

# **Fundraising Ideas**

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Fundraisers don't just happen, they require planning. When is the best time to start planning, **RIGHT NOW!** These are challenging times for The American Legion just as they are for our Nation. Too many Executive Committees are better at spending money than raising money. In my opinion, the key to the success of our organization is The American Legion Post. As the Post goes, so goes the Districts and Department. Most leaders have limited experience in fundraising. This is not something to fear, but rather a challenge to undertake. It is one pillar of your responsibility as leaders. There is one thing that never works, that is spending more money than you make. Another pit fall is spending money on every good idea that comes up. There are more worthy causes than you can afford. You have a fiduciary responsibility to be good stewards of your Post's funds. Control the spending! Make saving funds a priority. Get the best return possible on your savings. You will need a new roof someday or an upgraded kitchen. Plan ahead so you will have funds for these and other contingencies. If your Post is struggling, look around and find a Post that is flourishing. Seek advice and help from that stronger Post, from the District and from the Department. The strength of The American Legion is our willingness to sacrifice for others.

If you are not careful, your fundraiser can lose money. You must have strict control of the money. You must not eat up the profit. If you have a steak dinner, there can be no free steaks. Steaks are expensive so even the cooks should pay for their own. Sell the left over steaks packaged to go.

Unless you have a major event, you will need to have several fundraisers during the year and multiple fundraisers at the same time. For example, you might sponsor a Doggie Parade in a local park, and a bake sale with doggie treats at the same time. You might also sell raffle tickets at the event. Now go out and make money.

I want to hear about your successes and problems so please let me know how you have been helped by this information. Gene McVay [genemcvay@aol.com](mailto:genemcvay@aol.com) My personal cell phone number: 479 739-5111

The 50/50 drawing is perhaps the simplest of all fundraisers. Many organizations offer a 50/50 drawing at every meeting. You need a roll of tickets with numbers on both ends or a double roll. Draw a ticket and split the money donated with the winner.

**Steak at the Legion:** Have a steak dinner fundraiser at the Post. Entertainment could also be provided. Sell the extra steaks for take home. This event is more elegant than a normal Post dinner. Get the word out to the community.

**Coffee with the Commander:** Have coffee and donuts or cinnamon rolls at the post one morning every week. Make sure you serve regular and decaf. Charge a couple of dollars and invite everyone in the community. As word spreads the number of attendees will grow. Make everybody feel welcome. This is a good place to bring the mayor, county judge, state representative or police chief. They can say a few words or field questions. Let people know who will be there the next week. This could become a major weekly event for your Post and easily produce revenue.

**All You Can Eat Potato Bar:** Tired of the same old spaghetti dinner fundraisers? Try having an all you can eat potato bar for your group's next dinner fundraiser.

**Newsletter Ads:** If you have a Post Newsletter, sell ads or ask sponsors to help with the cost. Make sure to prominently list them.

**Baby and Kids Resale:** Babies and children outgrow clothing and toys so quickly, often before they are worn out. Host a baby and kids' resale as your next fundraiser.

**Bargain Basement Evening Gowns:** This is a wonderful way to clean out your closets and make some money during Prom and Homecoming Season. People always have Prom dresses and Bridesmaids dresses they no longer need and many will donate them to you.

**Break the Balloon:** Pop, pop, pop. What can be more fun than popping a balloon? Winning something for doing so, of course. This is an easy fundraiser and can be incorporated into other events, such as a dinner fundraiser or fair. You will need balloons, string, and slips of paper with prizes printed on them. Go to the local retailers and explain who your group is and what you are raising funds for. Ask if they would like to donate a prize in exchange for free advertising at your event. On the day of the event, place the prize slips into the balloons, blow them up or fill them with helium, and tie a string to them. All balloons should have a slip of paper, even if it is just a thank you for participating, so they all look the same. You may want the balloons to all be the same color to distinguish them from others at the event. Sell the balloons telling people to hold onto them until a big announcement. After all the balloons have been sold, instruct everyone to pop their balloon and see if they have won. It will be humorous to see the different methods of popping the balloons. Instruct the winners to come up and claim their prize.

**Death by Chocolate:** Chocolate lovers are everywhere. Give them what they want with a Death by Chocolate Fundraiser. Have coffee and all kinds of chocolate pastries. Also sell chocolate to take home.

