



How to Plan a Nonprofit Crowdfunding Campaign

The beginner's guide to creating an impactful crowdfunding campaign for your nonprofit or project.



About CauseVox

CauseVox is a crowdfunding and peer-to-peer fundraising platform for nonprofits and social good projects.

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What is Crowdfunding and Why Should You Do It?



What is Crowdfunding and Why Should You Do It?

Perhaps someone on your team or your nonprofit's board said in a meeting one day, "Why aren't we doing crowdfunding?" Or maybe you've been reading about all of the successful crowdfunding campaigns used by everyone from movie producers and entrepreneurs to kids and major brands.

A January 2014 Forbes article reports that 2013 “yielded an estimated \$5 billion in global crowdfunding with about 30 percent of that total going to social causes.”

Whoa! Imagine how much good could be done if we bumped up nonprofit fundraising dollars to even just 50 percent of the total?

So now you’ve decided to give it a shot. Congrats! We’re glad to have you on board.

But first things first. What the heck is crowdfunding and why exactly is it such a wildly successful method of fundraising? Here’s the rundown.

Let’s break it down:



CROWD
(a bunch of people)

+



FUNDING
(providing money)

=



**A bunch of people
giving money**

crowd·fund·ing

/ˈkroudˌfʌndɪŋ/

noun

1. the practice of funding a project or venture by raising many small amounts of money from a large number of people, typically via the Internet.
"musicians, filmmakers, and artists have successfully raised funds and fostered awareness through crowdfunding"

That's the basics. The official dictionary definition is above.

But there is a bit more to it, such as:

- ▶ Crowdfunding is particularly helpful to raise money for a specific project or campaign. The more specific, the better. Details matter here. You want to sweat the small stuff.
- ▶ Crowdfunding is usually time-based, to create a sense of urgency, challenge, and potentially competition. It's fun with calendars and countdowns.
- ▶ Crowdfunding is a great opportunity for extra bells and whistles like prizes and incentives, testing out tiered donation levels, peer-to-peer fundraising, and niche content.

Getting Started: Setting a Goal



Getting Started: Setting a Goal

So you're ready to get started with your first crowdfunding campaign. There are a lot of moving pieces, but the most important item to settle first is your organization's goals. And to do that, here are some questions to think about:

- 1 What is the problem you're looking to solve?
- 2 Whom or what are you trying to impact?
- 3 How will you do it?

You may have similar big picture goals to other organizations (i.e. preventing malaria, building schools, rescuing dogs), but you're likely to have a unique approach – a story that makes your organization and your quest to better the world different, personal, and relatable to your current community and prospective donors.

Based on your answers to the three questions above, break down your long-term mission and your story into a short-term, tangible action for your campaign. Some examples:



Item specific:

We want to send 100 bed nets to a village in Malawi



Dollar specific:

Help us to provide novels for five classrooms in a middle school by the fall (\$1,000)



Time specific:

Provide food and warmth for dogs at the local shelter before winter starts

These uber-specific mini goals all feed into your larger one, yet give people a sense of the impact they can make with their donation.

As with other fundraising campaigns you've completed at your organization, remember to think about these new goals in context of your current financials, and based on what is achievable. We recommend using the SMART framework to set your fundraising goals, so that they are:



You can read more about [SMART goals](#) and get other examples on our blog.

Determining Rewards and Donation Tiers



Determining Rewards and Donation Tiers

Giveaways for Giving?

Many organizations use rewards and premiums (gifts) to incentivize donations, and it's become a common element of crowdfunding campaigns. Rewards can range from the most basic, like donor acknowledgment on social media, to high-end gifts or recognition by the organization.

Although you've probably received your fair share of return address labels and free tote bags, ask yourself if those gifts actually spurred you to donate to the organization you received them from. More and more, research shows that offering trinkets and gifts in return for a specific dollar-amount donation is [creating a negative effect on the donor](#), and reducing the likelihood of a larger gift or recurring donation.

But that doesn't mean you should forget about gifts altogether. Nonprofits are still finding ways to reward their donors without making them feel obligated or guilty in the process. Here are a few options to consider:



Surprise them!

Everyone loves an unexpected gift or note of thanks. Think about going beyond the standard automated email thank you and mailing a handwritten note, or sending a gift after the donation has been completed.



