



The Charity Runner's Fundraising Guide

11 Proven Strategies to Help You Reach Your Fundraising Goal

By Sarah | Running Sarah

A practical guide based on the fundraising strategies that helped me raise over \$17,500 for charity.



Hi, I'm Sarah.

In 2026, I was selected to run the Boston Marathon for Dana-Farber Marathon Challenge. Through the generosity of friends, family, local businesses, and complete strangers, we raised more than \$17,500 for cancer research.

Along the way, I learned that fundraising isn't about asking for money—it's about inviting people to be part of something meaningful.

I created this guide to help other runners, nonprofits, and community members reach their goals while building connections along the way.

You've got this.



Table of Contents

If you are new to fundraising, I suggest starting here:	4	
Fundraising Idea #1: Ask Family & Friends	5	
Fundraising Idea #2: Company Matching Gifts	6	
Fundraising Idea #3: Personal Social Media Posts	7	
Fundraising Idea #4: Ask local businesses for donations and to hang a flyer	8	8
Fundraising Idea #5: Sponsorship Packages	10	
Fundraising Idea #6: Restaurant Fundraiser Nights	11	
Fundraising Idea #7: Raffle Baskets	11	
Fundraising Idea #8: Yard Signs with QR Codes	12	
Fundraising Idea #9: Facebook Birthday Fundraisers	13	
Fundraising Idea #10: Community Events	13	
Fundraising Idea #11: Sponsor a Mile	14	

Hi, I'm Sarah. I am a Mom, runner, fundraiser, dog lover, and wanderlust creative. In 2023, ten months after having my second child, I underwent brain surgery to remove a Vestibular Schwannoma. This surgery changed my life in many ways, including taking away the freedom of confidently walking down the street. After many months of PT and with the support of my family, I started running again. Running had always been a source of happiness for me. Finding peace in the quiet and feeling accomplished with each step. I always wanted to run Boston, and I pounced on the opportunity to run for the Dana-Farber Marathon Challenge Team. This team was important to me, having lost my Auntie Jerry to Pancreatic Cancer at 50. I set out to surpass my fundraising minimum and raised over \$17,500 for Basic Cancer Research.

This guide is a starting point for all fundraisers, whether you are running a race or passionate about an organization and want to contribute.

If you are new to fundraising, I suggest starting here:

- Ask Family & Friends
- Post Your Story on Social Media (make it public)
- Ask About Company Matching Gifts
- Ask Local Businesses for Donations
- Create Sponsorship Packages

These five ideas alone can help you reach \$1,000+, but I have included many more to help you reach your goal.

Fundraising can feel intimidating at first, but every dollar makes a difference. Start with the first five ideas in this guide and stay consistent. The people around you want to support you—*they just need to know how.*

Fundraising Idea #1: Ask Family & Friends

Many runners skip this step because they don't want to feel like they're asking for money. However, your family and friends are often the people most willing to support your journey.

Estimated effort: ★☆☆☆☆

Potential fundraising impact: 💰💰💰💰💰

Who to Ask

- Family members
- Friends
- Co-workers
- Neighbors
- Gym friends
- Book club members
- Parents from your children's activities
- People you see regularly at the coffee shop, library, or community events

Why It Works

People can't donate if they don't know you're fundraising. Many supporters want to help but are waiting to be asked.

Action Step

Reach out personally through:

Face-to-face conversations

Text messages

Email

Direct messages on social media

A personal message is far more effective than a generic social media post.

Pro Tip: Don't just ask once. Many people intend to donate but get busy. A friendly follow-up reminder can make a huge difference.

Fundraising Idea #2: Company Matching Gifts

One donation can quickly become two.

Many companies offer matching gift programs that will match an employee's charitable donation dollar-for-dollar, and sometimes even more.

Estimated effort: ★★☆☆☆

Potential fundraising impact: 💰💰💰

Action Step

When someone donates, ask:

"Does your employer offer a matching gift program? If so, would you consider submitting a match request?"

Why It Works

A \$50 donation can become \$100 without the donor spending another dollar.

Pro Tip

Include a note about matching gifts in your thank-you messages and fundraising posts.

Fundraising Idea #3: Personal Social Media Posts

Tell your story and why the organization you are running for is important to you and others. If you have a personal connection, tell how that organization helped you and why you are supporting them.

Estimated effort: ★☆☆☆☆

Potential fundraising impact: 💰💰💰

Action Step

Write a social media post with a personal story that connects you to the organization you are fundraising for. Tell your followers what compelled you to want to raise money and push your physical limits. This helps people understand the importance of your ask.

Why It Works

Your why can resonate with many people, especially those that know you well enough to follow your social media accounts. Hearing your personal story gives people a reason to donate.

Pro Tip:

Make your posts public. This will allow others to share and spread your message.

