



CHAPTER SEVEN

MISCELLANEOUS FUNDRAISING IDEAS

There are literally hundreds of fundraising ideas being used by fire and emergency service agencies across the country. Many volunteer or partially volunteer agencies use special fundraising programs to pay for vehicles, equipment and even their general operating costs. Funding sources range from traditional yearly door-to-door fund drives to bake sales, casino nights, bingo and sports events.

OVERVIEW OF APPROACHES

In addition to using many of the sources described earlier, fire and emergency services agencies have raised funds from:

- Food sales (including open-grills, formal dinners, bake sales, pancake breakfasts and barbecues)
- Entertainment events (such as dances, amusement park outings, carnivals, rodeos)
- Sports events (including turkey shoots, donkey baseball, softball, fishing, golf)
- Gambling (where legal, including casino nights, bingo, horse races)
- Raffles
- Door-to-door solicitation
- Direct mail solicitation
- Public service announcements soliciting funds
- Selling space in annual reports
- Donations of services or money from industry
- Sale of honorary memberships
- Training and community education
- Sales of goods (such as logo-embossed clothing, calendars, antiques, beverage insulators)
- Sales of services (car washes, pet baths)

- Shared profits with private vendors of commercial services (such as photographs) or commercial goods
- Water meter bills (discussed later in the section)

Volunteer departments may have an advantage in being able to raise money with fewer restrictions than career departments encounter. Donations to the volunteers are usually tax-deductible. (Some career departments, such as New York City, have set up foundations to receive tax-free donations for special purposes.) However, volunteer companies should be aware that they are still regarded as a public service entity and may be held accountable for the methods they use to raise funds, and how the money is spent. Volunteer companies must abide by state and local ordinances, which may vary considerably across the nation. For example, bingo may be legal in one district and illegal in the next, and jurisdictions may have different rules about financial disclosure.

All fire and emergency service agencies should carefully consider the costs versus the benefits of taking on new funding projects. Year-round bingo, for example, may be highly time consuming for members and “burn them out,” whereas an annual fund drive may be easier to take on as an agency project.

The clarity and content of the fund-raising message to the public must also be given careful thought. Will the money be earmarked for a tangible project, such as a new ambulance, engine or fire station, or will the money be going toward operating expenses that are harder for the public to visualize, such as electric bills or administrative fees? It may be easier to raise money towards a specific project, like an engine, which the public more



readily perceives as having a direct effect on its community's safety.

Fire and emergency service agencies should tailor their funding methods to their community's characteristics. Would a small community respond best to door-to-door efforts? Would a larger, more affluent community best be reached through a mail drive? Are the local citizens most likely to attend regular bingo nights, an annual fair or an annual antique sale?

Departments should consider the local media to assist in the fundraising effort. They may be able to assist agencies with flyers, newspaper articles, newspaper advertisements, radio spots and cable television advertisements. To get the word out, agencies may want to consider presentations to local civic and religious organizations to solicit on behalf of the fire and emergency service organization. Also, carefully consider the timing of fundraising efforts. If a department has a tax-exempt status, it may wish to reach out just before the year ends to allow customer to make tax-deductible donations before the tax year concludes. Be careful not to constantly bombard the community or they could get the impression that the fire and emergency service agency is only in business for the money.

There are many community resources that fire and EMS agencies can use to assist them in their fundraising programs. For example, local business may be willing to advertise promotional messages for fundraising campaigns. Schools may be willing to let departments send flyers home with children. Local celebrities may be willing to endorse the efforts as well.

The City of Virginia Beach is a combination department with 11 volunteer rescue squads which collectively make up one of the largest all-volunteer EMS organizations in the United States. The 11 squads do their own fundraising and maintain independent administrations. The training and operations are maintained by the City's Department of Emergency Medical Services. The City pays for station overhead costs such as electricity, fuel and insurance through tax funds. The volunteer corporations make up the remaining costs through twice-a-year direct mail fund drives, mini-grants from the state Rescue Squad Assistance Fund, and a city-supported government "United Way"-type program which brings in about \$10,000 per year. The department also receives excellent media support through public service advertising, including a TV spot and three full newspaper ads.

