



ASSOCIATION OF ESD PROFESSIONALS

# HOW TO CROWDFUND YOUR ESD PROJECT

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# HOW TO LAUNCH A SUCCESSFUL CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN



As an Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) practitioner, you do work that inspires people. Hopefully you know this already. Transforming cultures of violence into cultures of peace—and providing individuals with practical skills for personal safety while you do it—is no small feat. Unfortunately, admiration, inspiration and passion don't pay overheads ... at least, not directly. But, what if you could channel all that enthusiasm people feel about your work into direct funding for your ESD practice?

Enter crowdfunding. Modern-day crowdfunding typically refers to the raising of funds online, often but not always in exchange for gifts or rewards upon the project's completion. Of course, the concept is hardly new. Public fundraising can trace its roots at least as far back as the 1700s, and the "public" has the same characteristics as always—compassion, empathy, a desire for meaning, a longing to be part of something, suspicion of false promises, insularity—even if more information competes for its attention in the Internet Age.

Originally thought to be the domain of artists, musicians, and quirky side hustles, crowdfunding today is a feasible solution to fund a diverse array of creative, entrepreneurial, and social projects ... if you can successfully complete a campaign! In the next pages, we'll dig into key questions to ask before starting your crowdfunding journey, an overview of some of the most popular crowdfunding platforms, and critical steps to success.

Let's get started!

# QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE JUMPING INTO CROWDFUNDING



## 1 || Are you or can you GET COMFORTABLE ASKING PEOPLE FOR MONEY?

Do you believe that the work you are doing is important and valuable and deserves to get funded? Yes? Then you can do this.

Crowdfunding is as personal as it gets, short of going door to door asking for donations, or setting up a lemonade stand. So, can you overcome the (totally normal!) reluctance to ask for money as you look all those friends and strangers in the virtual face? But wait, let's rephrase that:

Do you believe that the work you are doing is important and valuable and deserves to get funded? Yes? Then you can do this.

## 2 || IS YOUR PROJECT BOUNDED, OR CAN IT BE?

Crowdfunding works best for projects that are bounded in time and scope. People want to see the results of their support, in a reasonable amount of time. For instance, you could crowdfund recording a music album, but probably not a songwriting retreat with uncertain outcomes. In ESD terms, you might crowdfund a teaching tour, a documentary, a book, an online course, or the startup costs for the first year of operations for a teaching space, but not the ongoing cost of simply running your ESD organization, day-to-day, indefinitely.

### 3 || DO YOU HAVE “PROOF OF CONCEPT”?

People like to fund projects that are already in motion, or proven to work, paradoxical though that may be. “Proof of concept” is a helpful term from the startup world that, for our purposes, means you are already successfully doing what you say you are going to do and that you can be trusted to complete the initiative you propose. Already have a few dozen workshops under your belt and the testimonials to show for it? That’s proof of concept. Can you point to 5-star reviews on past online courses, or do you have all the raw video ready and waiting? Proof of concept. Do you have survey results proving there is sufficient demand for your ESD school? Proof of concept.

You’re good to go.

### 4 || CAN YOUR NETWORK PLAUSIBLY CARRY YOU TO YOUR FUNDING GOAL?

While crowdfunding platforms and social media can theoretically bring your project to a much wider audience of potential donors, you don’t want to count on it. So, can your network of friends, family, and followers get you there? A fun way to calculate this (and to communicate it to potential donors) is to make a not-so-short list of the people you think are likely to provide support, be they friends, family, or highly-engaged followers, and calculate how much it would take to reach your goal. Five dollars per person? Ten dollars? Twenty dollars? Run some numbers, and figure out how many donors at what bracket you need. If your goal seems way off, you may need to bring it down.

#### KEEP IN MIND...

Just about every platform will allow you to receive more funding than your initial goal, but not always less. Set achievable goals, then keep going when you hit them!



## 5 || Are you prepared to do a lot of work?

There is no way around it, crowdfunding requires a significant amount of time and energy. It is advisable to determine before you begin if you truly have the capacity (and the desire!) to take this on. Crowdfunding is not everyone's cup of tea, so ask yourself, "Is this the kind of work that lights me up (energizing) or puts me out (draining)?" Your ESD project needs you vibrant and energized; you can't feed your work if it doesn't feed you.

### Common mistake...

Thinking that you can simply toss up a campaign online and it will fund itself. This is a big undertaking; it requires daily effort and months of consistent, determined hard work.



## 6 || Is your financial security independent of your crowdfunding success?

If not, don't do it. Find a stable income source first, then revisit the idea. Crowdfunding is not a surefire path to funds by any means, and desperation is antithetical to successful campaigning.



# TOP CROWDFUNDING PLATFORMS



Did you answer “yes!” or even an optimistic “maybe...” to most of those questions? Good, then let’s continue. Before traveling too far down the road of crowdfunding prep work, you’ll want to choose your platform. It is advisable to take some time to do your own research and consider your options (pay special attention to successful campaigns in your region/community/milieu, and which platforms get results). However, here are three of the most popular options to get you started:

## KEEP IN MIND...



While Kickstarter and Indiegogo have their own audiences and communities that might discover and support your campaign through those platforms, GoFundMe really relies on your own networks.