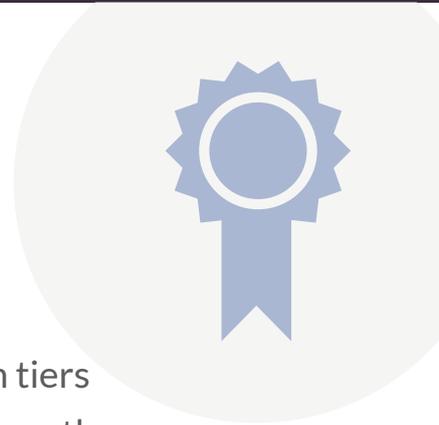
Align with your mission

If you really want to give your donors a gift, pick something that fits your purpose. Examples: a dog bandana or collar if you're an animal shelter, a personalized or branded notebook if you're an educational organization, or a recipe guide made by your team if you work on food and hunger issues.



People, not premiums

Think about what you would want from a nonprofit you support, and choose something that creates a deeper connection with your donors. For instance, an exclusive conference call with the Executive Director, or a special note from someone who was impacted by the campaign.



Establishing Gift Tiers

Another popular feature of crowdfunding is using donation tiers to provide several options of giving for a campaign. It removes the guesswork for the donors, but also gives you a chance to tie your goals more specifically to your mission, giving the donor a better handle on what they are supporting.

To determine the donation tiers for your campaign, take a look at your total fundraising goal, what the funds will be used for, and what it will take to get there. Each campaign will be different, so your tiers may vary from one project to the next. Here's an example setup that could be used by an organization advocating for youth fitness:

\$10	Covers the cost of a jumprope for a child
\$25	Covers the 5k race entry fee for a child
\$35	Buys a new pair of running shoes for a child
\$50	Pays for two swimming lessons for a child

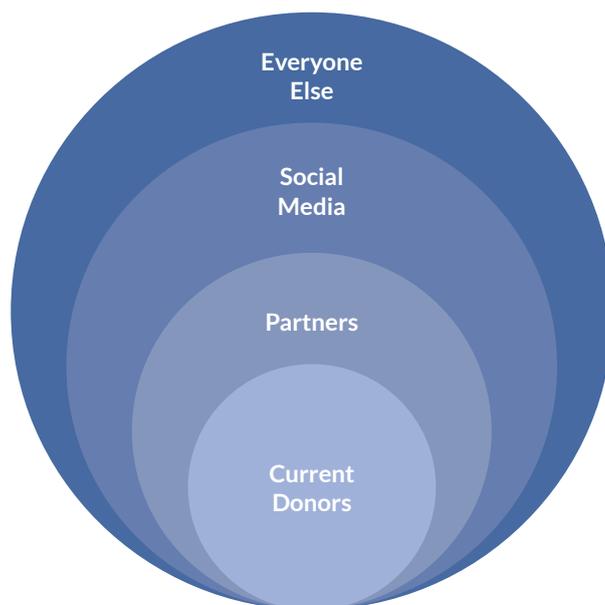
It's not always easy to match donation levels with specific impact goals, but when you can, it really increases your chances of success for a campaign. You can [create donation tiers](#) quickly and easily through your CauseVox admin dashboard, and edit them at any time.

Rallying an Audience

Rallying an Audience

Before you launch your campaign, you need to figure out whom you're targeting. In fact, you should be thinking about that as you craft the campaign concept and set the goals, too, because it's all related.

Through social media, nonprofits have been growing their communities at exponential rates, finding thousands of new supporters through Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms. And if you combine those folks with the people on your email list, your direct mail list, your partners, and all the other channels you use to get out your message, the potential for success is endless.





Activating Your Network

So, you've got all these people, and you've got a campaign to launch. Now what? It's time to get your supporters working on your behalf – after all, they can be just as much of an ambassador for the cause as your staff.

Here are a few ways to rally your community and get them ready for action:



Call your partners

If you're working with a [specific partner on a campaign](#), you should have a joint marketing plan ready to deploy. And if you're not, create a “family and friends” list of select past partners, sponsors, peer organizations, and champions to call or email in advance of the campaign launch, asking them to share with their networks. Prepare a simple marketing toolkit with sample social media updates, relevant imagery, and links.