Contact:

City of Virginia Beach
Department of EMS
1917 Artic Avenue
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23451
(804) 437-4850
FAX (804) 425-7864

The sections below expand on some miscellaneous fundraising techniques mentioned earlier, especially where there is a novel twist or emerging trend.

WATER METER CHARGES

Some fire and emergency service departments raise revenues through charges or donation requests that are directly attached to utility bills. These charges are not taxes because the resident has the option of deducting the



charge from the monthly bill.

In Spur, Texas, the volunteer fire department raises funds through a water meter charge, or mandatory

“donation,” of \$2 or \$5, depending upon whether a home or business is receiving the bill. The charge must be approved by the local voters thorough a referendum, since it is like a tax.

Contact:

City Secretary
City of Spur
402 N. Burlington
Spur, Texas 79370
(806) 271-3316

Cyprus Creek, Texas, EMS in suburban Houston has a different approach to collecting donations using water meter bills. Local water districts (called MUDs or Municipal Utility Districts) add a fee of \$3 to \$4 to each water bill as a “donation” for EMS service. All charges and fees on the water bill are itemized and then totaled to include the EMS donation. Customers who do not wish to make a donation may deduct the amount for EMS from the total. The idea of using water bills to collect donations was selected over user fees as a preferred method of raising funds.

The original household assessment for each municipal utility district was determined by setting the suggested minimum donation at \$.50 per month per household for the homes with the lowest value or lowest gross income. Areas with higher property values or household incomes were assessed \$1 per month per household, and \$1.50 in the area with the highest property values and incomes. Rates have been adjusted periodically to keep

pace with inflation and increased demand for service.

This funding mechanism currently generates about \$2 million annually for Cyprus Creek. In addition to the cash donations, Cyprus Creek has received substantial in-kind donations such as personal computers from Compaq Corporation, which is based in it’s district, and a new ambulance valued at \$60,000 from a local women’s group. One of its stations is located on land bequeathed by an area resident.

Although the current funding system has held Cypress Creek EMS in good financial standing, anticipated demands for training and equipment are forcing system administrators to consider other funding sources to fill future needs. One of the alternatives under consideration is third-party insurance billing.

Cyprus Creek EMS operates 8 mobile intensive care (ALS) ambulances from five stations. The units are staffed by 192 personnel, 17 of whom are paid paramedics. Cyprus Creek’s innovative and aggressive approach to funding has permitted it to remain one of the most progressive and respected EMS systems in the country.

DIRECT MAIL

Direct mail fundraising has proven to be one of the most effective means of raising money for fire departments and EMS agencies. With increasing demands on fire and EMS personnel for emergency responses, additional and mandatory training and ever increasing administrative responsibilities, many departments simply do not have the time to send their personnel on the tradi-



tional door-to-door fundraising campaigns of the past.

Direct mailing costs include printing a letter and self-addressed envelope for each household and business. Departments can register as a tax-exempt organization with the U.S. Post Office and take advantage of reduced mailing rates. Coordination with local media (community newspapers, radio and television stations) can help alert the public to the fundraising campaign. Some campaigns solicit general support and some target funding for a new piece of apparatus, a building fund, defibrillators or some specific need. Market research may help in designing the message.

Some departments hire outside agencies to help with direct mail fundraising. Outside companies can provide technical support and expertise. This may include preparations of documents, mailing lists, and statistical information on the types of information that work best for the demographics in your area. Most importantly, an outside agency greatly reduces the amount of time placed on volunteer members. This alone may be worth the cost of hiring an agency. The money invested in fundraising professionals can be offset by increased revenues.

A detailed analysis of the responses by geographic area is useful after a first fund drive is completed. One can divide the district by ZIP codes, postal carrier routes, streets, types of residences or size of donations. This would show where the fundraising efforts were most successful and where they failed, so that the next fund drive may be altered to build on the strong areas and work on the weak areas. Some agencies send a second, and even third, mailing to addresses that failed to respond to the first

mailing. Many departments are able to make between 20 and 30 percent of their total revenue from these follow-up mailings.

