

# More Money Together: Shared Fundraising Strategies

Rather than competing for money, join together for mutual benefit.

By Andy Robinson

In my work as a fundraising consultant and trainer, I'm faced with two persistent myths:

- **Scarcity** (there aren't enough resources to go around), which leads to:
- **Competition** among groups to gather those scarce resources.

To address these myths, let's begin with a few numbers. Nonprofits across the U.S. receive more than \$1.5 trillion per year. This includes fees and other earned income, government funding, and private philanthropy of all kinds: donations from individuals, legacy gifts, foundation grants, corporate sponsorships, etc.

To put this in context, the "nonprofit economy" totals 7% to 8% of the U.S. economy. If we were our own nation – the United States of Nonprofit Organizations – we would boast one of the 20 largest economies in the world. Your organization is a piece of this big economic engine.

Yes, there's a legitimate argument about how all this money is allocated – hence the conversation about competition. Regardless, \$1.5 trillion is the opposite of scarcity.

## Can We Be More Successful Together?

One way to reduce competition is through collaboration. When we collaborate, we increase our base of customers.

Without a mutual support and referral network, every nonprofit organization would be far less viable.

We can use the same approach when we're raising money. Let's give this topic some conscious thought.

## What Are People's Experiences with Collaborative Fundraising?

Here's the response to a survey asking nonprofits how they're raising money with peers. As you can see, nonprofits are trying a wide range of collaborative strategies.

- 65% Joint grant proposals
- 29% Shared fundraising events
- 27% Donor or funder briefings
- 26% Shared asks with major donors
- 26% Local or statewide giving days
- 21% Joint capital campaigns or land protection projects
- 18% Fundraising workshops with peers
- 11% Exchanged mailing lists or e-lists
- 9% Shared crowd-funding campaigns
- 8% Shared income from fee-based programs
- 21% Other



## What Do People See As Barriers?

When asked about barriers to shared fundraising, here's the response.

- 53% Not enough time or bandwidth
- 52% Competition for scarce resources
- 44% Fear of "losing" our donors
- 30% Resistance from board or staff
- 20% Don't know how
- 18% Why would we do that?
- 38% Other

The top three barriers are all about scarcity: not enough time, resources, and donors. If you're trying to raise money with others, your success begins by challenging these assumptions.

## Yes You Can! Success Stories

Sejal Choksi-Chugh of San Francisco Baykeeper offers an example. Three environmental organizations cooperated to organize a "floating funder" aboard a boat on the San Francisco Bay. Their goal: Demonstrate the pollution risks posed by a local oil refinery. Representatives from several foundations joined together to sponsor the tour of the bay.

Despite an unplanned delay – the boat was temporarily stuck on a sandbar – the event was a big success. The three groups subsequently received one grant together and are seeking others. In Sejal's words, "This collaborative fundraising effort opened doors for all of us that could not have otherwise been accessed." You can read Sejal's story at [blueavocado.org](http://blueavocado.org).

## Survey Respondents Tell Their Own Stories

Here are a few of the responses to the shared fundraising survey:

"We do a major donor event with another organization," says one survey participant. "We save land; the other organization builds trails. Our donors like to meet their donors, and everyone gets more support."

In another case, four local groups banded together and raised money to buy a van. They now share the van, using it for tasks such as:

- **picking up salvaged food** from grocery stores and taking it to multiple food shelves
- **distributing meals** to community food sites
- **transporting kids** to a youth program at a local ski mountain.

Further examples are provided by organizations that share the funds they receive from grants. One survey respondent explains, "We split grant money with partners, regardless of who wrote the proposal. It takes a lot of trust and partnership, but we realize we can both do more together than we can apart."

"This isn't easy," another surveyee notes. "It requires a lot of dialogue and planning. On the upside, it can lead to a larger pot of funding."


## Advice You Can Use

Those who responded to the shared fundraising survey offer suggestions to help you replicate their successes:

**Before seeking** potential fundraising partners, reach an internal consensus about the answer to the question "Why are we doing this?"

**Avoid** top-down partnerships. "Don't let a funder arrange the marriage."

**Prepare** clear agreements – contracts or memorandums of understanding – before you start writing grant proposals together or organizing any kind of joint activity.

**Embrace** a culture of generosity and plenty," notes a respondent. "It always produces better results!" Another adds, "I truly believe that donors appreciate it." 

---

*Andy Robinson (trainyourboard.com) is a consultant to nonprofit organizations and author of What Every Board Member Needs to Know, Do, and Avoid: A 1-Hour Guide and Train Your Board (and Everyone Else) to Raise Money (co-written with Andrea Kihlstedt).*

## Further Ideas for Sharing

You'll find a variety of collaboration and shared fundraising ideas in articles available at [NonprofitWorld.org](http://NonprofitWorld.org), including:

**Collaboration and Leadership: Secrets of Success** (Vol. 24, No. 1)

**Ten Ways to Provide Value to a Partner & Income to Your Nonprofit** (Vol. 39, No. 2)

**High-End Strategic Alliances as Fundraising Opportunities** (Vol. 19, No. 5)

**For-Profits and Nonprofits Meet Missions Together** (Vol. 25, No. 4)

**Is a Cause-Related Partnership in Your Future?** (Vol. 32, No. 1)

**Beyond Outsourcing: Five Shared-Service Ideas** (Vol. 27, No. 6)

**Pool Resources for Success** (Vol. 16, No. 5)

**Making the Business-Nonprofit Partnership a Win-Win** (Vol. 22, No. 1)

**Take the Collaboration Quiz** (Vol. 24, No. 3)

**Please Give Generously: How Your Nonprofit Can Help For-Profit Corporations** (Vol. 32, No. 3)

**The Power of Partnership** (Vol. 25, No. 3)

**Cooperating to Survive and Thrive** (Vol. 16, No. 3)

**For Long-Term Stability, Look to Corporations** (Vol. 32, No. 4)