

How to Organize a Walkathon: Your Complete Guide to Hosting a Walkathon



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DOJIGGY COOL TOOLS FOR NON-PROFITS

For more information on our walk-a-thon software, contact us today.

(888) 436-1999

<http://www.dojiggy.com>

Why Have a Walk-a-thon?.....2

Organizing and Preparing a Walk-a-thon2

 Assemble a Leadership Team2

 Design Your Course2

 Implement Your Plan4

Recruiting Walkers4

 Getting the Word Out4

 Walk-a-Thon Team Registrations4

 Harnessing the Competitive Spirit5

 Planning an Event that is Fun and Memorable.....5

Marketing Your Walk-a-thon6

 Brand the Event6

 Online Engagement6

 Print Materials6

 Utilizing and Engaging Media Sources6

Writing a Press Release7

Recruiting Race Sponsors7

 Companies Benefit From Sponsorship!7

 Don't Forget the Basics8

 Tailor Opportunities and Offer Lots of Options8

 Utilize Your Network8

 Be Organized9

Put DoJiggy to Work9

 What We Offer Administrators9

 What We Offer Participants10

Example Personal Fundraising Webpage11

WHY HAVE A WALK-A-THON?

Organizations have long favored walk-a-thons and other similar pledge events because they offer great opportunities for raising money and spreading the word about your organization, without heavy overhead costs. This allows organizations to apply more of the dollars earned directly to their cause. Walk-a-thons can vary greatly in size and scope. Both the March of Dimes and Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation host widely popular and nationally recognized races, which are based on the same format as the walk-a-thons seen in local communities everywhere. In addition, walk-a-thons engage people of all ages, and all abilities – offering a wonderful opportunity to connect with others.

ORGANIZING AND PREPARING A WALK-A-THON

Walk-a-thons carry a reputation for fast, fun and effective fundraising. Big results are entirely possible with careful planning and execution. The following steps are designed to keep the planning process on track, whether you are a first timer, or a seasoned professional.

Assemble a Leadership Team

Successful events hinge on the recruitment and action of a strong leadership team. The first step to creating a great event is to recruit help. Ideally your team should be comprised of individuals with diverse skills and talents that share a common interest in the organization's success. When recruiting, consider who you know that may possess any or all of the following characteristics:

- Enjoys managing details
- Exhibits creativity and passion for your cause
- Feels comfortable asking for sponsorships, in-kind gifts and/or donations
- Understands local laws and regulations and can work effectively with governing bodies
- Holds experience in the successful management of projects and events
- Knowledge or marketing, PR, and social media tactics to help spread the word

Design Your Course

Getting started requires the selection of a date, time, distance and location of your event. In addition, working smart at this stage of the game requires delegation. Consider assigning a person (or team of people) to the following project areas:

- Legal/Logistics:
 - Contacts city and local government to obtain permits
 - Works with local police departments on issues such as traffic and police detail
 - Communicates with local government regarding liability issues and oversees the procurement of the proper insurance coverage
 - Secures materials to mark the course, such as traffic cones and or tape, as well as communication methods (i.e. walkie talkies)
 - Checks into parking availability for event day
 - Recruits volunteers to manage set up, maintenance of and take down of course on the day of the event
 - Works together with the Hospitality Team to plan for poor weather conditions

- Corporate Sponsorships and Donations:
 - Prospects and solicits sponsorship from members of business community
 - Recruits in-kind donations, such as breakfast for walk-a-thon participants, beverages along the course, sunscreen and first aid products, tee-shirts, items for participant goodie bags, and any items needed for after event activities
 - Works with the Public Relations Team to develop a donor/sponsorship information packet;
 - Organizes expo area for vendors and sponsors
 - Maintains records of sponsors and donors
 - Oversees the proper acknowledgement of all donations (i.e. thank you notes, receipts or documentation of the gift, and recognition at the event and in event literature)

- Public Relations & Marketing:
 - Recruits celebrity participants for roles such as a master of ceremony, team leader, judge, or prize presenter). Celebrity participation helps to boost participation, media attention, and corporate sponsorship
 - Works with Corporate Sponsorship and Donation group to develop a sponsorship and donation information packet
 - Designs and develops print media for the event (i.e. registration packet, signage, and the coordination of sponsor logos within printed materials)
 - Creates and distribute press releases
 - Contacts local media to obtain information for press release submissions; pitch stories, extend VIP invites to events, etc.
 - Sets up an event website with pledge and donation collection and tracking capacity
 - Utilizes social networking, email campaigns, blogs, and online marketing tactics to spread the word online
 - Coordinates event photography and/or video

