

GETTING STARTED

- ✓ Assemble a Contest Committee
- ✓ Secure contest funds
- ✓ Develop a contest timeline
- ✓ Develop a contest budget

ASSEMBLE A CONTEST COMMITTEE

No matter how a contest is sponsored or organized, nearly all contests have benefited from having a Contest Committee in place. The Contest Committee may be composed of a wide range of individuals, including: school officials (a principal, teacher, representative of the superintendent), public officials, business leaders (and their spouses), civic leaders (members of Lions, Rotary or Kiwanis Clubs), religious leaders, and media representatives.

Regardless of how your committee is composed, you should keep the following in mind: Planning and implementing a *Laws of Life* Essay Contest take **leadership** and **teamwork**. Committee members should be committed to the ideals of the contest, willing to pitch in, and enthusiastic to work together to achieve the success of the contest.

Committee work tends to progress more smoothly when individuals are assigned specific tasks. When it is time for committee members to take on different roles, you may want to consider the following questions:

- ❖ Who will be responsible for raising funds for the contest?
- ❖ Who will work directly with the schools and teachers?
- ❖ Who will be responsible for developing the contest materials (posters, flyers, certificates, etc.)?

“Working with such committed people on the contest has been an incredible experience. I think that everyone has worked so hard because we feel that we are giving back to our community, and that we are making a difference in young people’s lives.”

*—Carl Schoenstedt
Contest Coordinator
Mankato, Minnesota*

- ❖ Who will be responsible for organizing the judging process?
- ❖ Who will be responsible for coordinating the awards event?
- ❖ Who will be responsible for the publicity of the contest?
- ❖ Who will be responsible for compiling the essays into an attractive publication?

SECURE CONTEST FUNDS

The following section was contributed by Amy Butler, Executive Director, Georgia Laws ofLife Essay Contest, and Arthur C. Franzreh, Fundraising Consultant, McLean, Virginia.

Raising money to fund your *Laws ofLife* Essay Contest is the perfect opportunity to promote and encourage community involvement and collaboration. Many communities have been creative in securing long-term funding commitments for the contest.

Fundraising requires an investment of time and talent. It is the application of philanthropy, a word that is Greek in origin and means “love of humankind.” Remember, the Foundation is ready to help you strategize the best way to secure funds for your contest.

When approaching potential funders, consider the following:

- ❖ Potential donors seek personal motivation that will provide them with a meaningful way to promote positive values, high academic standards, ethics, character, and accountability.
- ❖ Potential donors must have confidence in the qualifications of all individuals who have a leadership role in the contest.
- ❖ Potential donors may wish their donation to be tax-deductible. In such cases, you should approach local civic groups, chambers of commerce, or school districts, all of which are tax-exempt and can serve as the fiscal agent for your contest. These organizations can accept tax deductible donations from individuals, which they will in turn pass on to the contest.

FUNDRAISING TIP #1:

If possible, seek a major underwriting gift from a single individual or family. The amount of money needed for the contest is modest enough that there may be an individual or family in your community who can underwrite a portion or the entire cost of the *Laws ofLife* Essay Contest.

FUNDRAISING TIP #2:

Mention Sir John Templeton's name to potential sponsors. Many individuals in your community will know about and highly respect Sir John, a legendary investment counselor. Having launched the first *Laws ofLife* Essay Contest, Sir John may serve as an inspiration to those in the world of business and financial investments who seek to better the communities in which they live and work.

- ❖ There should be a long-range plan for the funding of the contest — “A design for its destiny.” We encourage you to seek sustained funding, so that the contest will become an anticipated annual tradition for many years to come.

