

ALA Unit Fundraising Tool Kit for ALA CA Girls State 2023-2024

Let's Start Fundraising to help send Delegates to ALA CA Girls State!.....	1
First – decide how much you want to raise and by when.....	1
Second – determine how many volunteers you need to help raise the money.	2
Third – determine who you can contact to raise money.	2
Fourth – be specific in what you want to do with the money.	2
Here are Five Awesome Fundraising Ideas that may not be in your current fundraising arsenal: .	2
The Heartfelt Donation Letter.....	2
The Restaurant Fundraiser.....	4
Turnkey Product Sales.....	7
Setting Up a GoFundMe Account	7
Hosting a Baby Picture Contest	7
Summary	8
Sample Donation Letter.....	9
Sample Thank You Letter	11

Let's Start Fundraising to help send Delegates to ALA CA Girls State!

Raising funds to send delegates to ALA California Girls State takes some planning and effort. Where to begin?

First – decide how much you want to raise and by when.

Are you trying to raise \$500 each to send four delegates to the upcoming ALA CA Girls State? That's \$2,000. With all fundraising, it takes upfront work to pay off with donations. Some of the ideas below can take between four weeks and three months to complete. You may need to have multiple efforts going on to raise the money you need to support your delegates. Consider this: set your fundraising goal a little higher so you can potentially sponsor *even more* delegates. There are many “orphan schools” that have no units to sponsor them and some of these schools may be in your sphere of influence. Your unit could be the hero by “adopting” one or more of these orphan schools to continue to expand the program.

Second – determine how many volunteers you need to help raise the money.

If you have a committee, you can plan an event or have some type of sale. Even if it's just a few people, you need to leverage your hours into the highest possible return. Divide and conquer is the best way to approach fundraising. Do you have someone who is a good writer? Put them in charge of the letters (or enlist someone who has a color printer and an eye toward details). Do you have some who are social and are well-connected in your community? Put them in charge of the restaurant fundraiser. Someone who is closely aligned with the Post? Put her in charge of the Baby Picture Contest. Many hands make light work is the key to effective fundraising. Spread the load to avoid burnout!

Third – determine who you can contact to raise money.

Do you have a list of past delegates and their parents? Do you have some local organizations that share the same values as the ALA and Girls State? Are there people who are interested in fostering the next generation of women leaders? These are all people who would be interested in supporting your unit sending delegates to ALA CA Girls State. Your list is valuable! Delegates who have just returned are still enthusiastic about Girls State. Knowing individuals within aligned groups is the key to getting in front of them. Protect this list and add to it every year.

Fourth – be specific in what you want to do with the money.

If you're trying to send MORE delegates to ALA CA Girls State, tell people that's your objective! If there are orphan schools in your area you've not been able to support because you haven't had the funds, tell people. If you're fundraising to keep sending delegates, let that fact be known! Also bring in testimonials from the girls who you've supported in the past to show the impact of going to ALA CA Girls State. If you haven't collected quotes from the girls, there are some examples in the sample letters to get you started. But eventually, you need to have quotes from girls who attend your area schools to make a positive connection. If you are specific ("we want to send one more girl than we did last year"), you can speak that goal into reality.

Here are Five Awesome Fundraising Ideas that may not be in your current fundraising arsenal:

The Heartfelt Donation Letter

The most important donation letter is the personalized one that is received with a snail mail Forever stamp! An email is easily discarded. Select organizations in your community that you or your committee have a personal connection to. And if you can send the letter twice, even better.

First, look to your affiliated American Legion Post, Sons of the American Legion, and Legion Riders, and ask specifically for them to support sending a delegate to ALA CA Girls State (ask for a \$500 or more donation). You can ask to speak at their meeting and potentially have a delegate come and speak at a meeting after ALA CA Girls State. You may have to make this ask over several years. Be gentle, but persistent in your annual asking! You can also look at other posts that are within your sphere of influence that don't have an ALA unit affiliated with them and ask

them to sponsor a Girls State delegate. Be bold! Yes, we know they have an American Legion Boys & Girls State program. We also know there are typically many more Legionnaires than there are ALA unit members and they may share some of their resources. The worst that can happen is they say no...this year. Continue to gently persist.

