

Interim Guidance for Crowdfunding and Other Online Fundraising

I. Purpose

Baltimore City Public Schools (“City Schools”) supports staff using online fundraising and crowdfunding to obtain supplemental resources for academic and wellness projects in schools and across the school system. City Schools is working to update [Board Policy KCD \(Gifts & Donations\)](#), and [Administrative Regulation KCD-RA \(Gifts & Donations\)](#) to address these topics, with the goal of completing these updates by spring 2022. As an interim measure, this guidance aims to support school and department leaders when advising staff interested in sponsoring online fundraising and crowdfunding.

II. Definitions/Terms

- *Fundraising* – An effort to raise money for a worthwhile project or cause that does not involve submitting an application or proposal. It encompasses a wide range of strategies, including individual donor outreach and various events (e.g., bake sales, product drives, races or walk-a-thons, etc.). It also includes online fundraising using an electronic medium like a website.
- *Crowdfunding* – A type of online fundraising, facilitated through an internet-based request for resources from individuals and organizations to support activities or projects that enhance an educational program.

III. Guidelines

A. Overarching Principles

1. All fundraising, whether online or not, must:
 - a. Comply with all applicable state law, Board policies, and City Schools administrative regulations;
 - b. Support established school and school system priorities;
 - c. Be organized and facilitated consistent with City Schools’ protocols for gifts and donations, including standards of acceptance for educational resources and technology; and
 - d. Be conducted in a manner that safeguards instructional time; maximizes the safety of students; supports a common school experience for all students; and includes appropriate accountability provisions, while serving City Schools’ core values, including [Board Policy ADA \(Equity\)](#).
2. Principals and department designees should ensure that staff provide advance notice of fundraising requests, including online fundraising, except when they are using [DonorsChoose](#), which is City Schools’ preferred platform (as discussed further below).
3. Principals and department designees are responsible for monitoring compliance with all protocols for development, promotion, and financial management of fundraising.

B. Online Fundraiser Considerations

1. Staff must determine the most appropriate platform to use for online fundraising:
 - a. Use of [DonorsChoose](#), which is a City Schools’ preferred platform (as

discussed further below), helps mitigate legal and financial risk and liability exposure to the district.

- b. Use of other platforms (e.g., Go Fund Me, Amazon Wishlist, Adopt-a-Classroom) is permissible; however, the organizer is solely responsible for management of the campaign and assumes all risk and liability for any funds raised and any actions that result from using the platform. The use of platforms with at least a 3-star rating on [Charity Navigator](#) is an industry standard. Schools and school-sponsored groups should consider the cost of online administrative fees to donors on a particular crowdfunding platform to determine whether the fees may deter potential donors and reduce the potential of the fundraiser. These platforms are not vetted centrally by City Schools, and therefore, staff must carefully review any terms and conditions of service. City Schools may review these other platforms to determine compliance with protocols that would qualify them as a preferred platform upon the request of a school or district administrator.
2. When consulting with staff who want to implement crowdfunding or other online fundraising campaigns, principals/department designees should consider that there are legal and financial risks, as well as benefits. Principals/department designees should work with staff sponsors to:
 - a. Ensure alignment with school and/or district priorities, Board policies and administrative regulations, and City Schools' organizational mission.
 - b. Consider whether online fundraising or crowdfunding is right for this project. Supplies or materials that are necessary to teach the curriculum, as well as many other classroom necessities, are provided directly by City Schools, so there should be no need for fundraising.
 - i. Some examples of appropriate fundraising projects, which supplement and enhance the educational experience, include (but are not limited to):
 - a. Diverse texts to support student literacy and access to authors and stories that reflect their lived experiences;
 - b. Photography and technical equipment (e.g., 3D printers) to support students in using advanced tools for projects;
 - c. A class set of plants and seedlings to support students in having individual resources for projects for class and at-home; or
 - d. Student incentives (e.g., trips to museums or parks).
 - ii. Some examples of requests that may be best supported by school funds or central office resources, rather than fundraising, include (but are not limited to):
 - a. Basic school supplies like individual pencils, pens, notepaper;
 - b. Basic custodial or professional supplies like copy paper, cleaning products, or tissue boxes available on K12buy, which is the school system's procurement website; or
 - c. Educational software, platforms, or resources which require vetting for data security and student data privacy compliance.
 - c. Determine whether additional consultation or approval is needed.
 - i. Fundraising to support a staff position, supplement staff salaries, or provide a staff stipend (e.g., for afterschool club leadership, etc.) must

- be approved by the principal, Instructional Leadership Executive Director (“ILED”), and the Finance and Human Capital Offices.
 - ii. Agreements with vendors of \$50,000 or more require vetting through City Schools’ procurement procedures and approval by the Board.
 - iii. Fundraisers to support capital improvements or building modifications require additional levels of approval, including Board approval for significant projects. For questions, consult Cynthia Smith, Director – Facilities Design and Construction, at csmith03@bcps.k12.md.us.
- 3. Principals and department designees should not approve use of crowdfunding websites that require donated funds to go directly to a staff member’s personal account or that are dispersed as a gift card issued directly to a staff member. Direct funding may create tax and other compliance consequences for the staff member, as well as accounting and accountability concerns for City Schools.
- 4. Fundraising to provide financial support to specific individuals (e.g., students, staff, or community members) who experience illness, house fire, eviction, or a family or personal tragedy must adhere to safeguards against conflict of interest in [Board Policy BCA \(Code of Ethics\)](#). City Schools staff may donate to fundraising for these purposes, but it is preferable that such efforts are sponsored by community members or organizations, rather than staff, given the extensive legal reporting requirements.