- Hospitality:
 - Plans and coordinates the use of in-kind donations for walk participants
 - Sends periodic coaching cards to race participants prior to the event with helpful tips for finding additional pledges and training for a safe and healthy walk
 - Coordinates an after walk event (Ideally an indoor event that could easily transition into a replacement activity in the event of rain or bad weather)
 - Recruits volunteers to serve breakfast before the event, beverages during the event, administer first aid along the walk course as needed, and for the after walk event)
 - Plans and facilitates fun pre-walk warm up activities for people that arrive early
 - Organizes token items, like gift cards, to compensate on race day for inconveniences or unexpected problems
 - Facilitates participant check-in
 - Recruits walkers and teams
 - Coordinates entertainment, such as music, contests and prizes to make event day fun and enjoyable for everyone

Implement Your Plan

Now that tasks are delegated, it's time to go to work. Timelines are essential for staying on track, which is why DoJiggy has also created a Walk-a-thon Timeline & Planner for your use. The leadership team should hold meetings and stay in regular contact throughout the event planning process, communicating and collaborating about shared accomplishments and challenges.

Excellent planning and event execution on your part will greatly impact your walk-a-thon event's success. Remember, outcomes also remain highly dependent on strong walker, media and sponsor participation. For this reason, consider focusing on the following areas to really boost your fundraising potential.

RECRUITING WALKERS

Successful walker recruitment hinges on several carefully administered elements of your event. Getting the word out, creating and producing an event that is fun and memorable, and offering easy ways for people to participate will all be important in this process.

Getting the Word Out

When it comes time to recruit participants and volunteers, nothing will be more important than your network. Networks exist in all sizes and capacities. To use your organization's resources to their fullest potential, you must first assess and understand what strengths exist within your established connections, and use these connections to develop areas that are not as strong.

Of course, it is natural to draw a large number of participants from your organization's constituents or benefiting party. These people are likely not only to participate, but to ask friends and family members to participate as well. Encourage this!

In addition, remember that an organization's number one recruiting tool is its Board of Directors, steering committee or leadership branch. Often times, the people serving in these capacities are well established in the community. The relationships these people have in your community are not only important for recruiting sponsors, but also for recruiting volunteers and participants. Often, companies value opportunities to engage their workforce in community activities. Therefore, it is important to ask companies not only for sponsorship, but also for their participation. Team registrations offer a fun and easy way for companies to participate.

Walk-a-Thon Team Registrations

Many organizations find success in offering opportunities for team registration. It is natural to find motivation in groups. Ask each member of your leadership team to head a team. Once a few volunteers are signed up on each team, post team registrations on your DoJiggy website and in other public areas. This way, people can see whose teams are growing and how much money they have raised.

Energy and momentum are contagious. People are more likely to register when they can do so with others that they know. As previously mentioned, walk-a-thon team registration will be important in engaging your local business community. Make sure to include information about team registration in your corporate sponsorship packet.

Harnessing the Competitive Spirit

People love opportunities to compete. Taking the time to plan fun and rewardable accomplishments can add significant value to your walk-a-thon by motivating pledges and participation. Consider different incentive points that can be incorporated into your event. Here are some ideas:

- **Head Start:** Participants raising a certain amount of money through pledges collected in advance receive a “head start” or are allowed to better their time by some margin.
- **Track Progress:** Your fundraising website allows you to track progress with a fundraising thermometer. Seeing how close you are to reaching your goal may not only motivate participants, but also donors.
- **Highlight top performing individuals and teams** on the home page of your fundraising website, giving others an incentive to step up their game
- **Awards:**
 - **Team Recognition:** Honor the team with the highest amount raised, or greatest participant volume. Give them exposure at the event through photo opportunities or by giving a special award on race day.
 - **Individual Prizes:** Honor the individual with the most pledges at the event. Organize a special prize, and publicize this prize prior to the event to help boost pledge incentive.
 - **Social Award:** provide an award for the individual with the greatest effort to spread the word through social networks (Facebook posts, blogging, etc.) – even though they may not have raised the most in donations, their efforts helped spread awareness for your cause.

