



Fundraising and Recruitment Tips for Fire/EMS Departments During COVID-19

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) has garnered these tips and ideas from NVFC members and others who have found creative ways to fundraise and recruit during the pandemic. If you'd like to learn more, join the discussion on the NVFC's [Volunteer Voices](#) member forum. Not a member? Join at www.nvfc.org/join.

Fundraising

- Solicit for individual or corporate donations online (i.e., via social media) or through direct mail campaigns.
- Host fundraising events, such as a raffle, virtually (e.g., via Facebook live or Zoom) instead of in-person.
- Organize drive-through meal events.
- Host birthday "drive-bys" for your community members.
- Set up a GoFundMe page for your department.
- When soliciting for donations, ask for funding for specific items rather than simply setting a monetary goal. That way, potential donors know exactly what their money is being used for.
- Fundraising projects are labor intensive, so consider the cost versus benefit. It may be more effective and efficient to ask specific people and/or businesses for a donation to cover the bulk of a fundraising goal.
- Take a hard look at your department's budget and see if you can cut unnecessary spending and/or expenses.
- Be transparent with your community about your fundraising challenges – chances are, they will be sympathetic and willing to donate.

If you decide to host a virtual raffle or auction, consider the following:

- Check your state and/or local laws to see if online raffles or gambling is legal for your organization(s). Things can get especially complicated if your department is selling tickets across state lines.
- Advertise your event on social media and/or by placing flyers in local businesses.
- Ask local businesses if they can donate or sponsor raffle prizes or auction items.
- If possible, make sure your raffle prizes or auction items are big ticket items (such as a Yeti cooler or television), as these work best for generating interest and encouraging participation.
- Make sure to define and communicate the raffle or auction's rules ahead of time.
- Suggested price range for raffle tickets are \$5-30 per chance.
- 32Auctions.com is an online auction hosting platform that can be linked to your department's Stripe or PayPal account.
- Consider using the app [Square](#) for payment. The transaction fee is minimal (~2.75%), and users can limit the total number of chances for sale and set up a separate link for each item raffled.

- Be transparent when picking the raffle winner(s). Make sure to show how many balls are placed in the bingo machine, how many names are on the wheel, etc.

If you decide to organize a drive-thru meal event or something similar, consider the following:

- Check with your local health department to see if there are any regulations related to serving food, especially during COVID-19. For example, what are the mask and glove requirements and recommendations, are food handler's cards required, etc. Previous exemptions may not apply or may have been suspended.
- Advertise your event on social media and/or by placing flyers in local businesses.
- Sell local businesses ad spots or signage to further boost revenue and build partnerships.
- Make sure your volunteers have room to put meals together.
- Pre-pack side dishes and keep them cold in coolers.
- Have plenty of pre-packaged napkins, utensils, and sanitary wipes on hand.
- Make sure you have plenty of grocery bags for food transport.
- Make sure there's room for the public to park their cars while they wait for their meals.
- Host spot raffles by having people walk the line of cars selling 50/50 tickets, chances on gift cards, or other prize packages. If you advertise in advance, this can help augment your fundraising.
- Pass out fire safety materials, especially stickers and giveaways for children.
- Manpower-permitting, your department could put on a fire extinguisher demo or other presentations for people waiting in line.
- Think about how you will address people walking up to get meals (instead of driving). It is possible a walker or biker may be in line with cars.
- Have a back-up plan in case of inclement weather.

If you decide to host a birthday drive-by, consider the following:

- Scout the location of the drive-by in advance to determine if there will be enough room to maneuver your apparatus.
- If possible, schedule multiple drive-bys together to save time and reduce resource usage.
- Consider asking for donations and/or discussing membership opportunities with those who requested the drive-by.
- Follow any local regulations, health official guidance, and department procedures regarding COVID-19.
- Encourage community members to participate in your birthday drive-by.
- Use the drive-by as an opportunity to provide driver training, advertise your department, recruit new volunteers, and garner donations.
- If applicable, consider bringing your ambulance(s) and crew along in case your department gets a call.

The NVFC hosted a [Facebook Live discussion](#) that delved deeper into this topic, as well as a free [webinar](#) on fundraising strategies for fire and EMS departments.

Recruitment

- Be active on social media, especially if your department is looking to recruit a younger audience.
- More traditional media channels, such as radio PSAs and direct mailings, are good ways to engage with your community offline.
- Organize a virtual fire station open house to generate interest in your department.
- Fundraising events, whether in-person or online, are great opportunities to recruit new members. Hand out recruitment material and engage with potential volunteers during drive-through meal events, birthday drive-bys, and virtual raffles/fundraisers.
- Consider organizing and hosting a virtual citizen fire academy to educate your community about the work your department does. It can also serve as a recruitment opportunity.
- Work with your local school system to engage with students and recruit new volunteers. This can be useful for recruiting new members to your junior program or setting up students on the path to joining the fire service after graduation.
- Consider applying for a [Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response](#) (SAFER) grant to aid in your department's recruitment and retention. This grant can be used for volunteer recruitment and retention initiatives as well as for hiring paid members.
- Access the NVFC's free [Make Me A Firefighter campaign](#) to create customizable recruitment materials and invitations, as well as access additional resources such as ready-to-use PSAs and recruitment best practices. Post your department's opportunities in the campaign's online database so prospective volunteers visiting www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org can find you.
- Utilize online meeting and training platforms such as Zoom, Blackboard, or GoToMeeting for informational sessions, orientations, basic recruit classes, and lectures to keep the recruitment process moving while adhering to social distancing and safety guidelines.

The NVFC hosted a [Facebook Live discussion](#) that delved deeper into the issue, as well as a free [webinar](#) on recruiting millennials into the fire service.