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How to Host a Fundraising Event for a Member of Congress/Candidate

Hosting a fundraiser for a candidate or member of Congress is a valuable way to develop a relationship with members of Congress. It’s also easier than you might think. These 10 steps will help you establish a relationship that benefits both your business and your profession.

Step 1: Contact NFDA for Help

The first thing you need to determine is the candidate or member of Congress for whom you wish to hold a fundraiser. NFDA’s advocacy staff can offer invaluable assistance at this point, particularly in determining if a member of Congress is actively working to support funeral service and NFDA’s issues.

Please contact advocacy@nfda.org to find out whether the NFDA Political Action Committee (PAC) can assist you with your efforts. Informing NFDA about your relationship and support also helps the association determine which members of Congress the NFDA PAC should support on behalf of funeral service.

Step 2: Find Partners

Next, you should connect with other local business owners, colleagues, friends, etc., to see if they might be interested in supporting the individual, too. People often forget to gauge the level of local support before organizing an event, but you should definitely see if others can help you arrange the fundraising event and get the word out to potential donor-attendees.

Step 3: Formally Express Your Interest

Contact the candidate’s or member of Congress’s local campaign headquarters and let them know you are interested in hosting a fundraising event. The staff can advise you on what type of events have worked in the past, such as a meet-and-greet at your funeral home, a tour of your funeral home followed by breakfast with local leaders, an off-site reception, etc. The campaign staff will also advise you on scheduling.

Even if an election isn’t imminent, raising campaign funds is a full-time job when you’re a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, who face re-election every two years.

Plus, if you help early in the two-year election cycle, you can become a trusted go-to resource when questions about funeral service arise in the future.

Step 4: Set Your Fundraising Goal

Once you have determined the time and location of your fundraising event, you need to consider your fundraising goal. Do you want to set contributions to attend the event at a lower dollar amount to encourage more people to participate and give the candidate/elected official the opportunity to meet new constituents? Or does it make more sense to seek a smaller group of local business and community leaders who might be willing to contribute more to help meet your goal?

As you contemplate your potential guest list, estimate how much you think attendees might be willing to contribute in order to meet your overall fundraising goal. With that number in mind, contact the campaign staff and ask how much money similar events generally raise. Use this information to help you decide on your overall fundraising goal and, therefore, where to set individual support levels for your event.

It’s important to remember that you can have different levels of support. For example, you might offer the opportunity to “co-host” the event for a higher contribution level. By doing so, other local leaders can show their support for the member of Congress/candidate while you gain access to their network of potential donor-attendees.

Step 5: Invite Donor-Attendees

Next, it’s time to figure out who to invite to your fundraising event and then invite them. The campaign staff might provide a list of previous supporters you can invite. In addition, you should invite your friends, business associates and members of any groups to which you belong, if appropriate.

The campaign staff will usually provide you with a template for your invitation, which you can then email or mail to potential attendees. Make sure your RSVP date is a minimum of one week prior to the event. This will give you time to make last-minute phone calls if you think your fundraising goals are falling short, and allow you to finalize details with caterers, etc.

Step 6: Track Those RSVPs

After you send your invitations, it’s important to track every RSVP because the campaign might ask you for a list of attendees prior to the event. In addition, knowing who plans to attend is critical for logistical purposes to not only help you determine how much food to order, for instance, but also so you can estimate how much money your event might raise.

Step 7: Finalize Event Logistics

During the weeks leading up to your fundraising event, you should (and probably will) continue to work with the campaign staff on everything from how much food and beverages to order based on your RSVPs and who will introduce the member of Congress/candidate during the event, to whether there should be a printed program, if there’s time for a Q&A, etc.

Please keep in mind that any expenses you incur are considered “in-kind contributions” by the Federal Election Commission. This means you must keep every receipt related to hosting your event, such as printing invitations, paying for a venue, food and beverage, etc. These expenses count toward your individual contribution limit of $2,700 per election.
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