Then, start mining local organizations. Does someone (or a spouse) belong to Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, DAR, Soroptimist, Assistance League, Junior League, Knights of Columbus, P.E.O. Sisterhood, Women's Republican or Women's Democratic committees, etc. Look at the entrance to your city and see which clubs are active in your area. Look at your local high schools on their guidance counselor page and figure out who gives scholarships to high school seniors; they have a heart for leaders and scholars and could be excellent candidate organizations to contact. Determine who within your unit has a connection to the organization. If you don't have a personal connection, the ask is much harder. The personal connection ideally signs the letter from your ALA Unit to ask for a donation. For some organizations, start by asking for \$500, and perhaps they will give \$100-\$250.

Write to the delegates you sponsored last year and ask them to contribute to help send a delegate this year. You can ask the delegate to ask their parents and grandparents to contribute to keep this program going. Appeal to their enthusiasm for the program.

Write to your city council and tell them about ALA CA Girls State as a leadership incubator program that is helping to build the next generation of leaders. Ask for a small grant (\$500). The city may have a leadership development fund, or a children and youth fund they can tap into.

Write to your local school board that governs the schools you select delegates from and ask them to help with a small grant (\$500) to send an outstanding student leader to a leadership development program. If you are targeting to send a delegate from an orphan school, tell the school board what you're trying to do and they may uncover some money for a donation.

If your state assembly member or state senator lives in the city where you send delegates from, write to their local office, and ask for a donation to help send delegates to ALA CA Girls State. Make the connection for the assembly member or state senator directly.

Ideally, you should strive to send at least 30 personalized letters, which can yield \$1,000 or more. Does this take a lot of time? Yes, but it can yield significant donations and is ultimately worth the Forever Stamp and the time it takes to put together the letter. Proof the letter carefully. Make sure people in your unit who interact with the groups and organizations you're sending to know about the letter so the next time their paths cross with the organization, they can warmly ask.

When should you send? Plan to send letters in September/October when many organizations are finalizing their budgets and getting back to work after the summer holidays. This fits perfectly with your efforts to identify delegates for the upcoming ALA CA Girls State session in

June. A sample letter is attached; customize to your unit's goal and situation. If you didn't get the letters completed in the fall, don't fret! Send them out as soon as you can.

If an individual or organization sends a donation, immediately send a written thank you note expressing your gratitude for their generosity. A sample thank you letter is attached.

As a further follow up, invite these organizations and donors to your unit's recognition event when you ask the ALA CA Girls State delegate to come to the unit and report on their experience. Every unit should have a recognition event! It can be as simple as setting aside time at your regular meeting and inviting the delegates to come and speak or a separate event that's all about the delegates and thanking the community and the unit members for supporting ALA CA Girls State. The recognition event is a great opportunity to not only expose the unit members to the good of ALA CA Girls State, but also the donors and target organizations to become more familiar with Girls State. Even if the organization or donor doesn't attend, follow up with them to say thank you for their support of ALA CA Girls State. Ideally, that recognition event is held in September/October and then the donation letters are sent out after that event.

[The Restaurant Fundraiser](#)

The following was adapted from the National PTA. It usually takes about four weeks to put together a restaurant fundraiser and then about two to three weeks to receive the proceeds.

Restaurant night fundraisers are a simple way to raise money for ALA. Events can be run by a few volunteers, and they don't require a big investment of time or money.

How Does a Restaurant Fundraiser Work?

A restaurant night is a joint effort between the ALA and a restaurant. A date is selected and community members are invited to eat at the restaurant during a set time, such as 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. The restaurant donates a percentage of the profits generated by the unit's participants (typically excluding alcohol, tips, and tax). The percentage usually ranges from 10 percent to 20 percent, but it varies by restaurant (and sometimes by location).

You can plan a fall and a spring restaurant fundraiser per year. You'll be most successful when you promote a restaurant night ahead of time so community members can add it to their calendars and make sure to attend. If you can add a theme (red, white, and blue!) or give out small door prizes or favors, you can make these events more successful.

Pick the Right Restaurant for Your Event

Many restaurants – from fast food to family dining locations, locally owned to national chains – offer fundraising programs. If it's a chain restaurant, look online to see what their fundraising program is; you may have to fill out a form there to start the process.

- While the typical arrangement calls for restaurants to give your group 10 percent to 20 percent of the proceeds from your supporters, some will extend the deal to a percentage of total restaurant sales for a given time frame. Be open to negotiating, and

plan how you would ask for a better deal. Write down exactly what you want to ask and refer to your notes when you meet with the local manager.

