

Fundraising for FRC: Getting Started

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Who am I?

With **FRC 6328 Mechanical Advantage** since team was founded in 2016

- Community-based team run through Littleton Robotics, an independent nonprofit organization, 100% volunteer-run
- Business Team Mentor
 - Fundraising, Outreach Programs, Sponsor Relations, Marketing, Social Media, Awards, Team Logistics and Management, Regulatory Compliance, etc.
- Littleton Robotics Board of Directors since 2017
 - Served as Board President 2017-2023
- Work in Nonprofit Administration for The Decibels Foundation
- Previously worked in Corporate Communications and Technical Documentation
- Parent of two FRC alumni - classes of 2020 and 2023



Fundraising for FRC

Pre-Work

- **Applicable to all types of FRC teams**
 - School, community, fiscal sponsored, etc.
- **Initial steps for a variety of different types of fundraising**
 - Including pre-fundraising work



Step 0: Create a Budget



- **Why?**
 - What is your scope?
 - Many grants require basic budget information
- **What are your anticipated expenses?**
 - Registration, robot parts, shop supplies and tools, facilities and overhead, outreach supplies, travel expenses, etc.
 - Required vs. Nice to Have
 - What expenses are covered by school or other entity?
- **What is your anticipated income?**
 - What does the school pay for?
 - Activity fees?

Financial Logistics

- **How will you be able to accept funding?**
 - School account
 - *FIRST* Dashboard
 - Booster club
 - Fiscal sponsor (4H, Hack Club Bank, etc.)
 - Independent 501(c)3
- Are donations tax deductible?
- Do you have an accessible bank account?



*Please don't personally accept funds,
that can have serious tax implications*

Getting Set Up to Fundraise

- **Craft your story - know the points you want to make**
 - What makes your team's story unique?
 - How will a donation impact your team?
 - How does your team impact the larger community?
- **Track hours and data**
 - Mentors and other program volunteers
 - Outreach programs and events
 - Program attendees
- **Have data and statistics ready to validate your personal stories**



CRAFT YOUR STORY

“Why then How then What”

HOOK

Paint a picture and
make a connection

SOLUTION

How you provide a
solution that works

CALL TO ACTION

What are you
asking for?



PROBLEM

Simple explanation of what
you're trying to address

BRAG

Proven impact and exciting
accomplishments



Craft Your Story



- **The “Do”s**

- Know your audience - who are you talking to?
- Start with a hook, something to grab attention
- Infuse the story with personal connections
- Go for emotion, grab the heart
- Know the points you want to make



- **The “Don’t”s**

- State a problem without a solution
- Dry statistics
- Jargon or insider-only language

Getting Set Up to Fundraise

- **Create simple sponsor information packet that can be printed, published online, emailed, etc.**
 - **Who** and **what** is your team? Keep it short!
 - Goals/mission/vision
 - What the team does
 - What geographic area, student age group, etc.
 - **Why** should someone contribute?
 - Past team accomplishments (don't focus on competitions and awards!)
 - Benefits/recognition for varying levels of contribution
 - **How** to get donations to the team
- **Infographics help illustrate the points you're trying to make**
- **Provide a tangible source of information with links and QR codes**
 - Don't just rely on words



Where does funding come from?

1. Simple Fundraisers
2. Fundraising Events
 - a. Raffles
3. Sponsors
4. Grants

Simple Fundraisers

- Restaurant Nights
 - Easy to set up
 - Up to you to publicize
- Selling items at local events
 - School or town events
 - Bake sale
 - Small 3D-printed or other team-made items
- Peer-to-peer fundraisers and crowdfunding sites
 - Ask for donations via social media sites
 - GoFundMe and similar
 - Generally best results come from asking for a specific, one-off need



Fundraising Events

- More effort to plan and execute, may have up-front investment in supplies
- Can have a bigger payoff of funds raised compared to simple fundraisers
- Examples
 - Car wash (check with police/fire station/school to host)
 - Pasta dinner
 - Flamingo flocking or garden gnoming
 - Graduation balloons
 - STEM camp
 - Silent or online auction
 - Game/activity/movie night
 - Group yard sale
 - Raffle



