soliciting donations and sponsorships? A great way to build your sponsorship list is to consider who you know. Who in your team of volunteers is connected to a small business owner? Who in your team of volunteers works for a larger company or corporation that may designate funds for local community projects? Can they help connect you to the person in charge of corporate sponsorships? What employers in your area have employee-matching programs, and what are the criteria for eligibility?

The most important thing to remember about networks is that they constantly grow and change. Most organizations do a great job of assessing their networks when first constructing recruitment and prospecting plans. As you recruit volunteers and participants, your network is also growing. Schedule a second and third assessment of your network, and actively seek out connections that will aid the success of your event.

Remember that no one can better express your event's mission and importance than you. Let your enthusiasm and passion be contagious, and sponsorships will come. Recruiting sponsors takes organization, tenacity, and energy. Consider working in teams or pairs when approaching potential sponsors. This is a great way to support each other, motivate, and learn new ways of approaching sponsors. If you decide to work in teams, it is helpful to clarify roles before meeting with the potential sponsor. Generally, one person should take the lead, and the other helps with clarification and support.

Be Organized

By now, you probably have a bunch of ideas in your mind. Here are a few handy steps for getting started:

1. Develop a corporate sponsor packet with a concise cover letter.
2. Determine what your agency will provide in exchange for sponsorship. For example, the use of logos on signs, tee shirts, websites, or in publicity materials.
3. Brainstorm a list of prospective sponsors. Delegate each prospect and create a concrete timeline for approaching each prospect.
4. Make sure to obtain the graphics and or logos for each sponsor as you go. You'll be thankful to have them ready when it's time to print walk-a-thon materials.

PUT DOJIGGY TO WORK

DoJiggy's crowdfunding platform offers security and time-saving benefits for walk-a-thon event administrators and participants.

What We Offer Administrators

DoJiggy software provides tools for streamlined registration, secure donation processing, event ticketing, and report building. With DoJiggy, your fundraising website can manage every facet of your event easily and efficiently. No more messy Excel spreadsheets and no fear over losing a row or a column. Our sales staff are happy to walk you through our user-friendly interface, and you can work knowing that your information is stored in good hands.

DoJiggy makes it easy to monitor the progress of your event. For example, our software allows administrators to manage and monitor total funds raised to date, highest team and individual fundraisers, number of participants registered, sales summaries, and many other event statistics.

In all, DoJiggy offers a hub for all registration, event tracking, and donation collection needs.

“I wish I had known about DoJiggy when I started with Meals on Wheels. People expect events to have online registration. DoJiggy gave us that next level we needed to be professional and gave us an advantage.” - Sheryl Dalton, Meals on Wheels

What We Offer Participants

Your walk-a-thon website allows each participant to create a personal fundraising page with a unique URL. Participants upload personal photos and videos and email friends and family members to ask for support. Participants can track their progress on their profile.

Online registration and pledge management are available 24 hours a day, so participants log in at their convenience from anywhere in the world. This not only helps bolster the success of the event through advance donations but also relieves the difficulty of collecting money from friends and family in the days immediately before or after the event.

DoJiggy websites support team registrations as well. Team captains can customize and manage their team fundraising pages with pictures, videos, and testimonials. This feature is great for teams with a mission to raise funds for a specific person or cause.

One of the largest benefits of hosting an online space for participants is the friendly competition that builds when participants can see their fundraising progress as well as the progress of their peers. Fundraising thermometers and leaderboards provide great motivation and can be fun, especially when paired with a contest or specific fundraising goal.

In Summary

DoJiggy has provided this resource paper to get you on the road to a successful walk-a-thon. When it comes to walk-a-thon software, DoJiggy can help manage every facet of your event more easily and efficiently. DoJiggy software provides streamlined registration, event tracking, and report building tools. Upon registration, each walk-a-thon participant will create a personal fundraising page with their picture, personal statement, and a thermometer that goes up as they reach their fundraising goal.

Please visit our website or contact us today at (888) 436-1999 for more information on crowdfunding software for your walk-a-thon.

EXAMPLE FUNDRAISING WEBPAGE

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a fundraising page on DoJiggy.io. The page features a large hero image of a woman running with a child. The title is "School Fun Run DEMO". Navigation buttons for "STUDENT CENTER" and "DONATE" are visible. A progress bar shows "\$1,100 RAISED" and "2% raised of \$50,000 goal". A navigation menu includes "CAMPAIGN", "DONATIONS (3)", and "CLASSES (3)". The main content area has a heading "Hope Elementary School Fun Run & Walk-a-thon" and a paragraph: "This year, we'll be walking to support our school's STEM programs. Won't you please support us? All of the money raised will go to support our school communities, and we all benefit from this work." Below this is a small image of children running and a snippet of text: "Students strive for their personal best as they walk, run, and have". To the right, there is a "Share the Campaign" section with social media icons and a "Meet the Organization" section.