**Dog Bake Sale:** Dog bakeries are popping up all over the country. Spending on our four legged friends is at an all time high. Take advantage of this trend to raise money for your Post. Dog treats can be made very inexpensively and sold for a large profit. Recipes can be found online or in a dog treat cookbook. Check your local bookstore or library. Find cellophane bags with paw prints or bones on them. You will be able to make more treats with more people helping at the Post kitchen. All ingredients should be easily found at your local grocery store. Stay away from using chocolate or raisins as they can be poisonous to dogs. Carob is a good chocolate substitute. You have a few options for selling your treats. Either take pre-orders or set up your dog bakery at a craft sale or sporting event. This fundraiser pairs well with a bake sale. Here is a recipe for Doggie Beef Cookies: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. 2 1/2 C Whole Wheat Flour, 6 Tbsp Margarine or Bacon Fat,

1/2 C Powdered Milk, 1 small jar Strained Beef or Lamb Broth (baby food), 1 tsp Sugar, 2 Tbsp Water, 1 Egg. Mix ingredients. Knead 3 minutes. Dough should form a ball. Roll out 1/2 inch thick. Cut into cookies. Bake on lightly greased baking sheet for 30 minutes.

**Doggie Parade:** Everyone loves a parade, so put your doggies on parade. The parade route can be a local park or even down Main Street if the street is blocked off. Charge entry fees and award prizes. Prizes can be donated by local merchants, restaurants, etc. Imagine the categories: Cutest dog, dog with cutest master, best behaved, best groomed, most conceited, dog that looks most like its master, smallest, and largest dog. Have fun making up categories. Combine this with the Dog Bake Sale. Invite your local humane society to bring dogs for adoption. Identify the entrants with a card with codes like "AA, AB, AC, etc." Select judges from the community. Give all entrants a bag of doggie treats. Entry fees could be \$10 to \$25. You might want lower fees for the first time and see what the participation will be. Allow registration in advance and at the event. You can also take pictures for a fee.

**Movie at the Post:** Once a month show a movie at the post. Have a concession stand and charge admission. Allow people to bring their own folding chairs or bean bags to get comfortable. The ideas are endless.

**Bake Sale:** This is an easy fundraiser to run as part of a larger event, such as a holiday craft sale, or sporting event. There are probably 25 million people with diabetes in the US. Why not include diabetic friendly items? People love their pets, offer baked dog and cat treats.

**Funny Photo Contest:** This is a chance for all aspiring photographers to show off their funniest pictures. Have a funny photo contest and ask for submissions from the community. Setup pictures like an art show. Have the pictures framed or matted and include a small biography of the artist. In order to raise money, place a jar, can, or box in front of each picture in which people can place bills to vote for their favorites. One dollar equals one vote. Set up the event at the Post or a community center. Leave the photos up for at least two weeks.

**Hold a Festival:** A Festival can be held for any season or Holiday (i.e. Fall Festival, Winter Festival, or Halloween Festival). You will want to find a large space to hold the Festival, perhaps a gym, cafeteria or an outdoor setting may work weather permitting. Allow each group to set up their own booth to run and raise money. Think of all the games and activities that can be found at a Carnival Midway. Face painting, caricature artist, toss the ball, ducks in a pond, guess your weight are all good ideas. Sell tickets for people to use at each booth and then split the proceeds with every group that is participating. Definitely set up a concession stand selling popcorn, hot dogs, cotton candy, and lemonade. Make sure that you advertise to surrounding communities to ensure a good turnout.

**Gift Basket Auction or Raffle:** This could be done every month with different themes like sports, chocolate, Christmas, hunting, patriotic, harvest, and American Legion.

**Farmers Market:** This fundraiser can be as simple or elaborate as you like. Offer space to sell local produce. The Post can buy produce to sell also. Pumpkins in October, watermelons in the summer and apples in season.

**Haunted Post:** This is a great fundraiser to run in October. Turn the Post into a haunted house. Enter through one door and exit through another. Be safe, but make it enjoyable for the whole family. Don't forget to sell spiced cider, hot dogs, popcorn, etc.

**Head Shaving:** A head shaving fundraiser can have many incarnations, so you are only limited by your imagination.

**Holiday Flower Sale:** Spring tulips, Easter lilies, fall mums, and poinsettias are all seasonal flowers that could be a great fundraiser for your Post. This event could be run much like a farmers market.