Give a sneak peek

Pull reports on your most active donors and supporters, and send them a special email a few days before the campaign launches. Give them the rundown, and ask them to spread the word in their networks.

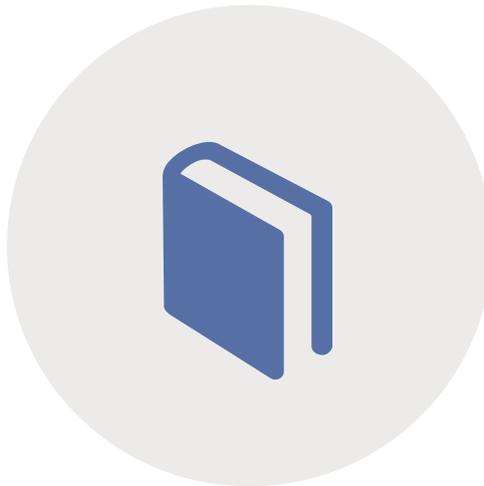


Head to the water cooler

If you're doing a lot of listening on social media and online, you know the people who are always mentioning you on Twitter, tagging you on Facebook, or posting about you in blogs and discussion forums. Go to these people, and tell them about the campaign. Think about a way you can acknowledge or thank them for being an ambassador for your cause.

And here are some other steps you can take to [build a community](#) for your campaign.

Crafting Communications and Storytelling



Crafting Communications and Storytelling

Your campaign is set up, your audience is primed, and now you need to craft your story. This is your chance to really bring a hyper-focused look at the work you're doing and make a connection with your donors.

Just like with other types of fundraising campaigns, there are a few questions to think about when creating a communications plan:

- ▶ What is the goal of this campaign?
- ▶ How do we achieve it?
- ▶ What does success look like?
- ▶ Whom or what is involved and what's the story?

Based on the answers to these questions, you can determine your launch date, duration of the campaign, and what types of partners you may want to involve. Learn more about some of these elements [here](#).



Calls-to-Action and Storytelling Mediums

The story you tell and how you tell it is impacted by the answers to these questions as well. Some campaigns may be better served by frequent email updates or blog posts, with a text-heavy component. But others may need a more visually appealing or interactive approach, with plenty of photos, videos, or graphics.

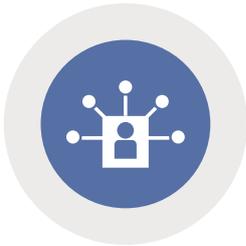
Additionally, you'll want to determine how your various distribution channels are integrated: does this call for a direct mail piece? Should you only use Instagram and skip Facebook? What about a Google+ Hangout?

There are [so many directions you can take](#) with storytelling and communicating for crowdfunding campaigns. No matter what you choose, it's important to keep in mind relevancy, personalization and connection, timing, and your audience's behaviors and interests to make sure you get the right mix for the best results.

Here are a few ideas to get you going:



Start with the campaign with a short, energetic, and informal video. It could be a special message from the ED, or maybe from someone who will be impacted by the campaign. Include the donation appeal and ask people to share it.



Host a Twitter chat, Google+ Hangout, or a Reddit AMA (Ask Me Anything) to share background or updates on the campaign and give supporters a chance to ask questions and get more engaged.



Bring a touch of old school to technology and create a template that makes your thank you emails look handwritten or typed on stationary or telegram paper. Or go all out and actually send a handwritten note.

