
How to Do a Raffle

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A common, easy, and fun way to raise almost any amount of money is a raffle. Almost everyone is familiar with raffles, having bought tickets for them, perhaps even won a prize in one. Because raffles are so common, most people don't realize that they can be complicated. When organizing a raffle, you can make your life more difficult by not paying attention to the myriad details that a raffle involves.

The first fact to keep in mind is that raffles have to be organized carefully so that they don't violate gambling laws. Although laws against raffles are rarely enforced, it is important to organize your raffle so that you are within the bounds of the law. In addition to federal and state laws, you need to find out the laws in your own community. Sometimes you will need to register with the sheriff's department, and in some towns laws against raffles are strictly enforced and you simply will not be able to do one. We will discuss how to set up your raffle so that you will be within the laws of most states. Ironically, states with their own lottery tend to be more likely to stop a raffle from taking place than states without a lottery.

Raffles basically appeal to people's desire to get something for less than it is worth. Here's how they work: Your organization gets some gifts donated, which are used as the prizes. These gifts can vary and may include cash, services such as child care for an evening or having your windows washed, or trips, microwaves, VCRs, and so forth. Generally, there are five to ten prizes, one of which is a grand prize. Tickets are sold for somewhere between \$1 and \$10 each. Many more tickets are sold than prizes available, so a person's chances of winning are relatively small. At an appointed day and time, all the tickets are put into a barrel or other container, stirred up, and an uninvolved person (such as a child) draws out the winning tickets.

The organization makes money from the number of tickets sold. There is no other source of income in a raffle. The costs can be kept low; ideally, the only costs are printing the tickets and getting the prizes to the winners. As a

result, most of the income is profit.

There are three parts to a successful raffle, each requiring three steps. These are described in detail in the rest of this article.

ORGANIZING THE RAFFLE

Step One: Get the Prizes

Bring together a small committee (two or three people) to decide when the raffle will be held and what the prizes will be. It is helpful if the prizes have a theme, such as "vacations," "services," "household," or "restaurants." Make a list of all the vendors who might give you a prize, and list specifically what you want from them, such as dinner for two, a weekend cabin, etc. Remember that people who own small businesses, particularly storefronts, frequently get asked to donate raffle prizes. They may have policies against doing it; they may have donated to five other charities and are not taking on anymore; they may be having a hard time in their business and not be inclined to give you anything. Have at least twice as many potential sources of prizes as prizes needed.

The small committee goes out and solicits the prizes. They stress to each merchant how many people will see the tickets, how much other publicity you are going to do, how you will not ask for another item this year, or whatever is true for you. Merchants must think about how giving your organization an item is good for their business, and you must help them in that thinking.

Step Two: Get the Workers

While you are soliciting prizes, start calling your volunteers to ask how many tickets they are willing to handle. Some people hate raffles — don't push them into taking tickets; they will resent it and probably won't sell their tickets. Give the tickets to people who work in large office buildings or unions, or who have large families or a large circle of friends. Offer a prize for the person who

brings in the most money selling tickets.

Keep track of who said they would distribute tickets. Raffles are a good opportunity to get some peripheral people involved, so don't just go to your reliable volunteers who already do everything else. Ask each person if they know someone who would be good at getting people to buy tickets. People's spouses or lovers, neighbors, business partners, etc., can be recruited for this effort.

Step Three: Get the Tickets

Once they have the prizes, the committee decides which will be the grand prize, the second prize, and so on. They decide on the date of the raffle drawing. Raffle ticket sales should go on for at least a month, and can continue for up to six months without losing momentum. The ideal time period for a raffle is two to three months.

Printing the tickets requires attention to detail. (See illustration for the points discussed.) First of all, it is with the tickets that groups usually run afoul with the law. This is because raffle tickets cannot actually be "sold." We speak of "selling" tickets but actually what we should say is that the ticket is free and a donation of \$1 (or whatever the amount determined) is requested. Technically, someone can ask for a free ticket and not give you any money. If you were to turn down that request, it would be clear that you are selling the ticket and that is against the law. In this article, we refer to "selling" the tickets because that is the common shorthand; however, keep in mind that we are not truly selling anything.

No. 4467	Name: _____	ANNUAL ACTION RAFFLE Suggested Donation: \$1.00 ticket, 6 for \$5.00 Grand Prize: Videocassette Recorder (VCR-VHS) Second Prize: \$200.00 Cash Third Prize: Microwave Oven Fourth Prize: \$50.00 <i>A benefit for ACTION, a nonprofit organization helping people</i> DRAWING: December 10, 2000, San Francisco Need not be present to win. Winners will be notified by mail. Free ticket available on request. <small>A list of winners available with SASE. Write ACTION, Street, San Francisco 94110</small>	No. 4467
	Address: _____		
	City: _____		
	State: _____ Zip: _____		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Please send me more information about ACTION		
	Seller's Name: _____		

You must print on the ticket how a person can get a free ticket and that a list of winners will be available and supplied on request. This is to help ensure that the prizes are actually awarded. To increase sales, also indicate on the ticket that the donor doesn't have to be present to win.

The tickets must be numbered so that they are easy to keep track of. Although it costs more for the printer to number the tickets, it is worth it. Many organizations try to save money by not having numbered tickets or by numbering the tickets themselves. This is an unwise savings of money or a foolish use of time. It is also critical that the ticket stub be perforated so it can be easily separated from the body of the ticket. Don't save money by printing

cheap raffle tickets. Your volunteers will not distribute them as easily and donors will be reluctant to give their money when the ticket does not appear properly done.

Because of the need for numbering and perforation, not all printers can print raffle tickets. Find a printer who can, even if you cannot use your regular printer. Needless to say, seek to have the printing donated, but don't scrimp on print costs. They should be your only cost.