C. City Schools Partnership with DonorsChoose

- 1. City Schools partners with [DonorsChoose](#) as a preferred platform for teachers and other staff to use for crowdfunding campaigns for classroom resources and school projects.
- 2. City Schools participates in the DonorsChoose school district partnership program and identified DonorsChoose as a preferred platform due to a variety of benefits that it provides, including:
 - a. *A mission-driven partnership.* DonorsChoose is a not-for-profit organization and has received a 4-star rating on Charity Navigator. DonorsChoose is focused on providing children with a world-class education by supporting educators. DonorsChoose has also partnered with the National School Boards Association to develop best practices for online crowdfunding, available at this [link](#).
 - b. *Impact reports and accountability measures.* These tools help match resources to school needs and ensure alignment with City Schools’ expectations.
 - c. *A centralized City Schools webpage.* This resource helps direct potential funders to DonorsChoose campaigns happening throughout City Schools.
 - d. *Integration of City Schools’ technology guidelines.* DonorsChoose maintains standards of acceptance for district technology and resource priorities to ensure teacher/school requests are aligned with school and district guidelines. Organizers don’t have to wonder what type of technology is best suited for schools, age appropriate for particular grades, and compatible with City Schools data privacy and security systems.
 - e. *A far-reaching and expanded donor base.* As of May 2020, 60% of funds raised through DonorsChoose for City Schools projects came from outside Maryland.
- 3. For details on how to successfully run a campaign for a classroom/school project using DonorsChoose, see [Guidelines for Running a DonorsChoose Campaign](#).

D. Other Resources for School Support with Fundraising

1. The Fund for Educational Excellence can serve as a fundraising resource. Staff can be consulted to potentially link schools and departments to the Foundation's system-wide support initiatives and projects. For more information, contact Roger Schulman, President and CEO, at rogers@ffee.org.
2. City Schools partners with the United Way of Central Maryland for an annual giving campaign (formerly known as the Combined Charities Campaign). Recognized school and district charity funds can be supported through the annual giving campaign. For details on including your school or department charity in the annual giving campaign or for support with running a successful United Way Employee/Giving campaign, contact Dr. Andrea Bowman at abowden@bcps.k12.md.us or Sophia Minott at the United Way of Central MD at sophia.minott@uwcm.org.

E. Promoting online fundraising campaigns

1. Online fundraising posts and any related promotional materials must be shared in ways that are consistent with the values and mission of City Schools.
2. Schools or departments interested in creating promotional materials, online postings, or links to an approved campaign platform from the school's website or social media page, can do so with the following considerations:
 - a. The online post description and any related promotional materials require advance notice to the principal/department designee.
 - b. Any use of student images must adhere to the applicable laws, Board policies, and administrative regulations.
 - c. Promotional materials must clearly state the purpose for which the funds are being raised, and that all net proceeds must be distributed for the purpose for which they were collected. In addition, fundraising efforts must be completed promptly after fundraising goals are met to ensure excess funds are not collected. No fundraiser should extend longer than one fiscal year.
 - d. Promotional materials should focus on the benefits that the campaign will bring. It is okay to share the challenges that staff and students face and how the campaign will help meet those challenges head-on. Just ensure that the staff member is painting City Schools in an accurate, positive way and avoid activities that could have the potential to negatively impact student or staff safety, as well as the reputation of the school or school system.
3. Promotional Materials must include the disclaimer that: *"These products or services are neither sponsored nor endorsed by Baltimore City Public Schools, City Schools CEO, or this school."*
4. Depending on the platform, it is best practice to ensure that principals/designees are notified when submissions are shared, and matches are made, to promote compliance.
5. For questions, contact Abigail Lane, Communications Manager, at amlane@bcps.k12.md.us.

F. Tracking and managing crowdfunding and online fundraising campaigns

1. One key benefit of DonorsChoose is that it provides standard tracking systems and offer regular reports of fundraising activities to City Schools. All other online fundraising activities require independent tracking by the organizers.

2. Accounting for fundraising must be managed in accordance with fiscal management procedures outlined by the Finance Office.
3. Any cash or financial payments received through fundraising efforts must be reported to the Board of School Commissioners. Notice must be provided by recording the details in accordance with Board Policy KCD and Administrative Regulation KCD-RA through City Schools' online central database (Partners in Education Portal). For questions related to gifts and donations reporting, please contact Monique Simms, Manager - Volunteers and Partners, at mjsimms@bcps.k12.md.us. Please note that reporting of fundraising through DonorsChoose is managed centrally by City Schools and, thus, additional reporting is not required.
4. Equipment, materials, and supplies received through any fundraising are property of City Schools, and not the staff member(s) who spearhead the fundraiser. Donated items should remain with the school or department of origin, even if the organizer is no longer an employee of City Schools.
5. Any equipment received or purchased through online fundraising must be added to City Schools' equipment inventory based on standards set forth by the Technology and Operations Offices. Before fundraising for equipment, the principal/department designee should consult with the related office(s) to gain knowledge of requirements and approval. Generally speaking, Chromebooks are the preferred hardware for student use and should be purchased through City Schools' approved vendor, whenever possible, to best integrate them with our systems. For other technology questions and list of preferred technology vendors, please reach out to Robert Griggs, Systems Administrator, at rgriggs@bcps.k12.md.us for more details.
6. The principal/department designee should consult with the Office of Finance and Procurement to ensure compliance with any applicable procurement procedures on items/equipment purchased from fundraiser proceeds.

In addition to the specific individuals mentioned above, please feel free to reach out with questions or concerns about online fundraising or crowdfunding to:

- Wayne Godfrey, Manager - Treasury/Capital, Finance Office, at WGodfrey@bcps.k12.md.us.
- Monique Simms, Manager – Partnerships and Volunteers, Family and Community Engagement department, at mjsimms@bcps.k12.md.us.

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