School Fundraising

Challenges, Opportunities, and Tools for Success

BiddingForGood
in partnership with
PTOTODAY Helping Parent Leaders Make Schools Great

BiddingForGood, Inc.
100 CambridgePark Drive
Cambridge, MA 02140
866-918-0313
www.biddingforgood.com

School Fundraising: the Challenge

Across the country, funding for schools is being slashed and budgets are squeezed, resulting in cuts to critically-needed educational programs. Teachers and parent volunteers are increasingly stepping up to offset the impact of these cuts and to help close the funding gaps in schools across the nation.

While busy folks like you have added the planning and running of school fundraisers to your already jam-packed schedules, these events require a lot of time, organization, and effort. So now - more than ever - it's critical for those of you running fundraising events to find innovative ways to raise more money, get the most out of every dollar you invest, and to use your time as efficiently as possible.

The good news is that schools are uniquely positioned to run successful fundraisers, due in part to the deep connections you have with your parent and local communities. More schools are trying innovative approaches that: make the most of these community ties; help to forge even deeper connections; and have a positive, tangible impact on strained budgets.

In this eBook, we'll show you how schools like yours are maximizing the time spent planning and organizing events and reaching new heights of fundraising success, by running successful online auction fundraisers.

Who are we?

BiddingForGood has helped schools and nonprofits like yours raise over $130 million with online auction fundraisers. Our customers earn an average of **$6 for every dollar they invest**, because we provide a complete suite of tools designed to help you expand your audience, get more auction items, and raise more money. More schools and nonprofit organizations are moving to online fundraising auctions for one reason: **they work**!

School Fundraising: the Opportunity

At BiddingForGood, we've helped run over 13,000 online auctions, and we know what it takes to run a successful fundraiser. While working in partnership with our school customers, we've learned a lot, and are thrilled when we're able to help a school reach its fundraising goals.

Of all the organizations we work with, schools have a unique opportunity to be successful. You have deep and authentic ties to your community, a truly engaged base of supporters, and the audience that you are reaching out to has the very same passion as you – to continue to support the educational programs and activities that enrich our children's lives.

At the same time, you face a few challenges that are unique to schools. You may lose a superstar parent volunteer when his or her child moves on to middle or high school. You depend heavily on volunteers who may or may not be able to add more to their already overflowing plates. And, with new parent volunteers each year, you may not necessarily hang on to institutional knowledge when members of your fundraising team move on.

Ratchet up your fundraising

Cookie dough and gift wrap sales, raffles, car washes, and spring flings have been helping to boost fundraising for years, but in general, these smaller fundraisers create more work and result in lower returns. Some of them put your children in the awkward position of having to ask Aunt Millie to buy a 3-month subscription to a magazine that she may not really need. These small-scale fundraising programs may be appropriate for discrete activities or needs, such as a school trip or uniforms, but for a bigger, long-lasting impact, it's more effective to put a collaborative effort into a big fundraising event. One or two events during the school year can yield much more than all of these smaller efforts combined, and when you combine an online auction with a silent auction, that's a winning formula for success.

Why add an online auction?

Adding an online auction to your fundraiser provides opportunities that other programs do not. With an online auction, you can partner with local businesses and parents for item donations and sponsorships. Local media are always interested in fundraising events, and you can easily get their attention with a phone call or press release. Best of all, you can expand your reach outside of your immediate parent community. With cookie dough and car washes, your reach is likely limited to the school newsletter.

Then there's "donor fatigue." Parents are getting hit hard for cash, supplies, and their time throughout the year. But with an online auction, you're tapping into discretionary household spending instead of money set aside for charitable giving (which has taken a huge hit in recent years). It can be easier - and definitely more enticing! - for parents to bid on a "date night" than to simply write a check.

There are benefits to having an online auction beyond the money to be raised. You can build awareness about your school and what goes on behind the scenes, deepen relationships with your donors, and educate your attendees about your school's financial need, all while highlighting the positive impact of your school on the community. Think of an online/silent auction as more than a fundraiser; it's a way to deepen personal connections that have long-lasting benefits.

5 Things to Consider before Running an Online Auction

Successful fundraisers don't just happen - they require time, planning, and promotion. We've compiled this list of *5 Things to Consider Before Running an Online Auction*, which we hope this will answer some of your big questions as you begin your journey toward your next fundraising event.

1. Plan an overall approach

How big will your auction be? Will you continuously put new items up for bid over time, or create a limited-time event? How will your auction mesh with the rest of your fundraising strategy and your live event?

2. Think about how to acquire items to auction

A successful auction requires a considerable number of attractive products or services. Many schools find items by asking constituents and friendly businesses for products and services. You may also wish to consider asking for donations of unique experiences; for example, the opportunity to have lunch with the mayor or your school principal. BiddingForGood also offers Instant Items, which are donated by our partner companies at no cost to you, to help enhance your catalog.

