

USO Challenge

What is the USO Challenge?

USO Challenge is a great way to raise money to support our troops and their families. It involves teams competing in Olympic-style events. Each team raises money prior to the event that goes to support troops and their families. Awards can be given for individual contests in the USO Challenge as well as team awards for events won, fundraising and team spirit. This is a great way to:

- team build
- boost morale
- foster good-hearted competition
- get some exercise
- relieve stress

Teams can be formed from different departments within a company, clubs, fraternities/sororities on college campuses, or other families in a neighborhood. A company can also host an event and invite their vendors and business partners to participate. Be creative and rally a wide variety of groups for your event!

Checklist for Success

- Set a specific fundraising goal. How much money do you want to raise? Build a budget and plan to achieve the goal you set. [\[see sample budget\]](#)
- Develop a team to help you. Recruit a full complement of potential volunteers and don't leave anyone out. People naturally want to help others so give them a way to help! [\[see sample organizational chart\]](#) [\[see "Where to Look for Help"\]](#)
- Develop a timeline [\[see sample timeline\]](#)

Keep it simple! Elaborate events don't necessarily raise more money...they just wear out the organizer.

If you start to feel overwhelmed, stop. Take a breath. Ask yourself if this is something critical to the success of the fundraiser. If it is, think of who can help you get it done. If it feels too overwhelming to get complete all at once, break the task down into multiple steps. Cross each step off as you finish it. You will feel a sense of accomplishment.

As you begin to plan your event, answer these questions:

What do you want to accomplish with this event? Here are just a few potential answers. Note those that apply or write your own.

I want...

...to get the members of my church/club/alumni group/family/neighbors more engaged

...to give back to our troops and their families for all that they do for us

...to have fun

...to become more involved in the community

...OTHER

How much money do you want to raise to support the troops? (after any expenses)

Suppose you want to raise \$10,000. Use the sample budget and organizational chart to help you get there. [\[see sample budget\]](#) [\[see sample organizational chart\]](#)

How many people do you want to attend? Are you trying to engage a certain group of people?

How many people can you comfortably host at the venue for your USO Challenge? Do you have a community center, school or other location where you could host a larger crowd? Will this be an indoor or outdoor event? Where will people park?

If you want to engage a larger group of people, you may need to think of alternative locations to host the challenge. A local park or school athletic field could be a great location.

How many people do you think you can get to help you?

You will need people to help you for the success of the event, to maintain your sanity, and so everyone can have a lot of fun while organizing the fundraiser! Asking for help does not make you weak; it strengthens you. [\[see sample organization chart\]](#)

Team Recruitment Volunteers

Where to look for fundraising teams -

- ↪ Departments at work (Finance, Development, HR, Communications etc.)
- ↪ Departments at school (English, Math, Science, History, Civics, Phys. Ed. etc.)
- ↪ Fraternities and Sororities
- ↪ Clubs and Organizations
- ↪ Vendors (people you do business with)

Ask Others for Help

Engaging others to help you will automatically help get the word out while spreading the workload across a team of individuals. You will be surprised who is willing to help when you let others know what you are doing. People are more likely to volunteer to help if you are clear on what you would like them to do. Be very specific so that each of your teammates understands his or her role and can check tasks off their list easily. This will keep them engaged and wanting to help again.

- Different Roles Friends Can Play
 - Team recruitment
 - Planning games
 - Obtaining food/beverage donations

- Obtaining supplies
 - Getting auction/raffle items/prizes
 - “Day of” logistics. Set up and clean up etc...
- Where to find help? [[see “Where to Look for Help”](#)]

Budget

Your budget includes your income (donations) as well as your anticipated expenses. What we offer here are guidelines and will help you in your planning. Each event and team are free to set their own fundraising goal, but we have provided you with an example of how to easily raise over \$10,000 for your USO Challenge.

- **Controlling Expenses.** Donors want to know that the money is going to help the troops and their families. Expenses should be kept to between 10-15% of your total money raised. So, if your goal is to gross \$10,000, your expenses should be between \$1000 - 1500. You can still have a first class event—just get first class items donated!
 - Getting Items Donated. Create a check list of items you need to make the event a success. For an athletic competition, it usually is fairly simple and may include:
 - ♣ Chalk
 - ♣ Whistles
 - ♣ Balls/bats/gloves/pucks etc
 - ♣ Jerseys/flags
 - ♣ Referees/judges
 - ♣ Tents
 - ♣ Decorations
 - ♣ Scoreboard/scorekeeping

- ♣ Auction items/raffle items
- ♣ Other prizes

- [\[see sample in-kind donation letter\]](#)

Recruiting the Teams

Host a USO Challenge Kick Off. Ask your volunteers who are recruiting teams to brainstorm ideas of where to find Team Captains. In much the same way you recruited your volunteers, have them seek out Team Captains using the “[Where to Look for Help](#)” tool.

