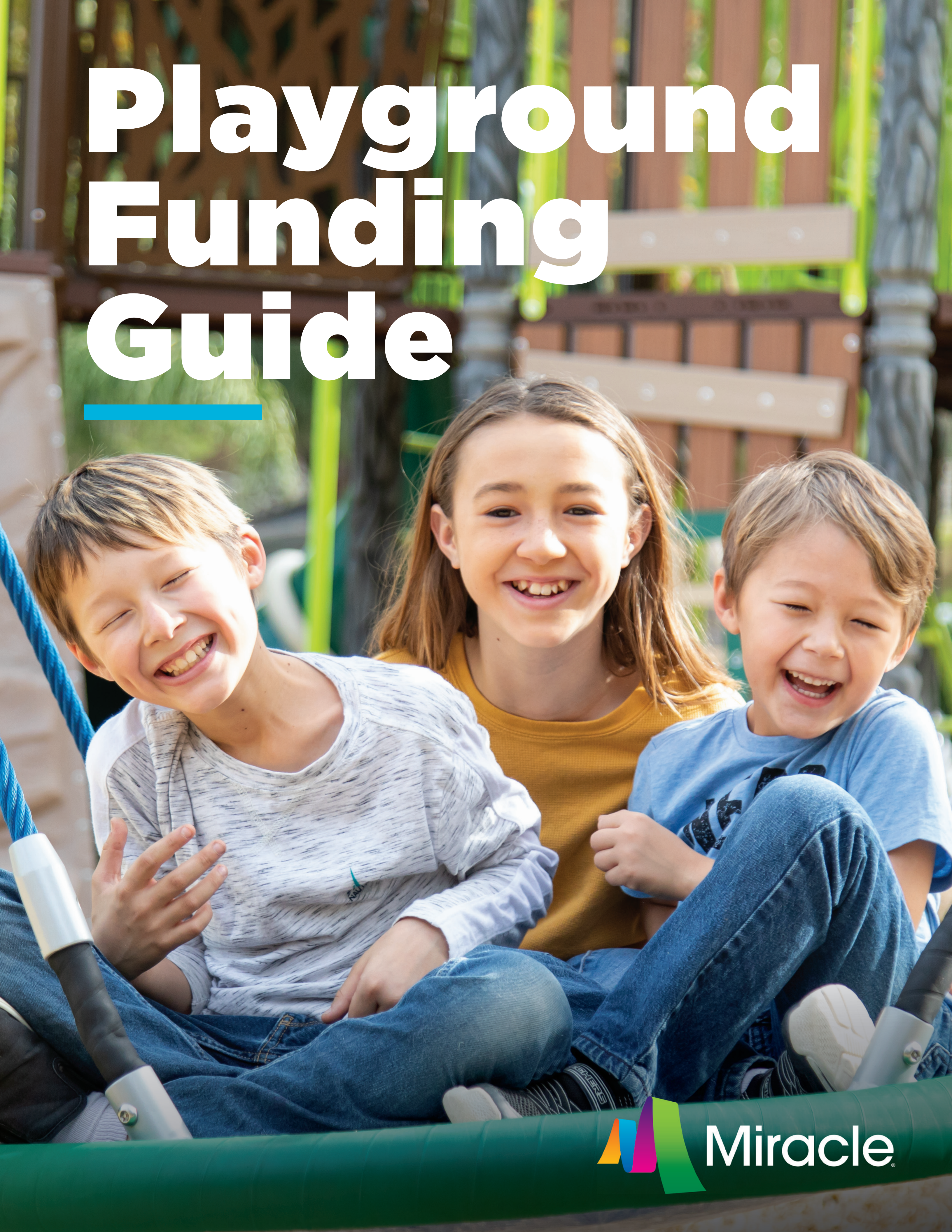
Playground Funding Guide



Miracle

The art of raising funds

Are you trying to raise funds to make your playground dream a reality? You've come to the right place. We're here to help. And good news—raising funds isn't rocket science. It's simply about getting the right message to the right person, at the right time.

This guide will answer three specific questions on how to raise funds for your next playground.

1. Who Will Fund My Project and Where Can We Find Them?

There's only so much money you can raise from bake sales. Like any other charitable organization, you need to examine all the funding pools that are open to you – and dive into the most promising ones.

