**May 2023 Volunteer Coordinators’ Forum**

**Crowdfunding by Sonia, Sutton Community Farm**

**Introduction to Sutton Community Farm**

Sonia, Head of Communications at Sutton Community Farm, gave some background about the farm which has been operating for 13 years to address the environmental impact of wasted food and to address social needs such as diet, physical activity, making friends, being in touch with seasons and where food comes from. The farm produces 20 tonnes of vegetables each year and run online farm shop deliveries to around 600 households a week with the help of 70/80 volunteers and 9 part-time staff members, for the benefit of the local community.

All produce is organically grown using no chemical pesticides but by welcoming wildlife to the farm.

They are not a charity but a social enterprise and have received grant funding over the years. At the start of the pandemic 3 years ago there was a huge surge in demand for veg boxes by 50 percent going from 400 to 600 and they had to adapt quickly. By 2022 this started to fall away due to the cost of living impact, and their fruit and veg costing more than it can be bought for in the supermarket.

**Topic: Crowdfunding**

After many unsuccessful fundraising bids, the farm started losing money and therefore stopped replacing staff so that the team is at the smallest it has ever been. They therefore took the decision to Crowdfund as they would have gone bankrupt by August 2023.

Their ask was £50K but they achieved £61K after going for a stretch target of £80,000.

[This was their Crowdfunder page.](https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/save-sutton-community-farm)

**How to Run a Successful Crowdfunder**

**General points**

* A crowdfunder is a massive communications exercise
* It helps to have a good network to spread the word
* As well as raising funds, it can also raise the profile of your organisation / cause, get you a lot of free publicity, and other benefits! (eg. more customers and volunteers)
* It’s intense and lots will lay in the preparation beforehand, savvy planning, and being able to say yes to opportunities that occur once it’s running
* Be realistic about what is possible to achieve, and then have full belief you will achieve this! The strength of the campaign will come from the central team
* Keep the tone really fun and inspiring, showing energy and enthusiasm, and get everyone believing that you are going to reach the target.
* On the start date you hope to secure 20-30% of the target, so need to continue to be responsive to keep the momentum going.
* Smaller asks typically run for 4 weeks, but the farm ran for 6 week as they were asking for a larger amount.
* Select which platform you want to use, they chose Crowdfunder and because they were going for a large sum of money they were assigned a member of staff to help them with the crowdfunding.
* You can try to get match funding from other organisation, Crowdfunder gave them some options. However, you need to ensure all your documentation aligns with theirs.
* Decide how much you want to ask for, they chose £50K but the average is around £10-15k
* Launch on a Monday - Recommended launching on a Monday to capitalise on the whole week and finish on a Friday.
* Try to reach further afield to people who have no connection and will be more likely to donate if you have already had good support.

**Preparation is key!**

* A lot of the success will come from doing decent preparation
* 4 - 6 weeks before launch
* Make sure as many people as possible know about the launch date beforehand so you can create lots of momentum from day one
* Decide on:
* What you are raising money for
* What will your key message be? The “top-line” which can be summarised in one clear sentence. Test your key message(s) before launching, amend if need be.
* Who are your different audiences?
* What communication tools will you use for each segment of your audience?
* Who in the team will be responsible for what? Think about the skills that can be utilise and different areas of responsibility.
* How long will your campaign run for?
* All-or-nothing or take what you raise?
* You need to get people excited with a good appeal message.  Think what your key message is.
* They got staff and volunteers to vote on what would motivate people to donate. This needs to be an easy and clear message for people to grasp and be able to talk about.
* Think about different audiences and adopt different messages, ie. Loyal volunteers, people on the street or social media so that you have more effective messaging.

**Rewards**

* Offering rewards can really boost the donations
* They raised a third of their money through selling rewards ie. experiences on the farm, merchandise which quickly sold out
* Have a range of different prices for rewards e.g. for individuals versus corporate groups
* Plan to release some more rewards mid-way through campaign to give a boost and not all at the beginning
* Great for creating a buzz of excitement (especially if you are mysterious about what will be released)
* Can encourage higher donation amounts / bring in more money
* Can showcase things you already offer / used as a marketing tool
* Think carefully about the cost of fulfilling rewards in both money and time
* Source rewards from favourable organisations or businesses
* 10 - 15 rewards is optimal, a range of prices and tangible / intangible, physical / digital / in-person experiences

**Media Content**

* Crowdfunder video:
* Create a video that is fun, engaging, and shorter than 3 minutes (ideally as short as possible)
* [This was their video](https://youtu.be/KtCxvR5vzpM)
* Video content / reels are prioritised by the algorithms on social media over still images
* A great way to get your message across and engage a wide audience
* Video massively upscaled how popular the campaign was
* Photos
* A great way of showing who is involved in your project, a storytelling tool
* Photos are great and can be shared with press releases, on newsletters and social media and makes stories and people come alive.
* “A picture tells a thousand words”
* For social media: always portrait over landscape to fill the screen more

**Comms**

* Make sure as many people know about it before you launch – volunteers, customers, events.
* They have a huge mailing list of 5.5K and they emailed everyone and told them why they were doing the crowdfunding.
* Make sure it is front and centre of your website and social media pages for the whole campaign
* Update email signatures
* 50 printed posters to spread the message
* Send updates throughout the campaign: try to get your supporters to advocate on your behalf
* Mention the milestones, e.g. how many donors and how much has been donated, can we get there by this
* Schedule comms and create social media plan: don’t want to overdo it and turn people off, but need to have a strong start, strong final week, and peppered throughout to keep momentum going and posting other bits of news so that you can show what you are doing outside of the campaign too.
* Build in platform updates on the Crowdfunding page and email them to people who have so far supported to capitalise on their energy and them wanting to see you reach your target -  thank them for supporting and now can you get 3 more people to donate and help in supporting and achieving our target!
* Encourage everyone to keep sharing, again and again!
* Keep the tone fun, positive and celebratory

**Local press**

* Identify key contacts at your local newspaper / online media / radio
* Write a press release, send it before the day of launch
* Include nice photos that can be included in print
* After being featured in the Sutton guardian, ITV news got in touch, it got followed by the BBC who came to the farm which definitely raised the profile and got more donations.
* This was also great marketing fostering loads of new customers and volunteers.

**Other Organisations**

* Identify contacts in other organisations that can promote on your behalf
* Create copy for social media and newsletters that can be easily share
* They were not that successful with people sharing and didn’t see huge amounts of tagging on social media but really successful reaching out to other organisations, sending press releases for them to share with their networks after launch date and then on the day.

**After the Crowdfunder**

* Crunch the data i.e. New or existing clients etc.
* Claim gift aid as a registered charity
* Fees paid on transactions/credit cards etc 3.2% + 20p per transaction
* No reports or accountability for the money is required
* Be timely in fulfilling all the rewards – and thinking how to keep people engaged, subscribe to newsletter, support an event etc.
* Think about how you can best keep people engaged, harnessing further support