The Hackettstown Rescue Squad in New Jersey has been raising funds by traditional door-to-door efforts since it was founded in the 1950's. During their best year they raised \$22,000. Several years ago the department started contracting with a private company that specialized in direct mail fundraising for fire departments. Costs for the mailing were about \$3000, and some members were skeptical about the new technique – until the checks came in. That first year, Hackettstown raised over \$42,000 from their direct mail efforts.

A standard letter requesting funds was sent to all homes and businesses. A second mailing went to addresses that had failed to respond to the first letter. The second mailing raised over \$10,000. The following year, under the advice of their direct mail company, Hackettstown switched to separate letters targeted for businesses and homes. Revenues have remained steady at around \$40,000 a year. Hackettstown's total budget is just under \$100,000 a year, made up from their direct mail campaign, a \$30,000 yearly donation from their township and other funding activities. They respond to 800-1000 emergency calls each year. The major problems encountered by their fundraising efforts have been at the Post Of-

Contact:

Hackettstown Rescue Squad
PO Box 201
Hackettstown, New Jersey 07840
(908) 852-3130



face, where bulk mailings are often delayed because of their fourth-class nature. This has led to a slower dispersal of letters throughout the squad's district, causing some coordination problems in advertising their campaign.

The Chestnut Ridge, Maryland, Volunteer Fire Department has used direct mail campaigns for over twenty years. They have hired a private company to assist in the campaign for over twenty years. Their community is made up of high-income, upwardly mobile professionals, and like many communities, has been making the transition for a rural to a suburban district. Because of the demographics of their area, direct mail has been the most efficient way to raise funds. Chestnut Ridge has found that the key to success is in a good mailing list and a message that is of real concern to the public. Rather than send out general flyers, they attempt to make their community aware of specific problems that must be overcome to provide fire protection. Chestnut Ridge raises

an average of \$50,000 a year through their direct mail campaign. They send the mailing at the same time every year. Sometimes, in support of the campaign, they post political campaign style posters around their community advertising the same message they have used in their

Contact:

Chestnut Ridge Volunteer Fire Department
12020 Green Spring Avenue
Owings Mills, Maryland 21117
(410) 252-9734

OCS, Omni Computer Services (Direct Mail Comp.)
1319 Lee Lane
Eldersburg, Maryland 21784
(800) 877-4627
FAX (410) 795-7261
ocsinc@ocsmail.com
www.ocsmail.com

fundraising letters.

The Bethesda/Chevy Chase, Maryland, Rescue Squad conducts an annual door-to-door fundraising drive combined with a mail solicitation campaign that raises the huge sum of \$600,000 per year. They have their own career personnel as well as numerous volunteers and a large, modern rescue vehicle fleet.

Contact:

President
Bethesda-Chevy Chase
Rescue Squad
5020 Battery Lane
Bethesda, Maryland 20814-2699
(301) 652-1000
FAX (301) 656-6523
www.bccrs.org

Donations of services or goods can also be pursued through a direct mail fundraising campaign. There may be businesses in the area who are willing to give a donation of the product or service they provide instead of a monetary donation to the fire or emergency service department. For example, some restaurants may be willing to provide refreshments for the department's next training event, or a local merchants may donate gift certificates that company leaders can use to award members for service or special achievements. Larger local businesses may also be willing to do an internal fundraising effort or event for the department.

CASINO NIGHTS

Casino-style gambling involves selling chips or tickets used to make wagers in roulette, blackjack, craps and other forms of gambling found in Las Vegas or Atlantic City casinos. The local fire or emergency service



department plays the role of the house, and earns money by paying odds that do not return all of the bettors' money in the long-run, and/or by taking part of the pot. They may also charge an admission and run concessions.

Departments may look at gambling as the solution to their funding problems, but need to be cautious in proceeding with such a program. The major downside of gambling is that it can lead to a tarnished image and the possibility of charges of corruption and embezzlement if not carefully managed and policed. Social and legal barriers to gambling in the community also may need to be overcome. Department personnel should be ready to devote a large amount of time to the effort involved in starting and running a casino operation; this type of fund-raising often becomes a business unto itself. Also, the future for volunteer casino gambling is in some doubt as the IRS and other federal agencies are considering various aspects of it. One fire department was slapped with a \$600,000 penalty by the IRS. Casino gambling must be approached carefully and with the advice of the attorneys and accountants.