- Think about the popularity of a particular chain in your community and how it will fit with other events on your calendar. For example, a recently opened restaurant may have some buzz in town and could make a good choice.
- Many national restaurant chains have detailed program descriptions on their websites. Often, restaurants will require your group to fill out a short form or application that is processed at the corporate level. Most of the forms are simple, although a few will ask questions such as “What is your fundraising goal for this event?” (Note: Restaurants often require groups to provide a tax ID number when completing the application.)
- Once your application has been processed, a local manager will contact your group. Try to build a rapport with the local manager so you have a designated go-to person throughout the process.
- Try to contact the manager between the lunch and dinner rushes (i.e., mid-afternoon). You’ll be more likely to connect with a manager who has time to listen and respond to your request.
- Ask up front what will seal the deal. Is there be a contract that both your group and the restaurant manager must sign? Find out how they will confirm your event.

Review the Details

- Review the written terms of the restaurant night program and discuss them with the local manager. Is it a flat percentage or a sliding scale based on number of guests or amount spent? In a few cases, restaurants may not donate anything if your group brings in fewer than 20 guests.
- Make sure the scheduling works for your group. Some restaurants allow groups to hold an event anytime, including weekends. Others set aside a few specific times each week for groups.
- For scheduling purposes, most restaurants recommend that you get in touch about four weeks before you wish to hold your event.
- In some cases, restaurants will require your group to have a few volunteers on site during the event.
- Most restaurants will provide a customized flyer or ticket for your restaurant night. Your job is to make copies and distribute them to your unit’s supporters in advance (restaurants generally won’t let your group stand outside the entrance and give them out). It’s important that participants understand that they *must* present the flyer or ticket at the restaurant, or in some cases mention your group’s name, for your unit to get credit for the cost of their meals.
- Find out when and how your group will receive its donation. Most restaurants will send a check within a few weeks.
- Look at your calendar to determine what will work for your unit. Select a few dates and forward those to the restaurant.
- Seek a few volunteers to help with promoting your event and get a few people to be on-site helpers the night of the event. They can do one-hour shifts or work together. You won’t need a big group of helpers, but it makes sense to have at least one

representative of your unit present throughout the evening. Ask whether one or two volunteers are willing to take some photos at the event.

- Consider handing out small door prizes, like flags, to boost community spirit when your families arrive at the restaurant. That way, they'll be able to spot each other as they dine.

Getting the Word Out

Publicity can make or break a restaurant night fundraiser—the more community members who know about the event in advance, the higher your attendance is likely to be.

- For starters, send out an invitation that promotes the event to help your unit. If possible, tie it to a specific fundraising project: “Come for a meal at XYZ Restaurant and help raise money to send XX delegates to 20XX ALA CA Girls State!”
- Communicate the date and hours so they know when to come to the restaurant.
- Communicate that this is a no-fuss event. All they must do is bring the flyer/ticket, eat, and the restaurant will automatically donate a percentage of what they spend to the unit.
- Remind supporters what they need to do so your group gets credit—bring the flyer or ticket or mention your unit’s name. Most restaurants will not allow groups to pass out flyers or tickets on site, which makes it even more important to distribute them widely in advance.
- When publicizing your restaurant night, reach out to the community in a variety of ways, including email, Facebook, and Twitter. Post a screenshot of the flyer on Facebook to catch people’s attention.
- A few days before the event, send a reminder and tell the community again what they need to bring to participate.

The Big Night

- On the day of your event, check in with the restaurant to confirm your plans.
- Send out a last-minute reminder to the community via social channels.
- Arrive at the restaurant ahead of the start time and check in with the manager.
- Be available on site in case any of your supporters have questions.
- Make sure you sit and enjoy a meal with your own family or unit!