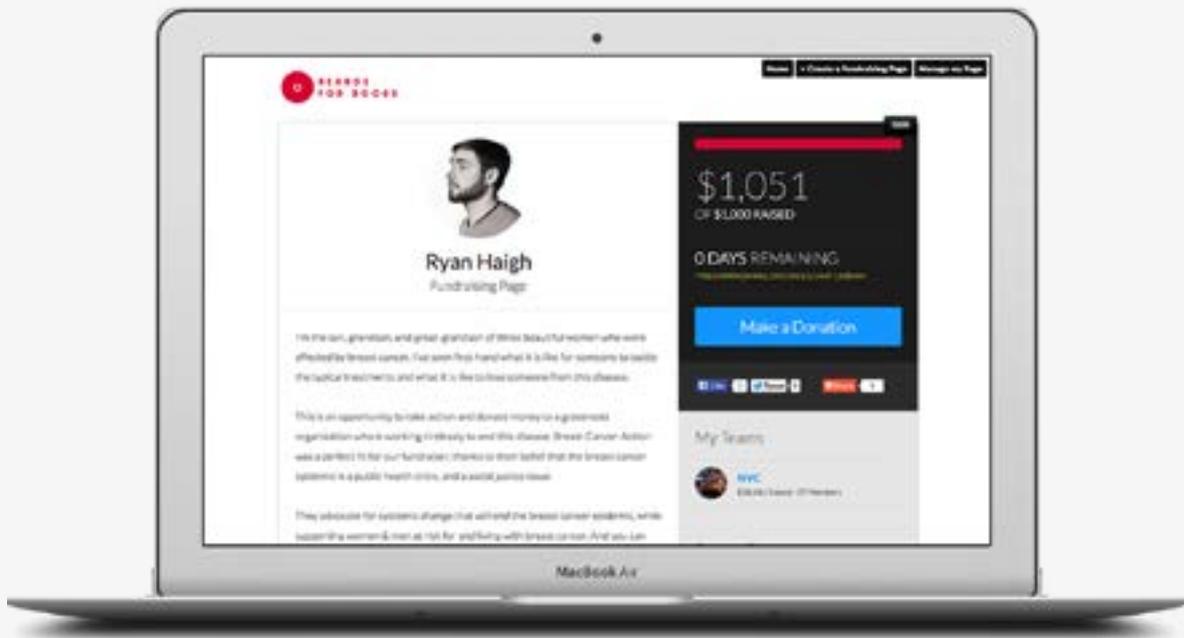


Use your email updates as a diary or “Day in the Life” of someone impacted by the campaign for a personal touch.



Experiment with a new photo storytelling app or website for a sleek, yet authentic perspective.

Using Personal Fundraising Pages



Using Personal Fundraising Pages

If you're looking to take your crowdfunding campaign one step farther, personal or [peer-to-peer \(P2P\) fundraising](#) is a great way to do it. Research shows that people are more likely to donate to a cause after being asked by someone they know. Think of how many times you supported a project because your nephew, neighbor, or grandmother asked you?

More Resources, More Reach, More Results

Let's face it: you're probably already feeling pressure to reach yearly fundraising goals for your organization, and a short, intense crowdfunding campaign may only seem to pile it on. Crowdfunding is hard work, we know, but incorporating personal fundraising is worth it for many reasons, such as:



You get lots of extra help!

Your community is your best asset. While your team is busy managing multiple tasks behind the scenes at your organization, your donors are out there making connections, building awareness, finding new supporters, and raising money for you – for free.



Your name goes far and wide

One of the greatest benefits of P2P fundraising is that your cause and brand is introduced to potentially hundreds and thousands of new people – all potential donors and activists. Sally in Montana may have never heard of you or asked her entire book club to donate if it wasn't for her granddaughter Lizzie sending her a personal note and a link to her fundraising page.



You are making it personal

A lot of donors support a cause because of a personal connection. When you take it a step further and let them recruit family and friends through a personal fundraising page, they can make the story their own. The deeper the connection, the deeper the impact.