Keys to recruiting Team Captains:

- It's always better to ask in person
- If you can't meet someone on your target list in person, call. The last choice is email/mail because it is very easy for someone to say no.
- Remember that you are not asking people to help you. You are asking them to help support our troops and their families!
- Sometimes people will give reasons why they can't form a team. See the page “Overcoming Objections” for some hints on addressing these common excuses
- If they really don't want to form a team...that's okay, maybe they will make a donation or donate something you need for the event.

Build great enthusiasm among your volunteers by sending out regular emails recognizing their successes with recruiting teams, and getting food, beverage, tents, etc. donated. Keep them informed of the different challenge games that are being organized so they can get their Team Captains excited!

Helping Teams Achieve Fundraising Success

In the provided budget example, each team needs to raise \$1000 in order to meet the fundraising goal. And two teams need to raise \$1500.

- Provide each Team Captain with a Team Captain Toolkit [\[see Team Captain Toolkit\]](#) and Teammate Resources packet [\[see Teammate Resource Packet\]](#).

Each includes some great fundraising ideas.

- Work with them to set an appropriate budget so your overall fundraising goal will not be compromised
- Will you need a 501(c)3 Tax Exemption Letter for the USO? One can be obtained by submitting a request to **Matt Vidulich at mvidulich@uso.org**. Many businesses/potential donors may require proof of the USO's charity status. This can be provided to them with the Tax Exemption Letter.
- Send out emails to team leaders to keep momentum rolling and fundraising efforts focused. [\[see sample emails\]](#)
- Recognize teams as they start to raise money.
- Send out updates regarding types of games that will be at the USO Challenge and any other important happenings.
- Use your emails to get teams excited to compete against each other! Announce the different types of recognition: for fundraising, for each event winner, and overall champion of the challenge!

Examples of fundraising teams:

- Departments at work (Finance, Development, HR, Communications etc.)
 - Departments at school (English, Math, Science, History, Civics, Phys. Ed etc.)
 - Fraternities and Sororities
 - Families in your neighborhood
 - Alumni groups
 - Clubs
 - Associations
 - Vendors (people you do business with)
 - Clients
 - Co-workers
 - Classmates
- Set a deadline for collecting donations prior to the competition. Give incentives during the games to teams who turn in their money by specific deadlines before the event.
 - Examples include:
 - ♣ All teams who have raised \$750 three weeks prior to the event will get a sign with their team name on it.
 - ♣ All teams that have raised \$2000 one week prior to the event will get a special locker room/rest area/private tent.
 - ♣ Individuals who have raised \$150 one week prior to the event will be put into a drawing for four tickets to local amusement park, or dinner at local

restaurant, etc., whatever you can get donated.

- ♣ Teams who have raised \$1500 one week prior to the event will get two extra shots at the basketball challenge or one extra person for the tug of war, etc.

Event Planning

- Create an event planning checklist/timeline to guide the production of your event
 - [\[see sample timeline\]](#)
- Types of events
 - Games such as H.O.R.S.E, hockey/broomball, tug of war, target shooting, etc.
 - Silly games like the dizzy race (where a runner starts by putting their head on the end of a baseball bat and spinning around 5 times before starting the race), the egg relay race (where runner has egg on spoon and has to run to next runner pass on the spoon and egg and then run to next leg), three-legged race, Simon Says, or musical chairs.
 - Track and field events (foot races, hurdles, longest throw, shot put, etc).
 - Office derivations of games (desk chair rowing, trash can basketball, paper ream hurdles, etc.)
- Day of Agenda
 - [\[see sample agenda\]](#)
 - Be sure to plan thoroughly. Do your best to account for every possible scenario that could arise during the day and budget time accordingly.
 - Keep the message of supporting the troops and their families fresh in people's minds all day long!
- Food and Beverage
 - Assess what needs, if any, you have for food and beverage at your USO Challenge.
 - Consider the following items

- ♣ Water
- ♣ Gatorade/Powerade
- ♣ Chips/pretzels
- ♣ Bagels
- ♣ Powerbars/Clif Bars
- ♣ Fruit
- ♣ Sandwiches
- ♣ Pizza

