

PR Campaign – Tusculum Baseball Fundraising

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Tusculum University is a small private university in Greeneville, Tennessee, founded in 1794. Their athletics compete at the Division II level in the South Atlantic Conference. The Tusculum University Baseball team competes at Pioneer Park, which holds about 2,450 people (Quick Facts, 2024). The 2024 roster includes fifty-seven students, one graduate assistant, and three coaches. Like most Division II sports, the baseball team must do most of its own fundraising and is not able to pull in the kind of donations that Division I schools can earn.

The baseball team's current funding from the school is \$64,000. Their current fundraising goal is \$100,000. Their spending from the 2024 season totaled \$161,350, \$64,000 from the school and \$97,350 from fundraising. This includes spending on recruiting, travel (i.e., hotels, food, transportation), umpires, supplies (i.e., equipment, cameras and other technology), and postage and copy needs (T. Ireland, personal connection, 10 October 2024).

Tusculum University Baseball does a couple different things to fundraise, one of which is working for Axis Security. Through Axis, they work University of Tennessee football games, two music festivals – Bourbon & Beyond and Louder Than Life, and a NASCAR race at Bristol Motor Speedway. From Bourbon & Beyond, they made roughly \$15,000; from Louder Than Life, about \$12,000; from Bristol, about \$10,000; and assuming they work the rest of the home Tennessee games, they will make about \$8,000 (B. Steele, personal connection, 9 October 2024).

The other large chunk of their fundraising comes from eTeam. Organizations can set up a fundraiser online and share the link with others. So far this year, Tusculum Baseball has raised \$23,829 of their \$45,000 eTeam specific goal (eTeamSponsor, 2024). The rest of their fundraising is supposed to come from cold calls to alumni and former donors, of which they've made \$2,000 this year (B. Steele, personal connection, 10 October 2024).

With the \$65,000 they will get from the school (increased from last year), the baseball team has a total of about \$133,829. This is \$27,521 less than what they spent last year. Plans to bridge this gap are to continue making cold calls to alumni and former donors with hopes to make up to \$20,000 and starting a program called the “Dugout Club.” The program will consist of several donor levels ranging from giving \$20 a month to \$150. At the lowest level, the donor will just receive recognition on social media. As donors give more, they will receive items such as hats, T-shirts, opportunities to throw out a first pitch, sit in the dugout during a game, and at the highest level, sit in a suite during a game. The goal with the first year of this fundraiser is to average \$50 a month from five donors. Over a five-month period, this would gain the program an extra \$1,250 (B. Steele, personal connection, 10 October 2024).

Campaign Goals & Budget

The goal for this campaign would be to increase Tusculum Baseball's fundraising output by 40%. This is a very large goal, but it would put them well above their spending from last year, so they could save a chunk of the money for next year and be ahead of their fundraising in case anything were to happen (like a hurricane causing some of their fundraising events to be cancelled). To meet this goal, the team would need to make \$27,531.60 in addition to what they've already made this year. It would not quite meet their \$100,000 goal, but it would bring them pretty close.

This could be done by modeling one or both fundraisers put on by Frederick County Public Schools in Winchester, Virginia. The first is an annual murder mystery dinner. A relatively small event, they only sell 140 tickets, but at \$150 a seat. Off seats alone, they can gross up to \$21,000. They also sell tickets by the table, pricing them anywhere from \$1,500 to \$5,000 depending on what the sponsor wants to pay. They offer a cash bar, dinner, and live and silent auctions. As the guests enter the venue, they are greeted by the volunteer actors, all playing characters with a theme – last year everyone played a country singer. During cocktail hour, guests are treated to appetizers, while the actors mingle and set up a story line. When dinner is served, guests can bid on silent auction items, donated by various businesses, while also being treated to the murder mystery show. This is done about every fifteen to twenty minutes with just a couple minutes of the show done at a time. The whole show is about fifteen minutes long. Guests can vote on who they think the murderer is and if they get it right, they have a chance to win a prize (M. Nordman, personal connection, 10 October 2024; Merod, 2019).

The whole event grosses about \$35,000 and nets about \$25,000. The most money comes from selling tickets and tables, but a good chunk of money comes from the silent and live auctions. The best-selling items are bundles of liquor – though not sure how well that would go at

Tusculum – and graduation packages for local high schools. These included premium parking and seating, plus some merchandise for the school. Frederick County has three high schools, so it was able to put together three of those baskets.

This would be a lot of work, but is doable, especially if it was a shared fundraiser. If Tusculum Baseball partnered with Tusculum Arts Outreach, they may be able to get volunteer actors happy to put something on their resume. If the baseball team didn't want to share the fundraiser, they could use the baseball players as actors, but they would have to get creative when it came to female characters. There should be venues on campus that are free to use for university purposes, or at least at a discounted rate. The biggest cost with this would be catering for dinner and appetizers. According to Roaming Hunger, a sit-down dinner could cost anywhere from \$7,000 to \$16,800 for 140 people, so care would need to be taken when selecting the caterer, maybe even consider stepping down to a buffet option, which is cheaper (2024).

For silent and live auction items, the baseball team would have to rely on donations. Local businesses could donate baskets to market themselves. For the live auction, a professional auctioneer could be paid, which would help bring in money (a bad auctioneer raises less money), but it would save money if someone in the community does it, like the head coach or the president of the school. Audio equipment is another potential expense, but it is something the university might have available for use for free.

The other fundraiser put on by Frederick County is a golf tournament. There are no individual tickets, teams must sign up in groups of four with levels starting at \$150 and a tee sponsorship. Teams can pay different levels and sponsorships all the way up to \$2500. All except the lowest level come with tee sponsor signage. This fundraiser grosses about \$18,000 and nets about \$10,000 for Frederick County (M. Nordman, personal connection, 10 October 2024).

The Graysburg Hills Golf Course offers a discount for staff at Tusculum, so its possible that they would offer a good rate to host a fundraiser. These fundraisers have been in place for years, so they have established donors. If Tusculum Baseball is to be successful with the same fundraisers, they would probably need to start smaller at first with not quite as high prices. If they put on the Murder Mystery with 140 seats at first, they could make up to \$17,500 selling them at \$125 a seat (more if they were able to sell by table). If they switched to buffet, they could probably find a catering service for about \$2,500, which would net them \$15,000 before auction items. Another \$3,000-5,000 could be gained off auction items.

For the golf fundraiser, if the golf course discounted, the baseball team could budget \$5,000 for venue and signage. They would need a lot of teams to sign up, especially teams that give more than the minimum donation to make up for this offset in cost.

A smaller fundraiser that can be done to make up for any funds not raised during the big fundraisers would involve lottery tickets. If the team buys anywhere from \$25 to \$50 in lottery scratchers and staples them to a poster board, tickets can be sold for this during games or other events. Even if the tickets are only \$1, the money spent on the lottery tickets can easily be earned back and more, especially if this was done at a largely attended game.

A combination of all three of these would take work but would help the team meet their fundraising goals and keep them consistently.

Key Publics and Channels

The intended publics would be students and faculty at Tusculum University, as well as the larger community of Greene County, especially any fans of Tusculum Baseball.

As the program would be trying to keep costs down, paid media would not be engaged, but the use of earned media could be used through newspaper, radio, and magazines by doing personal interviews related to the fundraising. The shared media aspect would consist of promoting the events on Instagram and X, the baseball team's primary social media accounts. The owned media would cover promoting the events on the team's and the university's websites.

Evaluation Method

To evaluate whether the fundraising was successful, the team could look at how much money each event raised and see if it was a sufficient amount. They could also monitor social media to see what the attendees of the events said about each event.

References

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