Fundraising Idea #4: Ask local businesses for donations and to hang a flyer

Local businesses love to support their community, especially if you support them.

Estimated effort: ★★☆☆☆

Potential fundraising impact: 💰

Action Step

Visit local businesses (coffee shops, sandwich/pizza shops, fitness studios, retail stores) and ask if they will donate a gift card or service for your fundraiser. While you are there, ask if you can hang a flyer about your fundraiser by the cash register or on their community board.

Create a simple flyer that includes:

- Your photo
- Your story
- The cause you're supporting
- A QR code to donate
- Your fundraising goal

Ask local businesses if they would be willing to:

- Hang a flyer near the register
- Display it on a community bulletin board



- Share it on their social media page
- Include it in a customer newsletter

Best Places to Ask

- Coffee shops
- Fitness studios
- Local restaurants
- Libraries
- Hair salons
- Veterinary offices
- Independent retail stores

Why It Works

If you support a business, chances are they would love to support you in return. Asking for donations also allows them to reach an audience they may not already have. Hanging a flyer costs them nothing but raises goodwill.

Pro Tip:

Make sure to post about the businesses that support you. Local businesses love a good boost in visibility and will be more willing to partner with you in the future. Don't get discouraged if you hear no. Some businesses do not allow flyers, this is not a "no" to you, it is a "no" to any visual noise in their business.

Fundraising Idea #5: Sponsorship Packages

Put together sponsorship packages (Gold, Silver, Bronze) with set dollar amounts and clearly identify the benefits for each level.

Estimated effort: ★★☆☆☆

Potential fundraising impact: 💰💰💰💰

Action Step

Pick a realistic goal for sponsorship packages. Say \$500+ for Gold, \$250+ for silver, and \$125 for bronze. Each level will have benefits with Gold receiving the most recognition.

This could look like:

- Gold:
 - Personalized social media post
 - Logo on website (singlet, yard sign, flyers, etc.)
- Silver:
 - Group social media post
 - Logo on yard sign
- Bronze:
 - Logo on yard sign

Why It Works

The different levels incentivize individuals and businesses to donate. Maybe they were going to donate \$375 and now they will donate \$500 for the extra perks.

Pro Tip:

Create a Sponsorship page on your website that outlines the levels. Be sure to showcase current sponsors frequently and prominently.

Fundraising Idea #6: Restaurant Fundraiser Nights

Many restaurants (especially chains) have a charity program in place where if someone mentions your cause during a set time frame, a portion of their meal is donated to your charity.

Estimated effort: ★★☆☆☆

Potential fundraising impact: 💰💰

Action Step

Research chains that are popular in your area and see if they offer fundraising partnerships. Some national chains that do are:

- Panera

Why It Works

Restaurants get a boost in sales, supporters pay for their meal, you receive donations.

Pro Tip:

Check the guidelines before you market. Some restaurants will not allow you to place flyers on cars in the parking lot and some may have ideas that have worked for others.

Fundraising Idea #7: Raffle Baskets

Whether you raffle items off online or at an event, people love to support you while having a chance to win something. A variety of baskets full of donations from local businesses or new items donated to you from individuals help you reach a variety of people.

Estimated effort: ★★★★★☆

Potential fundraising impact: 💰💰💰💰

Action Step

Write a social media post asking for donations of gift cards or services and share publicly. It is possible your friends and family have items they were gifted or bought and never used that would work well in baskets. Local businesses may be willing to donate too.

Why It Works

Support a good cause and possibly win a prize. Win/win.

Pro Tip:

Presentation matters. Put together nice-looking baskets with a creative description for each. This will help “sell” the basket and raffle tickets.

Fundraising Idea #8: Yard Signs with QR Codes

Tell everyone you are raising money for an important cause with a yard sign and an easy-to-scan QR code.

Estimated effort: ★★★★★

Potential fundraising impact: 💰💰

Action Step

Design and print a yard sign with a working (double-check before sending to print) QR code.

Why It Works

People who walk by can stop, scan, and donate. It tells your neighbors who see you hitting the pavement and getting those miles in WHY you are and allows them to support you.

Pro Tip:

Create a visually appealing but not crowded sign. Add a photo of you, your website, the BIG QR code for easy scanning, and the charity you are fundraising for. They can find more info on your website, don't add your whole story to a 3 foot by 2 foot sign.

Fundraising Idea #9: Facebook Birthday Fundraisers

Ask for donations on your birthday (or birthday of the person you are honoring).

Estimated effort: ★☆☆☆☆

Potential fundraising impact: 💰💰💰💰

Action Step

Post on your social media accounts, "Today's my 37th birthday! I would love for you to donate \$37 to 123 Organization to support me in my marathon."