3. Who will you reach out to?

Marketing and promotion are key components of a successful online auction. Email updates are effective for letting your constituents know about your auction, and to remind them to visit and bid over the course of the event. There are a lot of creative ways to get the word out: social media, your website, partnerships with sponsors, and more.

4. Be ready to provide excellent customer service and shipping

As with any e-commerce effort, you'll need to be prepared to respond to questions that may come up. If you're selling goods, keep in mind that you'll need to mail or deliver them, and allow for the time and money required to do so.

5. Make sure you accurately estimate the amount of time required

All of the steps described above will require a considerable investment in staff time. Remember to budget enough time to create item descriptions, take photos, upload information, help participants troubleshoot, and more.

The above may seem like a lot to think about, but with the right amount of planning, you can run your most cost-effective fundraiser yet and experience the power of online auctions firsthand!

Planning Your Fundraiser: a Sampling of Checklists

We appreciate that planning and running an online auction takes a lot of time and hard work, and we are committed to helping our clients use their time efficiently. We have found that a simple but powerful tool can work wonders - the checklist. We provide a variety of checklists to our clients, to help them stay organized and on task. By following the steps provided in our checklists, you can make sure that you've covered all the bases and can maximize the impact of your fundraiser.

On the pages that follow are several examples of checklists that we provide.

Getting Organized - Checklist

	Task	Due Date	Owner
☐	**Assemble your fundraising team** Hint: Assess the skills needed – create different jobs and tasks to attract more people with diverse skill sets and varying levels of availability. Examples: copywriting, event logistics, selling sponsorships.		
	Define your goals		
☐	How much are you hoping to raise?		
☐	Your budget		
☐	Event date/days until event		
☐	Any additional goals (e.g., increase PTO membership)		
	Build your project plan		
☐	Assign specific tasks and deadlines across your team		
	Example tasks:		
	Logistics		
☐	Secure venue		
☐	Plan catering		
☐	Book entertainment		
	Promotion and communication		
☐	Invitee lists		
☐	Invitations		
☐	Email campaigns		
☐	Website listings, updates		
☐	Print mailings, postcards, flyers		
☐	PR, contact local media		
☐	Social media		
☐	Set up event-dedicated email address (e.g., yourauction@gmail.com)		
	Sponsorships and donations		
☐	Detail donations sought: cash, event services, auction items		
	Plan outreach to everyone in network:		
☐	Local businesses		
☐	Potential individual donors		
☐	Board members		
☐	Past donors		
☐	Family and friends		
☐	Current vendors serving the school		

Example Checklist: Promote Your Event

	Promote Your Event - a Checklist for Schools		
	Task	**Due Date**	**Owner**
☐	**Determine your message** Keep it focused on: How much you're trying to raise Why you need the funds How much you've raised Concrete examples of how funds help		
	Make your plan		
☐	Your budget		
☐	Barter for services, vendors needed for event		
☐	Create timeline for tasks		
	Promotions to consider:		
☐	Email campaigns		
☐	Social media: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn		
☐	Websites - school, school district, town		
☐	Parent newsletters, e-newsletters		
☐	Announcements over PA system		
☐	PTO/PTA outreach		
☐	Bookmarks		
☐	Posters around town		
☐	Announcements at planned/athletic/community events		
☐	Backpack flyers		
☐	Banners in school, town		
☐	Email signatures		
☐	Information kiosk or table (parents' night, sporting events, etc.)		
☐	Advertise and announce in local paper – ask for donated ad space!		

Example Checklist: Finding Volunteers

	Finding Volunteers - a Checklist		
	Task	**Due Date**	**Owner**
☐	**Assess your needs – where do you need help?** Hint: Create different jobs and tasks to attract more people with diverse skill sets and varying levels of availability.		
	Example volunteer jobs:		
☐	Copywriting		
☐	Event logistics: venue rental, catering, audiovisual, etc.		
☐	Selling sponsorships		
☐	Setting up auction site home page and items		
☐	Data entry		
☐	Graphic design		
☐	PR/promotion		
☐	Soliciting cash and/or item donations		
	Where to look		
☐	Include a call for volunteers in the next PTO meeting		
☐	Send out a flyer or email to parents		
☐	Contact room parents throughout the school		
☐	Existing school groups – booster clubs, theatre, etc.		
☐	High school students - volunteering can be great resume builder for college		
☐	Local colleges or universities – create an internship		
☐	Social media: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn		
☐	Local volunteer centers – Examples: BostonCares.org and NYCares.org. Hint: Search online for "volunteer action center" to find one near you. Also try the HandsOn Network at www.handsonnetwork.org.		
☐	Add a listing to VolunteerMatch.org, Idealist.org and/or Craigslist		

From our school customers

BiddingForGood provides online auction services to schools and nonprofit organizations, and has helped over 6,000 customers raise more than $130 million for their causes. Here's how we've helped some of our school customers - how can we help you?

