Main Street
NATIONAL TRUST FOR
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Successful Fundraising Ideas: Collected by Kathy La Plante

1. **Auctions** – Have businesses donate items to be auctioned off at a gala event. Tilton, Dover, Jaffrey, and Durham, NH have run successful auctions, raising thousands of dollars ($10,000 - $32,000). A great place to get merchandise is from Steiner Sports (www.steinersports.com) that offers autographed sports memorabilia at special prices to non-profits. It must sell for a minimum bid but if it does not, the merchandise can be returned. Local businesses can donate merchandise, which is often easier for them to donate than cash. In Dover, the librarian donated historic research on anyone's home. The fire department offered a fire truck ride. A local chef offered to cook a dinner for eight at his home. The Board Chair offered a three-hour boat ride on the Great Bay followed by a lobster dinner. Get your board or planning committee to come up with creative ways to add items to the auction menu. Typically, auctions will take in at least 50% of the total value of the items available. These events are labor intensive and need a minimum of six months of planning. Tickets are sold to attend auctions, generally from $15-$25 per person.

2. **Historic Home or Building Tours or Garden Tours or Cemetery Tours** – Raise awareness of historic preservation and history by doing home or Downtown historic building tours, charging and admission fee and soliciting corporate sponsors. Similar events would be hosting a Garden Tour or a Kitchen Tour. Dover, NH hosted a "Factory Revealed" tour of their mill. This play/reenactment and art sale raised over $11,000 for Dover Main Street. The next year, Dover did "Graveyarns" a cemetery tour that had actors playing those deceased. This event raised about $12,000. However, in other Main Street communities, there was outrage when a cemetery tour was proposed as people left it was disrespectful. Gauge your own community.

3. **Sweet Treats on Main Street** – Participants are invited for $10 per person to eat all the sweets they can in an evening. Volunteers can provide the treats. Great promotion near Valentine's Day. Enfield, NH (population 3,500) has done this project and raises $1,000 - $2,000.

4. **Chair Affair and Birdhouses** – Laconia, NH Main Street held their first Chair Affair in 2004 to raise money for their façade grant program. 15 Adirondack chairs were painted by local artists and auctioned off. Visit www.laconiamainstreet.org to see photos of the Chairs. The first auction netted about $5,000 from the 15 chairs and admission to the auction. They doubled the number of chairs in 2005 and the auction is scheduled for late summer. The chairs are on display throughout Downtown and special events. Picking up on Laconia's idea the Greater Meredith Program is doing birdhouse (these are BIG birdhouses). They were very creative in asking people to decorate them, including a request to Laura Bush (who declined) but they did get Rebecca Cole from *Surprise by Design* to do one. Their auction is schedule for the summer of 2005.

   Another popular event from Arkansas is street art that is eventually sold to interested parties. See http://www.southsidemain.org/Chairs.htm as an example. In 2007 it made around $15,000.

5. **Roasts** – The Greater Meredith Program held two successful roasts of local personalities in 2004 and 2005. At their first event, they roasted the police chief. The second dinner they roasted a local property developer who also happened to be the Main Street program board chair. Creative invitations were sent in small boxes. Opening the box the invitee found the invitation cover that noted, “Caution: Contents Flammable”. In the bottom of the box was a piece of charcoal surround by bright orange and red confetti (to simulate flames). Tables were decorated candles and charcoal and hot pads with the program name and event name on them that each attendee got to take home. Sponsors for the event were solicited and tickets to the dinner and roast cost $60 per person. The organization raised approximately $12,000 - $13,000.

6. **Great Check Event** – Claremont, NH Main Street has hosted a Great Check Event, asking those pledging to the program to show up in Downtown to have a group photo taken from a building top, as they all hold up their checks. The photos are then sold as a fundraiser too.

