



Fund-raising for the Washington Leadership Conference

The Washington Leadership Conference (WLC) is an adventure that will pay off for the rest of your life. The cost of travel may seem high, but with the following fund-raising ideas and techniques, the opportunity to attend WLC is closer than you think. With a little creative thought and initiative, you can find sponsors in your state and local community who are willing to fund a portion of your program. Your entire community will benefit from your experience, so get them involved!

Getting Started

The hardest part of fund-raising is getting started. First, you need to have a clear idea of the reasons you want to participate in WLC. Do you want to learn about servant leadership? Will the program help you further develop your chapter and community? You must be able to clearly state how you will benefit from your experience. You should also be prepared to tell potential sponsors how they would benefit. Try to tie into their area of interest or geographical location. Local service clubs or civic groups are often willing to help sponsor your program if you agree to present a slide show when you return.

Develop a Plan

Once you have set out your program objectives, sit down with your parents or your FFA advisor and develop a plan of action. List who you are going to contact, how you can publicize your program, what activities you can put on yourself to raise funds, and so on. Throughout your campaign, keep careful records of everyone you have talked to, what you have done, and how much money each sponsor has donated. A good way to keep track is to make an index card for each contact and activity. Don't expect to raise the entire amount of money from one or two organizations, and don't be intimidated by the amount of money that you must raise. If you are industrious and creative, little by little, you will obtain the necessary amount. Remember, every little bit helps!

Go in Person

When you begin to look for sponsors, remember that people give money to people. Don't just write letters requesting assistance. Make an appointment and meet with the contact from the business in person. When working with large companies or statewide organizations, try to find someone in your community who can introduce or refer you to the appropriate person. If this fails and you don't know whom to contact, call a general number and ask for the name and number of the public or community relations specialist. Many companies budget money to donate every year to various programs like WLC, but they will need time to have your request approved by their board. Therefore, it is important that you start your fund-raising campaign as soon as possible.

Whom Do I Contact?

Your FFA chapter is the best place to start your fund-raising campaign. They may have money available for a scholarship or be willing to help you raise funds for your experience. There are many activities that you and your chapter can do. Past participants have held raffles (be sure that this is legal in your state), pancake breakfasts, chili/spaghetti suppers, car washes, garage sales and plant sales. Be creative! As people become aware of your efforts, you will be surprised at the support your community will provide.

You can also approach local businesses, civic groups, church groups and agribusinesses to help fund your trip. A potential list of sponsors might include:

- Agribusinesses
- Banks
- Car dealerships
- Cattlemen's associations
- Chamber of commerce
- Civic organizations
- Commodity groups
- Doctors
- Electric company
- Farm Bureau
- Feed stores
- Friends and family
- Implement dealerships
- Insurance companies
- Large corporations
- Large family operations
- Lawyers
- Local businesses
- Production Credit Associations
- Restaurants
- Seed dealerships
- Trucking companies

Say Thank You

Write a thank you note to each sponsor immediately after you receive their donation. Be sure to publicly recognize your sponsors. One good way is to write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper thanking them before you leave. Keep in touch with your community by sending the newspaper a short article about your program. Sending a post card from Washington, D.C., about the activities you've been participating in will also be appreciated by your sponsors. Finally, after your return visit each sponsor to tell them about your program and personally thank them for their contribution. If you received a large donation, you may want to bring back a gift from your D.C. adventure and present it to the head of the company or organization. The FFA catalogs also have many items that can be used to show your appreciation. You can thank your community for their support by making presentations about your trip to school groups, youth organizations and civic groups, particularly those who sponsored you. (Don't forget to take pictures on your trip!)

Good Luck!

Fund-raising takes a lot of time and patience, but if you are persistent, you will be successful. Remember that this is the opportunity of a lifetime for you to experience and share with your community.