

REACH OUT!
PLANNING A FUNDRAISING HOUSE PARTY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

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A house party can be a wonderful and rewarding way to raise money for your film. The goal of this type of event is to raise funds from a community that already has a vested interest in the project. The most likely community would be a group of people who care about the subject or the issues raised in your film, but it could also be a community of people who care about you (such as people from your hometown, or friends and alumni from a school that you attended), or a community that cares about the arts (such as a local civic or arts organization). This document will focus on doing an event with a community that is interested in the subject of your film, and is based on our personal experience raising the initial funds for our documentary *Made in L.A.* (www.madeinla.com).

It is important to note that a fundraiser only works when it is conducted with integrity and with respect for your potential donors. This is not a way to exploit people, or to trick them into donating money. The basis of this kind of event is to work in collaboration with a community around issues that you're both involved with and care about. At its best, it is a symbiotic relationship: you need THEM to help support your work, and they need YOU to create the kind of work that they want to see – and that you're hopefully already creating.

House parties can also serve an additional purpose beyond fundraising. They are an opportunity to reach out to your core audience and to get their feedback while you are shaping your film. This can be a life saver – instead of being locked in your house by yourself writing grant proposals, or struggling to re-edit a scene, these events give you a forum to connect with your audience. And they may also thank you for your passion, your time, and your commitment to your project. Remember: you're NOT alone. And you cannot thank them enough for reminding you of that.

Finally, it's important to realize that a successful house party will also be the beginning of your outreach and distribution campaign, since at each event you'll gather a list of names of people who deeply care about the subject of your film.

The following is a list of tasks that we have used to organize our house parties, in chronological order:

1. Establish a working budget and timeline. Establish goals

We find that people work better when they have clear goals in terms of attendance and the amount of money that they hope to raise. You may want to establish a realistic fundraising goal and also a “stretch” goal that everyone is willing to work hard to reach. The regular goal will allow you to declare success once you reach it, and the “stretch” goal will encourage everyone to push themselves just a little bit harder.

Be sure to establish a realistic timeline to prepare for the event. Planning a house party is more fun than writing a grant, but it also takes time. Depending on the size and scope of the event, it could take anywhere from one month to three or four months to prepare a successful event.

2. Find host or space to host event

Ideally, the party should be organized at the home of someone respected in the community. We find afternoon garden parties or evening cocktail parties to be most effective in creating a sense of a “community event” that people want to attend. Remember, part of the reason that people will be attending is to spend time with people they share something with. It’s worth brainstorming to figure out what sort of venue or event would work for your film. The choice will depend on the subject of your film and on the particular community that you’ll be reaching out to.

3. Find sponsors for your event

The sponsors are the people who commit to giving (or raising) a certain amount of money ahead of time, and/or who lend their name to the event. You’ll need to establish up front the way they’ll be collaborating on the event:

- Establish sponsorship levels clearly and invite people to be "sponsors", "co-sponsors", "hosts", etc, each of which might require, for example, a \$500, \$250, or \$100 donation (feel free to create names for each category). People can choose to give that amount directly, or to raise it by gathering smaller checks from their friends or colleagues.
- You may also want to have "honorary hosts", who might be local celebrities or influencers who can lend their name and/or perhaps speak at the event.
- You may also want to experiment with hosts or sponsors who make non-financial commitments, i.e. agree to mail x number of invites, or invite x number of people. Generally, though, a simple, concrete fundraising amount can be the best motivator.

4. Design and print the invites

Create an invitation that describes the event (a cocktail party, a garden party, a reception, etc) and also lists the names of the sponsors. The sponsors' names should give you credibility with the community that you're reaching out to, and should make it clear that the event already has a lot of support. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- The invitations should portray the fundraiser as an exciting event!
- State clearly that you'll be asking for donations at the door. The amount should be set according to the population you're reaching out to, but we usually ask for lower amounts for students and couples, and state "no one turned away for lack of funds". For example, you could ask for \$35 at the door, \$60 from couples, and \$20 from students. Be sure to mention whether donations are tax deductible. (They would normally only be tax deductible if you're working with a nonprofit fiscal sponsor.)
- Remember that you can make very fancy, expensive looking invitations, or you can design simple invitations that you can print yourself on a laser printer. Do your best to keep expenses down, so that the maximum possible portion of the money raised actually goes to support the film itself.
- Pay attention to design. Don't use too much text (as it's hard to read) and only use 1 or 2 different fonts. Also, try using an image—for example, if your film has a logo or a clear identifiable image that represents it.
- Don't forget to include a small "remittance" envelope that already has your address on it along with a stamp. That way, people who can't attend the event can easily mail you a check.

5. Outreach

The success of our event will depend almost completely on the effectiveness of your outreach and publicity around the event. The effect of outreach will be measurable in terms of the monies that you raise, and will also impact how much "buzz" and "word-of-mouth" you are able to generate as a result of the event.

Once again, remember that you're not alone: you are "one", but your sponsors are "many", and they will know many other people you don't know. Use the idea of the "tree branching out": for every person you contact, they will contact many others, and so on.

