

The Endless Crowds Complete Guide to Project Creation and Funding

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SECTION ONE: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A. What is Endless Crowds?

Endless Crowds (“E.C.”) is an online fundraising platform specifically tailored for the use and benefit of police, firefighters, military personnel, veterans, individuals and the organizations supporting this important assembly of Americans. We call this group of military, firefighters and police officers “MFPs.” Specifically, E.C. offers a one of a kind online platform that is strategically designed to allow MFP project creators and entrepreneurs to reach out to the general public and to grow their support base alongside other MFPs and their diverse sources of support.

B. What is Crowdfunding?

Suppose the New York Fire Department (FDNY) needed to raise \$20,000 in donations to purchase a new fire truck. It is highly unlikely that firefighters would create a fundraising campaign aimed to attract one single donor to donate the entire \$20,000.00. Rather, FDNY would ask for smaller donations from a larger crowd of donors, perhaps \$2.00 in funds from 10,000 donors. By using the collective power of the crowd, FDNY would be more likely to raise the funds it needs to repair its truck. This same concept is adopted by crowdfunding.

Crowdfunding is the collective effort of many individuals who network and pool their money, via the Internet, to support efforts initiated by project creators. Like FDNY, project creators solicit small amounts of money from a larger crowd; however, unlike FDNY in our example, crowdfunding over the internet reaches hundreds of millions of people from around the globe. If FDNY was able to solicit even one penny from the over two billion internet users in the world, they would have enough money to fix a thousand fire trucks.

SECTION TWO: THE PHASES OF A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN

E.C.’s key to a successful campaign can be divided into 5 phases, and summarized in one word: **PICKS**. First, Project Creators have to take time to **P**lan it out. Careful planning will lead to near-flawless execution. After a strong start, E.C. encourages Project Creators to keep their project’s **I**nertia moving forward by distributing project materials to potential supporters within their own network. Marching forward, the Project Managers are encouraged to **C**hase success by posting status updates and revisiting leads that were previously cold. As Project Managers get over the half-way hump, Project Creators are encouraged to **K**eeP the ball moving forward by using creative marketing, such as highlighting notable supporters or key updates in the campaign. Finally, like every MFP is trained to do, Project Creators are encouraged to finish **S**trong!

1. Phase One: Plan it out!

One month before a campaign launches, Project Creators start planning their project's campaign. Before a project launches on EndlessCrowds.com, the identified suggestions below should be completed in order to give the project the greatest chance for success. Not every successful campaign requires all of the suggested steps below, but for very task not properly implemented, the campaign's chance of success will decrease substantially, which is why E.C. encourages Project Creators to Plan it out!

A. Suggestions for establishing a solid foundation before your campaign launches

1. Clear Campaign Description and Realistic Goals: Project Creators should provide E.C. with all of the important details about the campaign. How much money will be needed? Who will the project be designed to assist? What will the proceeds be used for? Generally, by providing more information to E.C. Project Managers about the campaign, E.C. managers will be able to create more personalized, detailed and impactful marketing materials. Donations are more likely to come from E.C. supporters who have a clear and concrete understanding of what their money will be used for.

2. Budget/Realistic goals: Additionally, setting clear and realistic objectives will help your campaign develop momentum and meet your donation goal. Supporters want to donate to campaigns that they believe have specific goals and a legitimate chance for success. With that said, Project Creators will face occasional obstacles during the campaign. Project creators should also factor in E.C. platform and gateway fees into the donation goal. Asking for \$10,000 when you need \$8,000 might be necessary if the subject matter of your campaign is running on a tight budget.

3. Start off with a bang: Donations are more likely to be given to a campaign that demonstrates success. This is because a successful campaign allows supporters feel like they are making a difference. Successful crowdfunding campaigns start with a core group of supporters. These are often friends, family, supporting/partner organizations. Project Creators must identify their core-supporters early and consider the most effective way to communicate with them. E.C. will provide a letter that highlights and details the campaign should be sent to these individuals. Their donations will help to establish credibility and momentum for the cause, which will pay dividends if the department, organization or business manages to exhaust its social network.

4. Networking and Outreach: In the event that core-supporters are unable to support your campaign's donation goal, E.C. prepares a networking and outreach plan to help drive traffic to your campaign. For some, this will involve the use of the internet to connect with untapped networks of people that will be supportive to the cause through outlets like the E.C. campaign webpage, social media platforms and direct e-mails. Other Campaign Managers prefer more traditional means of communication including newsletters, circulars, postage, flyers and word of mouth. Combining both forms of networking and outreach will attract additional traffic and help exceed the campaign goal.