7. **Suitcase Party ---** A Main Street program hosted a "suitcase party" fund raiser. It was in the bleakest, coldest, snowiest part of winter, when everyone needed a little bit of sunshine. They raffled off a weekend trip for two to the Bahamas. They dumped a few dump truck-loads of beach sand into a vacant storefront, added some palm trees and a mural of the ocean and sea, and turned it into a "beach". On Friday night, they had a beach party - steel drum band, piña coladas, etc. Everyone brought a suitcase packed for a weekend in the Bahamas (a suitcase/coat check-in area set up at the front of the storefront). At 7:30 pm they drew the winning ticket; there was a limo waiting outside, and the couple who won got their suitcases, got in the limo, went to the airport, and flew to the Bahamas right then. Everyone else partied all night. In 1984 when this event was held, the trip cost us about $1,500; the party cost another $2,500 or so (including a “heavy hors d’oeuvres” buffet and a drink ticket). They charged $50 per raffle ticket and sold about 300 of them, and made a little bit of money on drink sales – so, they grossed about $15,000 and netted a little over $10,000.

8. **A Diamond Dig** -- similar to the beach party theme - folks get to dig for a diamond in a big pile of sand at $2.00 a shovel full-use a child's pal and shovel. This could be added to many downtown special events.

9. **Solicit Businesses Directly** – remember that large corporate businesses have charitable funds and marketing funds, and many support the program administratively and on promotional events. Samples of fundraising letters from Main Street communities are available at the NHMSC. Littleton Main Street had each board member sign all letters to businesses being solicited for investment in the Main Street program and Board Members agreed to make personal follow-up calls. “You can’t get milk from a cow, by sending it a letter.” Personal contact is always the best way to get the most money. At a minimum, phone calls to each prospect are necessary to be effective.

   Try a theme when soliciting new pledges. Denton, Texas’ last one was a Safari theme--Denton Main Street's Expedition for New Members. Invitations were on leopard print paper and board members invited potential members to a mixer at Bushwacker's Wine Safari (that really the name of the store, thus the theme). They used puns like "Hunting for new contacts? Come meet our Main Street members." "No need to forage for food, drinks and appetizers are provided."

Chanute Main Street did a round-up theme with a bandana tied around a mug like a cowboy neckerchief. The invitation was printed on paper with a bandana border and was hand delivered to the recipient. The mug was filled with peanuts in the shell.

10. **Peer-to-Peer Solicitation** – Goffstown, NH Main Street had a local landscaper and realtor agree to solicit investments for the Main Street program from their peers. Each wrote their own personalized letter to others in their field. It challenged each business to match the investment their business had made to the Main Street program. The letter noted that they would call to follow up if they didn't reply by mail. Seventy percent of the landscaper businesses responded and 85% of the realtors.

11. **Cutie Pie Beauty Pageant** – Conway, SC. A hilarious event with twenty Community Business Men dressing as women participating in a talent and evening gown competition to raise money for charity! It takes Real Men to do this event and not only are these Cutie-Pies raising money to benefit Historic Preservation, Arts, and Culture in our Authentic Historic Rivertown, but will also make a difference in the lives of children. A portion of the proceeds will be distributed to several children's charities locally in and around the Grand Strand/ Horry County areas whose mission is to help fostered, poverty stricken, or hungry children. Partnering with other nonprofits broadens the potential attendee list.

12. **Yankee Magazine Subscriptions** – For Northeaster states, Yankee Magazine offers a program where nonprofits can sell subscriptions and received $8 per subscription. Yankee offers back up publicity and incentives.

13. **The No-Bake, Bake Sale** – TEAM Jaffrey, NH, sent letters announcing a bake sale that no one had to bake for. In the letter, people were asked to send in whatever money they would have spent to make something for a bake sale. No work, no trip to the grocery store, no promotion or set up. The first No-Bake, Bake Sale netted TEAM Jaffrey $700.

14. **Grants** – Research opportunities for state and nationwide grant funds.

    - Order the catalog of Grant/Nonprofit Development from the Foundation Center http://www.fdncenter.org
    - NH State Council on The Arts, NH Charitable Foundation, Scenic By-Ways, Joint Promotion Program (JPP) Tourism Office, other foundation grants.

