

Hydrocephalus Association WALKs – 12 Steps to Maximize Your Fundraising Potential*

By Randi Corey, HA Director of Special Events

1. Start early. The earlier you start fundraising, the more money you will raise. Although it's never "too late" – the more time you have to ramp up your fundraising efforts, the better. Get an early start on getting organized (create lists, develop a schedule, customize emails.) By getting a head start on these various activities, you will have a longer window to solicit donations.

2. Set a challenging but attainable fundraising goal. Experienced "a-thon" fundraisers suggest setting a 'stretch' goal (on their personal WALK web page) — one that is challenging to attain, but not impossible. As you come close to reaching your goal, it should be set higher. The idea is to avoid a situation in which prospective donors decide not to donate because your goal has already been reached! You might end up increasing your goal multiple times during the duration of your fundraising. For returning participants, this year's goal should be a step-up from the total raised in previous years. (For new participants, national statistics show that walkers **without** a direct connection to the mission raise an average of \$127. Walkers **with** a direct connection to the mission raise well over that.)

3. Develop an exhaustive list of prospective donors. Don't limit yourself to your email address book – you have many more potential donors. Names from clubs or organizations you belong to (e.g., a running club, a church congregation, garden club) should be added to the list. Reach out to **anyone** who might donate — you will be surprised by who will make a donation. (**Don't make the decision for someone else by not asking.**) Remember offline address books, too – holiday card lists or rolodexes are great sources for prospects. Aunt Tillie doesn't have an email address? Create a separate list of people who should receive a letter by regular mail. (Make sure your letter includes detailed instructions of how to make a donation online using your personalized Walk web page or offline by mailing a check.)

4. Customize your emails. HA provides you, and all walkers, with email templates that you can use to solicit donations from friends and family. To maximize donations customize this template to incorporate **your own personal story** – your voice, your passion. Ideally, the email should communicate several key points:

- **Why you are participating in the event.**
- **Why the Hydrocephalus Association is important to you.**
- **What HA does.**
- **How their donation will help.**

And, of course, the email should also **include a link** to your personal WALK web page!

5. Create a schedule for email communications. With a start date (*the day you register for the event*) and an end date (*the day of the event*) you can create a detailed fundraising schedule for the days, weeks, or months to come. Creating and following a schedule requires you to be organized and disciplined, but the efforts will yield the desired results. The schedule should include target dates for a series of emails. For those that don't know where to start a sample schedule is outlined below. **Starting 8 weeks before the WALK:**

of Weeks Until Event

Email Topic

Week #8	Send an email explaining that you will be participating in the HA WALK and explaining why (why the cause is important – <i>telling your personal story</i>)
Week #7	Share your personal fundraising goal (not your team goal) and ask for their support
Week #6	Update everyone on your progress to your goal; give people step-by-step instructions on how to sponsor you (using a credit card on your WALK web page or mailing a check.)
Week #5	If you know people who are unable to contribute financially invite them to walk with you. Encourage them to register with your team for the WALK (<i>stress the importance of registration</i>) and give them hints and tips on fundraising (mention the average walker – without a direct connection to the mission -- raises \$127.)
Week #4	Provide an update on your current progress toward your goal; if you've already exceeded your initial goal announce your "amended" goal (<i>due to the generosity of your family and friends you've been able to increase your initial goal – and provide more money for HA's mission</i>); thank everyone for their support – whether monetary, emotional, or day-to-day.
Week #3	Remind everyone that the WALK is coming up quickly – that there are only three weeks left to achieve your goal.

Week #2 If you've met your initial or revised goals announce your current goal – remind everyone **why** you are asking – that the problems and challenges of hydrocephalus are bigger than any one person – that in order to eliminate the challenges of hydrocephalus money is needed to fund vital research programs.

Week #1 If you haven't met your goal remind people that the WALK is coming up quickly. Let everyone know that it isn't "too late" to make a donation – that your website will remain active for a few weeks after the event. Thank everyone for their support. Let them know that the money they have contributed will be wisely spent.