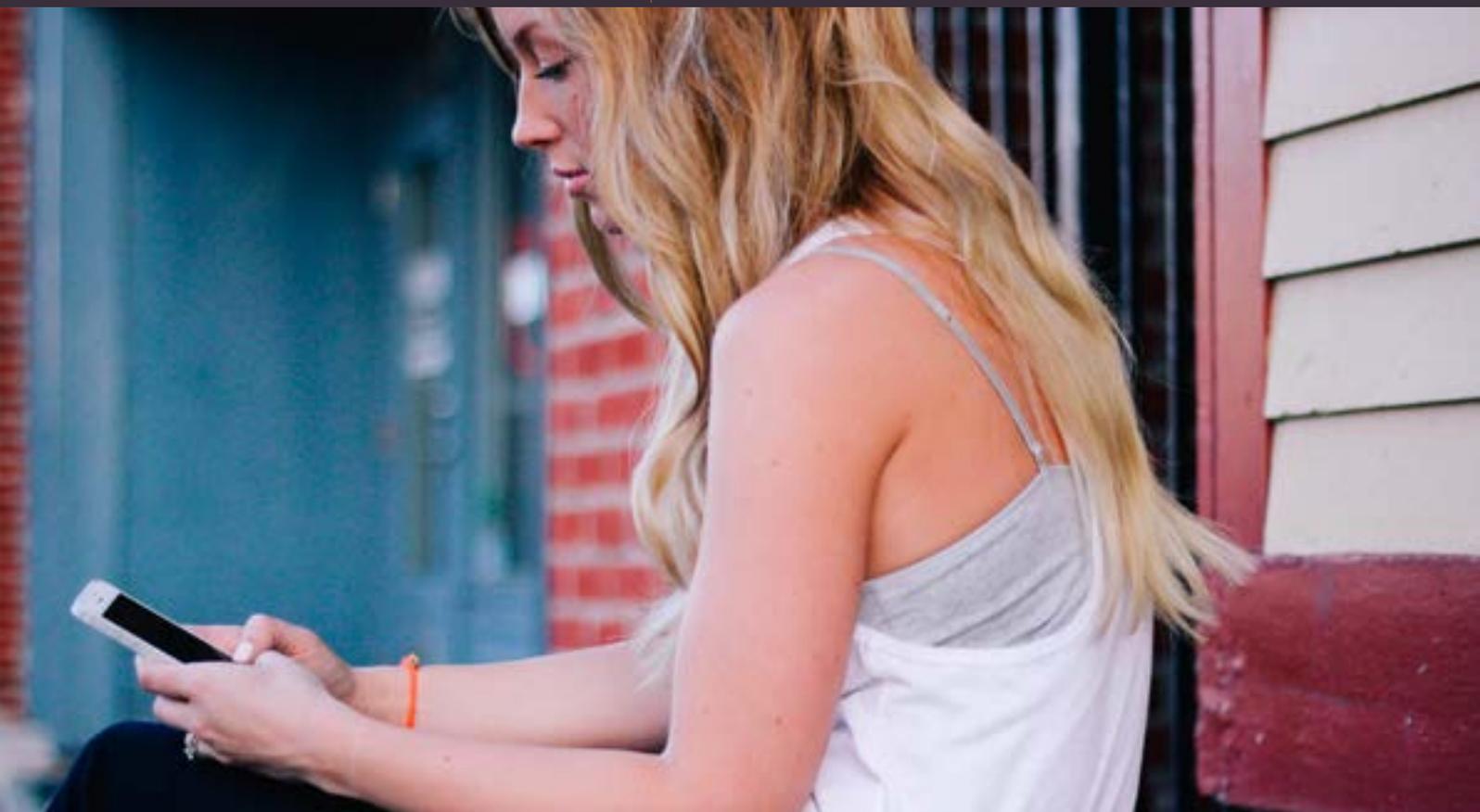
Set Them Up for Success

You have to give your community the right tools to help them tell their story well, and to help make your campaign a success. After all, they're supporting you because they want to, and because it makes them feel good. So it's in your best interest to make their experience fun, easy, educational, and fulfilling.

Consider setting up mini training sessions with fundraisers via web conference, providing online toolkits and tips, and creating a special email series with behind-the-scenes updates, exclusive content, and notes of encouragement.

Check out our [guide to getting started with personal fundraisers](#) for more best practices, including the basics on fundraising and crowdfunding technology, and ways to empower your supporters to achieve their goals.

Publicizing Your Crowdfunding Campaign



Publicizing Your Crowdfunding Campaign

So you've got a great story, an enthusiastic community of supporters, and an awesome goal for your campaign. A little love and attention from writers and journalists would be helpful, too, right?

Publicity can be a great way to get your brand and campaign to the masses, and appeal to folks that might not usually come across it otherwise, even through friends and family. It also can lend some credibility to your campaign – a positive article or blog post could go very far in pushing prospective donors to check you out and join the campaign.