15. **Merchandise Sales** – T-shirts, sweatshirts, coffee mugs, umbrellas, note cards, caps, tote bags, afghans, etc. Initial funding is needed to purchase and hold stock. Merchants should be encouraged to help sell your Main Street products. Main Street should also give a percentage of sales to the merchant.

    Free T-shirts from Patagonia -- Patagonia T-Shirts, Beneficial T's Department Corporate Offices: 1.800.676.5546. They fully donate T-shirts to non-profit organizations that fit their giving guidelines, which focuses on the environment.

16. **Christmas Ornament Sales** – pewter, bulbs, brass featuring historic sites or community landmarks. Annual ornaments become collector pieces and can raise thousands of dollars each year. Ornament sales have provided income of anywhere from $1,000 to $7,000.

17. **Cookbooks** – historical recipes or from Downtown businesses. Main Street communities have done successful cookbooks tied into a "Taste of "our town". Typical first runs for cookbooks are about 500 books. More can be ordered later. Celebrity recipes were solicited. Marketing of any merchandise is important.

18. **Advertising** – Sell advertising space in your newsletter or getting one newsletter sponsor to cover the entire cost. If mailing on a non-profit, tax-exempt bulk rate, advertising in newsletters is not allowed. Finding newsletter sponsor can raise money and does not violate this postal regulation if they are just recognized for their sponsorship.

19. **Brick Pavers** – to assist with sidewalk or park improvements. Brick typically sell for $50 or $100 each and are engraved for placement in new sidewalks or pathways.

20. **In honor of -- A** favorite fundraiser is when programs sell historic light poles "in honor" of someone as both a fundraiser & design project. These change the appearance of downtown for the better, make tons of $ (tens of thousands) and allow the non-profit to fundraise in that category generally reserved only for churches – eternal life. While the lamp post won't be there technically forever, it's about as close as we can come save brick pavers, etc. in Main Street. Another popular event is street art, eventually sold to interested parties. See http://www.southsidemain.org/Chairs.htm as an example. I think this made 15k-ish last year.

21. **Special Projects Sponsors** – Some businesses and individuals prefer to invest in special projects rather than the administrative operation of a program. Look at specific projects, such as streetscape improvements, beautification projects, historic marker plaques, etc. as special projects that warrant going back to some contributors for additional funding. The Organization Committee can be charged with looking at the overall sponsorship opportunities, to avoid other committees overlapping.

22. **Raffles** – successful if prize package is substantial and volunteers are committed to selling the tickets. Raffle licenses are required from the State. 50/50 raffles are popular as add-ons to existing events.

23. **Calendar Raffles** – Organizations sell a calendar, usually in the $10 range. Cash prize drawings are held on special days, with one of two major drawings each year. Key to the success of this project promotion and selling of the calendars. Derry, NH conducted a one-month calendar raffle in 2003, raising over $3,000. Plymouth. NH developed an "almost nude" calendar that raised about $9,000.

24. **Corporate Sponsorship** – secure the success of a festival by recruiting Corporate Sponsors so that all expenses are covered before the event occurs. Put together sponsorship packages that show specifically what a sponsor will get for participating: press releases, logo or name on posters, table tents, etc., banners, logo on event promotion materials like balloons or T-shirts, verbal recognition at the event, etc.

25. **Stock Investments** – Goffstown, NH Main Street was the recipient of $10,000 worth of stock from a local citizen. Half of the funds were directed to the operating budget, the other half to an endowment fund.

26. **Vendors**
    - Charge vendor fees for booth space – don't underestimate the value.
    - Charge food vendors a percentage of gross to cover promotional costs or a flat fee.
    - Operate the food stand at your own festival or operate a food stand at a community festival, but be warned that this is volunteer intensive.

