GalaBid

FREE DECISION GUIDE

School Fundraising Ideas That Work

Choose the right fundraiser for your school, your volunteer base and your timeline. Seven ideas compared on effort, lead time and revenue, with the four questions to answer before you commit to any of them.

GET STARTED

How to Use This Guide

Most school fundraisers do not fail because the idea was bad. They fail because it was the wrong idea for that school, at that time, with that volunteer base.

This is an action list, not just a checklist. Answer the four questions, compare the seven ideas against your own constraints, then use the decision page at the back to commit to one. Anything in [square brackets] is for you to complete.

You'll Find

1. **Four questions to answer before you choose**
2. **Seven ideas compared on volunteers, lead time and revenue**
3. **What each idea actually earns from, and the upgrade that lifts it**
4. **Two ideas worth reconsidering**
5. **Why digital changes the numbers for schools**
6. **A decision page to commit on**

Where School Fundraisers Go Wrong

✓ **The idea outgrew the volunteer base.** A fete needs months of sustained commitment. A raffle or online auction can be run by two or three people.

✓ **The goal was vague.** "$8,000 to replace our outdoor play equipment" raises more than "supporting the school". Specific and visual beats worthy every time.

✓ **The lead time did not match the idea.** A gala needs months. A raffle or donation drive can be live within a week of deciding.

✓ **One revenue stream carried the whole event.** A fete with only gate entry and food stalls leaves real funds on the table.

✓ **The ask did not suit the community.** Some school communities respond to a direct ask. Others prefer the exchange of bidding or buying a ticket.

STEP #1

Four Questions Before You Choose

Answer these honestly and most of the seven ideas will rule themselves out, which is the point. The remaining one or two are the ones your school can actually deliver.

Your honest answers

1. How many reliable volunteers do we actually have?

   [ ]

2. Does our community prefer a direct ask, or the exchange of bidding and buying?

   [ ]

3. What exactly are we raising funds for, and how much do we need?

   [ ]

4. How much lead time do we have before we need the funds?

   [ ]

On question three: *the more concrete and visual the goal, the stronger the result. Name the thing you are buying, not the area it sits in.*

STEP #2

The Seven Ideas Compared

Find the row that matches the volunteers and lead time you actually have.

Idea	Volunteers	Lead time	Revenue	Choose it when
School fete or fair	Large, sustained across months	Months	High, across many streams	You have a big, committed volunteer base
Gala dinner or fundraising night	Committee plus an event-night team	Months	Highest per head	You have an established parents and friends committee
Silent auction, online only	Two or three people	Days to a few weeks	Strong for the effort	Volunteer capacity is your real constraint
Raffle	Two or three people	Under a week to set up	Strong, and scales with your list	You need funds for one specific, nameable thing
Trivia night	Moderate	Weeks	Reliable mid-tier	You want community engagement without a fete
Fun run or walkathon	Moderate, plus teacher buy-in	Weeks	Good, and involves every student	You want every child taking part
Donation drive	Minimal	Days	Depends entirely on goal clarity	Your goal is specific and easy to picture

Nothing here says you can only run one. The strongest school calendars pair a low-effort digital fundraiser with one large community event a year.

THE BIG EVENTS

The Fete and the Gala Dinner

The School Fete or Fair

Revenue at a fete comes from layering activities, not from any single one. The schools that raise the most treat it as a multi-channel fundraising event rather than a social occasion with a cake stall.

- ☐ Gate entry or wristbands
- ☐ Food and drink stalls
- ☐ Game booths
- ☐ A silent auction running on phones throughout the day
- ☐ A raffle drawn at the end
- ☐ Buy-it-now items

The upgrade most fetes have made is running the raffle and silent auction digitally. Parents buy tickets and place bids from their phones before and during the day, so there is no paper, no cash tin to reconcile and nothing to count. Running the draw on a screen in front of the crowd, with each winner appearing live, turns it into one of the best moments of the day.

The Gala Dinner or Fundraising Night

For schools with an established parents and friends committee, this is usually the highest-revenue night on the calendar. A silent auction running on phones through the evening, a live auction of premium items, a raffle draw and a paddle raise together can do in one night what months of smaller activities do.

✓ **Treat it as a fundraising event, not a social night.** With fundraising bolted on afterwards. That distinction is the whole difference.

✓ **Programme, MC and items all matter.** A skilled MC and items that genuinely excite the room are not optional extras.

✓ **Bidding and checkout should not need clipboards.** Parents bid from the table, and checkout happens on mobile before anyone leaves.

✓ **Show the total building.** A leaderboard on screen turns the room into participants rather than spectators.

THE LOW-VOLUNTEER OPTIONS

The Silent Auction and the Raffle

A Standalone Online Silent Auction

A silent auction does not need a physical event. Many schools run online-only auctions over five to ten days, sharing the link through the newsletter, social media and email. Parents browse and bid on their phones, outbid alerts by SMS bring them back to compete, and winners are notified and pay online at the close. No venue, no catering, no hundred volunteers.