COMMUNITY TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Many fire and emergency service agencies offer training to the citizens they serve on CPR, first aid and fire safety. Often times, these programs can be expensive to the agency. Many fire and emergency service departments are now charging fees for the public to attend these classes. The fees are intended to cover the costs associated with the delivery of the class (books, refreshments, use of specialized equipment, etc.)

Some organizations are separating their education budgets from their operating budget to track the income that the program is making versus the expenses. If managed properly, a fire and emergency service department can make enough revenue for an education program to make it self supporting, in other words, the program requires no additional funds from the operating budget. This allows the fire and emergency service agency to continue to provide critical public education programs even in times of tight budgets. Also, through careful planning and budgeting, the program fees can be very reasonable, and not be cost prohibitive for the general public. Charging fees for these classes can save a department's education program from going under due to budget constraints.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Many volunteer fire departments have successfully raised funds through annual special events, which also can be the cornerstone of an annual fund drive. The events often require large amounts of preparation and effort on behalf of department members, but the results may be worthwhile financially and be enjoyable for the department members and the citizens who participate. One of the most famous special volunteer firefighter events is the annual auctioning of wild ponies in Chincoteague, Virginia, for the benefit of the local volunteer fire department. The ponies are rounded up and then herded in a swim to the mainland where they are auctioned off to raise funds for the volunteer department.

The St. George Island, Florida, Volunteer Fire Department has an annual chili cook-off. From a modest start in 1983, the cook-off grew into an annual event which



has helped raise \$40,000. The department has used revenues from the cook-off to purchase apparatus and to train and outfit its volunteers. Fire insurance premiums in the area have been lowered due to the increased level of service the department is now able to provide. This event helped the community to be named “Florida Outstanding Rural Community of the Year” by the Florida Department of Commerce.

A mainstay for many fire departments is an annual carnival and parade, usually held during the summer. The department usually provides the land to hold the traveling carnival, and arrangements are made to split the proceeds. Often other fund-raising events such as raffles are held in coordination with the carnival. Such annual events are also excellent for bringing fire prevention messages to the community and for recruiting new members. The Urbana, Maryland Volunteer Fire Department holds a week-long carnival each summer that grosses about \$50,000 and nets about \$32,000. It is a highly labor intensive affair, as the department is responsible for all the concession stands and booths at the fair. A committee works year-round arranging the logistics of the event.

Many special fund-raising events involve sports. Each year, the Deltaville Volunteer Fire Department in Virginia takes advantage of the nearby waters of the Chesapeake Bay to sponsor an annual Bluefish Tournament. Entry fees of \$135 are charged per boat, with a limit of 350 boats; large cash prizes are handed out, and the event is sponsored by the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company. Other fund-raising events take place during the weekend to augment the revenues from the tournament.

The department nets approximately \$20,000 - \$30,000 each May, depending upon the weather and the fish. The event has become so popular that the number of boats allowed to enter had to be cut back because of safety on the waterways.

Another fund-raising sport is the turkey shoot. One department in Alabama has about a dozen contestants take one shot for a prize, at \$2 to \$3 per shot. The shooter with the best score wins the prize, which may be a ham or turkey. The charge per shot varies with the value of the prize. *Field and Stream Magazine* has been involved in promoting some of these contests in the past.

Many departments hold softball or whiffle ball tournaments and charge registration fees for teams, as well as operating concession stands. Some departments hold “donkey” softball or “donkey” basketball tournaments, where the players ride donkeys, making for an amusing spectacle. Other sporting events that may be done for fundraisers include softball tournaments (police versus fire, fire department versus fire department, etc.) and basketball competitions. Some fire and emergency service departments have sponsored EMT skill contests or extrication contests as fundraisers as well.

Many departments sponsor golf tournaments to raise funds. These events often have cash prizes and special contests such as driving or putting competitions. Money is raised from selling sponsorships for the tournament, for individual holes, and through entry fees for contestants.

Annual barbecues are also popular ways to raise



funds and develop good relations with the surrounding community. They can often be combined with other fund-raising events. The Edinburg, Texas, Fire Department's annual barbecue is attended by 4,000-5,000 guests. Some departments charge a flat rate, such as \$10 a head. Discounts are often offered to children and special groups.