Reaching Out to Reporters

You may not have the time or resources to pitch journalists and bloggers about your campaign efforts, but if it makes sense to add a publicity component, here are a few approaches to consider in your strategy:

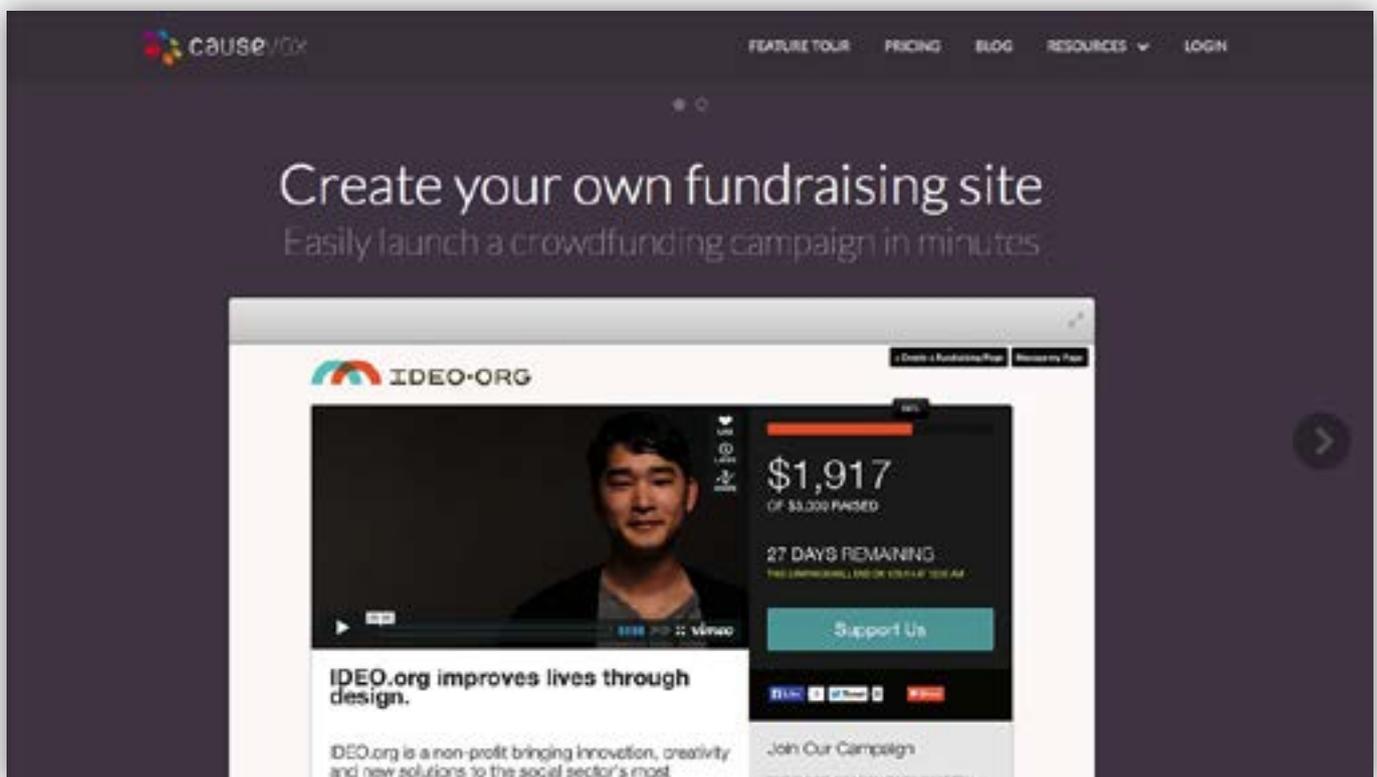
- 1** Make the most of free search tools in the places journalists are listening: [Twitter](#), [Help A Reporter Out \(HARO\)](#), [Seek or Shout](#), and others. Check to see which ones are writing about your issue area, or about unique stories in philanthropy or tech.
- 2** Craft your pitch so that it can be easily used for multiple journalists, but then take the time to tailor them and pull out specific attributes of your campaign that would be appealing to the individual reporter or blogger. Don't send a mail merge – it's worth the effort to personalize your pitches.