Planning an Event that is Fun and Memorable

Perhaps the event you are planning exists as the first in your organization’s history, and perhaps the event is one in a long line of events. When planning, remember to keep a long term prospective. Successful events are best repeated yearly, and draw very loyal participants. For this reason, it is helpful to build in elements that participants will find both fun and memorable; activities that will help maintain your participants’ excitement for the event year after year.

Consider amplifying your event with pre-race day and race day contests, photo opportunities, and race day souvenirs. Matthew DePace with the Parkinson’s Disease Foundation suggests identifying an event item, such as a bandana, tee-shirt or snack pack, which people can collect from year to year to mark participation. Mr. DePace also suggests developing goody bags for the day of the event filled with donated items from sponsors such as sun block, gift cards, energy bars and other event related items. To encourage turn-out, make the goody bags and tee-shirts available on race day only.

Websites can also be helpful in producing fun and memorable events, because they offer public forums for photos and personal testaments. Now participants have a canvas to tell their story. With DoJiggy Pledge software, participants create individual fundraising pages where they upload personal photos and videos, set fundraising goals, and post comments from supporters and donors. Not only are these pages fun to create but they make collecting donations easy, as participants can share a link on their Facebook page or send emails to their network of family and friends. How can you use your website to give your participants a way to check in before and after the event? How can the website be used to track ongoing success and create a public space for each walker?

MARKETING YOUR WALK-A-THON

Depending on the size of your pledge event, you may design marketing efforts for a small audience, such as a school or specific community organization, or create a communications plan designed to reach a larger national audience. Regardless of the size of your event, marketing will serve an important purpose in raising awareness, drawing participants, bringing in donations, and cultivating action. Most organizations utilize a variety of media for getting the word out.

Brand the Event

Whether the event you plan is your first, or one in a series, good planners think long-term when planning marketing efforts. This means not only considering how your event can be marketed now, but also about how the marketing tactics chosen will serve your organization and event in future years. Creating a brand, a logo, and slogan for the event is a great way to start. This brings familiarity to your event and helps people recognize your event now, and in the future.

Online Engagement

One of the most cost effective ways to promote your event is through online channels. Once you've created a fundraising website that explains the "who, what, when, where, how" of your fundraising event, you have a great place to direct people for further action. Since so many people communicate through their computers and mobile devices, a fundraising website allows for easy promotion of your event by simply sharing a link to your site. Here people can learn more about the event, register, buy event related products, and make secure online donations. Your organization can remind people of your upcoming fundraiser by sending an email blast or posting on Facebook, Twitter, or other Social Media outlet. Then you can ask your supporters to share the link to your fundraising website with their networks...opening up your campaign to an even larger audience. Be sure to look for online media opportunities including event calendars, popular "local events" bloggers, and more.

Print Materials

Print materials provide important exposure. They are an easy way to recognize sponsors, while at the same time promoting the event. Many options exist for print materials. Tee-shirts, flyers, brochures, posters, signage, stickers as well as items with uses specific to your event, like walking apparel or shoe laces offer opportunities for marketing. Utilize the resources available to develop graphics and logos that are visually appealing and can be used year after year. It's a good idea to provide participants with event items prior to the event, such as stickers, tee-shirts, posters, pens and pencils. As participants use these items, your event will become more visible.

Utilizing and Engaging Media Sources

The media plays a big part in reaching prospective participants and creating positive buzz about your event. Consider recruiting someone with media connections to your leadership team. If this is not possible, seek sponsorship from the local newspaper, television station and/or radio station. Often times, these media sources will donate ad time or space in exchange for sponsorship.

Writing a Press Release

If media connections are not readily available within your leadership team, you will need to do a little more legwork to get the word out. In many cases, this means communicating information to the media in a clear and concise manner and in a format that can be easily used. In other words, your goal is to make it as easy as possible for the media source to publish, attend or announce your event with the least amount of work on their part.

Press releases are perhaps the most common method of communicating with the press. Normally press releases go out several days before an event. These releases communicate all the details of your event.

Basic Guidelines for Writing a Press Release:

- Include a concise, catchy headline to introduce the event
- Are not more than one page in length (single spaced)
- Communicate the who, what, when, where, and why of your event
 - This will include mandatory details such as: event name, date, time, information about your organization and the benefiting cause, as well as possible mention of sponsors, entertainers, etc.
- Include your contact information (name, telephone and email address) in the top left hand corner of the page
- Provide a link to your fundraising website so media may obtain more information about the event and send readers your to your site.

