

united students against sweatshops

1150 17th St. NW Suite 300 Washington DC 20036; tel: 202-NOSWEAT; fax: 202-293-5308 www.studentsagainstsweatshops.org



Raising Funds from the Grassroots

Dear amazing USAS organizers,

So, we know. You've looked at the title of this document and groaned. Who has time to do fundraising? You're probably already in a position where you've taken on too much anyway, and the urgency of organizing takes precedence over fundraising. After all, no one is hassling you to take his or her money. But everyone is urging you to support his or her cause.

Fundraising may not be as glitzy or glamorous as mass mobilizations or strategic campaigns, but it is nonetheless very necessary to cultivate your fundraising skills. If you continue working for social justice, keep in mind that funds are limited, and there is a lot of competition for support.

Hopefully this will help you raise money for your travel expenses to United Students Against Sweatshops' national conference in Knoxville, Tennessee on Feb 19-22! The conference is approaching quickly, and USAS has limited funds to support folks with travel scholarships.

Raising funds locally, "grassroots style," isn't as difficult as you may think. It just takes patience, practice, and the courage to actually ask for money to support your work. And you *do* believe in your work, and love it, or you wouldn't sacrifice as much of your time as you have already. So get out there and just ask.

We've enclosed a sample letter to encourage you to send similar ones to professors and other working adults who will support you and other activists on your campus. You'll have a good time, and enjoy the sun, so make an effort. You won't be sorry!

Sincerely,

Shaun, Salma, Jack, and Rod
USAS National Organizers

Tips for Grassroots Fundraising

1. It is very important that you to remember that you need to come right out and ask for support. It is the hardest part of a slightly uncomfortable conversation, but in the end, it is going to make or break you effort. Here's an example:

“So, would you be willing to give a \$100 or \$200 donation to our anti-sweatshop group to attend this important conference?”

It really is as easy as that.

2. Think. What has your organization contributed to the campus climate recently or over the past couple of years? Two or three concrete victories (they don't have to be huge, it really can be anything, like recruiting 5 new members) will strengthen your pitch, so articulate these to your supporter.

3. Be confident and persistent. Generally, it is good to send a letter, followed with a phone call to set up a meeting, then setting a meeting time with the supporter so you'll actually be able to pick up the check. Sometimes, a meeting isn't necessary: the person may prefer to just send a check to you in the mail. But usually it is a good idea to meet face to face with your supporter.

4. Union locals, non-profit organizations with larger budgets, student government grants, and local foundations are all avenues for you to receive small donations. Research, and approach as many sources as possible, keeping in mind their budgets. Don't ask for \$200 from a local you've never worked with, for instance. Make sure to meet all timelines for student government grants and fill out the applications carefully.

5. Don't feel guilty. If a person is not able to give you support, they won't. You aren't “conning” anyone into anything. Most students are workers and are themselves in debt. People understand this, and if you can present yourself as a responsible, ambitious, and dedicated organizer, your supporter will feel some gratification in supporting your cause.

6. If you've never talked to your supporter before, reference whoever or however you got their name. “Cold” calls are the most difficult, because the supporter will feel no connection or obligation to your organization. Articulating a connection makes everyone feel part of a larger movement.

GENERAL FUNDRAISING TIPS

- **Start looking for money NOW.** Funding sources will run out of money, groups will have to vote on your funding, any event you run will take planning. February is FAST approaching.
- **Give people a number.** Try to estimate how many people are coming to the conference. Research flight costs from your area. Remember to calculate in the registration fee (we have a sliding scale of \$35-\$100). And then don't be afraid to overestimate any of these costs—people will usually only give you a third to a half of what you ask for. If possible, try to book your flights as early as possible!
- **Appeal to people's self-interest;** show them how giving you money will benefit them. So if you're approaching student government, say you'll bring back what you learn to educate the student body as a whole. Unions, meanwhile, should be happy to give you money to become better organizers for worker's rights.
- **Always follow up.** Make phone calls—it's harder to say no in person. Find out what forms or information they need to give you the money. Fill out the forms. Make it as easy as possible for them to give you money.
- **Give them what they need.** Don't make it hard for people to give you money. In any request you make for funds make sure you include information like who they should make checks out to, where they should send checks, how they can contact you, and what the money is for. Some people/organizations will need more information than others about how you're using the money. You should find out about the people/organizations' particular needs when you make follow-up calls.
- **Get help.** Fundraising is a difficult task and hard for one person to do alone. Getting more people involved from the beginning only guarantees a better outcome in the end. Dividing the work up on your campus can help too. (IE one person to approach unions, one to do on campus fundraising and one to organize an event)

WHERE TO GET MONEY ON CAMPUS

- **Student governments** often have deep pockets. Figure out how they go about funding groups and what they fund for. If they don't usually fund conferences because it's an off-campus event, figure out how to make your case anyway. Find allies in student government to help you. Or plan a future take-over.
- **Faculty members or departments** can also be a good resource. Sometimes sympathetic faculty will give you money out of their pocket—write a letter explaining the conference and put it in their mailbox. Departments and programs might also have funds set aside for just this sort of thing, especially if they focus on labor, global studies, even women's studies.
- **Hold an event.** (Unofficial) Parties can raise large amounts of money. Have a progressive band perform. Or try selling things—food, T-shirts, buttons, etc. It might not get you the whole way there, but it can be a good supplement to your other sources of money.

