FUNDRAISING GUIDE

Thank you for deciding to raise money for the ocean.

Here is everything we have learned about doing it well.

Practical advice from divers, dive centres and communities who have already done it. For anyone raising money for PADI AWARE Foundation.

PADI AWARE FOUNDATION™

Fundraising guide, 2026 edition · padiaware.org

What is in here.

Every line is clickable.

You do not need to read this end to end. Start where you are, and come back to the rest when you need it.

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What your fundraiser pays for.

Your fundraiser helps transform the world's largest diving community into the world's most powerful force for ocean conservation. That runs on funding, and a good share of it comes from people who decide to ask.

In practice it works like this. A diver logs what they find on the seafloor. The log joins a database large enough for scientists to take seriously. That data goes into treaty negotiations with people who hold an accredited seat at the table. A government changes a rule.

Every link in that chain costs money to maintain. Your fundraiser pays for the links, not just the last one.

The shortest version

One-off gifts fund projects. Regular funding builds the force. Whichever you raise, you are funding the machinery that turns what divers see into what actually changes.

What the community has built so far

Use these numbers when you need proof. They are current as of October 2026.

2.8 million+
pieces of marine debris logged by 100,000 divers across 120 countries

100+
shark and ray species with increased protection measures

$800,000+
awarded to 80+ community-led conservation projects in 28 countries

44,000+
marine animals freed from entanglement

Setting your page up so people can say yes.

Five things, about twenty minutes.

01 **Give your page a proper title.**
Something that says what you are doing. "Reef clean-up at Tioman" tells people more than "Sam's fundraising page".

02 **Write your reason at the top, in two sentences.**
Under sixty words. What did you see, and what do you want to be different? Yours might be a reef you have watched change over fifteen years, or a species you no longer see on a site you know well. That is the opening line. The target goes underneath it.

03 **Add a photograph of you.**
In or near the water if you have one. People give to a person, so a photo of you works better than a logo or a stock image.

04 **Set a target that feels slightly uncomfortable.**
Low targets get hit and stop. Reachable but ambitious keeps people pushing.

05 **Make the first donation yourself.**
Before you send the link to anyone. A page sitting at zero asks a visitor to be the brave one. A page with your own gift on it, however small, says the ask is real and you are in it too.

Choosing a goal, and raising it

Pick something that feels reachable but not automatic. There is no right number: a few hundred dollars from people who know you is a real result, and every fundraiser adds to the Community Grants we award to community-led conservation projects around the world.

If your fundraiser is ongoing rather than tied to one date, raise your goal as you go. A target that moves up gives people something to react to, and it is a better story than one sitting half full for months.

Asking people to give.

A post to everyone is an ask to no one. The strongest fundraising happens in direct messages, not broadcasts. Write down ten people who know why the ocean matters to you and message them one at a time.

Name the amount. "Would you put in $50?" outperforms "any support appreciated" every time, because it removes the thing that actually stops people, which is not knowing what is expected.

Broadcast posts still have a job. They are for the people you forgot, and for momentum updates once the total is moving.

Your first week

Day one. Set the page up properly, all five things above, and make the first donation yourself.

Day two. The ten messages, sent one at a time. Individual messages beat the group chat, even though the group chat feels quicker.

Day three. Go public. Post once with the reason and the link, and tag @padiaware so we can see it and share it. If you are a dive centre, print a QR code for the counter and the classroom.

Week one onwards. Announce your event date if you have one. Post an update whenever something genuinely happens, about one a week. Thank every donor by name.

One thing worth knowing

Most pages take the majority of their donations in the first seventy-two hours and the final week. The middle is quiet for almost everyone. That is normal, not a sign it has failed. Plan an event or an update to break it.

Three things that make a post work.

01 Lead with the impact number, not the dollar amount.

"415 kg of debris, and counting" beats "$800 raised" every time. Kilograms removed. Dives completed. Divers involved. Species recorded.

Dollars are the receipt. Impact is the story, and it is the thing people repeat to someone else.

02 Specific beats general, always.

Name the people. Name the place. Use the real number. "Clean-up dives in Puget Sound" gives someone a picture in their head. If a sentence could have been written by any charity anywhere, it is worth another go until it could only have been written by you.

03 One call to action per post, and make it specific.

"Fuel the next clean-up" asks for something. "Support us" asks for nothing anyone can act on. Pick one thing and end on it. Three asks in a caption usually gets none of them.

A structure that works

Beat one, what you saw. "I have dived this site for eleven years. The soft coral on the north wall is nearly gone."

Beat two, what happens now. "So I am raising $2,000 for PADI AWARE, because the people who can change the rules need the data divers like me collect."

A few phrases worth swapping out

These turn up in most charity writing and they tend to slide past the reader. Something more specific usually lands better.