Why It Works

People spread joy! Let them celebrate you and your efforts by asking for donations.

Pro Tip:

Make your posts public. This will allow others to share and spread your message.

Fundraising Idea #10: Community Events

Gather your friends and family at a community event such as BINGO.

Estimated effort: ★★★★★

Potential fundraising impact: 💰💰💰💰💰

Action Step

- Decide what kind of event you would like to host
- Find a spot to host your event
- Price out tickets, whether they be to enter the event or for different raffles, activities at your event
- Publicize event on your social media, in local businesses and gathering spots with a flyer, ask friends and families to share your post for your event

Why It Works

An event allows people to gather and support you. If you charge at the door or for raffle prizes, people love to know they are supporting you by showing up and contributing money towards your efforts.

Pro Tip:

Post frequently. People may forget if you first posted months in advance. Post a countdown on your website and schedule social media posts more frequently as the event nears.

Fundraising Idea #11: Sponsor a Mile

Ask your friends and family to donate and dedicate a mile to someone/ something. This could mean daily for the 26 days before the race, you post about the person who sponsored a mile or you could put a name on your singlet for each mile sponsored.

Estimated effort: ★★☆☆☆

Potential fundraising impact: 💰💰💰💰💰

Action Step

- Create an image that has miles 1-26

Sponsor a Mile

MILE 1 \$75	MILE 2 \$75	MILE 3 \$75	MILE 4 \$75	MILE 5 \$75	MILE 6 \$100	MILE 7 \$100
MILE 8 \$100	MILE 9 \$100	MILE 10 \$100	MILE 11 \$125	MILE 12 \$125	MILE 13 \$125	MILE 14 \$125
MILE 15 \$125	MILE 16 \$150	MILE 17 \$150	MILE 18 \$150	MILE 19 \$150	MILE 20 \$150	MILE 21 \$175
MILE 22 \$175	MILE 23 \$175	MILE 24 \$175	MILE 25 \$175	MILE 26 \$250		

#RunDFMC

- Below each number, select a suggested amount to donate to sponsor that mile
- Update the image as people donate

Why This Works

People want to support you, and sponsoring a mile allows them to be a part of your race. Also, if you fill up your board with \$25 donations, you will have raised over \$400!

Pro Tip: Always check with the donor if they would like the mile to be in their name, in Memory of someone, or in Honor of someone.

30-Day Fundraising Checklist

Use this checklist to kickstart your fundraising efforts! Remember, fundraising is about building connections, sharing your story, and inviting others to be part of something bigger than themselves.

Week 1: Start Strong

☐ Ask 10 Friends

Reach out personally to at least ten friends or family members. A simple text, email, or phone call can go a long way. Don't be afraid to share why this cause is meaningful to you.

☐ Make Your First Social Media Post

Introduce your fundraising journey! Share your "why," your goal, and how others can support you. Include a photo whenever possible—people connect with people.

☐ Create a QR Code

Make donating easy! Create a free QR code that links directly to your fundraising page and add it to flyers, social media posts, and emails. A great free resource is:

<https://www.qr-code-generator.com/>

Week 2: Build Momentum

☐ Contact 5 Local Businesses

Reach out to local businesses to ask about sponsorships, gift card donations, or company support. Many businesses are happy to give back to their communities!

☐ Apply for Company Matches

Ask your employer (and encourage donors to ask theirs!) if they offer matching gifts or volunteer grants. Many companies will double—or even triple—donations.

☐ Order a Yard Sign

A yard sign is a great way to spread awareness in your neighborhood. Include your photo, fundraising goal, and a QR code for easy donations. (See our customizable templates on RunningSarah.com.)

Week 3: Engage Your Community

☐ Plan a Fundraiser Event

Fundraisers don't have to be complicated! Consider:

- A "Dough Raiser" at Panera
- Restaurant fundraiser nights
- A bake sale
- A calendar raffle (see [RunningSarah Templates](#))
- A trivia night
- A 50/50 raffle
- A group run or walk

Sometimes the simplest events create the biggest impact.

Week 4: Finish Strong

☐ Thank Every Donor

Never underestimate the power of gratitude. Send a text, an email, a handwritten note, or a social media shout-out to thank everyone who supports your journey. People may not remember your fundraising goal, but they will remember how you made them feel.

Bonus Tip

Fundraising isn't about asking for money—it's about inviting others to join you in making a difference. Stay consistent, be authentic, and remember to celebrate every donation, no matter the size.

Small actions, taken consistently over 30 days, can lead to extraordinary results.

If this guide helped you, I'd love to cheer you on.

Follow along at **RunningSarah.com** for more fundraising ideas, running tips, and encouragement.

Remember: you are not asking for yourself. You are asking on behalf of a cause you believe in.

Happy fundraising,

Sarah