Items That Work in School Auctions

- ☐ Children's artwork, especially at primary level, where parents bid generously for their own child's work
- ☐ Experience packages from local businesses
- ☐ Family activity bundles
- ☐ Donated services from parents with relevant skills
- ☐ Premium hampers
- ☐ Larger experiences sourced on consignment, returned at no charge if they do not sell

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The Raffle

One of the most volunteer-light fundraisers a school can run. Parents buy tickets from a link in the newsletter or parent app, digital tickets arrive instantly, and the draw takes one click. It works best when tied to one specific goal, because the specificity is what makes the ask feel purposeful rather than generic.

✓ **Add it to any ticketed event.** A raffle alongside a fete, gala or trivia night consistently lifts the total, because it gives people another way in at a lower price.

✓ **Primary schools do particularly well.** Where parents are already highly engaged, a well-promoted raffle with desirable prizes can sell out before the event.

✓ **Check your local rules first.** Requirements on prizes, ticket prices, licensing and draw processes vary by state and country, and some places require a permit.

THE MID-TIER OPTIONS

Trivia, Fun Runs and Donation Drives

Trivia Night

Lower effort than a fete or gala, with strong engagement and predictable revenue from ticket sales, team entry fees and whatever you layer on top. Tables can browse and bid between rounds, and the raffle draw becomes the entertainment at the end.

> ***The one tip that changes the total:*** *sell tables in advance rather than individual tickets. Local businesses who buy a table add predictable revenue and often compete to win, which lifts the energy of the whole room.*

Fun Run or Walkathon

A perennial because it involves every student, carries low overhead and earns through pledges rather than tickets. It also aligns with what the school already values, so it tends to get strong buy-in from teachers and leadership.

The upgrade is moving pledge collection online. Students share a personal link with extended family anywhere in the world, and the school receives the funds securely rather than collecting cash envelopes.

Donation Drive for a Specific Goal

A direct ask works better than people expect, as long as the goal is specific and the communication is clear. "We need $5,000 to buy new music equipment for the school band", with a progress thermometer the community can see, generates a different kind of generosity from a general appeal.

Transparent, progress-tracked fundraising creates momentum. As parents watch the total climb, they are more likely to contribute and more likely to share it.

THINK TWICE

Two Ideas Worth Reconsidering

✓ **Catalogue product sales.** The wrapping paper and cookie dough model. Return rates are typically low, the school keeps only a fraction of total sales, and the burden falls on parents selling to friends who often feel obligated rather than motivated.

✓ **A single revenue stream at a large event.** A fete with only gate entry and food stalls leaves real funds on the table next to one that layers in a raffle and a silent auction. Adding them does not add proportional planning effort.

Why Digital Changes the Numbers

Not just convenience. Reach, speed and revenue:

✓ **Reach beyond the room.** Grandparents, extended family and community members who cannot attend an evening event can still bid, buy or give from wherever they are.

✓ **Sales before the day.** Up to 40% of campaign sales can happen before a live event begins, so a campaign opened a week before the fete banks a real share of the total in advance.

✓ **No cash handling.** Funds go directly to the school's own connected account. No tin, no deposit, no manual reconciliation.

✓ **Outbid alerts bring people back.** An SMS pulls a parent back in to compete again, which is something a paper bid sheet cannot do.

✓ **Knowledge survives committee turnover.** Last year's campaign becomes the starting point for this year's, so a new committee is not starting from nothing.

COMMIT

Your Decision Page

Fill this in at the end of the meeting where you choose, and circulate it. A decision written down is a decision that survives the next three conversations.

What we are running, and why

Our fundraiser is: [ ]

We chose it because: [ ]

What we are raising funds for: [ ]

Our target: [ ]

Reliable volunteers we have: [ ]

Activities we will layer in: [ ]

Campaign opens: [ ]

Event or draw date: [ ]

Who owns it: [ ]

PRO TIPS

Tips That Lift a School Total

✓ **Name the thing, not the cause.** "$8,000 for new play equipment" beats "supporting the school".

✓ **Match the idea to your volunteers.** Not to what the school ran last year.

✓ **Layer your revenue streams.** Adding a raffle to a ticketed event lifts the total without proportional effort.

✓ **Open the campaign before the day.** A week of pre-selling banks funds before anyone arrives.

✓ **Sell tables, not tickets, at trivia.** It is the difference between a $3,000 night and an $8,000 one.

✓ **Put the children's artwork in the auction.** Parents bid generously for their own child's work.

✓ **Check your raffle rules before you sell.** They vary by state and country, and some places need a permit.

One Campaign, a Committee of Three

Raise more, stress less. Your raffle, silent auction and donations run as one campaign, so a small committee can do what used to need a room full of volunteers:

✓ Digital tickets delivered instantly via email or SMS

✓ Outbid alerts by SMS that bring parents back to bid again

✓ No app download needed for parents

✓ Funds go straight to your school's own account. GalaBid never touches them

Real fundraising experts, not chatbots. Trusted by fundraisers since 2011.

GET STARTED →

SEE PRICING FOR YOUR REGION →