If your press release reads like a short news article, with no grammatical errors or unexplained technical terms or jargon, and effectively draws the interest of a reader, you have succeeded! Contact your local media outlets to find out how you may submit your press release for review.

RECRUITING RACE SPONSORS

Race sponsors fulfill a critical role in any successful walk-a-thon. Most importantly, race sponsors create a financial backbone for your event. When organizations successfully recruit sponsors, each walk-a-thon pledge can go further because sponsorships help to immediately offset event costs. Also sponsorships often increase community exposure, which is helpful when it is time to attract the attention of the local media and recruit volunteers.

For many first time organizers, soliciting sponsorships can be an intimidating task. It may be helpful to remember the following:

Companies Benefit From Sponsorship!

Understanding and articulating the ways in which prospective sponsors benefit from working with your organization is crucial. Everyone likes to help out a great cause; however, companies are looking for a win-win relationship. Be able to articulate exactly what your event will do for the companies that you seek

sponsorship from *before* you speak with them. When speaking with companies, stay open to possible benefits you may have missed and look for opportunities to create more value.

For example, companies located along the walk-a-thon course are great prospects, especially if they sell or deal with any sort of product that correlates to walking. Beverage companies and grocery stores are great potential sponsors, especially for in-kind donations. Insurance companies may be able to create special slogans pertaining to health and safety. Perhaps you offer an event expo area before and after the event where sponsors receive a free booth to sell or promote their product or organization.

Be creative and have fun! For example, if a mattress store or furniture store is along the route, maybe they can create a special “rest stop” for your walkers as part of their sponsorship. This would certainly attract more eyes on their products come race day, while at the same time helping further your fundraising mission! The possibilities are endless. Don’t be afraid to think outside the box.

Don’t Forget the Basics

In addition to pairing the mission of your potential sponsors and the activity or mission of your event, remember that other general benefits exist for lending sponsorship. These benefits may include, and are not limited to the following:

- Increased exposure in the community
- Tax deductions (check with your organization’s tax advisor for details)
- Opportunities for teambuilding and employee development

Tailor Opportunities and Offer Lots of Options

The best sponsorship opportunity is one that fits the capacity of the sponsor perfectly. For this reason, it is important to remain flexible, and allow many options for sponsorship. Examples include:

- In-kind donations (such as tee-shirts, beverages, snacks, sunscreen, and/or signage)
- Sponsorships with varied levels of financial support (such as starting line or finishing line sponsors, mile sponsors, team sponsors, and pit stop sponsors)
- Develop sponsorship levels corresponding to sponsorship size. Select race related names for the levels of sponsorship (such as platinum, gold, silver, and bronze or marathon, half-marathon, 10K and 5K)

Utilize Your Network

You’ve considered your network for recruiting volunteers and participants. Have you considered your network for soliciting donations and sponsorships? A great way to build your sponsorship list is to consider who you know. Who in your team of volunteers is connected to a small business owner? Who in your team of volunteers works for a larger company or corporation that may designate funds for local community projects? Can they help connect you to the person in charge of corporate sponsorships? What employers in your area have employee-matching programs, and what are the criteria for eligibility?

The most important thing to remember about networks is that they are constantly growing and changing. Most organizations do a great job of assessing their networks when first constructing recruitment and prospecting plans. However, as your registration grows, as you recruit volunteers and participants, your

network will also be growing. Schedule a second and third assessment of your network, and actively seek out connections that will aid the success of your event.

Remember that no one can do a better job of expressing the mission and importance of your event than you. Let your enthusiasm and passion be contagious and sponsorships will come. Recruiting sponsors takes organization, tenacity, and energy. Consider working in teams or pairs when approaching potential sponsors. This is a great way to support each other, motivate, and learn new ways of approaching sponsors. If you decide to work in teams, it is helpful to clarify roles before meeting with the potential sponsor. Generally, one person should take the lead and the other helps with clarification and support.

Be Organized

By now, you probably have a bunch of ideas started in your mind. Here are a few handy steps for getting started:

1. Develop a corporate sponsor packet with a concise cover letter.
2. Determine what your agency will provide in exchange for sponsorship. For example, use of logos on signs, tee shirts, websites, or in publicity materials.
3. Brainstorm a list of prospective sponsors. Delegate each prospect and create a concrete timeline for approaching each prospect.
4. Make sure to obtain the graphics and or logos for each sponsor as you go. You'll be thankful that you have them ready when it's time to print walk-a-thon materials.