27. **Rubber Duck Race/Turtle Trek/Fish Float/Pumpkins/etc -** $5.00 per floating item raced down waterways – offer substantial prizes or tickets won't sell. Prize value should be at least $5,000. Many communities have all held this kind of fundraiser. The success of these events depends on the volunteers and board members selling tickets.

28. **Go-cart Races** – Companies lease go-carts for area celebrities or residents to race and raise funds for the Main Street organization. Caution: insurance!

29. **Farmer's Market** – Charge vendor space. Set up a Main Street booth and sell lemonade or ice tea and hand out information about the program. Main Street could also sell Farmer's Market bags.

30. **Special Events -** In Arkansas festivals are a big fundraiser for many, if not most, of their Main Street programs. Weather permitting, they raise anywhere from $20-50k, from the stories they tell at quarterly trainings. See www.myspace.com/mainstreeteldorado for an example. Generally, the programs set back a certain amount of funds as a seed for the next event & the rest go to the general fund. However, we have had festivals get so big that they've become all the program ever did (King Biscuit Blues Festival in Helena, for example). They've been forced (in this case, at our insistence & prior to my tenure) to spin off into their own non-profit.

31. **Pumpkin Festivals** – Milford, Goffstown, and Jaffrey, NH hold successful Pumpkin/Fall Festivals. Milford's festival, the oldest of the three, annually nets about $30,000. They feature scarecrow making, a pumpkin boutique, pumpkin selling, food vendors, craft sales, quilt shows, and raffles. Goffstown's features a giant pumpkin regatta. Jaffrey's features "Scarecrows on the Common", and attached thousands of visitors, even tour buses.

32. Punta Gorda, FL is "The International **Coconut Racing Capital of the World**." (People "rent" coconuts to be in water races as a fund-raiser. Additionally, they held a nut painting contest, selling coconuts to area businesses for $25, a coconut cook-off, coconut cream-pie eating contest, coconut games, and we gathered recipes to create a coconut cookbook to be an on-going fundraiser.)

33. **It's In the Bag, Baby!** A fundraiser from Denton, TX and other communities. Sometimes sponsored by a local arts organization in cooperation with downtown. In Denton, the Greater Denton Arts Council hosted this outrageously fun fundraiser, It's In the Bag! party and silent auction. Participants are encouraged to let those creative genes flow. Anyone can enter. Participants find or make a purse or bag of any kind, and decorate it any way they like. It can be practical, whimsical, nouveau or downright funny; whatever inspires you. Bags are photographed and but on the arts organization website for all to see. A party and silent auction is held where bags are up for auction! Attendance is $20.00 per person. To tie in the downtown and make the bags even more valuable, merchants provide gift cards – different ones of different values are places in each bag. El Dorado, Kansas called their event **"Dinner with an Old Bag".**

    Kissimmee, Florida has another take on the event. We have a **"Pick A Purse"** fundraiser during out Sculpture Gala. Purses are donated (nice ones) and a ticket is placed in each purse. The purses are laid out on a table and you can purchase a purse that you like for $25. I think we have 20 purses. Later in the evening a ticket is drawn and who ever bought the purse with the matching ticket in it wins the big prize. Last year the prize was a 2 night stay at the Gaylord Palms, a very nice and expensive hotel. Not only are you getting a nice purse you are getting the chance to win a great prize.

34. **Downtown Gift Certificate Programs** – Gift Certificate programs can earn money by either charging participating businesses a fee or by keeping the money in an interest bearing account. Communities find that after several years, gift certificates go unredeemed. These funds must be held for many years – check the regulations in your state. .

35. **Heritage Society –** For organizations with an endowment fund or wishing to create one. Offer charter memberships (enrollment current open) for people who are willing to sign up for a planned gift. The most common form of bequest is to your nonprofit organization as a beneficiary in a will, trust, or retirement plan account. Life insurance is another common and uncomplicated method. Most people leave an estate when they die, even though they may not have a great deal of wealth. Even an individual with a small estate can arrange to leave a charitable gift.