**Apple Pie and Ice Cream:** Bring people to the post for desert. I good time for this fundraiser would be Sunday afternoon after lunch. There is nothing more American than apple pie at the American Legion.

**Karaoke Night:** There is a hidden singer in all of us. Most people will admit to singing in their shower or car when no one else is around. Bring the singer out with a karaoke night for you next fundraiser. Find a place that rents karaoke machines and see if they will give you a deal because it is a fundraiser. Tell them you will give them free advertising during the event. Theme your karaoke night as a coffee shop. Serve fancy coffee drinks or non-alcoholic frozen beverages. Charge an entry fee and give a discount to those willing to sing to ensure there is entertainment. Allow people to sing solo or in groups. Have an emcee to keep things flowing. Encourage those who did a great job and got the audience going to sing again.

**Love from Home Packages:** Being away at college or serving in the armed forces is a huge adjustment and can leave one homesick. The perfect remedy is a care package from home. Have a list of care packages for sale and their contents. For example, you can have a chocolate lover's package, a coffee lover's package, an assortment package, etc. You will want to put things in the care package that are convenience foods that can be easily prepared in a microwave and are shelf stable. Let the parents place a personal message in the care package. Shop at discount food stores to get the best price on items. Find businesses willing to donate cardboard boxes so that you can ship the packages. Parents will appreciate the convenience and recipients will appreciate the love from home.

**Radio Advertising:** This fundraiser involves working with a local radio station, and helping them sell advertising time for a specific day. It will probably involve a great deal of work, but can have a large payoff for your group. Find a local radio station that is willing to work with your group. Decide on what percentage of the advertising money will go to your group. You may be able to reach people that wouldn't be able to afford it normally. Get creative too. Let individuals sponsor songs and let them dedicate them to someone special in their life. See if the radio station will let your group help to read the ads on the air.

**Reserved Seats:** Everyone dreams of sitting on the court at a basketball game or on the fifty yard line at a football game. Make that dream come true with a best seat in the house raffle. Place two special seats in the stands or on the floor. The winner and a friend will get to sit in the reserved seats for the entire game. Have someone take orders from the winner and retrieve things from the concession stand. If the coach is willing to get into the spirit of things, have him or her go over to the winner during the game and consult them for "advice." Give the winner a team ball or t-shirt as a souvenir of the game. This is a good fund raiser for every home game to fund Boy's and Girl's State.

**Santa Breakfast:** Ho! Ho! Ho! Santa Claus is coming to town. No one likes to wait in line at the mall to visit Santa Claus. Host a breakfast (or lunch) with Santa Claus to make the experience more enjoyable. Normally Saturday or Sunday mornings are not in high demand, so they may be willing to cut you a deal. Serve breakfast buffet style with all of the usual favorites, such as pancakes, Belgian waffles, scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast. Decorate with a Christmas theme and find a throne or big comfy chair for Santa to sit in. Enlist the help of a photographer to take pictures.

Call up each table individually to meet with Santa. Allow each child to sit on Santa's lap and tell him what they would like for Christmas. Make sure Santa has a box or basket to deposit wish lists into. Give everyone a souvenir picture to remember the day.

**Scramble (best ball) Golf Tournament:** Have a golf tournament that is fun for everyone, regardless of their skill level. Host a scramble golf tournament. Find a golf course that is willing to donate their facilities for the day. Let people enter in four person teams or individually and randomly draw teams. Charge an entry fee to raise money for your group. See if local celebrities are willing to participate and be a member of a team. Your entry fee could be higher that way. The way a scramble works is that all four people on a team tee off. The team then decides whose tee shot is in the best position, and all four team members then hit their ball from that location. This continues until the team reaches the green. They pick the best green lie, and each member putts from there. However, after the first putt, everyone plays their own ball location. Only record the best score for each team. Have a photographer take pictures of each foursome while on the links as a souvenir. Don't forget to send around a soda cart to provide refreshments for additional donations.

**Slip Into Something More Comfortable:** Hold a fashion show. Charge admission and serve refreshments. This can be a major event at a large auditorium or a smaller event at the Post. A celebrity Fashion Show would include local politicians, radio and TV personalities, coaches, teachers, principals, etc. High school students will volunteer to fill in and participate to help veterans. The variations are endless. One fashion show could be for thrift store or used clothing that would be auctioned off on the spot. Perhaps the mayor has clothes he or she would donate and model. The winning bidder could have a picture made with the celebrity.