Some local businesses may be able to assist in fund-raising efforts. McDonald's Restaurants have a program where \$2 tickets for pancake breakfasts are sold by volunteer groups. \$1 goes to the volunteer group for every ticket sold.

SALES OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Many organizations offer commercial products and services at wholesale prices to be sold by volunteer departments for profit. Volunteer departments have sold fruit, Christmas trees and cards, calendars, insulated mugs, and many other items.

The Lavale Volunteer Rescue Squad has been selling citrus fruit annually since 1960. By 1998, they were making about \$18,000 a year from annual fruit sales held in the month of December. Incentive programs were est-

ablished, offering prizes to members who sold over 50 boxes of citrus. In 1995, the squad was able to purchase a \$94,000 ambulance with money strictly from the fruit sales.

Contact:

Lavale Rescue Squad
PO Box 3343
Lavale, Maryland 21504
(301) 729-4458
FAX (301) 729-8191

A new ambulance is purchased every five years from this project alone.

Other sales efforts may be tied directly to public safety. Departments may sell items such as fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, or first aid kits though typically these are sold at or close to cost, and do not raise much net profit. One fire company sells water purification products for use in emergencies. Safety-related items can be purchased for resale to the public as part of an emergency preparedness campaign or as part of a disaster relief plan.

The Cabin John Park Volunteer Fire Department in Montgomery County, Maryland, raised over \$18,000 towards the purchase of a heavy rescue squad through sales of family photographic portraits. The department's Auxiliary arranged with a photographer to offer the portraits to members of the community. The photographer's own employees canvassed the community on behalf of the department. The Fire Department provided space for the photographer to take photos in the firehouse.

Most of the work was done by members of the Auxiliary and the photography company, leaving the department's members free of time constraints. The portrait fund drive took place over a six-week period. The Fire Department received a \$15 dollar donation check and each family received one complementary portrait. The photography company received money only from additional orders made by each family. Other departments have handed out coupons for photographers, then split the profits of any business that the photographer brings in from the coupon.



Departments arranging this or similar types of fund-raisers should carefully check the background of companies with which they plan on working, and the quality of the products or services. If the company is going to directly solicit funds on behalf of the department, make sure they are representing the department in a favorable light. Advertise the sales events before hand, and be prepared for citizens to call the department inquiring whether the effort is legitimate. Departments must also check to see what resources they will be required to provide for the portrait fundraiser and be certain they are comfortable with this arrangement prior to agreeing to the fundraiser.

Many fire and rescue organizations have produced calendars as a fund-raising method, some raising thousands of dollars. The “pin-up” style calendars are often controversial, and branded as sexist. They can adversely affect public perception of the fire and EMS department. However, many departments have created calendars that highlight community events and show photos of the fire department vehicles, ambulances, emergency scenes, public relations events and other department related activities. These calendars are not only saleables, but can be important public relations tools too. For example, fire departments can mark certain dates on the calendar to remind buyers of “Change Your Clock, Change Your Battery” or Fire Prevention Week. Fire departments can also highlight their own events (dinners, open houses, etc.) as well as print safety messages within the calendars.

Fire and emergency service departments commonly rent out meeting or banquet halls attached to the fire station or adjacent to the fire station. This has proven

itself to be a viable fundraising method for many agencies all across the country. Even fire and emergency service departments without dedicated meeting halls can take advantage of this type of fundraising opportunity. In many stations, there is a large training room which is used occasionally for department meetings or training functions. It may be possible to rent out this type of room to community groups looking for meeting space or to private companies looking for off-site meeting areas. There also may be storage areas which the department is not using that can be rented out temporarily as a means to make money for the department.

Another type of fundraiser that departments have had success with is collaborating with local restaurants and eating establishments to conduct special events. Fire departments can work with a local community restaurant, for example, to have a special night where a percentage of all food sales will be donated to the department. The fire department may assist the restaurant in advertising the event to increase their business, making the collaboration a win-win situation.

HONORARY MEMBERSHIPS

Many departments sell honorary memberships or other kinds of memberships on an annual basis to help raise funds. For prices typically from \$5 to \$15, members of the community receive a small membership card, a certificate for their wall, or a sticker for their car.



