

# Grassroots Fundraising Guide

If you're reading this, you're probably part of the grassroots climate movement. We're a gathering of many voices, governed from the bottom up, demanding change. As much as possible, we want our funding to come from the grassroots as well!

This guide is meant to provide ideas and tips for doing some grassroots fundraising, both from within the climate movement and from friends, family, and acquaintances who may be concerned about climate change but less actively involved.

When you raise money for the climate movement, you amplify your impact by funding a staff person to spend dedicated hours supporting our movement, providing funds to purchase signs and other materials that will help spread the message, and engaging in conversations that build awareness about climate change and what we can do to reduce carbon emissions. Grassroots fundraising isn't just asking for money; it's another important way we build the climate movement!<sup>1</sup>

[House Parties](#)

[Local Businesses & Events](#)

[Other Ideas](#)

[How to Collect Donations](#)

## House Parties

House parties are a great way to bring people together to socialize, discuss climate change, and raise some money. Below you will find some of the basic information you need to get started.

### **Step 1: Identify a Location, Time, and Place**

If you are the host, this will probably be your home—although if you have a friend with a strong interest in climate change who could host more people more comfortably, you might consider cohosting at their house instead. The key part about a location is that it's a) free, and b) has a warm, inviting atmosphere. So your home is probably perfect! Talk to the rest of your family, and find a date and time that works with everyone's schedules. Weekend evenings or mid-mornings are often good times for social gatherings, and we find that two-hour spans are usually best, though sometimes people will stay a little longer.

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<sup>1</sup> Better Future Project provides staff, administrative, and fundraising support to 350 Massachusetts for a Better Future, referred to as 350 Mass throughout this document. 350 Mass is a statewide network of volunteers developing and pursuing campaigns for meaningful action to address the climate crisis.

## **Step 2: Set a Fundraising Goal**

Set a fundraising goal for your house party. We recommend somewhere in the range of \$500–\$2,000, but you know your network better than we do. Think about how many people are likely to attend, and divide by that number to figure out what an average donation would look like. (For example, if you can get 15 people to come and each give \$100, that’s \$1,500!) You might find it easier to first generate a guest list (see below) and then set a goal related to whom you plan to invite.

## **Step 3: Develop a Guest List**

Think through friends, family, colleagues, movement colleagues—basically, everyone who lives nearby and shares an interest in a liveable future. When done right, fundraising house parties do not just raise funds for the movement, they also help grow it! Think about who is in your circle who might benefit from learning more about climate change and the growing movement to address it.

### **Step 3A (Optional): Assemble a Host Committee**

If you have friends who might be interested in supporting your efforts beyond attending the party, don’t go it alone! Assemble a small host committee of people who are willing to take on some of the expense and/or responsibility related to hosting. This committee could also be made up of people willing to make bigger financial pledges in advance.

Serving on the host committee would involve:

- 1) Making a firm pledge (perhaps at least \$100) in advance of the event
- 2) Having their name on the invitation that goes out
- 3) Getting a thank-you at the party for being on the host committee
- 4) Helping to expand the guest list with their own family, friends, and colleagues

Having a host committee can give your party a boost by guaranteeing a certain number/amount of donations, increasing the number of people who care about the party succeeding, and spreading the work of identifying and inviting prospective guests.

## **Step 4: Identify a Hook**

What will draw people in? A featured speaker (which BFP would be happy to provide from among our staff)? Music? A fun theme? A combination of the above? Sometimes an appealing menu is all it takes. Whatever your hook, it will help you “pitch” the event to prospective guests.

## **Step 5: Create (and Send) the Invitation**

The invitation does not have to be fancy—a simple email will do! Or you can use something like Paperless Post (<https://www.paperlesspost.com/>), Eventbrite (<https://www.eventbrite.com/>), or other online platforms if you want to take things to the next level.

Note: We’ve used Paperless Post for past fundraising parties, and it allows for fairly easy tracking of RSVPs and sending out of reminders (to guests who are attending and those who

haven't replied yet). Paperless Post offers limited services and invitation options for free, and upgrades are fairly inexpensive. The downside is that it can be challenging to work with some of the invitation templates.

