

9 CHARITY FUND-RAISING EXPEDITIONS

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Fund-raising for charity by expeditions is now well established. It evolved from sponsored sporting events, such as sponsored bicycle rides and the running craze of the early 1980s, which involved a whole new generation of charity fund-raisers, to add to the traditional circle of coffee mornings and village fêtes. Now we have Charity Challenges, which are in effect energetic fund-raising events in an exotic overseas venue.

Most people have discovered that raising money for charity is not an easy option. The concept of fund-raising for a charity is often an add-on to an existing expedition plan, but in reality may require even greater planning, organisation and time than the trip itself. Whether you raise £100 or £100,000 it can give enormous satisfaction.

It's an exhausting business not to be entered into lightly. However, once the team is committed, there can be many benefits, not only to the charity receiving funds from your efforts, but also by providing a tightly defined target that spurs on the expedition as a group, demanding a new set of management skills from those involved.

CHOOSING A CHARITY

There is an almost endless selection of charities from which to choose. They start at the big end with the likes of Save the Children Fund, Christian Aid and Barnado's, going through the medium-sized groups such as ITDG (Intermediate Technology Development Group), and reaching little dynamos such as APT in Gloucestershire, with merely six workers, working on a plethora of projects in the less developed world.

Most will have their own personal preferences to guide them to their choice of charity. For the undecided there are one or two useful points to consider:

1. Are there any convenient parallels between the expedition and the charity? The

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public tend to enjoy the thought that the expedition understands a little about the beneficiaries, e.g. a team of canoeists in Norway creates a strong mental image of bobbing around on choppy seas under dark cliffs, and this could quickly translate to raising funds for lifeboats and the RNLI. A tight concept and close link are essential in many fund-raising opportunities particularly in radio, TV or newspapers, because there is so little time/space to convey information to the audience.

2. It is worth asking yourself whether there is some experience that the charity can lend to the expedition, e.g. knowledge of particular countries, even contacts out there. But please remember that most charities are heavily overworked and many of their staff will not have the time or resources to devote to helping your project.
3. You might choose a large charity that is instantly recognisable to your potential sponsors, or conversely choose a smaller group and help raise public awareness about their activities among a larger audience. The fund-raising team of a larger charity may be able to provide greater help with support materials and a formalised system for collecting funds. Alternatively, there is a danger that you might become forgotten among a mass of other projects. So you could find that small is beautiful.
4. Some teams try to link several different charities together and all monies raised are split between them. This could work to the benefit of a smaller charity linked to a more well-known charity. But in general this tends to mean that the approach to donors is, like Hobson's choice, split so that no one gets maximum return, and none of the charities is particularly keen to service you fully.

Despite all the logic, there is no substitute for putting your efforts to the benefit of the charity that you honestly believe to be doing the most appropriate work in its field. When you are sincerely trying your utmost then everything you do becomes so much more fruitful and enjoyable.

FROM THE CHARITY'S POINT OF VIEW

Funds collected by an enthusiastic self-organising team are always welcome. It is a bonus if they also promote the aims and intentions of the charity. Added benefit comes from listing the names and addresses of all donors so that a long-term network of sympathisers can be built up.

However, expeditioners are prone to being rather active imaginative people who can, if undisciplined, become a drain on the time and resources of the charity. The most cost-effective scenario might be a venture that requires no more than a meeting over coffee to discuss proposals, a request after a couple of months for more hand-outs about the charity, and then a small celebration at the end to enable the charity to receive a cheque for a few thousand pounds.

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A continual worry to the charity is that a single mismanaged expedition will tarnish their good reputation and public image. If you are raising money using their name, legally you should have their permission to do so. Charities often have strict rules governing the use of their logo and charity registration number and guidelines on how they like to be described on paper and by the media.

FINANCES

Each expedition must fund all its own costs. Charities do not contribute to expedition expenses.

In particular, teams must be explicit about whether they are approaching a sponsor for expedition funding or materials, or a charitable donation, or both. For example, to solicit Karrimor for some good rucksacks for the expedition is a quite different plea from asking a Women's Institute for a gift to the charity (see "Targeted letters" below).

It is advisable to get all donations sent directly to the charity. Their treasurer or fund-raising officer must, of course, be asked first for approval because sorting and filing all the material is time-consuming. In my experience the fund-raising officers will keep a separate log of all donations sent in as a result of your expedition.

METHODS OF FUND-RAISING

All charity events need to have a fund-raising mechanism by which potential donors are approached and monies collected and channelled back to the charity. It is all very well to say you aim to raise a million – it's a different thing to do it. Aim high – but notify the charity of your "confidently achievable" target. This avoids future disappointments all round when you have raised only £500 of a £20,000 target.

Individual sponsor form

This traditional method requires a lot of legwork on the part of the expedition member to go around all his or her friends and relatives. However, it is a cheap safe method that is usually guaranteed to generate a few hundred pounds from a quick local exploit and as much as a few thousand from a long exotic adventure.

Most charity fund-raising departments will be able to provide pro forma sponsorship forms for your use. Do check with the charity first before designing your own form. The sponsor form must be clear and concise, preferably with a splash of colour to grab the initial interest of the potential donors. Double-sided A4 is usually good because it folds easily into an envelope and also two sheets can be put up side by side on a noticeboard to give a full explanation of the trip.

