

How to Host a Fundraiser

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I. Introduction

Thank you so much for your interest in holding a Swing Left fundraiser! 2020 will be the most important election of our lifetime. We need to beat Trump and the GOP by flipping the White House, the Senate, and key state races that will determine redistricting in 2021. Republicans are going to do everything they can to hold on to power, so we all need to pitch in to support the Democratic nominees running against them in key races up and down the ballot. Hosting a grassroots fundraiser directly supports those Democrats while helping build a community of people dedicated to winning.

All across the country, people like you have been hosting fundraisers, from small, friends-and-family events in their homes to headline-grabbing, party-all-night “fund-ragers.” No matter what sort of event you’re envisioning, this guide is your go-to place for planning and executing an awesome event.

How Does Swing Left Fundraise?

There are three ways we fundraise:

1. **Early Money.** Swing Left uses a combination of nominee funds and political action committees to raise money in advance for Democratic nominees in targeted federal and state races. The money for these candidates is held in escrow by ActBlue or one of our Flippable State Funds and then disbursed to the eventual nominee after the primary or the candidate filing deadline if no other Democrat has filed. Early money has a huge impact on building strong campaigns.
2. **Contributions to Nominees.** Swing Left raises money directly for Democratic nominees after they win their primaries in targeted races across state and federal offices
3. **Contributions to Swing Left.** Money raised for Swing Left goes to hiring organizers, building technology and tools for volunteers, and covering operations expenses that keep grassroots organizing humming.

II. Things to Know Before You Start

There are some tried and true methods of doing effective political fundraising. And there are also various guidelines to follow from the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and state election agencies. But don’t worry, you don’t have to be a high-roller or legal expert to figure this stuff out! In fact, we’ve made it as easy as possible for you to be your own rockstar political fundraiser.

Getting Your Personal Fundraising Link

Your first step in hosting an amazing fundraiser is setting up your personal fundraising link. You can do that by [clicking here](#) and following the instructions at the page. You can customize your fundraising page, gather and track incoming contributions, and keep spreading the word about your fundraiser!

Hosting an Awesome Event

Ready to set up your event on Mobilize?

Create event

The next step in planning a Swing Left fundraiser is understanding what goes into hosting an event.

In general, the host has control over:

- Conceptualizing the event—the guest experience, from invitation through to thank-yous for attendees and donors
- Producing graphics for the event
- Selecting and locking down a venue
- Programming, such as arranging speakers or organizing a host committee
- Sending invitations
- Wrangling attendees
- And generally ensuring the success of the event.

Guidelines for hosting fundraisers for Swing Left Funds

Since Swing Left allows you to raise money for federal and state candidates, the laws surrounding those fundraisers is a bit complex. But don't worry—our team has created [this helpful chart](#) to give you a complete overview of our funds - who can/can't give, how much they can give, and resources for in-kinds and check contributions.

Want to know more about the specifics of each fund? We've got you covered in the sections below.

Who Can Give (and Who Can't)

When you're putting your fundraiser together, people will want to get involved, whether by helping host the event or just making a contribution to buy a ticket. Swing Left is a political organization, so the FEC and state election agencies have guidelines we all have to follow on who can and can't be involved and how.

The quick version: All U.S. citizens/green card holders using their own money can support your fundraiser.

Here's who can get involved in greater detail:

Any individual U.S. citizen or green card holder can host or contribute to a political fundraiser. Anyone who gives to a political campaign also has to use their own money. That means they're not borrowing money to donate or giving in someone else's name.

The rule around who can't support your event is also pretty simple:

Corporations, unions, federal contractors, and non-citizens/green card holders can't buy tickets or give to your fundraiser.

If you're ever unsure which bucket a person or organization falls into, just ask them! That's the best way to keep your event running smoothly and above board. And if you have any questions, contact us at host@swingleft.org.

Following the Hatch Act (For Federal Employees and Contractors)

What you need to know

The Hatch Act is a law that covers how Executive Branch employees and contractors can participate in political activities.

With federal employees facing budget cuts, censorship, and the rollback of vital public protections, more and more federal employees are asking how to speak out and become more politically active. As public servants, federal employees enjoy the same free speech and free association rights as every other American, but there are some limits that prevent certain federal and local government executive employees from raising money for political candidates, even on their own time.

If you want to get involved, don't let these restrictions keep you on the sidelines. Instead, understand and follow the law and know that at a time when the very idea of public service is under attack, your voice is needed more than ever.

If you're an Executive Branch employee—working either directly for the White House or for a federal government agency or department—you CAN:

- Volunteer with Swing Left
- Attend Swing Left events
- Donate to candidates
- Donate to Swing Left
- Speak at Swing Left events (without soliciting contributions).

But you CAN'T:

- Solicit contributions from other people for Swing Left or any candidate, even on your own time
- Appear as a "sponsor" or "host" on an invitation to a fundraiser.