PUT DOJIGGY TO WORK

DoJiggy's online services offer time saving benefits for walk-a-thon event administrators as well as fundraising event participants.

What We Offer Administrators

DoJiggy software provides tools for streamlined registration, safe and secure online donation processing, event tracking, and report building. With DoJiggy, every facet of your event can be managed easily and with efficiency through your fundraising website (which is easily customized using one of our state-of-the-art website templates). This means no more messy sorting problems with Excel spreadsheets and no fear over losing a row or a column. Our personnel are happy to walk you through our user friendly interface, and you can work knowing that your information is stored in good hands.

DoJiggy makes it easy to monitor the progress of your event. For example, our software allows administrators to manage and monitor total funds raised to date, highest team and individual fundraisers, number of participants registered, sales summaries, and many others event statistics. Plus, using DoJiggy allows for easy report generation, which is helpful when it is time to determine total dollars raised, product sales, sponsorship sales and other event totals.

In all, DoJiggy offers a hub for all registration, event tracking and pledge collection needs. Sheryl Dalton with Meals on Wheels says, ***"I wish I had known about DoJiggy when I started with Meals on Wheels. People expect events to have online registration. DoJiggy gave us that next level we needed to be professional, and gave us an advantage."***

What We Offer Participants

Your walk-a-thon website allows each of your participants to create a personal fundraising page with a unique URL. Participants may upload personal photos and videos and email friends and family members to ask for support and to share their experience. Participants can track their progress and enter off-line pledges as well. Programs allow both flat-rate donations (i.e. \$25) and pledges per unit of effort (i.e. \$10 per mile walked).

Online registration as well as pledge management are available 24 hours a day, so participants can log-in at their convenience from anywhere in the world. With our supported payment processors, supporters can direct their donations and pledges immediately and with security. This not only helps bolster the success of the event through advance pledges, but also relieves the difficulty of collecting money from friends and family in the days immediately before or after the event.

One of the largest benefits of hosting an online space for participants is the friendly competition that builds when participants can see their fundraising progress as well as the progress of their peers. This provides great motivation, and can be fun, especially when paired in combination with a contest or specific fundraising goal.

DoJiggy websites support team registrations as well. Team captains can customize and manage their team fundraising pages with pictures, videos and testimonials. This feature is great for teams with a mission to raise funds for a specific person or cause.

In Summary

DoJiggy has provided this resource paper to get you started on the road to a successful walk-a-thon. When it comes to walk-a-thon software, DoJiggy can help! With DoJiggy Pledge, every facet of your event can be managed easily and with efficiency. DoJiggy software provides tools for streamlined registration, event tracking, and report building. Upon registration, each of your walk-a-thon participants will create a personal fundraising page with their picture, personal statement and a thermometer that goes up as they reach their fundraising goal. See the screen shot on the last page for an example of a personal fundraising page.

Please visit our website or contact us today at (888) 436-1999, for more information on DoJiggy Pledge software for your walk-a-thon.

EXAMPLE PERSONAL FUNDRAISING WEBPAGE



Walkathon
Walking For A Cause

HOME
REGISTRATION
SPONSORSHIPS
PRODUCTS
OUR SPONSORS
PARTICIPANTS
MAKE A PLEDGE
LOCATION
NEWS
EVENT INFORMATION
CONTACT
LOGIN

Olivia Adams

57%
\$800.00 RAISED GOAL \$3,000.00 [Donate Now](#)



My Status
Number of pledges received: 2
Goal achievement: 27%
Number of page visits: 1072
Days left before event: 948
I am captain of 'Team DoJiggy'
See the Team Team DoJiggy

Event Information
What: Hope Foundation Walk-a-thon
Where: Central Park
When: Sunday September 27, 2015 at 12:00 AM



On September 27th, I will be walking to support The Hope Foundation. Won't you please support me? All of the money raised will go to support our communities, and we all benefit from this work. Also, if you're in town - come out and walk with me!

Thank you for supporting me and The Hope Foundation! Your contribution is greatly appreciated. Thanks! Olivia.

Latest Comments

test
by test 4 months ago

Thank you for your hard work!
by Taylor 4 months ago

Share on Twitter
Share on Facebook
Email to a Friend

Share the link:
<http://demopledge.pledge.dojiggy.com/oliver>

Like 0 +1 Share Tweet 0 Send Share

Everybody can be great because anybody can serve... You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.
— Martin Luther King Jr.

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