5. Prepare your team: A team of supportive members can help ease the Project Creator's work load. Team members can help by working alternate shifts to avoid "burn out" and by providing a substitute in the event a Project Creator is ill or otherwise disposed. Participation by a team motivates the individual members to help with the project because they have accountability over the success or failure of the campaign. When more people get involved, a team gains different individuals with different areas of expertise. For example, a tech-savvy team member could use computers to make your campaign run more efficiently. The most important thing a Project Creator can do when assembling a team is to surround

him/herself with people who believe in their ideas. Project Creators should strategically choose the right team members, individuals who are motivated, dedicated, and accountable. Project Creators then introduce the campaign and the benefits of the campaign to team members, divide and delegate tasks to the most appropriate people, and execute the game plan

6. Think outside of the box: Identify various marketing promotions that you are going to unveil at each phase of your campaign. Use creative marketing techniques to create interest in your campaign. For example, fireman Fred could use washable paint to write the web address of his E.C. webpage on a fire truck. Alternatively, Fred could hang a banner with the webpage address outside of the firehouse. Don't be afraid to partner with local businesses to throw fundraising events.

7. See What Works: Research other crowdfunding campaigns that are similar to yours. Crowdfunding extends beyond fundraising it's also an exchange of ideas. Research the rewards, promotions and other marketing tools being utilized by other campaigns and consider whether or not they could also be effective for your campaign. E.C. recommends researching at least three current successful crowdfunding campaigns and identifying the ways in which they are effectively marketing their campaign

8. Rewards: Crowdfunding campaigns often offer rewards to users who donate a certain amount to a campaign. Rewards are way to thank those who have supported your cause. For example, individuals who donate over \$50.00 might receive a formal letter of gratitude from your department or special recognition on your website or newsletter. Individuals who donate over \$200 might receive a T-shirt from your business, department or organization, or perhaps a K-9 assistant could be named after the donor. Donations over \$1,000 might entitle a person to the reward of having a fire truck and/or room names after the individual. Having trouble thinking of incentives? Use social-media to elicit feedback from your core supporters to measure what potential incentives might motivate them to make a larger donation. The possibilities for different rewards are endless.

9. The Video: Industry research confirms that crowdfunding campaigns with videos are significantly more effective than campaigns launched without a video. The video introduces your idea, explains the benefit it will bring and helps to establish a personal connection with a potential supporter. Some of the most successful crowdfunding videos are recorded with a cell-phone, and convey an emotional, compelling and powerful message or need. Other videos are mere screen recordings of a strategically planned Power Point presentation. Some users might also prepare professional, high-definition videos, however do not let these videos intimidate you. The substance of the content is more important than the medium in which it is expressed.

B. Welcome to Hollywood: Keys for a Successful Crowdfunding Video

1. **Script it:** Powerful videos require thought and effort. Getting in front of a camera and "winging it," while acceptable, is highly unlikely to leave a lasting impression. If necessary, E.C. will help prepare your script and give you suggestions to create a compelling video. E.C. has guides available on request that will help you easily overcome the intimidating technical barriers to creating a digital video on your computer.
2. **The Hook:** The average donor's attention span is short, and a video that fails to capture their attention in the first 10-15 seconds will probably not be viewed through its conclusion. Increase viewer engagement and better convert viewers into supporters by starting your video with a concise, exciting, high-level overview of the problem that you're seeking solve, and your creative solution.
3. **The Empathy Factor** – Show your audience that you are passionate about your project. When people are able to relate and empathize with another individual's struggle or dream, they are more likely to donate and become a committed supporter. Police, firefighters, active military and veterans have some of the most interesting stories and noble causes. MFP's have the largest and most

dedicated network of supporters in the country, so it's important for Project Creators to take advantage of this network.

- 4. Substance** - Besides providing a "hook" and an "empathy factor", the substance of your video will drive most people to donate to your campaign. Tell your viewers what your project is and what the money will go to.

**Remember:* Be as concise and succinct as possible while still being able to express your idea.

- 5. Editing Process** - No one expects a crowd-funding video to be a Hollywood production.