- **"Raise awareness"** does not say much on its own. Say what the money does instead.
- **"Support us" or "please help us"** is vague, and it puts you in the position of asking a favour. You are inviting people into something, so ask directly.
- **"Together we can"** is hard to picture. Say what happens when the target is reached.
- **"Passionate about"** tells people less than showing them what you actually did.
- **Doom on its own.** Name the problem by all means, then give people something they can do about it.

Photographs.

The most useful thing you can send us.

Good ones are easier to take than people think.

- **People, not scenery.** Faces, hands, gear, debris on the deck. A diver counting what they pulled up beats a beautiful empty reef every time.
- **Documentary, not aspirational.** Real divers, real conditions, real mess. No stock. No posed silhouettes against the sun.
- **Named places.** Tell us where it was shot and who is in it. A photo we cannot caption is a photo we cannot use.
- **Horizontal and vertical.** Vertical for stories, horizontal for everything else. Take both while you are there.
- **Get permission on the day.** Anyone identifiable should know their photo may be shared. Much harder to chase afterwards.

What to send us

Photographs, two or three sentences in your own words on why you did it, what the day involved, the numbers you counted, and the names you are happy for us to use. We cannot promise to share every fundraiser, and we will always check before publishing anything with your name or face in it.

Turning your dives into data.

The part most fundraisers skip.

This is the part that makes your work count twice.

If your fundraiser involves removing debris, report it through the PADI AWARE App at action.padiaware.org. Sort it, categorise it, weigh it, log it. The app takes three kinds of survey: Dive Against Debris, the Global Shark & Ray Census, and Biodiversity Surveys.

Once it is logged, your clean-up stops being a good day out and becomes a data point in the database carried to the UN Global Plastics Treaty negotiations. That is the whole model, and your fundraiser can sit inside it rather than alongside it.

It also gives you your best content. A logged clean-up produces a number, and a number is something to post that is not another reminder to donate.

What gets measured gets managed

That line comes from Paul Ladehof at Dive Tioman, whose team sorts, weighs and documents everything after every Eco Day, then publishes the totals. It is also, not by accident, exactly what makes a fundraiser easy to keep supporting.

The chain your fundraiser pays for

A diver logs what they find. The log joins a database large enough for scientists to take seriously. The data is carried into international negotiations by people with an accredited seat at the table. A government changes a rule. Every link costs money to maintain.

The fundraisers that last have a rhythm. Not a burst of effort, then silence.

We have watched enough fundraisers now to see the same four things behind the ones that keep going. None of them need a budget.

Pick a date and repeat it

A monthly clean-up on the same Saturday beats a bigger one-off every time. People plan around it, staff know it is coming, and nobody has to reinvent it. The second one is always easier than the first.

Give people more than one way in

Run the diving, but put something on the surface too. A talk, a workshop, a quiz in the evening. Snorkellers, families and people who have never dived will come to those, and they donate just as readily as divers do.

- **In the water.** Debris dives logged through Dive Against Debris, Shark & Ray Census sightings, and Biodiversity Surveys.
- **On the shore.** Beach cleanups, logged through Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell app. Dive Against Debris is for underwater debris only.
- **In the room.** A marine life talk, a species workshop, a conservation session.
- **In the evening.** An ocean quiz, a challenge, a reason to stay.

Attach training to it

Feature one conservation speciality alongside the event, discounted on the day. The event turns into training, and training turns into people who can run the next one without you.

Count it, then publish the number

Sort the debris, weigh it, and log it. Underwater debris goes to the PADI AWARE App through Dive Against Debris. Anything collected on the shore goes through Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell app, since Dive Against Debris is for underwater only. Then post the total, because a number is the easiest thing in the world to post about.

Start with one thing. You do not need the whole programme on day one.

If you run a dive centre, do this one first

Put something in reception that people can do for a small donation while they wait. A game, a jar with a challenge on it, a guess-the-weight board next to the debris you pulled up last week.

It costs almost nothing once it is built, it earns on the days when nothing is scheduled, and it starts a conversation with people who would never have opened a donation page on their own.

One dive centre built a magnetic fishing game for theirs. Guests pay to play, catch enough of one colour and they win a T-shirt or a discount on a speciality course.

Dive Tioman, Malaysia

Protect What We Dive

Runs a conservation dive day on the last Saturday of every month. Everything collected is sorted, weighed and logged in the app, and the totals are published afterwards. The result is a fixture their community plans around rather than an occasional effort.

Blackfish Empire

A gaming community, no dive site involved

No boat, no cleanup, no reef. A five hundred strong gaming community picked a cause, played a charity battle, and raised $14,100, the highest total on our fundraising site. The connection to the ocean was the fundraiser's own, and that was enough.

What both have in common

Neither asked people to care about the ocean in general. One made it local and repeatable at a named place. The other made it personal to a community that already trusted the person asking.

Something specific, something people can do rather than read about, and someone real behind it.

Running an event.

Safety, waste, and what happens to the money.