- 3** Think beyond traditional media and consider reaching out to radio, podcast services, niche bloggers, or even your local TV station. If you're in a college town, call the student newspaper. Ask partners organizations to mention you in an e-newsletter or on social media, especially if they are a well-recognized name with a larger audience.
- 4** Prepare campaign materials to include in your pitch. Create a version of the toolkit you would create for your partners or personal fundraisers for media, with links, logos and approved photos, and quotes from spokespeople or champions.
- 5** Take the opportunity to begin cultivating relationships with a select few journalists or bloggers for future campaigns. Or if you already have a great relationship with a reporter, give them an exclusive.

For more best practices and recommendations on planning a pitch strategy, see our [guide on publicizing your campaign](#).

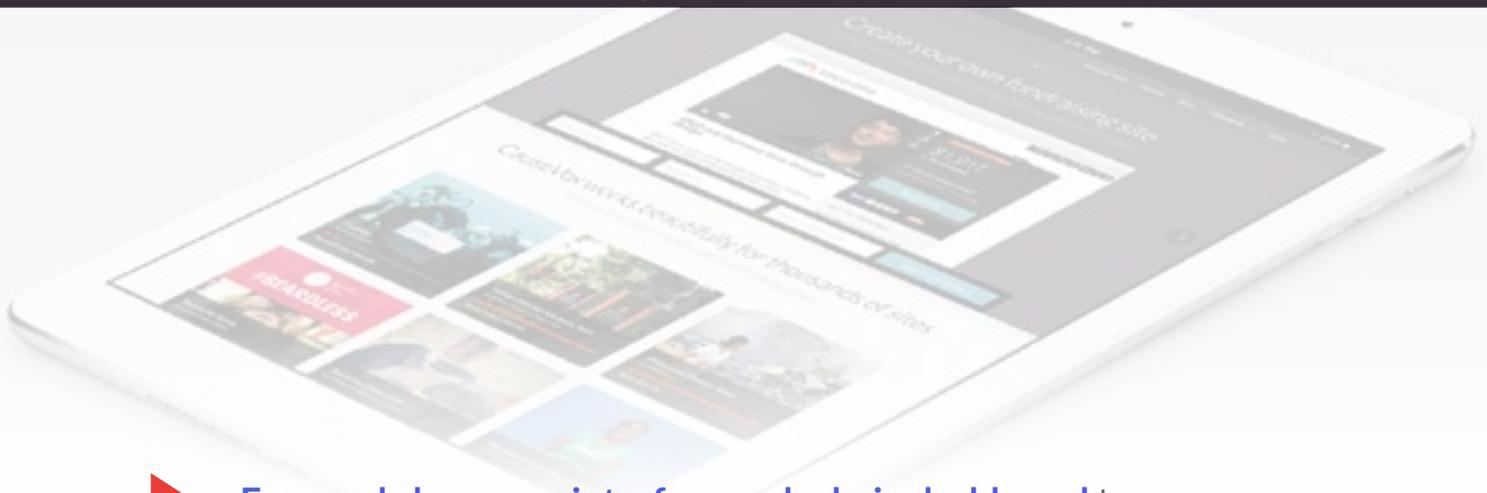
Building your Campaign on CauseVox



Building your Campaign on CauseVox

We know you're itching to start your campaign, and we're ready to help you make it happen! If you haven't already, we hope you will sign up for CauseVox today to support your crowdfunding needs. As a CauseVox user, here's just a few of the features you'll have access to:

- ▶ [Fully customizable fundraising site](#) to integrate with your branding and design
- ▶ [Comprehensive fundraising tools](#) to help you manage your campaign (metrics, emails, social media, content, donation progress, and more)



- ▶ [Easy and clean user interface and admin dashboard](#) to manage donors, create content, adjust your campaign, and get real-time updates
- ▶ [Personal and team fundraising pages](#) for more resources, more reach, and more results
- ▶ [Straightforward donation processing](#) with offline gift integration, donor data, and compatibility with the major transaction processors
- ▶ [Widgets and API](#) capability so you and your community can raise funds anywhere online and on personal networks
- ▶ [Free guides, toolkits, case studies and resources](#), in addition to our frequently updated blog to help you be as successful as possible

There's a lot more where that came from, and the CauseVox team is your number one resource. Don't hesitate to reach out for more information on any of the topics covered in this guide, and feel free to browse our website for related content if you want to dig a little deeper.

Ready to get started? [Sign up on CauseVox today.](#)



www.causevox.com