Raffles

Raffles can be an easy and fun way to fundraise

- Donated items or purchase prize out of raffle ticket proceeds
- **Know your state rules** about charitable gaming and how to run raffles
 - Who is allowed to run a raffle?
 - Record keeping and reporting requirements
- Online raffle ticket sales are tricky because of different state regulations about charitable gaming
- In Massachusetts, charitable gaming rules are set by the Public Charities Division of the state's Office of the Attorney General



Types of Raffles

- 50/50 raffles
- Calendar raffles
- Basket raffles
- Big Ticket item(s)



Finding Sponsors

- Where to find sponsors
 - Parent and mentor employers
 - Local businesses
 - Locally owned
 - Local branches of larger businesses
 - Friends and neighbors
 - School newsletters reach a wider scope of families
 - Local media (does anyone still have a town newspaper?)
- Community outreach
 - Get visible in your community so local business owners know you
 - Demos for municipal governing boards
- Know what could be helpful, in-kind sponsorships



Finding Sponsors

- Know your sponsor benefits and recognition levels
 - How can you set the breakpoints to encourage someone to give at the next level?
- Common recognitions include:
 - Listed on website, team banner, apparel
 - Shout out on social media
 - Free t-shirts or other merch
 - Logo sticker on the robot
 - Sponsor logo display in team's pit
 - Tour at an event
 - Personal robot demo



Finding Sponsors

- Research and more research
- Create a spreadsheet of potential sponsors
 - Company and contact information
 - What do you want to ask for?
 - Prioritize - is it a small sheet metal fab or an in-home daycare facility?
 - Make notes of outcomes
- Run a sponsor outreach campaign
 - Create an email template and/or phone script that can be personalized
 - **STUDENTS** do the outreach
 - Gracious Professionalism still counts
- Maintaining sponsor relationships
 - Keep track of who donated what each year



Keeping Sponsors

- Turn a **YES** into another **YES** next year
 - Don't want to start from scratch every single year
- Make sponsors feel appreciated and show the impact of their sponsorship
- Cultivate long term relationships with sponsors
 - Consistent, affirming communication
 - Short email updates through the year
 - Photos and short video clips grab attention more than walls of text
- Show that you know and appreciate your sponsors
 - Keep track of who donated what each year (update that spreadsheet!)
 - Thank you cards signed by the team with a small team photo
 - Consider hosting a Sponsor Open House



Finding Grants

- Again, research and more research
- Who is listed on other teams robots and websites?
 - Even better if they're listed on multiple teams' robots/websites
 - Research online to see if they have an open grant application
- Start with the *FIRST* grants listed on firstinspires.org
- Other potential local grant sources
 - Most local banks have foundations for community investment
 - Workforce development groups
 - Local community foundations
 - Local service organizations (Lions Club, Rotary, etc.)



Applying for Grants

- Watch for deadlines!
- Many grant questions are the same
 - Create a shared doc with answers to standard questions to draw from and customize
 - Watch the character limits
 - Get specific with data to back up the work your team does
 - Have compelling stories written down that can be used as appropriate

Typical Grant Questions

- Briefly describe your program and its history
- What are your team/organization goals?
Mission?
- Describe your team's structure and how responsibilities are divided
- Explain your annual budget and how you got to it
- What makes your program unique?
- What are the benefits to the organization providing funding?
- What need are you addressing in your community?
- How do you define and measure success for your program?
- What is your program's impact and how do you measure that?



Record Keeping

- Keep track of which sponsors are approached
 - Which give and which decline/no response
- Which grant applications you fill out
 - Links and deadlines
 - Which are granted, which decline, which are no response
- Contact info
 - Name, email address, phone #
 - Company website
- How you made the connection
 - Parent or mentor employer?
 - Outreach event?



Resources

- [FIRST Fundraising Toolkit](#)
- [FIRST Team Grant Opportunities](#)
- [Grant Database](#) (courtesy of FRC 353 and FRC 358)
- [Sponsor Packet Template](#) (courtesy of Bryce Hanson)
- [Sponsor Tracking Template](#) (courtesy of Bryce Hanson)
- [Budget Template](#) (courtesy of Bryce Hanson)
- [Fundraising 101](#) (courtesy of The Compass Alliance)
- [Fundraising for FIRST Webinar](#) (courtesy of FRC 3216)



Questions?