Here are a few tips for a successful outreach campaign around your event:

- Send out invites about a month in advance to as many people as possible. Be sure to get the hosts and sponsors for the event to also mail invitations out to their contacts. You're trying to get them to reach out to their circles of influence. But don't give them more work: personally deliver (or mail) the invites to the hosts for them to mail. Be sure to call the hosts to remind them to follow up on their invitations.

- About two weeks before the event, do an e-mail blast to as many people as possible. And one week ahead do a second e-mail blast. Ask others (including hosts) to forward the e-mail version of the announcement to their e-mail lists.
- You can go to local radio stations or newspaper and ask them to run a story about the film or the event. Plan on having the story run a week or a few days before the event. Try to reach out to reporters who have covered stories that relate to the subject of your film. Use personal contacts to get an introduction whenever possible. Cold calls are rarely successful.
- Keep track of the RSVP's, as this will help you anticipate the number of chairs and/or the amount of food that you'll need for the event. It will also help you gauge the success of your outreach efforts.

6. Logistics for the day of the event

Then have a great event!!! As was mentioned before, at the event you may choose to start with a reception and then at some point gather everyone together to watch the trailer and to have a discussion. A Saturday or Sunday afternoon works for many events, while an evening party may work better for others. Here's a list of tasks to keep in mind:

- a) **Entrance:** You'll need a table at the entrance and at least two volunteers to help people sign in and make donations. Your sign up sheet should ask for people's name, e-mail, address, phone, and, possibly, how they heard about the event. Be sure to get everyone's contact information so that you can slowly build your database of people who care about the film. E-mail addresses are important!
- b) **Parking:** Post signs that clearly show people where to park. If parking is difficult, consider having some volunteers available to direct people to the parking area. Bring: rope, staples, duck tape.
- c) **Volunteers:** Don't try to do everything by yourself on the day of the event. Depending on the size of your event, you may need volunteers to help with each of the tasks on this list. You'll need to be free to talk with potential donors and to be "the filmmaker". Consider having volunteers handle the following functions:
 - a. Donations and check-in table
 - b. Parking and directions
 - c. Food and cooking
 - d. Set-up and cleaning (both during and after the event)
 - e. Childcare. Bring games. (But note that there are sometimes insurance concerns about designating people to do childcare. Check this out carefully.)
- d) **Food:** Drinks and Hors d'oeuvres. Try to get food donated if possible. Sponsors may want to participate, or you may want to reach out to local stores in exchange for a credit in the film.

- e) **Auctions:** Consider doing a silent or a live auction. Bring: art & books, and also captions for the art and sheets of paper for people to record their bids for the silent auction.
- f) **Music:** Sound system or acoustic performance. If your film relates to music, this could be the “main event”. But in any case, music is always a wonderful way to create a nice atmosphere.
- g) **Trailer Screening:** Depending on the size of your event, you may choose to screen a 5-10 minute trailer for your film, either on a TV screen or on a projection screen. If you choose to use a projector, you’ll need to bring a video source such as a camera or DV deck or VCR or DVD player, cables, a projector and a screen. Be sure that your sound system can accommodate the audio from your video source. We’ve used a stereo system with an auxiliary input to play the sound.
- h) **Money Pitch.** Choose a good person to do a pitch to after the screening! At this time in the event, people should be emotionally engaged by your work and may be willing to give additional donations. It’s usually best if you don’t do the pitch yourself. Let someone recognized in the community speak on your behalf.
- i) **Sample Program**

2pm -3pm: Guests arrive, chat, mingle. Music.

3pm: Intros -be sure to thank hosts and everyone who has donated to the event.

3:10pm: Screen the trailer

3:30pm: Q&A + Pitch + cont. Q&A. Announce closing of auction and winners.

4pm: Program closes.

7. Financials

A house party can be very successful financially. Depending, of course, on the size of your budget, it may bring in a big chunk of your budget, or it may help keep your production going while you wait for bigger money to come in.

Let’s use a theoretical example for a small community event to measure the financial success of your event. Imagine you have 5 sponsors at a \$500 level of give/raise commitment + 5 sponsors at the \$250 level + 5 at the \$100 level. That’s already \$4,250 that you have raised before the event even takes place. If you have 50 people attending, and request a \$35 donation at the door, that’s \$1,750. Many people will not be able to attend but will send their contributions: suppose another 50 people send

\$35 contributions –that’s another \$1,750. Finally, imagine that you’re able to raise \$1,000 from the “pitch” at the event. The total at this point is \$8,750.

These numbers will change depending on the audience you’re reaching out to, and the level of commitment your sponsors can afford. Remember, however, that you will not be able to measure the level of emotional support that you get from the event and the fact that you are creating a database that will be very helpful down the road!

8. **Follow-up**

- Thank the hosts!
- Thank the donors and send “thank you” cards or letters. If the donations will be tax deductible, be sure to include the nonprofit organization’s tax ID # and tax-deduction information. It is of course easiest to do this kind of event if you have a non-profit fiscal sponsor. Everyone likes a tax deduction!

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These are the steps we have followed in planning our house parties. As you can see, this is a time consuming process, but it brings back many wonderful rewards. Good luck with your film and your fundraising, and don’t forget to enjoy it!

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