Notice in the illustration that the seller is asked to sign his or her name on the ticket stub. This is another incentive that you can build in to your raffle: giving a prize to any person who sold winning tickets. A person is obviously more likely to win such a prize if they have sold a lot of tickets.

To promote the organization, also include a box for the purchaser to check to get more information about the group's work. If you do make such an offer, be sure you go through all the tickets, pull out those with checked boxes, and send the information in a timely manner.

To know how many tickets to print, add up how many tickets the volunteer workers are willing to take and note what your goal is for the raffle. Always print at least 200 more tickets than your financial goal, because some tickets are bound to be lost or mutilated.

One final word concerning the law: Many groups send raffle tickets to potential donors through the mail. This is against postal law and, if caught, your letters will be sent back. If you send tickets by bulk mail, you risk having your bulk mail permit revoked.

In any case, raffles are not mail appeals. If you want to use the mail to raise money, do so, but do not combine raffles and mail appeals.

TICKET "SALES"

Step Four: Distribute and Keep Track of the Tickets

Make a list of everyone selling tickets and the numbers on the tickets they take. Keep track of the tickets as they are returned. Have a date by which all ticket stubs and donations are to be turned in. Call volunteers with unsold tickets to remind them of this deadline.

Step Five: Encourage the Workers

Call your volunteers at least once a week to see how they are doing with their tickets. Remind them of the deadline and to send in their stubs and cash. To encourage competition, tell them who is winning the "most sold" prize so far.

The job of the small committee is not to sell tickets, but to keep other people selling them. A raffle works best when organized like a pyramid, with the most tickets

being sold by a large number of workers, and the smaller number of workers distributing the tickets to others. Raffles fail when there are not enough people selling tickets, or when the people who take tickets don't sell them. Be sure to have a lot of people selling tickets, and keep reminding them of due dates, praising those who are doing their job and encouraging those who aren't.

Every volunteer ought to be able to sell a minimum of 25 tickets. Most people who live in a town or city can sell 50 tickets in two or three weeks with no difficulty. Some people will be able to sell 100 to 500 in one or two months.

Step Six: Set Up the Drawing

The drawing is held on the date printed on the ticket. Some organizations hold the raffle drawing as part of another event, such as a dance or auction. Using a raffle as a part of another event increases your profit (and may sell more tickets right up to the moment of the drawing), but it involves organizing the other event as well. However, you don't need to have another event — it is fine to have a small party for all those who worked on the raffle and sold tickets and do the drawing there. If you have good food and drink, the drawing is then a celebration and a reward for a job well done, as well as a way to ensure that all the sold tickets are turned in on time.

Step Seven: Round Up the Tickets

Surprisingly, most people find the most difficult task in a raffle lies not in getting the prizes and not in getting the workers, but in getting the tickets and the cash back.

Some volunteers will be careless with their ticket stubs, or return stubs and promise cash later, or claim to have sold tickets when they really haven't. If you have encouraged people to turn in money and stubs as they go along, you will have less difficulty than if you wait to collect all the stubs and proceeds until just before the drawing. Final submission of stubs and cash should be due at least three days, and preferably five days, before the drawing. That way, you can ensure that you have all the tickets accounted for well ahead of time. People should turn in unsold tickets as well so that all numbers are accounted for.

The problem with a raffle is that all the transactions are in small amounts of cash. Someone sells three tickets to a co-worker, puts the stubs and dollar bills into their wallet, then goes to lunch and uses that cash for lunch without thinking. Later, they turn in more stubs than cash. Without a careful recordkeeping system, this error might not be caught.

Another advantage of getting ticket stubs in well ahead of time is that some people try to make their stub into the winning one by bending down a corner, sticking

something on the back, or tearing it nearly in half and then taping it together. Workers will sometimes fold ticket stubs or spill stuff on them. These stubs cannot be used, and new stubs must be written. This is, in part, the use of the 200 or so extra tickets. For the drawing, the stubs must be as uniform as possible.

THE DRAWING AND BEYOND

Step Eight: Hold the Drawing

Get a big box or barrel for the ticket stubs. Be sure to mix and remix the stubs thoroughly after each prize is drawn. Start with the bottom prize and work up to the grand prize. Have a blindfolded adult or child do the actual drawing to guarantee neutrality.

After the prizes are drawn, announce the prizes for top salespeople and award these. Many organizations give several prizes to their salespeople. In addition to the person who sold the most tickets, they award a prize to the person who got the most prizes donated, to the person who got the most other people to sell tickets, to the person who sold the most tickets in a week or to a single person, and so on. Having a lot of prizes for salespeople is a good motivator for those who are competitive during the selling process and a nice reward at the end.

After the drawing, sort through the tickets to find those where people checked that they were interested in getting more information about your group.

Many organizations also use the ticket stubs to get names and addresses for a mail appeal later. It can be labor intensive to sort through the ticket stubs, eliminating current members' names and making sure that you only have one ticket stub for each person, even if they bought 20 tickets. However, this is a productive way to build a good mailing list.

Step Nine: Send Out the Prizes, Thank Yous, and Evaluate

Arrange for the winners to get their prizes, either by picking them up at your office or receiving them in the mail.

Send thank-you notes to each person who sold tickets and to all the merchants and others who donated prizes.

Count your money. Note how many tickets were unsold, where the problems were with the workers, the merchants, the tickets themselves, etc. Make a file with all the information about the raffle, including a list of winners, a list of people donating items, a list of volunteers, and notes about timing and other issues. The next year, it will be much simpler to do the raffle if a committee can pull out the file and benefit from the previous year's experience.