Make the most of your funding:

Once you have obtained some funding, you may want to approach the following individuals and organizations, which can help to leverage the money you have collected:

- ❖ Radio stations (may want to interview students and have them read their essays on the air)
- ❖ Local newspapers (may want to publish essays with students’ photos)
- ❖ Local public relations firms (may want to offer public speaking/interview training to winning students)
- ❖ Civic groups (Rotary Clubs, Lions, Kiwanis, Junior League, etc.)
- ❖ Chambers of commerce

Think creatively about fundraising and all the ways of approaching potential donors within your community. It is a fun and interesting way to network and link various community members, and conveying your commitment and dedication to the contest is the key to gaining support.

FUNDRAISING TIP #3:

Link specific contest activities to specific funding sources. For example, in one community a local bank dedicated its financial contribution to the design, printing, and distribution of a handsomely bound collection of the winning essays. The collection was widely distributed throughout the community, and the bank was proud of its unique contribution to the contest.

FUNDRAISING TIP #4:

Hand out the Contest Brochure to potential sponsors. The brochure effectively conveys the important benefits of the contest and is a wonderful promotional tool. Contact the Foundation to request free copies of the Contest Brochure.

DEVELOP A CONTEST TIMELINE

In most communities, the contest is held only once a year. About half of the contests takes place in the fall, and half takes place in the spring.

The below timeline is only a rough approximation — your contest will take on its own schedule.

	Spring	or	Fall
Contest announcement in schools	January 15		September 15
Students write	Jan. 15 - Feb. 15		Sept. 15 - Oct. 15
Contest entry deadline	February 15		October 15
Judging	Feb. 15 - March 15		Oct. 15 - Nov. 15
Preparations for awards evening	March 15 - April 9		Nov. 15 - Dec. 9
Awards dinner/reception (Announcement of winners)	April 10		December 10

Two important considerations when designing the contest timeline:

- 1) The time allowed for writing can be less than one month; however, it is very important to keep writing time consistent for all participants. If two schools are participating in the contest, don't let one school allow one month for students to write while another allows only two weeks.
- 2) The contest is usually administered in English classes. You should be aware that some schools follow "Block Scheduling" for English classes, in which half of each grade's students takes their English classes in the fall, and the other half takes their classes in the spring. For those schools, in order to allow all English students to participate, you should allow the students taking English in the fall to write their essays in the fall. Once the spring students have written their essays, both the fall and spring essays can be compiled and judged together.

DEVELOP A CONTEST BUDGET

The donated time of volunteers is what makes the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest cost-effective. As we mentioned earlier, many contest organizers work with a chamber of commerce, a local business, a youth or civic group, a local foundation, or a school district. Oftentimes, people at these organizations contribute their time to the contest, and some organizations even “donate” an employee to work on the activities of the contest. Organizations also donate incidental costs to the contest, such as photocopying, postage, computer time, telephone use, etc. Whenever possible, you should seek these types of contributions from organizations participating in the contest.

Usually, there are two significant out-of-pocket costs associated with the contest:

- ❖ The cash prizes awarded to the student winners
- ❖ The awards dinner or reception

When designing your budget, your Contest Committee should give careful thought to the prizes. Not all contests award cash prizes, and not all give only money to their winners. For example, in one contest, students are given gift certificates to a local bookstore. In another, students are given partial scholarships to local colleges. Another consideration is the amounts of prizes. Is it more important to offer large cash prizes to fewer prizewinners, or should there be more “Honorable Mentions” among the prizewinners? Finally, is the entire school going to compete for the Grand Prize, or will each grade have their own Grand Prizewinner? (Some contest organizers do not feel that it is fair for different age groups to compete in the same writing contest.) These are some things to consider as you determine the amounts and breakdown of prizes in your budget.

Outlined on the following pages are three different variations on the contest budget. We have tried to clearly identify the differences in each budget. It is important to note that some contests start small and increase their budgets in subsequent years as the contest grows in stature, success, and participation. Remember, local businesses and foundations like to back a “winner.” In the beginning, the budget formulated by the Contest Committee should reflect your optimism — but we also encourage you to be fiscally prudent and cost effective at all times!