After the headings, an effective format is to use the first paragraph to outline the expedition project, the second for a brief description of the work of the charity and a

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third to describe how your donations will be used (if you have arranged this with your charity). Following this a few details of expedition members or the field area or some expected problems lend specific interest to the sponsor form. The last paragraph will usually be a plea for donations rounded off by a “thank you for helping” phrase.

The second side needs to be divided up into columns and boxes for date, sponsor’s name, address and amount donated. At the top of the page give a one-line description of the charity plus the expedition title and at the bottom of the page don’t forget to put the charity’s registration number, address and/or your own address. I usually persuade a friend to make a decent donation on the top line to get the ball rolling.

It is virtually always best to collect donations at the same time as donors sign the form because a stupendous amount of effort is required to seek out all signatories at the end of the event which may be up to 24 months ahead. Sponsor forms with your expedition title can also have their second side designed so that individual donors can send it with a cheque or credit card donation direct to the charity. The charity will be happy to receive donations as soon as possible in order to be able to put them to good use immediately. It is also possible to get your sponsors to Gift Aid their donations. This means the charity will receive a further 28 per cent of the donation amount from the Inland Revenue, at no further cost to your sponsor. You will need to get the correct legal wording from the charity to include this on your sponsorship form. But it is well worth doing as you can help raise nearly a third more in donations for your charity.

Informal sponsor form pyramid

Each expedition member persuades his or her friends, relatives and workmates to go around with sponsor forms collecting signatures, thereby spreading the net wider, saving the member legwork but putting some administrative burden on his or her shoulders. The benefit to the charity is an exponential increase in funds.

Formal sponsor form pyramid

This is the traditional method used initially for fun runs and marathons (the Great North Run, the London Marathon) and now copied and extended to overseas charity bike rides as well as many other “mass participation” events. The idea is that the event is open to as many people as possible and each automatically becomes a collector. It is usually quite expensive and time-consuming to organise and is a headache to supervise, but the returns can be enormous. This method could be applicable to an overseas school visit, for which all the pupils in each participating school join in fund-raising.

Targeted letters

These are usually on expedition headed notepaper to people, groups trusts or

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companies known to be sympathetic to expedition members or to the charity. Before any contacts are approached you must first check with the charity that the names on your list are acceptable to the charity, which may have an existing financial input with some groups, or have an ethical policy avoiding, say, tobacco or logging industries. This targeted method may require a lot of time-consuming research and the production of letters. Some people who claim that it can generate considerable donations have never raised a single penny this way, although I do know some who were successful with this method.

Internet

Promoting your expedition and its charitable aims on the internet need not be time-consuming to set up, and is a good opportunity to link up your expedition website with your chosen charity's website. For examples of how other expeditions have done this look at the links on RGS–IBG Expeditions database (www.rgs.org/expeditionreports). You can also go to www.justgiving.com to simply create your own fundraising web pages. Your sponsors can also donate directly on-line to your event.

Merchandising

This is the profits from selling T-shirts, postcards or knick-knacks (also included in this category is running a raffle for, say, the expedition's teddy bear).

OUT OF SIGHT ...

If your expedition is a lengthy one you need to ensure you are not “out of mind” of your sponsors. Invite all or selected sponsors to a send-off party; send back a “half-way” or regular newsletter for sponsors and the media. Keep your webpage live while you are travelling by keeping an on-line journal. Appoint a relative or friend as the UK base contact who can occasionally check on your fund-raising total with the charity and tell them where and how you are.

POST-EXPEDITION

Funds can be raised from lectures, articles, sale of photos and books, e.g. John Pilkington has donated several thousand pounds to ITDG through royalties from his two books *Into Thin Air* and *The Road to Tartary: Adventures on the Silk Route*. Many people fear that you need a flair for presentation to participate in any of these fundraising opportunities, but, having sweated in front of a sea of expectant eyes on several occasions, I can assure you that everyone can relate the story of the adventures in their own little segment of an expedition so long as they pluck up a bit of courage and realise that they are the “world experts” with regard to their own endeavours. Remember to include your charity in feedback.

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THE MEDIA PULL

This has the potential to draw spur-of-the-moment donations from people whom the expedition never sees. This can be extremely effective but requires plenty of luck to stumble on the exact formula that goads the media to give coverage to the adventure and also to urge the general public to send in donations. Any exposure in a local newspaper is beneficial to fund-raising because in the eye of the general public it gives an unofficial stamp of approval to a project. Try also local radio, and regional and satellite TV. For further advice on working with the media see Chapter 8.

THE WORLD BEYOND FUND-RAISING

Money is only the first step. Communication is equally, if not more, important in the long run.

From our platform as expeditioners we are able to inform others of the aims of our chosen charity and give them details of successful projects. This information will help them to understand why the work of this particular charity is necessary. You could be responsible for stimulating your sponsors to become long-term supporters of the charity, providing valuable donations way into the future.

Finally, it is worth remembering that, from the moment of the first link with a charity to the last celebration party of the expedition, you are all ambassadors of goodwill for your chosen charity.

SUGGESTED READING

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