**Super Sub Sale:** Take advantage of the big sports events: the Super Bowl, All Star Game, Final Four, Stanley Cup, etc. and have a super sub sale. You can change the name to reflect the sporting event. Take pre-orders so you will know how many you will need to make and supplies needed. Have two or three choices of subs, such as Italian, Turkey, or Ham. Also you could offer the American Legion Sub Deluxe. For simplicity offer only one size. You will want to have onions, lettuce and tomatoes as well. Hot peppers, pickles and dressing should be available on the side. Gather all the ingredients the night before and assemble them on the morning of the event. For speed and efficiency, have a large group to assemble them "assembly line style." Have a time set up for people to pick up their orders. Make a few extras for last minute sales.

**High Tea at the Post:** High Tea is usually served at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and dates back more than 200 years. Teatime is about dressing everything up and being more detailed and luxurious than normal. Usually teacups and pastries are smaller because once upon a time, tea was very rare and expensive. High Tea is more substantial than normal teatime and usually includes a hot dish in addition to small sandwiches, biscuits and cookies.

**Raise funds by selling private label bottled water.** Several companies will sell you bottled water with your own custom label. Your label might read something like this: "88<sup>th</sup> Birthday of John Doe Post 33 Commemorative Water 2009."

Here are sources: <http://freemanspecialty.com/products.html> and <http://www.bottledwaterstore.com/> There are many others. Because of the uniqueness and collectability, a single bottle might sell for \$2 and cost as little as 37 cents. To avoid shipping costs you can buy just the labels and affix them to water you buy locally. Here is a source:

<http://www.bottleyourbrand.com/personalized-label.asp> Better yet, just buy blank weatherproof vinyl inkjet labels and design and print your own. The labels cost about 14 cents each at: <http://www.onlinelabels.com/> Here is a design I did on my computer, original size is 8.5" wide by 2" high, the labels look better than this copy.

**The American Legion  
Department of Arkansas  
is a non-profit veterans'  
organization est 1919.**



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**STILL  
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Serving Size: 1 bottle • 1/2 L	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 0	Calories from Fat 0
% DV	
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	0%
<b>Sodium</b> 0mg	0%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 0g	0%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 0g	
NET Carbs 0	
<b>Protein</b> 0g	0%
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%	Iron 0%

**Wacky Hat Day:** For a one or two dollar donation, allow people to wear a wacky hat for the day. Have a "create your own wacky hat" station for those who would like to participate but didn't bring one of their own. Have blank hats, fabric, glue, fabric paint, sparkles and other items for decorating. Sell the hats and allow people to have fun. Have a wacky hat contest. Award prizes to the best and worst wacky hats, silliest wacky hat, cutest wacky hat, etc. You can also have a parade of wacky hats to show all the great creations off.

**White Elephant Silent Auction:** This contest is a wonderful compliment to a diner fundraiser or a group meeting. Have members donate items in advance of the event. Perhaps they have a lamp, painting, ceramic figurine, or cake stand they don't want anymore. This can be done as a silent auction or surprise box raffle.

**Coffee Mugs:** If your post does not offer an official coffee mug for sale, you are missing the boat. There are several custom mug companies to select from. Contact me for information on where I had these made. The Department has these Mugs available for sale. See them at all Conferences or at Dept Hq:



**Grant requests are accepted by many giant foundations.** Writing a grant request is a daunting task. However, on the local level I have walked into several Walmart stores and distribution centers and filled out one sheet grant applications. This is something that every Post should do every year. One year I even received a call asking me if I had forgotten to fill out an application. In some cases the employees decide who receives the funding. The checks I received were for \$1,500. Make sure you thank the people responsible. I was asked to speak to the employees and tell what the funds would be used for. The better you do, the more likely you are to receive help the following year. Think outside the box when looking for funds. Girl Scouts, cheerleaders, and many others are active fundraisers. The typical store in a popular location sees people every week who want money. Think about the processing plant, bottling company, veterinarian or distribution center that is off

the beaten path. Don't overlook the government. Each State Representative controls several thousand dollars that they give out in \$1,000 grants. Corporations usually budget by the calendar year and usually run out of grant money in the early fall. Governments work on a fiscal year and usually run out of grant money by the end of the year. Foundations give out grants year round and depend on their grant deadlines. Often the first time you apply is just a getting-to-know-you phase. Apply again. Go in and talk to the funder and find out how you can increase your chances of receiving a grant next year. Don't take rejection of your proposal as a rejection of you, your cause and your organization.