- Fun
 - Encourage teams to come up with a unique team name and possibly even a logo.
 - Challenge each team to represent a theme (around specific outside events like the Oscars, the Super Bowl, March Madness, Graduation, Dancing with the Stars, Amazing Race, etc.)
 - Come up with several levels of success for both fundraising and the competition. Assign awards to each, such as added points in the competition for the top fundraising individuals or teams.
 - Top fundraisers (team and individual)
 - Top competitors (overall team and individual event)
 - Best team spirit (costumes, cheering sections etc)
 - Best individual spirit (see “theme” section above)
 - Mission reminders/mission moments
 - Background music (will you use a CD player, iPod... live music?)
 - Take plenty of pictures/video before, during and after your event. Share them with all your volunteers and competitors on Facebook, Twitter, Myspace or YouTube, or by sending some out in your thank you letters/emails. Be sure to also share pictures from your event with the USO!

Wrapping Up

- Thank You Notes/Letter

- [\[see sample thank you letter\]](#)
- Turning in donations to the USO
 - Make sure you submit all donations to the USO within two weeks of the conclusion of your event.
 - All donations should be accounted for on a master spreadsheet or other centralized accounting system. Include donor names, check numbers, cash amounts etc. and total all results. Place all donations and corresponding accounting sheet in an envelope and send to the USO.
- The following supplies may be necessary at an event where cash and or checks are expected to be collected:
 - } Donation lockbox
 - } Adding machine/calculator
 - } Adding machine tape
 - } Pens/pencils
 - } Donation receipts
 - } USO brochures
 - } Clipboards
 - } Rubber bands
 - } Coin rolls

Security of Donated Funds

A safe location (i.e. home, office, bank, or hotel) should be secured for the verification process of money received during the event, and in order to reduce the risk of misappropriation of funds.

All checks and cash collected during the event should immediately be placed in a

donation lockbox. The key to this box should be maintained in the custody of a pre-assigned individual at all times. As each donation is received, volunteers should issue a receipt to the donor indicating the amount of the donation, the donor name, address, phone number, and any additional pertinent information. This information should also be written on a donation log.

At the conclusion of the event, funds should be verified and documented.

Cash and checks should be separated. At this point, funds should be counted using the adding machine. Totals should be recorded for both checks and for cash on the donation log.

For cash donations, have each donor fill out a TEAM USO donation form with their contact information and amount of donation. Transfer the cash into a cashier's check and send in both the check and the donation form.

After you have finalized your accounting compile all donation forms and checks and send in to the USO.

- Debrief with event committee and volunteers
 - Consider discussing:
 - ♣ Strengths and weaknesses of event
 - ♣ Consider making it an annual event
 - ♣ Document highlights
 - ♣ Fundraising results
 - ♣ Share photos
- **Bring together volunteers to evaluate the event and start planning your next year's event to support of the troops and their families! WOOHOO!**

Fundraising Tools

Sample In Kind Donation Letter

Mr. Potential Donor
Company
Address
City, State Zip

Dear Mr. Donor,

On **[date]**, I am holding a USO Challenge to support our troops and their families and would like your support. The USO (United Service Organizations) has been around since 1941 supporting our troops and their families and today their work is as important as it ever was.

With the extended and multiple deployments, our military families need our support more than ever. Many of our service men and women are leaving behind children who have only seen them in pictures. Others serving in forward operating bases in war-torn Afghanistan are looking for any bit of normal life or piece of home.

That's why I've decided to join the USO in supporting our brave men in women in uniform. But I cannot do it alone however, and I'm hoping you will be willing to donate to the event with a generous contribution of **[specific item(s)]**

Enclosed is a description of the USO Challenge as well as information about the USO. They have been taking care of our troops and their families for close to 70 years, and go where no other organization can go to ensure that our service men and women receive a little bit of home regardless of where they are serving.

Thank you very much for your help in this great effort. Together we will make sure that our troops are always in our hearts and on our minds.

Sincerely,

Overcoming Objections

What if to do if they don't say yes right away...

"We don't have any money in the budget for another charity event"

Response: Great! This kind of participation doesn't cost any money! We want to give you and your employees/colleagues an opportunity for a fun day of team building. Each individual will be asked to raise money to support our troops and their families. We have Team Captain kits and fundraising ideas for teammates—making it easy for you to reach your goal!

"We can't make a big time commitment."

Response: That's okay, lots of people have little time for additional things these days—that's why we make it easy to participate. You can sign up using the online registration. Each team member can use the TEAMUSO.org online fundraising tools and, in 10-15 minutes, can have their fundraising up and running! There's no real training necessary for the USO Challenge—it's really just a chance to get out and have some fun. The challenges are games and meant to be a great team building opportunity!