There are four different types of donor who can contribute to your playground:

- **Individuals**: Local business leaders, the general public, friends, extended family
- **Businesses**: Brand-name companies with hundreds of employees, or small- to medium-sized enterprises located in your community
- **Foundations**: Community foundations, family foundations, services clubs (e.g. Rotary Club, Elks Club)
- **Government**: Federal, state, and municipal government grants

Your best donor prospects will be located in a 50-mile radius of your playground. Start with your local county and the largest city closest to you.

Once you've seen all the available donors in your immediate area, try branching out on a regional or even state level to take in your entire giving community. Though there are some foundations that may give to your playground on a national basis, those opportunities are pretty limited.

When you're looking for a donor, there are three things to ask yourself:

- **Do they donate in my area?**
- **Do they support projects like mine?**
- **How can I start a conversation with them?**

These are some local prospects that are ideal supporters of playground projects:

Large Corporations: If they donate, they usually invest in the communities where their employees live and work. Banks and other financial service agencies make great prospects, for example, as they typically have open application processes and enthusiastic volunteers. They're also hungry for positive public relations stories of their employees doing good in their community. Think of other large businesses in your area, then start building a relationship with a representative who can advance your request. Any kind of relationship that takes you up the corporate food chain is a valuable investment of time and energy.

Wealthy Individuals: It's a bit of a truism that everyone is only six degrees of separation away from the richest and most famous people in the world. Find someone with a pre-existing relationship who can open doors to wealthy people in your community. If you don't have anyone like that on your team, start the process yourself.

Family Foundations: Start by identifying the local community foundation and a handful of the top family foundations in your area. Here's a hint: go to the local pool, community center, hospital and/or any other major community focused facility and take the names off their donor wall. You should also conduct a news search of recent donations in your community to identify all the 'big fish'.

Family Run Businesses: You may be surprised how much money the local grocery store owner or lawyers' office generates each year. Local business owners want to demonstrate their good citizenship. Remember: businesspeople almost always prefer to donate materials or labor, rather than reach into their own pocket.

Chain Stores: Like banks, local chain-store managers often have their own giving budget. They can also recommend your project for their national or regional offices to consider. Get the ball rolling by speaking with the local manager and giving them one of your campaign packages. They might even know of other businesses in the area that can help.

Service Clubs: Never underestimate the power of your local Elks, Rotary, or other dedicated service clubs. They're not only great potential donors, they can connect you to other wealthy people and decision makers in your community. They're also a great source of volunteers when it comes time to stage your big campaign launch event.

2. What's the Most Effective Way to Approach a Potential Donor?

Relationships are the lifeblood of the charitable sector—people give to people they know.

Once you've identified that potential donor, start thinking about ways you can get yourself and your project in front of them. You'll want to start by leveraging existing relationships, and building new ones, with all the people in your community who can contribute to your playground.

In the end, a successful donor partnership almost always boils down to a few key ingredients:

- **Engagement with the right stakeholder (e.g. who's the decision maker, who writes the check?)**
- **Ongoing cultivation and stewardship (e.g. it typically takes more than one touch point with a donor to convince them to contribute)**
- **A well-timed request (e.g. always try to ask as early in the year as possible; by October-November, most big donors are starting to look to next year; be aware of calendar vs. fiscal year budget timeframes, too)**

Try asking your most extroverted and best-connected supporters to help you with the relationship development task. Create a brief script that outlines how they're going to speak to that donor and ask for their money. It will give everyone involved confidence and help define your key selling features (e.g. inclusiveness, community development, fitness, and recreation for children in your community).

Bottom Line: Your investment in relationship development will pay dividends when it comes time for that donor to review their latest requests and make a decision.

There are four basic methods you can employ to engage with a donor:

1. **Grant Applications**: If a foundation or a business has an online application, be sure to review their giving guidelines closely and follow their instructions to the letter. Failure to follow instructions will almost always result in your application being tossed out. Keep in mind that you're being graded on each answer, so do your best to answer each question fully and with as much transparency as possible.

2. **Personal Requests**: Wherever possible, you should always try to meet face-to-face with a prospective donor to share your passion for the project and demonstrate your capability to get the job done. If you can't reach the key contact by phone, or through a personal connection, try sending them a two-page letter of inquiry with lots of photos/renderings, then follow up after.