**The Great American Chili Festival:** This is a major fundraising event and can grow into a huge regional attraction. Rent booth space for vendors or all kinds from auto accessories to T Shirts. Provide 12X12 areas for Chili Cook-off teams. Team displays, costumes, showmanship, etc. will also be judged. Ask for local auto dealers, beverage companies, banks, etc to be sponsors. Only allow sponsors to advertise. Local bands will volunteer to provide entertainment along with firefighting exhibits, police dog demonstrations, Frisbee competition, etc. Charge admission at the gate.

**DATE & LOCATION:** Late September or later at the fairgrounds, park or similar location.

Sample rules: Booths may be setup Friday between 3 and 8 pm but no later than Saturday by 8 am.

\*Registration and the gate will be closed at 8:00pm Friday. No vehicles will be allowed in the event area after 8:00pm Friday. All vehicles that cannot fit within your 12x12 area must be removed from the event area by 7:00am Saturday or they will be towed.

\*Once the cook-off begins, please do not bring vehicles into the event area until the event is over.

Following the event on Saturday, all booth equipment must be removed from the site.

Remember\*\*\*\*\*no cars will be allowed to enter the event site until the event is over... we suggest that you park your car in the public parking.

\*No team or booth may display advertising or sponsorship. Any booth promoting outside sponsorship will be disqualified and removed from the site. For sponsorship information, call XXX-XXXX

1. Chili must be cooked on site the day of the cook-off from scratch. "Scratch" means starting with raw meat and using regular spices." Commercial chili powder is permissible, but complete commercial chili mixes are NOT permitted.

2. Chili must be prepared out in the open in as sanitary a manner as possible.

3. No beans, pasta, rice or other similar items are allowed.

4. The head cook must prepare the chili to be judged.

5. Your chili will be judged on Appearance, Aroma and Taste.

\* We encourage you to cook as much chili as you like, but we expect each team to cook a minimum of 4 gallons of chili to serve the public with. One quart of chili is required for judging. Cornbread must be cut into 10 one inch squares for judging. Teams preparing and serving harmful ingredients will be held liable.

\*Under no circumstances are food, drink and or novelties to be sold to the public

\*Supplies: participants must furnish their own cooking utensils. Your heat source can be a number of different methods including traditional propane camp stove, Coleman fuel or generators. Open fires are permitted only if contained within concrete blocks. (Work with local Fire Chief)

\*Judging: Cooks must not "mark" containers in any way. If container is damaged, a replacement can be obtained by turning in damaged container. Entries for judging should be submitted in the quart containers provided and delivered to the judge's tent in the following timelines:

Chili: 11:45-12:00pm

Cornbread: 1:45-2:00pm

\*Final registration: you will need to send a team representative to final registration either between 8 and 10 am Saturday.

\*During final registration you will confirm your booth assignment. You will receive your t-shirts (or similar valued item), sample cups and containers for judging.

\*The top ten cook-off winners will be recognized in reverse order. Additional awards will be presented for Showmanship, Best Theme, Best Costumes, Most Efficient, Best Audience Appeal, Most Action, etc.

\*Teams must not offer or dispense any alcoholic beverages to spectators during their show.

\* A team discharging firearms, or using any other explosives or pyrotechnics will be disqualified. (No guns, capable of firing bullets or blanks, will be allowed at the event for show.)

\*This is a family event, nudity and lewdness in any form is banned.

\*The Great American Chili Festival is totally independent and not associated with any other competition. Proceeds from the event go to The American Legion for their programs to help disadvantaged veterans, widows and orphans, support American Legion Baseball, Boys State, Oratorical Contests, Junior Shooting Sports, Children and Youth Programs, as well as operational expenses.

Never be afraid to ask for help or advice. My personal cell phone number and email address are on this publication. Good luck.

**You can accomplish great things if you don't care who gets the credit**