The invitation should include:

- The name of the event (which could just be “Annabell’s 350 Mass Fundraising House Party!” or “Cocktails for the Climate”)
- The time, date, and location of the event
- The “hook”
- An encouragement to bring checkbooks—this is a fundraiser, after all!
- The names of the host committee members (optional)
- A suggested donation or suggested range of donation
- A date by which guests should RSVP (usually a week or so before the event)

The sample below is a two-page invitation via Paperless Post for a Better Future Project house party with a fairly high suggested donation and large host committee (names redacted for privacy). The hook was the upcoming Paris climate talks of 2015, and the invitation is fairly formal. Your invitation should reflect your style and the vibe of your party!



**Details**

We are pleased to invite you and a guest to a fundraising party to benefit **Better Future Project**. Please join us for French-themed refreshments and conversation about local and global climate action as we look ahead to the United Nations climate conference in Paris.

**Host Committee**

Kindly RSVP by **Monday, October 12, 2015**. Please direct queries and responses to Beth Newhall, Director of Development, at [beth@betterfutureproject.org](mailto:beth@betterfutureproject.org) or 312-218-7557.

**Suggested minimum donation of \$200**

### Step 6: Prepare for the Event

There are a handful of things you want prepared in the lead-up to the event.

- Drinks and finger foods: Full meals can be a lot of work and inhibit guests from mingling comfortably, so we usually suggest lighter fare.
- Agenda: Please leave plenty of time for informal conversations, as well as some time for music (optional), and definitely for someone to make a fundraising pitch!
  - Sample Agenda:
    - 5:00p–5:20p: Guests arrive and mingle
    - 5:20p–5:25p: Welcome from host
    - 5:25p–5:45p: Guests get food, mingle some more
    - 5:45p–6:00p: Organizer talks about the work of 350 Mass
    - 6:00p–6:05p: Host discusses why s/he supports 350 Mass, makes fundraising pitch. Puts out a basket to accept donations.
    - 6:05–6:30p: Guests write checks, ask questions, mingle
    - 6:30p: Raffle of a couple of door prizes
- Signs: If you need people to park in a particular location or your house might be hard to find, consider making a few signs to guide guests. Likewise, if you'll be hosting guests

who've never been to your house before, consider putting a sign on the bathroom door. You might also want to wear a nametag that distinguishes you as the host.

- Your pitch: The number one reason people don't donate is because they haven't been asked. While the party is in full swing, be sure to get everyone's attention for a few minutes and make your fundraising ask. Remember, you're among people who care about you and/or the issue of climate change—both good reasons for them to make a donation. And since your invitation indicated the party was a fundraiser, this will not be a surprise for anyone. So go ahead and thank everyone for coming, and make your pitch! Take a few minutes to explain what the organization does, why you support it, and why it's important for others to support it as well. If you're nervous, practice in advance with your family or a friend. You'll almost certainly be gratified by how much people are willing to support you and the organization.

Details for donations:

- Checks should be made out to Better Future Project. If the donations are intended for 350 Mass, donors should write that in the memo.
- After the event, we can arrange to pick up donations from the host, or they can be mailed or brought to our office at 30 Bow St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

### **Step 7: Say thank you!**

- Better Future Project will send a thank-you, either electronically or via hard copy, for every donation. But you can also show your guests your appreciation by dropping them brief thank-you notes (electronic is fine) after the party. This will also make guests more likely to give again when next you ask!

### **Bonus Points**

- There are a number of creative ways you can make your event more fun and/or successful, including hosting a silent auction where friends, guests, and so on, can offer gifts, services, vacation spots, etc., that you can auction off at the event. Note that holding an auction requires some additional record keeping and specific types of documentation, so please talk to a member of Better Future Project staff if you would like to proceed with an auction (especially if there are higher priced items involved).
- Customize your party to your own preferences and those of your friends. If you enjoy board games, host a game night. Consider having a family-friendly picnic or barbecue.
- You could raffle off a gift or gifts as door prizes. Climate-relevant gifts could include a packet of books by Bill McKibben, Naomi Klein, and others or 350 Mass tee-shirts.
- If guests won't know each other, consider providing name tags.
- If you belong to a local node of 350 Mass, you might want to have information about upcoming events or actions guests can take in their community.
- Consider snapping some photos! These can be a great addition to a thank-you email or something fun to share with your node. We could even add one to the weekly 350 Mass newsletter.

- Better Future Project is happy to provide informational materials to hand out to guests. Please don't hesitate to contact Craig Altemose, executive director, at [craig@betterfutureproject.org](mailto:craig@betterfutureproject.org) or Beth Newhall, director of development, at [beth@betterfutureproject.org](mailto:beth@betterfutureproject.org).