3. **In-Person Events**: Well-positioned, signature-type fundraising events can be great money-makers. Try hosting a party at your home (or the home of a wealthy supporter) and get five to seven key prospects in the room for a presentation from a special guest. Organize a tour of your property with the playground designer and some key prospects and existing supporters. Remember—if you feed them, they will come.

4. **Online Fundraising**: Although you may not be comfortable with the idea at first, try looking at some of the electronic-based opportunities available to your campaign, like a crowdfunding campaign, online auction, or peer-to-peer events (e.g. a sponsored walk/run). These types of events can be particularly effective for projects with a strong social media following, or a high level of community awareness.

3. How Can I Set up and Manage a Winning Fundraising Campaign?

Successful fundraising campaigns are a reflection of solid organization, day-to-day oversight, and ongoing management.

Think of your campaign like a game of football. Chances are you're not going to score that touchdown with one big throw. What you need to do is move the ball a little closer to the goal line every day. It will probably take a few attempts before you score, so be patient. You'll need at least three to six months of outreach and relationship development to start seeing the fruits of your labor in the form of pledges, verbal commitments, and invitations for follow-up meetings.

Here are a few strategies you can employ to manage your campaign and ensure it stays on track:

Create a Campaign Package: One of the first things you'll want to do is assemble a few quick-read documents about your project. Start by building a two- or three-page overview of your project that includes your financial goals, development plan, and timeline. Be sure to outline why the community needs your project. You'll also want to create a separate project budget that includes all campaign and construction related expenses.

Buy some presentation packages from the local office store and you're in business.
Add new material as information becomes available (e.g. overview of your team/board, newspaper articles or social media posts, list of recognition opportunities).

Many heads are better than one: The more people you can engage in your project, the higher the likelihood of success. If you can, it's always advisable to create a campaign committee of four to five stakeholders. Set a regular meeting (weekly or monthly) to pool your ideas, add new prospects, and coordinate ongoing outreach to potential donors. Ideally, your committee should be chaired by the most professional and engaged individual on your team.

Prioritize your prospect: Try segmenting your donor prospects into three tiers based on their overall alignment with the project. Then record and track all your outreach to them on an ongoing basis. Here's a good way to prioritize those individual and organizations:

- **Tier 1**: Your very best prospects; you're going to do everything you can to build a relationship with these donors before you ask for their money.
- **Tier 2**: These are less well aligned, or easy to connect with, prospects; with some cultivation, or a well-timed letter of inquiry, they could move to Tier 1.
- **Tier 3**: These are speculative donors, with a lower priority to give and no formal application process or existing relationship; try sending them an event invitation, or letter of inquiry, and see what happens.

Rules to live by

The following are some of the rules that typically govern the donation process. Take them to heart and your campaign will have a higher probability of reaching its objectives.

Rule #1. If you don't ask, you don't receive.

Question: What's the #1 reason a donor failed to contribute to your charity project?

Answer: No one asked them.

Action: Look closely at your evolving donor pipeline and think about the ways you can continue to touch those top prospects through a face-to-face meeting, follow-up event invitation, emails, or simple letter and brochure.

Rule #2. Community awareness will power up your campaign.

Does anyone else in your community know about your project besides you and your team? The more people who know about your project, the more likely they are to say 'yes' when you ask them.

Action: Develop a shortlist of local media, journalists, and TV personalities in your area who might be interested in your project. Ask them for an interview or prepare a one-page press release about your project and send it out to everyone who matters. Create a social media page and direct message every journalist, community leader, and local influencer you can. You may be surprised by the positive response.

Rule #3. Most donors want to be recognized.

The local bank or philanthropist might like the idea of putting their name on your playground. Donors, especially individuals and local businesses, want to be able to say, "I bought that piece of equipment," rather than, "I was one of 100 people who contributed to that playground."

Action: Develop a plan for recognizing your donors in front of their peers. Think 'big check' presentations, a permanent recognition installation adjacent to your project, or an affordable gift for everyone who contributes above a certain dollar threshold.

Rule #4. People give where they live.

Many states have their own unique geography and regions. They act as boundaries to where people give. Begin by understanding that the majority of donors want to raise the quality of life in their community before looking elsewhere.

Action: Focus your donor identification efforts on corporations, businesses, individuals and foundations in your home region before moving out into the next biggest city or market.

We hope you've found this guide helpful.
For more information, visit
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