"Our company is small. We may not be able to recruit 10 teammates."

Response: Your team can be smaller—or you can look to ask your family members to participate. Or what about your vendors or your clients? What a great way to show them how you support the troops and their families and ask them to join you! You could even make it an office suite event and ask the other companies in your suite/floor to participate!

"We already support other charity events."

Response: That's one of the reasons I'm talking with you because we know how philanthropic XYZ Company is. Would you be willing to offer a brown bag lunch and let me come in and talk about USO Challenge and see if there's interest? There may be a group of employees/staff who have members serving in the military or have an interest in supporting our troops and their families and they'll appreciate being given the opportunity to choose to participate in our USO Challenge!

Sample E-mail to Team Captains

Dear (Captain Name),

Wow! We already have seven teams signed up to participate in our USO Challenge! And all are recruiting their best and their brightest!

- TEAM CAR DEALERSHIP already has 7 teammates registered and has raised \$540 so far! WAY TO GO!
- TEAM LAW FIRM has 12 people registered on their team has set a fundraising goal of \$3000! Way to think big for the troops!
- TEAM COLLEGE ALUMNI GROUP has signed on and they want to make up for their university's football season! They are stoked! Welcome aboard!

Our challenge games are being organized and as we finalize the 12 events we will give you all the details. Here are just a few of the challenges we are working on:

- Simon Says
- Egg Relay Race
- H.O.R.S.E
- Tug of War

We're seeing that those teammates that use the TEAM USO online fundraising are getting donations in quickly—encourage teammates to use it! The average donation is around \$50! See if your company or someone will match what your team raises!

I don't know if you saw the notice in the paper but one of our recent grads from the high school was just deployed to Afghanistan. It's a great reminder of why we are hosting the USO Challenge. We want to give our brave men and women all the support they need—and see that their families are taken care of here at home!

Thank you so much for all that you are doing to help us with this challenge! Please feel free to email or call me if you have any questions

Name

Phone number

email

Sample Teammate Recruitment Flyer/Email

JOIN “ABC COMPANY/TEAM CAPTAIN’S NAME” TEAM In supporting our Troops and their families

As we compete in the **USO CHALLENGE**

Date

Location

1. **SIGN UP!** It’s easy, call [name] at [number] to sign up or go to teamuso.org and look up [team name or team captain’s name] to register online! You will receive a Teammate Resources packet when you register with lots of easy ways to raise money!
2. **RAISE MONEY!** Tell your family, friends and neighbors about the USO CHALLENGE and ask them to help you support the troops and their families! We’d like each teammate to raise \$100-\$150 so we can reach our team goal of \$1500! You will receive a Teammate Resources packet from your Team Captain with lots of easy ways to raise money! It can be fun, fast and easy!
3. **COMPETE!** We will have [number] of challenge games—including [list some of the games]! Embrace your inner child—you don’t need to be a star athlete—everyone will get to play!
4. **FEEL PROUD!** All this fun and we’re helping our men and women who bravely protect our country!

Let’s go for it!

Sample Timeline

8-10 weeks out

- 1) Set fundraising goal
- 1) Develop budget and plan
- 1) Recruit volunteers to help meet your budget and plan
- 1) Secure location
- 1) Host Kick Off meeting for volunteer helpers
- 1) Volunteers begin recruiting teams
- 1) Volunteers begin determining the challenge games who is going to lead organizing each game
- 1) Logistics volunteers begin getting their event items secured

6-7 weeks out

- 1) Check on team recruitment. 75% of your teams should be recruited by 6 weeks out
- 1) Send out email to all of your volunteers giving them update on event, recognizing individuals who have had great success and keeping their spirits high.
- 1) Send out email to all Team Captains (TCs). Update them on the challenge games and how many teammates will be needed for each challenge. Recognize individual TCs for their recruiting efforts and fundraising to date, etc. Also, let them know that you still have team slots available and ask them to let you know if they have any ideas for other teams.
- 1) Make sure any permits/city regulations are being secured and followed