Follow Up

- Send a thank-you note to the restaurant manager.
- Give your unit and the community an update in your newsletter and through other channels to share the results of the restaurant night!
- Post photos from the event on Facebook and in your newsletter. This will show people that the night was a success, and it will help build a sense of community.
- Within a week of the event, send an email asking your unit for feedback so you know what they liked and didn’t like about the event. This will help you plan your next restaurant night and make it even more of a success

Turnkey Product Sales

If you have a larger unit and post, consider doing a product sale, such as See's Candy, for members, especially at Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, or Easter. These kinds of sales give you a percentage of the sales. This is a turnkey operation with See's Candy giving you all the materials you need. You can do an entirely online sale where you set up the online shop and spread the word to your supporters and unit members and the candy is shipped directly to the buyer. You can also presell the candy by taking orders and then the candy is shipped to one location and you deliver. The See's Candy profit is typically 20 percent on the purchase price, so funds can add up quickly. The benefit: no risk to the unit with upfront costs. You make a percentage on what you sell. See <https://fundraising.sees.com>

If your market is already saturated with See's Candy fundraisers, go online for additional turnkey product ideas: <https://doublethedonation.com/product-fundraising-ideas/>

Setting Up a GoFundMe Account

Online fundraising is simple with platforms that already have payment processing built in. GoFundMe is the granddaddy of online fundraising and is a very simple platform to use. You can quickly build a GoFundMe account using your Unit's Tax ID number as a charitable giving site. Set a specific and attainable goal: "We want to send 6 delegates to Girls State from Unit XXX and it will cost \$3,000." You can tell your story and populate with quotes about how Girls State changes lives (Hint: take some of these quotes from the donation appeal letter if you don't have specific quotes from your area high school delegates). You can add a photo. Then start sharing with friends, unit members, and ask them to donate. Put it out in your newsletter. Ask people to pass along the message, "Are You From Girls State?" and ask them to donate. Whenever a donation occurs, write an immediate thank you online. This is so important and helps people feel good about giving. If you have a website, include a link to GoFundMe. Also, include the link in your newsletter or on any social media. GoFundMe takes a very small percentage of the actual donation as a payment processing fee so your unit will not get 100 percent of the donation, but the platform is turnkey so you are paying for the convenience of them hosting the fundraiser.

<https://www.gofundme.com>

Hosting a Baby Picture Contest

If your ALA Unit is connected to a Post, especially a post with a bar, ask for permission to hold a Baby Picture Contest. It's a very simple, fun fundraiser that requires just a few things: ask members to submit 8x10 cute, fun, silly, or crazy baby picture of a real person in your unit to a single volunteer coordinating the contest (no peeking by other members). The coordinator puts the pictures into either a frame or seals them into a plastic sleeve with a number on the front. Only the coordinator knows who the baby pictures are! The coordinator also includes a sealed donation cylinder can (purchase sealed poppy donation cans from Legion Emblem and cover with paper and the matching number). Display the baby pictures with matching can at the Post bar. Post and Unit members vote on their favorite baby picture with their money. The donation is \$5 per vote. Publicize the Baby Picture Contest with a small banner or poster telling

what you'll do with the proceeds (send delegates to Girls State) and open the cans during a Post or Unit event. The winner is the baby picture that receives the most donations and gets a framed Honorary ALA CA Girls State Delegate certificate or other prize. Announce the totals. (Remember to bring a can opener to open the sealed tubes!) The following year, you can ask for another set of baby pictures, or you can ask for a baby picture of the Legion member who the ALA unit member is through (or you can ask for spouse baby pictures), or baby pictures of children, or grandchildren. However, keep it within a theme (member, Legion member, spouse, children, grandchildren) for that particular year.

Alternatively, this can be set up online or through your unit's newsletter. Have the coordinator collect baby pictures from members and scan them to post online. The coordinator assigns each baby picture a number and then in an article in the newsletter, asks the membership to vote for their favorite. Members can also ask their friends to vote! Set up a PayPal, Venmo, or Zelle account that connects to your unit's bank account for easier donations. Each of these payment processing platforms have very easy applications to set up donations and payments are easily transferred directly to your unit's bank account.

Summary

Holding one or more of these fundraisers can raise some significant dollars to help your unit send delegates to ALA CA Girls State. Don't be shy about hosting these fundraisers. When the community understands the value and benefits of ALA California Girls State, they want to participate in this important leadership incubator program.

The following pages include sample a donation letter and a sample thank you letter. Customize these letters to your own unit and use your unit's letterhead (should have a logo, your unit's mailing address and Tax ID number) so the correspondence looks official.

Good Luck! May the Funds Be With You!

Sample Donation Letter

<Date>

<Name, title, if applicable>

<Organization name, if applicable>

<Address, or PO Box>

<City, State, Zip>

Dear <Name>:

We are writing to ask you for financial help to send delegates to the American Legion Auxiliary's XXth Annual Session of California Girls State, on <dates of the upcoming session> at California State University, Sacramento. ALA Unit XXX of <your location> sponsors delegates from the following high schools:

- <Name of school>
- <Name of school>
- <Name of school>
- ...