RAFFLES

Raffles are a classic way to raise funds. Many items can be raffled off, and large amounts of money can be raised. Raffles work best when the fund-raising is targeted towards a specific goal, such as a new engine or other piece of apparatus. The downside to raffles is that the members of the organization must sell tickets. This creates a time burden, is considered unpleasant by many, and may receive some resistance. A method of financial accountability must be established due to the large sums of money that will be collected by many members of the department.

Usually the items raffled are donated or purchased at significant discount. Automobiles, TV's and vacation trips are among the things often raffled, but sometimes more interesting items are used. The Arminger, Maryland Volunteer Fire Department raised funds through the raffle of a large hot tub. To promote their raffle they sold tickets at a booth during the Maryland State Firemen's Convention. They also towed the hot tub on a trailer behind their apparatus during the annual convention parade. The Libertytown Volunteer Fire Department in Frederick County, Maryland, makes almost \$10,000 profit on an annual raffle of a pickup truck.

Some fire departments, especially in rural areas, have raffled guns. However, members of an urban fire department in the East received bad publicity after a raffle of hunting rifles and handguns raised \$10,000. Some members of the community were upset that the guns were being promoted. Such sensitivities must be considered. What works in a rural area may not work on an urban

area, and vice versa.

OTHER MISCELLANEOUS SOURCES

Undoubtedly there are many other ways to raise money from the private sector. Fire and EMS departments should look closely at the private sector sources within their own community and form strategic partnerships to help raise much needed revenue for their agencies. A few examples of private sector partnering are described here.

Movie Production

Movie producers may contract with local fire and EMS agencies to provide vehicles and other assets if they are called for in the script. This can be a source of funds or of nearly-new equipment. San Francisco received a new chief's car for assisting in the making of the movie, "The Towering Inferno."

Another opportunity is for EMS agencies or fire departments to provide EMT standby personnel during filming. Film contracts and work rules often require on-site emergency medical capabilities to be provided. Fire and EMS departments can earn sizable donations or may formally contract for the services. Check with local and state film commissions to find out what filming may be going on in your area; then contact the production company directly, if they have not already approached you.

Special events such as auto races, circuses, and fairs also require EMS protection. Fees are usually charged for providing on-duty personnel or, more often, using per-



sonnel on overtime or off-duty.

Advertising

Advertising, while not a source itself, is a technique that can be applied to many private fund-raising activities described in this chapter, and is given special treatment here.

Advertising is sometimes considered taboo in the fire service, but can be a valuable means of raising revenues in several ways. First, ads can be used to solicit funds as part of fund drives. Ads may refer to the amount needed (“million dollar drive”), the purpose of the money (“new station”), or benefits (“faster ambulance response time”). Fire stations and vehicles themselves can be used to provide the space for temporary ads for fund drives. Message boards placed in front of stations can be used to remind residents that a fund drive is in place or that donations of equipment are welcome. (These are also suitable places to put up recruiting ads.)

Another way to use advertising for fund raising is to publicize the people or organizations who make the donations. Sometimes this is simply an acknowledgement and sometimes it is an openly traded quid pro quo. Safety trailers used for public education purposes often have a list of donors or set of plaques showing the various organizations that donated time, money, or materials. Sometimes the company that funds a project may display its logo on the side of the trailer, or put one on printed prevention materials. Automobile dealerships have displayed logos on utility vehicles that they donated to departments. The La Habra, California, Fire Department shows the cor-

porate donor’s name on its heavy rescue vehicle. The Melbourne, Australia, Fire Brigade has displayed the logo of a health insurance provider on the side of its fire vehicles in return for the insurance company financing a public fire education campaign for the Fire Brigade.

City-owned public transportation, such as buses and subways, have sold advertising space on the sides of vehicles, at waiting areas, and inside vehicles for decades. This outright sale of space probably is not palatable to most fire and EMS agencies. Care also must be taken not to make it difficult to recognize emergency vehicles by covering them with corporate logos, like race cars. On the other hand, many corporations may not require or even want to have their name crassly attached to donations; this must be discussed with the donor.