4-5 weeks out

- 1) 100% of teams should be recruited by now
- 1) Send email to volunteer helper to give update on event: logistics, teams, fundraising, recognizing individual helpers for their great efforts.
- 1) Send email to all Team Leaders.
 - o Give update on event
 - o Recognize teams and individuals who have reached their fundraising goal or are close
 - o You may want to set up a challenge to have teams stretch to a higher level—for instance all teams who turn in \$1500 or more 10 days prior to the event will be given one challenge advantage (an extra person in tug of war; an extra shot at horse, etc.) Or come up with another motivator
 - o Remind them of the team spirit award—and encourage them to wear team colors, etc.
- 1) Review all set up and challenge game equipment and materials. What is still needed? What might you have to pay for?
- 1) Let all volunteer helpers know where you are in your fundraising total and expenses vs. your goal and what specific things need to happen. All hands on deck—don't try to do it all by yourself!
- 1) Visit venue with the logistics team and map out the layout for the event:
 - o Check in/registration
 - o Each challenge game
 - o "Staging Area" for announcements and awards
 - o Food and beverage areas

- Cheering sections, etc.

2-3 weeks out

- ⌋ Really build momentum with volunteer helpers and Team Leaders
- ⌋ Have volunteer helpers call each Team Leader to give them an update and ask if they have any questions and get them excited and motivated—there's still time to raise money and exceed your goal!
- ⌋ Focus on Team Leaders who are having great success and create/encourage friendly competitive spirit on the fundraising side—which team will raise the most money. Use a few ideas in the Team Captain kit and highlight them as great last minute fundraisers
- ⌋ Logistics should be finalized
- ⌋ Games should be finalized

1- 2 weeks out

- ⌋ Make sure you have the names of each participant for each team. Each teammate needs to have raised some money in order to participate.
- ⌋ Are teams at their \$1000 minimum? Who may need a call to make sure they are still committed to getting to their minimum?
- ⌋ Send TCs the final details on each challenge and agenda for the day. Include with the list of challenges how many teammates will be needed for each challenge. Explain that each team is participating in one challenge at a time.
- ⌋ Hold a logistics/games meeting
 - Make sure each game leader has all the support they need and are ready
 - Do you have enough day of volunteers for set up and breakdown
 - Is there enough food and beverage?
 - Are awards and prizes secured and collected?
 - Who is picking up equipment and supplies needed for day of?
 - Go over timing of day and make sure everyone understands their role the day of the event

2-3 days out

- ⌋ Email to TCs with final details. Get them psyched. Recognize great fundraising. Remind them of the type of awards that will be given.
- ⌋ Confirm with logistics volunteers that all equipment, supplies, food and beverage are taken care of and no last minute surprises.

1 day before event

- ⌋ Email to volunteers thanking them for their hard work. Include any last minute reminders and a list of who is doing what onsite the next day.

Post event

- ⌋ Send out thank you letters to guests, sponsors, auction donors, anyone who donated supplies/food, volunteer helpers
- ⌋ Set up time for wrap up meeting/happy hour/lunch with volunteer helpers
- ⌋ Submit all checks to USO within two weeks of the event

Sample Agenda

7:00 a.m.

- Set up volunteers arrive
- Review plans for set up
- Make sure everyone has specific assignment for set up

7:15 a.m.

- Set up begins
- Each game
- Registration/check-in area
- Food and Beverage stations
- "Stage"—where announcements and awards will happen (where a/v will be if using any)
- Scoreboard
- Set up signage

8:30 a.m.

- Set up should be completed
- Make sure all volunteers are at their stations and ready to go
- Make sure that all game/challenge volunteers understand the rules of their game/challenge

9:00 a.m.

- Registration/check-in opens
- Each team captain receives the order of their games/challenges

9:30 a.m. -1:30 p.m.

- Welcome
- Mission moment: American Legion honor guard, national anthem sung, etc.
- Announce all competition locations
- Begin competitions (figure 20 minutes per competition including rotations)
- Encourage teams to grab a quick bite to eat at the food & beverage station

1:30-2:00 p.m.

- Competitions conclude
- Results tallied and prizes awarded

2:00 p.m.

- Congratulate and thank all participants
- Address Mission of USO again
- Announce how much money has been raised to support the troops and their families

Sample Thank You Letter to Participants/Donors

Dear **[Name of Donor]**,

Thank you so much for **[participating/donating-list what was donated]** in our USO Challenge on **[Date]**. You helped us raise **[amount event raised]** to support our troops!

Since World War II, the USO has been the bridge between the American public and the U.S. military. In times of peace and war, the USO has consistently delivered its special brand of comfort, morale and recreational services to the military. By **participating in/donating to** the USO Challenge you have become a part of this mission. We appreciate your support of our military families.

Again, we would like to express our sincere thanks. Because of you we can continue our support for those men and women who sacrifice daily for our country and we will do so...until everyone comes home.

Sincerely,