350 Mass Cape Cod "Sink or Swim" fundraiser and awareness-building party

### Sample Timeline

- Two months in advance: Select a date and theme for the party. Begin contacting prospective host committee members.
- Six weeks to one month in advance: Finalize details. Draft and send invitations.
- Three to two weeks in advance: Make a shopping list for party or place catering order.
- Two weeks in advance: Send a reminder to folks who haven't responded.
- One week in advance: Send a reminder to attendees.
- A few days in advance: Prepare agenda, welcoming remarks, fundraising pitch.
- Directly in advance: Prepare food and set up.
- Day of: Have fun!
- NOTE: If you want to have a special speaker, be sure to contact the person and ask them to reserve the date as far in advance as possible. Send reminders a month and week in advance, and make sure they have good directions to the party site.

## Local Businesses & Events

Many small businesses are excited to support local organizations, and 350 Mass is no exception. Do you frequent a local pub? Maybe the proprietor would let you “pull pints” for an evening and keep a percentage of the night’s sales. Do you patronize a business that might donate an item for a fundraising raffle or auction?<sup>2</sup> Think about the businesses you frequent and whether there might be an alignment between their values and the efforts of 350 Mass. It never hurts to ask!

Here are some Massachusetts businesses that have regular opportunities for local nonprofits to conduct fundraisers:

- Flatbread Company—with locations in Somerville, Canton, Salem, Bedford, Georgetown, Amesbury—does Tuesday night benefits at their locations. Events typically raise \$400–\$1000 for the organization in question. See <https://www.flatbreadcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf/FB-Benefit-Contract-Somerville-5-19-11.pdf> for application instructions.
- Blue Ribbon Barbecue in Arlington and West Newton holds benefit nights during which nonprofits receive 20% of the cost of the meal of anyone who mentions their name. See <http://www.blueribbonbbq.com/charity>.
- Panera offers benefit days at their cafes. See <http://fundraising.panerabread.com/> for more details.

If you do work with a business to hold a fundraiser, be sure to give yourself plenty of time to get the word out. The more people who attend/participate, the more money your event will raise!

## Other Ideas

- Are the holidays coming up? A birthday? Consider asking friends and family for donations in lieu of gifts. (Donors get a tax deduction, even when they make a gift on someone else’s behalf.)
- Are you part of a 350 Mass node that meets regularly? Ask for a few minutes during your next meeting to talk about the importance of supporting the climate movement with gifts of money as well as time, for those who are able. Encourage folks to think about ways they could do some fundraising as well.
- If your 350 Mass node tables at festivals or participates in or holds other events to build awareness and recruit new members, consider having a donation can at the ready. People who might feel that they don’t have the time to attend meetings might be glad to have the opportunity to give \$20 instead.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the IRS requires meticulous records for raffles, auctions, and other similar fundraising activities. Please speak to Beth Newhall, [beth@betterfutureproject.org](mailto:beth@betterfutureproject.org), if you wish to hold a raffle or an auction.

## How to Collect Donations

People can give online at [betterfutureproject.org/donate](https://betterfutureproject.org/donate).

- Those who wish to direct their donations to 350 Mass should select **350 Massachusetts** from the **Program** dropdown menu.
- Those who wish to use their donation to support our student organizing work, including the Climate Organizing Fellowship, should select **Student Organizing** from the **Program** dropdown menu.
- People can sign up for an automatic monthly donation (and direct the donation to 350 Mass, if they wish) at [betterfutureproject.org/donate\\_monthly](https://betterfutureproject.org/donate_monthly).

If people prefer to donate by check, they can make the check out to **Better Future Project**.

- Those who wish to direct their gift to 350 Mass should indicate **350 Mass** in the memo.
- Checks can be mailed to  
Better Future Project  
30 Bow St.  
Cambridge, MA 02138

If you hold a fundraiser and collect small cash donations, please note that the donors will not receive a receipt for a tax deduction unless the donation includes a written record stating the donor's name, the donation amount, and the date of donation. If donors do not require a receipt for cash donations, you can collect the cash and deliver it to our office at the address above, or you can deposit the cash and write a check for the same amount. Please do not mail cash.

Contact Beth Newhall, [beth@betterfutureproject.org](mailto:beth@betterfutureproject.org), if you have any questions or concerns about donations.

Thank you!