<We are also seeking to send delegates from <name of school>, which has not previously had a delegate!>

We are writing to you today because <name of organization> also supports these high schools through <scholarships and programming that benefits these schools or other description of how their mission aligns with ALA CA Girls State>. <This is the place to demonstrate a connection with the organization...it's ok to drop some names!>

American Legion Auxiliary California Girls State is one of the most respected experiential learning programs focusing on our democratic form of government, citizenship, and leadership, and it epitomizes the ALA's mission to support patriotism and Americanism. These values are very compatible with <organization name>. In the space of just one week, the <XXX ... can say 500+> delegates form a complete, functional government at the city, county, and state level. They develop policy, party platforms, pass legislation, adjudicate court cases, and experience government in action. It's amazing to see how the delegates start and finish their week together. Girls who come home from the Girls State experience say they have "found their voice," "feel empowered," and "want to get involved in local, regional, state, and national issues and politics." It's exciting to behold. <If you have a personal connection to ALA Girls State...either as an alumna or as a volunteer at the session, this is the place to put that information.>

ALA California Girls State is an empowering experience that changes girls' lives. For some, it puts them on a different trajectory where they can use their voices. Here are quotes from just a few of the girls who attended ALA CA Girls State:

"I never expected to gain the depth of knowledge, perspective, and life changing experiences I ended up receiving from my time there. It was a place where every woman was eager to hear new ideas and debate them with the utmost respect. It was the place where I learned the definition of empowerment and what it is to be a true leader." – ALA CA Girls State Delegate

"Words cannot convey how grateful I am for the experience you have provided me. I walked away from every conversation I had at Girls State with a new perspective, a new idea." – ALA CA Girls State Delegate

Will you help us send delegates to American Legion Auxiliary California Girls State? We are seeking donations of \$500 per delegate per delegate for the week-long program. <Our unit is on the smaller size, with a very small core of active members; we're actively working to increase our membership so we can continue to support this great program, and other programs that focus on veterans>. We fundraise throughout the year and would very much appreciate any contribution you could make to help defray the costs of this valuable program. We hope we can count on a donation from <organization name> to help with this worthwhile program.

Donations in any amount may be sent to <your unit's address>. We are a 501 (c) (19) veterans organization <your unit's Tax ID>.

Thank you for your support of Girls State.
Sincerely,

<Name and relationship to your unit and Girls State>
<Phone number>

Sample Thank You Letter

<Date>

<Name of individual and title, if applicable>

<Name of organization, if applicable>

<Street address or PO Box>

<City, State, Zip>

Dear <Name of individual>,

On behalf of the American Legion Auxiliary Unit XXX of <your location>, please accept our heartfelt thanks for the generosity of the <name of organization> for your support of our unit's quest to send XX delegates from to ALA California Girls State. Your <\$XXX> donation was a game-changer for our unit and just the support we needed! We are grateful for organizations like <name of the organization> who said **YES!** to helping cultivate the next generation of women leaders. With your help, our unit sponsored XX delegates to Girls State...and they are very excited about the prospect of building and running a fully functioning government in just a few weeks. The schools we sponsored include:

- <name of high school>
- <name of high school>
- <name of high school>
-

Interviewing prospective delegates is always a "shot in the arm" where we get to see amazing youth in action. It's the affirmation for the work we...and <name of the organization> ...do day in and day out. We know you're nodding your head because of the amazing outreach <description of how the organization helps to support leadership in your city>. The future really is bright!

Don't take it from us, listen to what some ALA Girls State Delegates had to say about their experience:

"From the close friends I met to the immense confidence I gained, Girls State has truly changed my life. You have changed my perspective on the world." – ALA CA Girls State Delegate

"I enjoyed being surrounded by such empowered women and girls who had so much intellectual power, emotional strength, and zest for needed political changes. Each day there was an opportunity to find something new about myself. Thank you for sponsoring me and I thoroughly enjoyed this amazing experience." – ALA CA Girls State Delegate

Again, we are very grateful for <name of the organization>. Busy volunteers are the very best; together, we change the world, one volunteer hour at a time. We're so thankful for the generosity of the <organization> and your hardworking members.

Sincerely,

<Signature>

<Name, Unit title>

<phone number>