You can also try a more targeted approach to your emails by suppressing all individuals who have made a donation already. Depending on the amount of time you are willing to dedicate to your fundraising efforts, you might consider taking an even more sophisticated approach by segmenting your list of prospective donors into groups (e.g., past donors, new list members, family, fellow members of a club) and sending different emails to each audience.

6. Ask, ask, and ask again. In addition to following the email communication schedule, you need to ask, ask, and ask again at every possible opportunity. **The only way that people can make a donation is if you give them the opportunity to do so.** During face-to-face interactions or phone calls with friends, family, neighbors, or other prospective donors, mention your fundraising progress and your goal. Give people a chance to donate, but leave the ultimate decision up to them.

7. Customize your personal fundraising web page. The most compelling fundraising web pages include text, **your personal story, your video and your photos.** The combination of these elements will convey your strong passion for the organization in a way that motivates visitors to make a donation. Text on the page should be aligned with the email communications. Specifically, the text should explain **why you are participating, what the diagnosis of hydrocephalus meant to you and your family, what the Hydrocephalus Association does, and how the donor's gift will be used** (to fund vital research and program services.) Update your personal WALK web page periodically with your progress (or challenges) so visitors can stay informed and engaged throughout the duration of your fundraising effort.

8. Add social media to the mix. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn and other social media sites are a great way to increase donations. By using status updates and tweets about the Hydrocephalus Association or your fundraising progress and by including links to your WALK web page, you can subtly encourage your friends, family and followers to make a donation. Social media is a great way to stay in front of people without making a 'hard' ask. Thank individuals who have already donated and ask everyone else to donate now. Introduce the event, what HA does, why you are participating and encourage the recipient to donate.

9. Get creative. There are an infinite number of creative ways to encourage people to donate. You can add a link to your WALK web page in your email signature, or create business cards with the URL to give to people who express an interest in donating during face-to-face interactions. Consider giving potential donors 'piggy banks' (antique milk bottles, jam jars...some sort of container) with a label providing your name and HA's name. Ask them to collect their change for a month in support of the event.

10. Join a team. Or start a team. There is a certain level of camaraderie and a sense of belonging that can only be experienced when you are part of a team. Start a team by recruiting friends, family and colleagues to walk with you. There is no minimum number of walkers required for a team – a team can be 2 or 2,000. Initiate friendly competition between your team members and/or between your team and other teams. There is power in numbers!

11. Stay focused. At times, the combination of fundraising and day-to-day life can seem overwhelming. To stay focused, you need to remind yourself of your motivation for participating in the event and how the dollars raised will enable the Hydrocephalus Association to help others. Checking in periodically with other WALK participants and Team Captains will provide a source of inspiration and will often lead to new ideas about how to raise more money.

12. Send a personalized thank you note. After the event is over and donations have stopped trickling in, reach out to donors and thank them again for their generosity. The thank you note should also include information about the event, the amount you raised (*and your team raised*), and a reminder of how the donor's contribution will help fund research and program services for the hydrocephalus community. Donors will be more likely to contribute to next year's WALK if they feel that their donation was appreciated and valuable.

*In the end, isn't that what it's all about – maximizing your potential and the potential of everyone on your team? The mission of the Hydrocephalus Association is to *eliminate the challenge of hydrocephalus...* that will only happen with funding to support vital, critical research – research aimed at bringing treatment methods for hydrocephalus into the 21st century and ultimately finding a cure!

For more information about the HA WALKs or *additional fundraising tips* please visit our web site at www.hydroassoc.org or call us at (888) 598-3789 Ext. 13

*In the end, isn't that what it's all about – maximizing your potential and the potential of everyone on your team? The mission of the Hydrocephalus Association is to *eliminate the challenge of hydrocephalus*...that will only happen with funding to support vital, critical research – research aimed at bringing treatment methods for hydrocephalus into the 21st century and ultimately finding a cure!