However, some simple editing will go a long way in establishing your project as a professional enterprise. Consider adding some background music or photos and still shots to go in the video.

- 6. Browse Other Videos:** You are not the first person to design a crowdfunding video. Check out other videos on Endless Crowds or other crowdfunding websites to get an idea of what is and is not working for people.

**Remember:* These are simply suggestions for the video that have proven effective in others crowd-funding campaigns. Moreover, this video is an expression of your creativity and passion about your idea. It's ok to think outside of the box and explore an avenue for a video that hasn't been tried before.

***Consider including the following in your video:** a clear depiction of the problem that your project seeks to overcome, what makes your project or circumstances unique; how much support you need; who you are and the background behind your relationship to the project; how donations will be used and why someone should trust that their donation will be used in good faith to advance your campaign's goals; the harm to your community if the problem that you have identified is not solved.

2. Phase Two: Develop *Inertia* for your Campaign.

A strong start to your campaign will help provide the inertia to keep you moving in the right direction. The first two weeks are about gaining momentum through core supporters. When your campaign raises 10% of its goal in the opening days, supporters will recognize the legitimacy of your campaign and become interested in your project.

B. Weeks One and Two

**Remember:* Before your project goes live, E.C. will already have provided you with most, if not all, of the marketing materials listed below. Your goal in week one is limited to distribution of these materials to your core supporters.

1. Identify your Core Supporters: Core supporters come in many shapes and forms well beyond simply your friends and family. It's important to think about all of your associations, including your church, social clubs, school, business partners, co-workers, not-for profit companies, and even your significant others own networks. Building core supporters is easier when your cause matters to others, so consider how your project will help, directly or indirectly, your core supporters.

2. Press Release: E.C. will provide you with a custom press release which you can send to local media outlets. The press release provides a snapshot of your project to the general public, which helps attract new supporters and legitimize your campaign to core supporters. Some media outlets you can use include: the local mayor's office, a newsletter or circular used in local businesses, your organization's website, local newspaper, popular local blogs, and any community forums that you participate in. It is important to be creative when considering media outlets.

3. Associate's Letter: Before your campaign launches, E.C. will provide you with a custom Associate's Letter to send to your core supporters and potential supporters to show that you've launched your campaign. Send this document to your listserv in order to gain initial support and get your campaign off the ground. The Associate's Letter will also prompt your core supporters to provide ideas and feedback regarding your campaign and/or project.

***Remember:** Crowdfunding is not just about an exchange on money but more importantly an exchange of ideas

Examples:

a. Electronic and Social Media Communication: Social Media has become a powerful tool for entrepreneurs and fundraisers alike. Using social media websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can generate a great deal of traffic to your project webpage. It can be as simple as posting your Associate Letter to your LinkedIn page and a link to your E.C. project page on your blog. This will inform your social network of your new campaign. You should also encourage your supporters to repost your Associate Letter and a link to your webpage on their communication pages. The more social media you use, the more success you are likely to have:

1. Facebook Me: Post a link and message on your Facebook with your Endless Crowds project page while also informing them of your new campaign. Encourage your supporters to repost the link on their specific social media outlets. Look for Facebook groups that may be related to your cause and repost their link to their supporters.

2. Tweet away: Twitter can provide you with vital connections needed to make your campaign a success. Identify hash tags that others are using that may relate to your cause. The more direct conversations you have with other Tweeters, the more likely they are to share your project with their followers.

b. Traditional Forms of Communication: Although cutting-edge technology and social media are attractive, there is no substitute for the traditional forms of communication, like an old-fashioned phone call. Don't be afraid to call your friends and family to talk about your project and gain support for your campaign. Sending letters in the mail with your own handwriting on the envelope creates a personal touch that is lost in an email. Send photos that detail what your project is about to E.C. for incorporation into your marketing materials. Individuals respond and are more likely to support your campaign if they can visualize your ultimate goal.

c. Say "Cheese": Add images and photos that detail what your project is about. Individuals respond and are more likely to donate to things they can see. For example, if your project requires purchasing a piece of property, photos of that property should be included. If you have a team of people that work for your organization, take one big group shot together so donors will know that their money is going to a worthy cause with a human face.