## 1 || KICKSTARTER

Generally touted as “the best and most popular” platform for the job, Kickstarter is nearly synonymous with crowdfunding. Donors “pledge” money to your project in exchange for different tiers of rewards (these can be experiential, material, or digital); they are only actually charged once you hit your funding goal and finish your campaign. This structure is good for building trust, but tricky for you. Kickstarter is all or nothing. If you don’t make your goal, you don’t get anything.

Note: 5% platform fee (only if you hit your goal) + 3-5% transaction fee to transfer funds. Factor it into your budget so you don’t eat the loss.

## 2 || INDIEGOGO

Similar to Kickstarter and similarly popular, Indiegogo has the same platform fees, but there is one noticeable difference: Indiegogo allows you to choose between a fixed funding goal (all or nothing), or a flexible one (you receive the funds you raise no matter what). Another bonus: You can keep raising money after the deadline passes when other surprise costs (inevitably) arise. Indiegogo tends to be a favorite for artists and nonprofits due to these features. Indiegogo doesn't quite have Kickstarter's massive reach and community of serial backers, nor does it have the same level of name recognition that makes Kickstarter campaigns seem more trustworthy to many.

## 3 || GOFUNDME

You've probably seen GoFundMe campaigns floating around to fund medical procedures, funeral costs, or birthday fundraisers, to name just a few. That's because it is designed for "personal fundraising" with zero platform fees for charitable causes in the U.S. (but there is a 2.5% transaction fee and you'll be charged \$0.30/donation). GoFundMe is a popular choice for smaller-scale community projects and could be a good option for you.

### An ALTERNATIVE...



Patreon is an interesting option that doesn't follow the standard crowdfunding format. "Creators" receive ongoing monthly support from "Patrons" in exchange for ongoing services or creations. This is a challenging model to sustain, as you must commit to delivering high value every month, and it takes a critical mass of patrons to be viable. Podcasters often use Patreon to bring in support for their podcasting efforts. So if you are thinking of launching a monthly webinar, podcast, and some one-on-one coaching sessions, for example, this could work for you.

**Note: Fees range from 5-12% of what you bring in each month**



# 5 FIRST STEPS TO CROWDFUNDING SUCCESS



## 1 || GET YOUR STORY STRAIGHT.

Your project must be bounded, as previously discussed, in that it has a clear beginning and end, i.e., “This is what I hope to accomplish and this is how and when I will do it.” You must also create a deeply compelling story that demonstrates a clear problem, mission, and solution. More detail and specificity is always better. Ending gender-based violence is an admirable long-term endeavor, but it is not a crowdfunding goal. On the other hand, providing ESD training to 100 at-risk adolescent girls in your city in one year (with already established partner programs) is achievable, immediate, and exciting!

## 2 || DREAM UP CREATIVE—AND REALISTIC—REWARDS OR INCENTIVES.

What do donors genuinely want to receive in appreciation of their donation? A campaign can potentially have far greater success if you run it as a “presale” rather than a fundraiser. For instance, you could structure it so that donors buy advance spots in ESD workshops or access to soon-to-be-released online courses, and support a great cause while they do it. Note: It’s still crowdfunding, in that you are getting the public to fund your project; however, the framing is shifting to something more appealing to many: buying a product in advance, rather than giving money away.

More is better, to a point. Toss in extra rewards by drawing on resources you already have (an e-book? stickers? coaching sessions?). As long as you won’t go crazy fulfilling orders or break the bank. Be wary of shipping fees and overcommitting your time!

### 3 || SET CLEAR GOALS AND TIMELINES.

Plan out your project ahead of time, and tell potential backers when they can expect to see results. No one wants to support a project that “might happen sometime next year.” But if it’s happening in six months, and you can be a part of it for a limited time only—that creates urgency!

### 4 || BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT POSSIBLE CHALLENGES.

If you can avoid it, don’t blindside your supporters with roadblocks halfway through. Do your best to predict potential challenges and lay those out in your campaign. Showing that you’ve thought this through builds trust with potential backers and makes you more credible.



### 5 || MAKE A GAME PLAN, AND STICK TO IT.

The biggest key to success here is consistency and determination. Make a pre- and post-launch plan for your campaign that includes posts across social media, newsletters, personal messages or emails, and anything else available to you—not just once, but multiple times each week for 2+ weeks leading up to your launch, continuing until the end. Don’t forget to make time to give thanks to the people who donate or help spread the word!

**READY TO GO?**

**YOU CAN DO THIS! WE ARE CHEERING YOU ON. STAY TUNED FOR MORE HOW-TO GUIDES ON  
BRANDING, MARKETING, AND TELLING YOUR ESD STORY.**

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