Safety

If your event involves diving, the diving is run by whoever is operating it, under their own standards, insurance and local rules. Your dive centre will have participants complete the standard PADI Release of Liability form, the same one used for any Dive Against Debris survey. If you are not running the diving yourself, check with whoever is that this is covered.

- **Brief before anyone gets in.** Conditions, depth, duration, who is leading, and how to identify them. Buoyancy check on entry.
- **Have an emergency plan** and someone with a current first aid or rescue qualification present.
- **Remove only what your training covers.** If something is anchored, heavy, or has coral growing on it, the ocean has claimed it. Leave it.
- **Watch your bag.** Debris adds weight fast. Hand bags up rather than climbing a ladder with one.

Your event, your responsibility

You agreed to this when you registered, and it is worth repeating here. You are the one running this, so the arrangements and the safety of everyone who comes along are in your hands. PADI AWARE is not the organiser and cannot provide insurance for your event, so it is worth checking that whoever is running any diving has their own cover, and looking into what you need for your venue and activity.

One small thing that helps us both: describe it as fundraising for PADI AWARE Foundation rather than as a PADI AWARE event, so nobody is unclear about who is behind it.

Waste

A cleanup that hands out single-use plastic is a story nobody wants to explain afterwards. Please run your event as close to zero waste as you can.

- **No single-use plastics.** No bottled water, disposable cups, plastic cutlery or straws. Ask people to bring a refillable bottle and say so on the invitation.
- **Source food and drink locally** where you can. If you are catering seafood, source it sustainably.
- **Sort and recycle** what you collect and what your guests leave behind, according to what your region accepts.
- **Donate leftover food** rather than binning it.

Handling the money.

Get this right and everything else is easier.

Every donation that can go through your fundraising page should. It receipts the donor automatically, it counts toward your total, and it reaches us cleanly. Print a QR code to your page and put it where people are standing.

- **Cash collected in person.** Do not hold it. Bank it and make one donation through your own page on behalf of the event, with a note saying what it was.
- **Never take donations into a personal account** to pass on later. It creates a receipting problem for the donor and an accounting problem for us.
- **Be clear about receipts.** A donation through the page gets one automatically. Cash in a tin does not. If someone wants a receipt, point them at the page.
- **Cheques, transfers or anything unusual.** Email community@padiaware.org before the event, not after.

Tax deductibility

Whether a donation is tax deductible depends on the donor's country and how the gift was made. We cannot advise on this, and neither should you. Point donors to their receipt, and to us if they have questions.

One thing worth avoiding

Try not to promise what a specific donation will buy. Everything raised goes into the same programmes rather than being costed against individual items, so describing the work is safer than putting a price on it.

Work backwards from the date.

The same shape fits an auction, a swim, a dive day or a quiz.

Most events come unstuck on timing rather than on the idea. This is the schedule the ones that work tend to follow. Compress it if you have less time, but keep the order.

- **8 to 10 weeks out.** Lock the date and the venue. Ask the people whose help you need before you announce anything, because an announcement you have to correct costs you the momentum.
- **6 weeks out.** Build your page and open registration. Everything you send from here points at one link.
- **4 weeks out.** Announce it. Post the detail, share the link, and give people a reason to tell someone else.
- **1 to 2 weeks out.** Remind them. Count down, name one or two people who have already signed up, and post the running total.
- **The day.** Collect, photograph, and post the number before everyone goes home. A total lands hardest on the day it happens.
- **Within 48 hours.** Thank people individually. Every donor, every helper, every person who lent you a room.
- **4 to 6 weeks after.** Come back with what happened next. What the total was, where it went, and what those programmes are doing now.

The step most people skip

The update at four to six weeks. It is the one that decides whether there is a second event, because it is the only proof anyone gets that the first one was worth their evening.

If other people are contributing

Artists, quiz writers, swimmers, anyone donating something. Ask each of them for two lines on why they are doing it and post those alongside their name. It gives you material for the four weeks of promotion, and it gives donors a person to respond to rather than an event.

If we ask you for photos.

A short note on what happens next.

Sometimes we see a fundraiser and get in touch to ask whether we can share it. If that happens, two things are worth knowing in advance.

We will ask you who is in the photos and whether they are happy for them to be shared. If you are unsure about anyone, just say so.

If anyone under 18 appears, we will send a waiver form through for a parent or guardian to sign before anything goes out. We only ever publish a first name for a young person, never a surname, school or location.

Nobody is committed to anything by saying yes. Anyone who agreed can change their mind later and we will take it down, no reason needed.

Worth doing at your event

If you are taking photos anyway, mention it in the briefing or put a line on the invitation so people know. It saves a conversation later, and gives anyone who would rather not appear an easy way to say so.

ONE ADDRESS, WHEREVER YOU ARE

community@padiaware.org

It reaches the whole team. Ask us anything: the consent wording, logo files, whether an idea will work, or what to do with a tin of cash after the event.

Thank you for asking on our behalf.

Asking is the hardest part, and not everyone does.

PADI AWARE FOUNDATION™