Additional General Guidance

“Further restricted employees” can’t attend fundraising events or volunteer for Swing Left. These federal employees are mostly in intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Federal contractors cannot donate to federal campaigns and committees as a matter of federal law, but employees of federal contractors (e.g., employees of Boeing, Deloitte, etc.) can donate. Since corporate contributions are already prohibited, the government contractor ban applies primarily to contributions from a partnership (or limited liability company) with a government contract. It also applies to the personal and business funds of individuals under contract with the federal government; and sole proprietors of businesses with federal contracts.

Employees of federal contractors who are not otherwise Executive Branch employees (and who are not foreign nationals) can solicit contributions for Swing Left and for District Funds.

The United States Office of Special Counsel (“OSC”) investigates Hatch Act violations. The OSC has in the past been a very active enforcement agency, and even minor violations often result in full investigations and serious penalties. Accordingly, we recommend that executive branch employees strictly follow the limitations of the Hatch Act and limit their political activities to volunteering and donating while being careful to never solicit contributions from others to donate to Swing Left or to a candidate for federal office.

What people can give

Your fundraiser is going to be awesome, and people around you may want to get involved in putting it on. That’s great! There’s two kinds of things they can give: Money and stuff.

Contribution Limits

Swing Left has funds that benefit both state and federal races. That means how much an individual can give to a candidate varies pretty widely. For example, the contribution limit for a US Senate race is \$2,800 while an individual can give as much money as they want to the Swing MI Left in 2020! fund. Check out [this chart](#) for complete coverage of contribution limits for each of Swing Left’s funds.

In-kind Donations (Services and Stuff)

If you or someone else wants to make a non-monetary contribution to your fundraiser, such as providing an event space, buying everyone food and drinks, or donating a prize for a raffle, they can! It’s called an in-kind donation, and you’ll need to [fill out and submit a form](#) laying out what the contribution is and how much it’s worth.

Why the paperwork? The FEC wants to make sure donors aren’t using gifts or giveaways to go over the contribution limit for candidates. That means in-kind donations also count toward a giving limit. So if someone donates a space that normally rents for \$2,000 they would only be able to give \$800 to a federal Swing Left Fund or Democratic nominee. Basically, if you or someone else is giving anything to the fundraiser for free that would normally cost money, it counts as a donation too.

(That said, if anyone in a given situation would receive something for free—e.g. anyone who rents an event space gets a free open bar from that space—that add-on doesn’t need to be counted as an in-kind contribution.)

The most important thing to understand about in-kind donations is: All the rules that apply to monetary donations—who can give and the limits on how much—also apply to in-kind donations.

III. Setting Up Your Event

Identifying Expenses

Finding a Venue

At your house

Hosting your fundraiser at home is a great option. Prepare and arrange your space like you would any gathering you've held at your home in the past. Ensure your wifi is working and charge your laptop, computer, or tablet if you are going to have your guests submit their contributions online through your device.

If you buy or make snacks and beverages, be sure to stick to contribution guidelines detailed previously.

At a public place of business

If you host the event through a commercial venue, including a bar, restaurant, coffee shop, or after-hours at your favorite yoga studio, just make sure the vendor is not giving your event any special treatment. Whatever they would charge a nonprofit or other cause-based organization is what they need to charge you. Even if they love, love, love our cause, you can't take special favors for campaign fundraisers, including things like free food and drink or discounts beyond what their normal rates for non-profits are. That said, if you run into a venue owner who likes Swing Left that much, definitely ask them to join your host committee and invite all their friends!

At a public venue

People also host fundraisers at community halls, libraries, parks, and other publicly-owned and publicly accessible places (meaning anybody could host an event there). Just make sure the space has good wifi or cellular service so contributing online is easy! If you're worried about spotty service, bring a hot spot.

Other Expenses

When thinking through your event, be sure to spend time cataloguing each potential expense related to your event. Here are some examples:

- Drinks
- Food
- Catering or wait staff
- Security
- Valet
- Audio-visual equipment
- Entertainment

In each case, when making a purchase for the fundraiser you will need to pay the full price or get it as an in-kind donation from someone who's allowed to give one to you.

Reimbursements and Financing Your Event

Swing Left has a set amount of money it's allowed to spend on each campaign in an election cycle, and reimbursements for event expenses count against that limit. For now, Swing Left is not making reimbursements, since that would restrict our ability to invest in these races when it's time to contact voters.

Some event planners cover costs through the money they raise. If you take that approach, we recommend keeping costs to 10 percent or less of what you plan to raise. However, note that all funds raised at an event must be reported to the FEC, even if some of those funds are used to cover the costs of the event.

Raising Money

Collecting Donations Beforehand

Whether you're hosting a fundraiser at your home, a restaurant, or some other place, the easiest way for people to donate is online. The best thing to do is [create a personalized fundraising link](#) and have attendees contribute through it!

To collect these contributions beforehand, send this link around with your invitation and ask invitees to donate. Once they do, they will receive a confirmation receipt. Ask them to forward you their confirmation receipt and/or bring it with them for access to the event!