***REMEMBER:** *Core supporters more than just a source for funds. They can also provide feedback when testing new marketing strategies. Many crowdfunding campaigns start and end their fundraising drive strong, but fail to maintain the momentum during the middle of their campaign. Planning in advance for weekly marketing promotions will help mitigate this lull in funds. However, be sure to save your best marketing promotion for the final week of your sixty-day campaign.*

B. Phase Two Checklist

Did you:

1. Send out your press release to your list serve?
2. Send out your Associate Letter to your most committed supporters?
3. Post links on social media highlighting your campaign and asking supporters to repost your link?
4. Submit photos of your project to E.C. to establish your credibility to your supporters?
5. Create a 2-minute video with good content for your project?
6. Identify and plan various marketing promotions that you will unveil weekly throughout your campaign?

3. Phase Three: Chase Success

A. Overview of Phase Three

At this point, you should have already launched your campaign, reached out to potential supporters, and established legitimacy in your project. In this phase you will be revisiting missed potential supporters and exploring additional media outlets for your Press Release.

B. Weeks three, four and five

1. Revisit Missed Opportunities; there are always missed opportunities to gain supporters in the first phases. This phase helps to identify groups and organizations that may be supportive to your cause but may have missed your message for reasons beyond your control. For example, a letter you sent to a local restaurant regarding your interest in a fund-raising event may have been mistaken for junk mail. Re-send your press release to any groups that you think would be interested in supporting your project. Most organizations today have an online communication forum that you can send/post your content to. Blogging and providing details about your project will attract the necessary traffic to your project page. Tell your story and promote your project in your community. This means actively circulating your E.C. press release to relevant community forums. VA halls, Police and firefighting organizations, college campuses, public libraries are among the many organizations that may be relevant to your cause

2. Inform your Followers by Posting a Campaign Status Update: Providing social media updates about the first week of your campaign will help maintain supporter interest. Previous supporters are comforted when they are given active updates about the status of a project and are more likely to donate in the future if they see progress. Those who did not previously support your project may feel encouraged to donate to your campaign when they see that your goal is achievable and can be accomplished with their help. Your update should stress importance of the project and praise any progress your campaign has made. Explain to your supporters that although you have made great strides, there is still more work to be done and that the goal cannot be reached without people like them. Utilize all forms of communication described above in Phase Two, including social media, phone calls, and letters. Finally, be sure to send thank you notes to those who have donated, and ask them to share the project with others who may also contribute.

3. Request feedback from your associates: What compelled them to donate? What deterred them from donating? What did they like and what did they dislike? Your supporters can provide more than

funding; you can receive critical feedback and suggestions from supporters to help improve your campaign. Having trouble meeting your donation goal? Reach out on social media and ask for insight and feedback from your peers.

4. Unveil your Second Marketing Promotion: As noted, week one should act as the planning phase of your campaign, identifying potential marketing promotions. Releasing the first of several and providing a new reward to potential supporters will incentivize people to donate.

C. Phase Three Checklist

Did you:

1. Identify groups that would be supportive to your cause and send them your press release detailing your project?
2. Post on various blogs and message boards that are related to your campaign?
3. Provide social media updates to your supporters on the progress of your campaign?
4. Actively circulate your press release around relevant forums within your community?
5. Unveil your second marketing promotion and new rewards?

4. Phase Four: *Keep the ball rolling*

A. Overview of Phase Four

At this point you should have planned, launched, and revisit your campaign. Revisiting missed opportunities is extremely important, especially for campaigns with smaller networks of potential supporters. Because most of the ground work has already been completed, Phase Four is based around continuous updating and revising the existing campaign to identify and implement strategies that work best.

B. Weeks six and seven

1. Update and Improve: Continue to update your supporters on your progress, be as transparent as possible. Conduct another round of research into other successful campaigns to find creative solutions to finding new funding.

2. Highlight Notable Campaign Supporters: Individuals love recognition. By recognizing and praising former supporters it may encourage them to donate again or relay information about your campaign to their friends and family.

3. Implement suggestions from your supporters: If your supporters give you a good idea, implement it and perhaps it will draw more attention to your campaign. If your supporters give you an idea that doesn't help you, implement it because your supporter will feel satisfaction and value which may lead to additional support. If your supporter gives you a harmful idea, take the time to thank him/her for caring about your cause so much that they took time to think of ways for you to improve.

4. Begin Preparation for the last two weeks of campaign: Studies have shown that the end of a crowdfunding campaign is where the largest portion of the funding is contributed. Make sure to have a strong game plan for the last two weeks to draw attention to your project and to stress its importance.

