

PODCAST: HOW TO ASK FOR MONEY

I'm Edith Wagner, editor of Reunions magazine, and this time I'd like to talk about how to ask for money for your reunion. Well, maybe at times it feels more like begging, but nonetheless, it's facing the reality that this reunion will cost money. It is not written in stone that it must cost a lot of money but you will need money if you're doing mailings for printing and postage; you'll need money for deposits if you're planning a banquet or reserving a park pavilion for your reunion. You get the idea and, if you're like many reunion organizers, you will be fronting some, if not all of the money, to begin. So, unless this reunion is your gift to your group or family, others will need to know immediately that you expect them to contribute to and/or pay their fair share to this important endeavor.

If yours is a family reunion, it's the family's responsibility to make it happen. Unless, of course, there is a bequest from a generous relative or ancestor to hold reunions paid for by this benevolent, generous person in perpetuity.

Okay, okay, so that's rather dreamy and unreasonable but, hey, we can all dream, can't we? Or maybe that might give someone an idea. So start by answering a question that addresses how to ask for money to stage your reunion.

Ashma Kumar wrote, "My family and I are planning our second Nandlall Family Reunion, next August. The hardest part is soliciting everyone in the family to contribute. This is not going to be an easy task. I would like to write a very tactful letter asking everyone for a mandatory contribution."

Ashma is certainly not alone in her concern and here are some of the things I've learned that I hope will help. In preparing a letter, I'd suggest you think about the following ideas and the letter will write itself.

How many of your family members know what you need and why you need it? Who have you talked to? What was their reaction?

Clearly state what you are really asking for. Money to start ... postage ... printing ... money to make early down payments ... reserve buses ... reserve a banquet or catering ... a deposit for accommodations. There are many things for which you will need advance cash so asking for help right up front is only to your benefit in the long run.

The first thing you must do is to explain why you need money and explain exactly what you expect to do with it, such as pay for printing, envelopes and postage or to make deposits.

Combine your request with some of the exciting ideas you're considering or working on. In fact, hook them first with the good news, then deal with their responsibility to make the reunion happen.

Fortunate families have generous, benevolent members who pay for the whole event or underwrite events/banquets/t-shirts/tour buses -- stuff like that.

Some donors demand that their generosity be shouted from the rooftops. That's easy: Do it! Thank them in all your correspondence and especially at the reunion ... over and over again. One bonus of the hoopla is that others may be inspired by the recognition to be generous, too. It's called sibling rivalry!

Others prefer anonymity. Lucky you, if that's your case.

Generally speaking, though, acknowledging any contribution no matter how small will always generate more. For example, in all your communications, list who has already stepped forward, unless they've requested anonymity. It will make others want to match — or exceed! — their generosity.

It is never necessary to mention the amount of money that has been donated unless it's a condition of the contribution. If you like, you can set up classes of contributions and list names within categories of

donations – for example, \$99 and under, \$100 to \$499, \$500 to \$999, \$1000 to \$5000 (not unheard-of). A list of names keeps everyone guessing, which is just fine as long as your members keep thinking about contributing. In any case, use every opportunity you can to praise generosity in all your pre-reunion communications, over and over at your reunion, and again when you thank members for coming.

Also consider trading in-kind services for some of your budget or needs. For example, don't pay for printing if someone has access to printing and is willing to donate. Or if a cousin is great at graphics, ask her to lay out your newsletter or design t-shirts. Or someone can donate catering for one meal or pay for the banquet (as does the long time anonymous donor to the annual Utley Family Reunion in Jackson, Tennessee). It's probably better to identify who you want to volunteer for a particular task and ask directly to get what you want rather than asking in general.

Not to keep you hanging! But topics you might wonder about right now (how to do reunion registration and fundraising ideas will be separate podcasts. Look for them soon. But first let me tell you about how a couple other reunions scare up funds.

Mary Thiele Fobian, of Pacific Grove, California, a veteran at both class and family reunion planning, says that how one asks family for money can depend on the family culture. Whenever her communication for her Knapp/Napp Family Reunion says anything like "Contributions to help cover costs are always welcome [mailing/startup/down payments ... you fill-in-the-blank]," the checks just fall out of the sky. But she realizes she may come from a very special family in that regard.

On the other hand, the Neptune (New Jersey) High School Class of 1972 – 35th reunion committee sent a very detailed save-the-date letter. They answer who, what, when, where and how questions plus add details.

They solicit address corrections and offer sign-up for the class newsletter — the *e-Blazer*, a two to three times monthly compendium of Class of '72, Neptune High School and Jersey Shore news items of interest to the class. They call this an efficient and cost-effective method of keeping in touch. They explain that their event is “For us, run by us.” They keep reunion costs low to encourage participation by the greatest number of classmates. “Our philosophy,” writes committeeman Bill King II of Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, “is that we’re our own best entertainment.”

Asking for money is not a one time thing. Once your reunion is established, it is wise to keep the understanding of your need for money in the forefront -- so you don’t have to beg all the time.

At Reunions magazine, we are always looking for new ideas for how you have successfully managed to get members to pay or donate or contribute ... what you ask for or how everyone pays their share of reunion expenses. Feel free to either send them to me at reunions@execpc.com or start a discussion on our forum at <http://forums.reunionsmag.com>. Sharing these ideas will make you Super Reunion Organizer because next to how to get family members to register in a timely fashion, getting them to pay is a large problem for many reunions. But, neither seems to be a deal breaker because some always help pay. And important as it is to know that, what we’re trying to help is to make it less likely that that someone is you!

Other podcasts will follow that continue the discussion of how to pay for your reunion: a dilemma experienced by many. Look for them soon. Meanwhile, there is much about both at www.reunionsmag.com.

We, at Reunions magazine, are always looking for ideas you’ve tested at your reunions. Feel free to email them to reunions@execpc.com or send them to Reunions magazine, PO Box 11727, Milwaukee WI 53212 or post them at our forum at <http://forums.reunionsmag.com>.

Lots of ways to communicate about reunions.

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