Summerfield Waldorf School and Farm

"BiddingForGood became a partner in our drive to support students on scholarship. The ease of operation, the upscale look and features, each helped us reach our goal and create a lasting, positive impression."
- Summerfield Waldorf School and Farm, Santa Rosa, CA

"I heartily recommend BiddingForGood. We doubled our income from the previous year's online auction on a site that is very easy to build and manage. There is no 'bad news' about BiddingForGood!"
- Wyoming Seminary College Prep School, Kingston, PA

Wyoming Seminary founded 1844

PS 11 PTA Friends & Family
William T. Harris Elementary School
320 West 21st Street, NY, NY 10011

"This is the third school I've brought the online auction to. We currently have over 600 students and every single one benefits from the money raised through our fundraising. Our auction is our number one fundraiser for the year and although the online portion is only a small part of it, it has quickly become a very important one…. All the money raised goes directly to our PTA, who use it to fund the amazing arts programs and activities for students."
- P.S. 11, New York, NY

"We were very happy with our outcome with BiddingForGood. The way everything is organized makes it very simple for us to find and use auction performance information for our future fundraisers. We will definitely be using BiddingForGood again next year."
– Emerson Middle School Arts & Education Foundation, Los Angeles, CA

"We were able to reach parents that don't go to the physical auction. The extended reach into our community translated into much greater involvement in our auction. The online auction has helped to build our support and sense of community – and it's fun!"
- John S. Bradfield Elementary School, Dallas, TX

lesley ellis school

"BiddingForGood secured over $2,000 of donated items for our auction, which were essential to our achieving our goal. By opening up our auction to out-of-state friends and relatives as well as hundreds of alumni families who don't normally attend our gala, we got an amazing number of new bidders and revenue. In the current economic climate, I'd be very nervous about doing an auction without that boost."
- Lesley Ellis School, Arlington, MA

"Wow… BiddingForGood really put the FUN back in fundraising. Our online auction created community buzz and gave us a lot of PR power. Going online helped us to raise awareness and raise more funds. Over 80% of our online winners were new donors who did not attend our live event of 700 guests! With statistics like that, you can bet we will be back!"
- Amit Community School Program, Atlanta, GA

"We had been thinking about an online auction for three years, but were leery because we thought it would be so much work. We thought if we could find an easy, efficient way to manage it, we'd be set! BiddingForGood made our dreams come true."
- Peninsula Education Foundation, Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA

Peninsula Education Foundation

Lake Country School

"Our first online auction experience with BiddingForGood was very good. The site was easy to set up and manage and the support service was outstanding. We plan to use BiddingForGood for our event again next year."
- Lake Country School, Minneapolis, MN

To conclude...

Thank you for taking the time to read *School Fundraising: Challenges, Opportunities, and Tools for Success*. We hope you found this eBook useful!

If you would like to learn more about BiddingForGood and online auctions, please connect with us:

- Call 1-866-918-0313
- Visit us at www.biddingforgood.com
- Build a sample auction with our edemo

Contact our Sales Department
- Call 1-866-918-0313
- Email sales@biddingforgood.com
- Schedule a 15-minute call

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Recent Headlines

Cash-strapped Schools Turn to Volunteers to Fill Budget Gaps

"Other schools have come up with creative ways to raise funds, including turning to online auctions. P.S. 158, in New York City's tiny Upper East Side neighborhood, has raised nearly $63,000 from the four online auctions it's held since the spring of 2009.... Gwen Kahn, an association board member who manages the online auction effort, said she plans to hold another three this school year."

Forget Bake Sales: Schools Turn To Luxe Auctions

"Since the economy went sour and school budgets withered, school administrators and parents have been scrambling to come up with cash. Many of them are putting aside the buckets of cookie dough and pails of caramel corn in favor of glitzy, high-dollar auctions to raise thousands — even hundreds of thousands — of dollars.... But live auctions can be a gamble because mom or dad might have scheduled a play date, or could just be too exhausted to show up. That's where a site called BiddingForGood comes in."

Go Back-to-School the High-Tech Way

"BiddingforGood.com takes the traditional school auction and puts it online (and on steroids) so even more parents and extended family can participate in important fundraisers."

3 Ways to Maximize Your Classroom Budget

"In some districts, parents are willing and able to make donations to support the education of their children. In other districts, it is not this simple. One creative way to raise classroom cash is to hold a fundraiser on the website www.biddingforgood.com."