C. Phase Four Checklist

Did you:

1. Give your supporters updates on your progress?
2. Contact bloggers relevant to your issue and request they blog about your project?

3. Research other crowdfunding campaigns and identify ways they are effectively marketing their campaign?
4. Recognize past supporters of your campaign in a personal email or social media post?
5. Request feedback and suggestions from your supporters on social media?
6. Release your week three marketing promotion?

5. Phase Five: *Finish Strong*

A. Overview of Phase Five

By now, you should have already completed most of the work for your campaign. There is no need to revisit things that have not yet been completed. Rather, refocus on what has worked best in the first eight weeks. Remember that this is the final push and a very important part of the campaign.

B. Weeks Eight and Nine

1. Update and Thank you: Continue to update your supporters on your progress, and be as transparent as possible. Implement suggestions from your supporters. Send thank you notes to supporters asking them to share the campaign link. Highlight notable campaign supporters. If you have gained more supporters, highlight them on your project page. Re-contact your supporters through your email list and tell them your story in a new way. Expect positive results and more donations when you put the time and effort into repeating past crowdfunding steps.

2. Re-contact Media Sources and Core Supporters who did not donate the first time around: Supporters are more likely to contribute to your campaign if they think it is likely to be successful and make an actual difference. While attracting attention from CNN or other major news outlets may be challenging, using these mediums at the local level is extremely effective. Contact your local news affiliate by way of your press release, phone call or email advocating a story about your project. Local news organizations want to run positive stories about uplifting community initiatives and will provide valuable advertising. Continue to expand your email list. Crowdfunding is often most successful when it is met with a vigorous email campaign to potential supporters. Continue to research new leads for potential supporters, and send mass emails to increase your chance of success

3. Revise Project Page and Release Final Incentive: Release your pre-planned final marketing promotion. This is your final marketing promotion and should be the grand finale of your campaign. Save your best marketing promotion for last!

4. An ace up your sleeve: The final week of your project is an important time to engage any inactive supporters. The most effective way of bringing these individuals into the donation fold is to highlight contributions from your core supporters. Large donations from committed supporters are a great advertising tool to elicit funds from those who have not yet donated.

C. Phase Five Checklist

Did you:

1. Expand your email listserv and research new leads for potential supporters?
2. Update the names and phone number of people that are backing your project?
3. Re-contact your supporters in your email list?
4. Contact local newspapers that may be sympathetic to your cause?
5. Release your pre-planned final marketing promotion?

SECTION THREE: CONCLUSION, ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

When Your Campaign is Finished!

Whether or not your project has met its goal there is still much to be done at the end of your campaign.

Thank your supporters

After the conclusion of your campaign it is critical to thank everyone who helped your project in anyway. Take time to personalize your “thank you” letters, possibly handwriting letters. If you have many supporters, consider sending letters to your largest supporters. If you didn’t meet your goal, explain why and what you plan to do next. Tell them about the charity you are going to donate to, reassuring them that their money was not wasted. If you did meet your goal, explain what comes next for your project. Always remember to stay connected! People want to stay current with a project they helped make happen. Send out weekly or monthly project updates to you supporters. Keep in mind that these supporters might also be great resources for future projects.

Reward Fulfillment

Next, make sure all the promotions and rewards you promised are fulfilled. It is always a good idea to stay organized and updated throughout the campaign with your supporters’ addresses, pledges and the rewards they were promised. It is important to keep your promises!

Collecting Funds

If your campaign succeeds, you will receive funding in accordance with our Terms of Use, which can be found on www.EndlessCrowds.com. Familiarize yourself with the Term of Use and know what to expect.

Taxes

Make sure you plan for the possible tax implications that your project might have if any investment dollars were raised. Plan accordingly and pay attention as your project continues to grow.

Future Possibilities

There may be other projects you wish to fund and we encourage Project Creators to return to E.C. and let us help you fund future project. Also, consider telling your friends and family about your experience as they may also be interested in starting their own campaign. With Endless Crowds, there are Endless Possibilities!

Overall, Endless Crowds gives you a platform and the necessary tools you will need to get started, but the success of the campaign depends on YOUR efforts. We will be there along the way to help you with anything you need, but ultimately your level of commitment will determine the success of your project. Prepared to plan and work hard and your dream can become a reality.