You can encourage this by setting donation levels. The only difference in the levels will be the title, but sometimes that's all you need to motivate someone to give a little more. Recognize donation tiers on name-tags or with buttons and stickers. Alternatively you can specifically recognize your highest tier of donors during your programming.

Auctions & raffles

Unfortunately, raising money through auctions and raffles creates some pretty significant legal challenges for you. There are plenty of fun ways to engage your guests at a fundraiser—we recommend exploring those in the [tips & tricks document](#).

Promoting Your Event

Setting Up Your Event on Facebook

A great way to boost attendance to your event is to promote it over social media! Setting up a Facebook event is usually the best way to get people to publicly RSVP and share an event with friends. If you create a private event, be sure to include your custom fundraising link in your event description. If you create a public event, which we highly recommend, you can include your fundraising link under the "Buy Tickets" button.

You can create your own image to serve as a cover photo for your event [or use ours](#). [Canva](#) is a great, free option, for making social-ready images that are exactly the right size for Facebook, Twitter, or other platforms.

Publicizing Your Event

Publicize your event with your network and let them know, if they want to join your fundraiser, they should donate through your personal fundraising link ([which you can set up here](#)) and forward you the confirmation receipt.

Email is the most straightforward way to publicize an event. Your social media accounts are also a powerful tool—don't be afraid of posting about your event multiple times. Adding a new speaker? Or offering up a new event-themed cocktail? As you nail more details down, post to your Facebook event and share it on your Facebook and Twitter accounts.

When people RSVP, thank them for their support and ask them to invite others. If you're working with a host committee, make them email their networks and post on their accounts part of the expectation for hosting.

Be sure to tag Swing Left in your post (we're on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#)) and we'll try to help promote. If your local Swing Left team has their own accounts, be sure to tag them, too!

And connect with other local progressive groups, especially ones that are active in elections. They can be great partners and might provide speakers or share your event in their newsletters or on their social media accounts.

If you're hosting speakers, particularly local politicians, consider inviting local press to your event, too.

Lastly, to avoid exceeding legal limits, only produce up to 499 of anything in hard copy form (like event invitations).

IV. At Your Event

[Download sign in sheet](#)

Collecting Donations At the Event

To collect contributions at the event, once people are gathered, there are two easy ways to give:

Laptop or Tablet. Online donations can be collected fairly easily by passing around a computer or tablet during your fundraiser. You can also set up a communal laptop or tablet in one place, but remember to. Remember to pull up your personal fundraising link so that you can track your progress!

Smartphones. At an appropriate time during your fundraiser, you can tell everyone to take out their phones and go to your customized Tracking URL to submit their contributions.

It is prohibited to accept contributions in the form of cash or other cash transfer applications (e.g. venmo).

You can even collect contributions at the event by check. The check should be made out to Swing Left with a memo line stating the race/fund the donation will go towards. For example, the memo line could read: "Unify or Die", "NC Senate Democratic Nominee Fund", "Swing AZ Left in 2020", etc. For every check, a donor must complete the [Check Contribution Form](#), so make sure you print copies of this sheet ahead of your fundraiser.

After the fundraiser, collect all checks and contribution forms and send both to the address at the bottom of the contribution form within 10 days.

And remember, the ticket price doesn't need to be the limit of guests' giving. People may be so energized by your event that they'll want to give more—and if they do, it's best to make additional contributions as easy as possible!

Spreading the Word at Your Event

Encourage attendees to post photos of themselves and their friends to their social media. Some of that will happen organically, but creating a time for everyone to take a selfie - or having a speaker take a selfie with the crowd behind them—can be a fun moment for everyone that helps build community. Some of our fundraisers have also included space with a banner and signs for people to pose for pictures at their venues.

It's also a great idea to designate a volunteer as an event photographer. If you hire a photographer (or rent a photo booth!) remember that that counts as an in-kind contribution (if it is given free, then it's an in-kind contribution from the photographer or booth vendor). Posting and sharing photos during and after an event helps deepen and grow our community as we push to take back the House! Again, remind everyone to post images and videos and tag Swing Left!

V. After Your Event

Pat Yourself on the Back

Hosting an event is such a great and effective way to contribute to flipping the White House, the Senate, and the State Houses key to rolling back Republican gerrymandering. We're not leaving anything on the table when it comes to our work in 2020, so take time to feel proud of yourself for standing on the right side of history.

Send Out Thank Yous and Celebrate on Social Media

Upload pictures to your Facebook event then send a thank you email to all your donors and attendees. Be sure to include some highlights from the event and let people know they can tag themselves and their friends at the Facebook event page.

Ready to Host Your Fundraiser?

Set up your event on Mobilize America to share it with nearby Swing Left subscribers! It will also appear on our [events page](#) for other Swing Left volunteers like yourself to see. Good luck, and thanks for all your work!

[Create event](#)