ASK UNIONS! (OR OTHER OUTSIDE GROUPS)

- Start with unions you already (hopefully) **have a relationship with.** Ask the people you already know to help you get funds from their union. Fax is usually the best way to make a more formal request for funds. Be sure to make a follow-up call!
- **Central Labor Councils** can also be a place to look to for support. Even if they can't or won't fund you, getting a statement of support from the CLC can help you lobby other unions. Labor councils generally meet on a monthly basis though so you need to get in touch with them pretty far in advance. You can go to the AFL-CIO website at <http://www.aflcio.org/unionand/statefed.htm> to find links to your state's CLCs.
- **District and Regional.** Contacting district and regional offices of unions can also be worth your while. Fax is usually the best way to put in a request for funds. Since you know exactly when they get it you can make your follow up call a couple of hours after sending the fax to make sure it get in

the right hands and see if they need any more information. It is always best to start with a contact that you know first at the district and regional offices.

- **Don't wait until the last minute.** When asking a Union for money sooner is always better than later. In some cases a local will have to vote before a substantial amount of money will be granted and that can take a few weeks, not to mention the time it takes to actually get a check cut.
- **Other community organizations** or your **local Jobs with Justice** can also be very good places to ask for funds.
- Approaching other community groups that you consider allies might help fund you. After all, they too have a vested interest in the presence of well-trained, experienced organizers in your area. Offer to let them set up an informational table, or give a presentation during lunch one day in exchange for a donation.

OTHER WAYS TO RAISE MONEY:

- **Pass the hat.** Take up a collection for the group at your meetings (five or more people discussing your group is considered a meeting). It's a great way to give a little at a time and to actually have money for when you need it.
- **Bake Sale.** A fun bonding activity for you and your group, and a great way to make some extra cash. Maybe do it one once a month for an extra \$50-\$100 for your organization!
- **Do a community fundraiser.** There are many ways you can do this. You can invite community and university allies, professors and activists (including students!) to a dinner fundraiser, where you charge \$10-15 a plate, and make homemade food, which can be another fun bonding experience, or you can have it be a potluck. Give out tickets before hand, sell them in the university center and visit local unions and community centers or send them letters inviting them. Just have it in one of the ballrooms or large rooms in your university center, buy some plates, cups and forks, drinks and napkins, and the return should be much larger than the initial cost!
- **Benefit Concert.** On campus, reserve a semi-enclosed area to have the concert. Ask local artists and bands to perform for free, and if you know people who know people in the band, I am sure they would be willing to do a free show for a good cause! Make some flashy flyers, post them up around school and pass them out- a ton of advertising is essential to a successful benefit concert. Charge \$5 at the door, then order pizza and charge \$1-2 a slice, and make some money! You can also put up a creative history of your organization for people to look at in-between acts (another fun bonding activity for your group to do, which reviews your history as an org). Just make sure your members man the entrance and make sure folks don't sneak in- you should give out wristbands or stamp hands of folks that have paid. This is also a really fun activity to do, especially after all the hard organizing work you have done all semester!
- The list goes on. You can do anything from having your own walk-a-thon to a yard sale, just remember to **BE CREATIVE AND HAVE FUN!!!!!!!!!!**



[enjoy this sample letter! - use your group's logo if you have one!]

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Dear Professor Progressive,

I'd like to take the time to tell you about a very unique movement that has swept across campuses in the United States, and literally around the world. You may already know about it.

The student movement against sweatshops, largely made up of a national network of thousands called United Students Against Sweatshops, has galvanized student organizing like no other issue since South African apartheid in the 1980s. And sweatshops go beyond the meaning of the word: USAS activists are organizing campus worker living wage campaigns, farmworker solidarity campaigns, and doing many other things to eliminate global inequality.

At this university, we've participated in a number of ways. *[List the number of ways, and don't forget to put them in a positive light.]* We're proud of what we've accomplished here and what USAS has as a whole, making real gains in workers' rights, in the collegiate apparel industry, and on our own campuses.

This February, USAS will be holding its annual national organizing conference in Knoxville, Tennessee. This is a very important conference as many new and young USAS activists are coming together for the first time to share in fun, skills-building, and strategizing for the upcoming years. Now, more than ever, it is important that we, as students, get serious about organizing for social change. These are unprecedented times for the global economy and no one knows the next disaster that is around the corner!

We are raising money locally for our group to travel to this conference, as travel expenses are a little higher than usual for this particular event. We also think it is crucial that we attend: students have so much more power when we can support each other from campus to campus. We are asking you for a \$100 to \$200 donation towards our expenses. Your donation will go a long way towards supporting one the most important student movement in recent years.

I'll be calling you soon after you receive this letter to discuss your thoughts on student organizing and to ask for a contribution. Please consider donating to our group very seriously. Thank you very much.

In solidarity,
Student Radical

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[Sample Fundraising Letter]

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[Date]

Dear [Union/Union Contact],

On the weekend of February 19-22, four hundred students from dozens of schools will gather at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville for the National United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) Winter Conference.

We need your support to make this conference a success.

This gathering comes at a special time: two weeks after our new president enters office. With the current economic crisis, this country needs a strong labor movement, and the students attending this conference are committed to strengthening it.

USAS is an international labor rights organization made up of students at hundreds of colleges and high schools, working together to coordinate national and strategic campaigns that win concrete victories for workers here and abroad.

Members of our group have been working on labor issues and attending this conference will help us improve our organizing skills to better work in solidarity with the local labor movement. Students will learn skills in facilitating meetings, dealing with school administrations, talking to media, fundraising, and more.

Our dreams are big, but we need help getting to Knoxville! Can you contribute [amount], which will allow us to pay for food and materials at the conference, and to make the weekend accessible to as many students as possible? An investment in this conference is an investment in the future of the labor movement. [Your union] has always been at the forefront of labor struggles, and your support would mean a lot to us.

I will call you in the next few days to discuss this further. I look forward to working with you more in the struggle for workers' rights everywhere.

In solidarity,

[name, title if you want/have one, etc]

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