

National History Day Fundraising Tips

Fundraising for the national NHD contest can seem daunting. Maybe you feel uncomfortable asking others for money. Perhaps you don't have a clue where to start. It may even seem impossible for you to raise all of the money that you need. But the National History Day Contest in Washington, DC, is an experience of a lifetime, and we want all eligible winners to be able to participate! Here are some tips to help you reach your fundraising goals.

Start Early

Starting early is difficult when you only have a few weeks between the state and national competitions. You should not ask for money until you know that you have qualified for the national competition, but you can start saving early! Instead of buying that new pair of jeans or another Xbox game, consider putting that money in the bank. Think about birthday or Christmas money that you could use for History Day. If you don't go on to Nationals, you'll still have the cash, but if you do, you'll have a head start on your fundraising goals. Once you do find out that you have qualified to go to Washington, DC, don't waste any time getting to work. The earlier you start, the less stressed you'll feel!

Work Together

If you have lots of students participating in History Day at your school, talk to your teacher about creating a group to fundraise throughout the year. At the end of the year, all students who qualify for the national competition can use the group's raised funds to help finance their trip. Funding your trip will be easier since you will have all year to fundraise.

Set a Goal

Most History Day participants will spend between \$1,200 and \$1,500 to go to DC. Take some time and figure out exactly how much you think it will cost for your entire trip. Don't forget to budget money for food and your registration fee. (However, you should not ask for money for things like souvenirs or sightseeing; you need to spend your own money on those things.) People are more likely to help if they know the total amount that you need, exactly how much you want from them, and how you are planning to spend their money. Make a schedule detailing how much you want to raise each week and what you will do each day to achieve your goals. Make yourself stick to the plan!

Begin in Your Comfort Zone

Maybe you are intimidated by the thought of approaching local businesses or planning an event. Start by asking your teacher about funding your school may offer. Many school districts provide scholarships for athletic or academic competitions. Next, try using online resources. It's easier to ask for money through sites such as GoFundMe or Fundly than it is to ask someone face-to-face. Don't stop there. Use social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to get the word out about your needs. This is also a good place to advertise for any fundraisers that you might coordinate.

Budget

If you plan to host an event, like a car wash or bake sale, be sure to figure out how much it will cost. Ingredients, tools, equipment, and other supplies will need to be paid for up front. Consider the time and cost involved before planning an entire event to ensure you use your time and resources productively. Make sure that the money you plan to earn will be more than the money you put into the event.

Help Yourself

Use your talents (and those of willing helpers) to your advantage. Are you an artist? Ask people to donate money for a portrait of their pet. Are you a photographer? Musician? Baker? Does your mom have a famous salsa recipe? Think about services that people might need. Could you help paint a house? Mow lawns? Babysit? Be sure to advertise your services, along with why you are raising the money, through social media and other outlets.

Ask, Ask, Ask!

This might be one of the hardest things you'll have to do, but it can be one of the best ways to raise money. Ask family and friends. Ask people from church, or a sports team. Ask local businesses and civic organizations like Rotary or Lions Clubs. Ask your local historical society. You should draft a formal letter that can be tailored to each individual person or business that you approach. Have it in hand when you visit or send it to out-of-town family members. Be sure to include how much you are trying to raise and what the funds will be used for. Most importantly, do not become discouraged if people tell you no! It will happen. Just thank them for their time and move on.

Be Smart

Is there a big high school baseball game on Friday? Do you have a local farmer's market every Saturday? Talk to people in charge of big events and see if you can set up a table near the entrance. Ask for donations of a dollar or two for your cause. Consider selling raffle tickets for a gift card or other prize. A local business might even donate an item for you to raffle off. Think about the locations of the events you are planning and try to organize them where you know big crowds will gather or where your target audience is likely to be.

Little Things Count

You don't need to raise the entire amount of money overnight. Realize that even a few dollars here and there can make a difference. Plan a _____a-thon. Fill in the blank with something you love, like swimming, running, jumping rope, or dancing. Have people pledge a small amount for every lap, mile, jump, etc. that you do. Send out a funny video of you doing the activity or invite donors to come and watch. Make it fun. Be creative.

Keep in Contact

Don't forget to send thank-you notes to donors. You want to make sure that your supporters feel appreciated. Consider creating a blog or sending email updates to let people know where you are in your fundraising efforts. After you attend National History Day, be sure to send another round of updates and thank yous, letting donors know how your trip went and what you got out of it. They will appreciate your efforts to keep them informed and will be more likely to support you again next year!