

# THE WALKATHON GUIDE

v2.0

Lee Garverick

author of [www.walkathonguide.com](http://www.walkathonguide.com)



## **How to Plan a Walkathon**

**Checklists, Timelines, Examples, and Tips**

*detailed sections for every committee*

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Finally, use your own best judgment. Nothing in this Guide is intended to replace common sense, legal, medical or other professional advice. It is meant to inform and entertain the reader, so have fun with The Walkathon Guide and best wishes for a successful walkathon.

## Contents

<b>How to Use this Guide</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Early Decisions / Up Front To-Do List</b>	<b>8</b>
Should you do this? Pros and Cons	8
Early Decision Checklist	9
To Do Now: Check Insurance & Inform Local Officials	13
<b>Volunteers</b>	<b>14</b>
Volunteer Recruitment Timeline	14
Master List of Volunteer Committees	15
Dependencies between Committees	16
<b>Technology</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Sponsors and Donors</b>	<b>18</b>
Team Responsibilities	18
Team Members	18
Team Dependencies	18
Timeline for Getting Sponsors	19
Notes on Getting Sponsors	19
<b>Publicity</b>	<b>20</b>
Team Responsibilities	20
Team Members	20
Team Dependencies	20
Timeline for Publicizing Within Your Group	21
Notes on Publicity and Logo	22
Slogan and Logo	23
Early T-Shirts for Publicity	25
PR Opportunities	26
<b>T-Shirts, Lap Cards, and Other Printed Materials</b>	<b>28</b>
Team Responsibilities	28
Team Members	28
Team Dependencies	28
T-Shirt and Lap Card Timeline	29
T-Shirt Notes	30
T-Shirt Vendor and Quantity	30
How to Track Number of Laps Walked	32
Other Printed Material	33
<b>Registration and Treasurer</b>	<b>34</b>
Team Responsibilities	34
Team Members	34
Team Dependencies	35

Registration Timeline	36
Registration Welcome Packets and Check-In/Out Process	38
Registration Volunteers	39
<b>Concessions</b>	<b>40</b>
Team Responsibilities	40
Team Members	40
Team Dependencies	40
Concessions Timeline	41
Complimentary Items	42
Volunteers	42
Sample Shopping List	43
Cash Box and Cash Runs on the Day of the Walkathon	44
<b>Entertainment</b>	<b>45</b>
Team Responsibilities	45
Team Members	45
Team Dependencies	45
<b>Course and Event Layout, Setup and Cleanup</b>	<b>46</b>
Team Responsibilities	46
Team Members	46
Team Dependencies	46
Setup Timeline	47
Notes on Course Layout	48
Event Setup	49
Cleanup	49
<b>Course Volunteers</b>	<b>50</b>
Team Responsibilities	50
Team Members	50
Team Dependencies	52
Course Volunteers Timeline	53
Supplies	54
<b>Celebration</b>	<b>56</b>
Team Responsibilities	56
Team Members	56
Team Dependencies	56
Timeline and Event Agenda	57
<b>Appendix 1: Example Forms, Flyers and Emails</b>	<b>58</b>
Documents related to getting sponsors	58
Publicity and Registration Materials	60
<b>Appendix 2: Technology Options</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Sample Waiver Form</b>	<b>82</b>

To my wonderful partners along this walk,

Tim,

Emily, Steven and Anna

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## How to Use this Guide

So you're thinking about having a Walkathon? Go for it! Walkathons are fun, lucrative, healthy, and great for building friendships within your organization. Also known as walk-a-thon, charity walk, walking marathon or sponsored walk, a walkathon is a community or school fundraiser where participants raise money by collecting pledges based on how far they walk. The walk follows a set course. There are typically a number of side activities such as water and orange slice tables, a way of tracking progress such as lap cards or beads, and concessions, music, raffles, and possibly a silent auction.

Use this guide to save time by having it all spelled out, and build your confidence that you have everything covered. In addition to this complete guide, you should have also downloaded the individual sections that are specific to each committee. This is the same material as is included in this guide, but by distributing just the individual sections, each committee leader will get all the info they need for their role without needing to wade through this entire document. This will make it easier to recruit volunteers, since it removes some of the uncertainty associated with the each role.

You can use the examples in **Appendix 1** for ideas when creating your flyers and emails. If you'd like to get Microsoft Word versions of these examples to save a lot of time and effort, please go to <http://www.walkathonshop.com/thebook.html> for more info.

I hope you find the info in this guide useful. Please let me know if you have suggestions for improvements. Contact me at [walkathonguide@gmail.com](mailto:walkathonguide@gmail.com).

### Planning a Walkathon in Twelve Steps

- 👣 Early decisions / up front to-do list
- 👣 Get volunteers
- 👣 Leverage technology
- 👣 Get sponsors and donors
- 👣 Publicize
- 👣 Make T-Shirts, Lap Cards, etc.
- 👣 Manage registration, finances, awards
- 👣 Plan concessions
- 👣 Plan entertainment
- 👣 Plan the site, walking route, setup, cleanup, rain plan
- 👣 Walkathon Day: course volunteers, other volunteers
- 👣 Celebrate!

## Early Decisions / Up Front To-Do List

If you think you want to have a walkathon, meet with the leaders of your group and discuss these topics. Now is a good time to start a planning notebook.

### Should you do this? Pros and Cons

Are you still debating whether or not a walkathon is right for your group?

Pros:

- It makes good money for a good cause.
- It builds community. People make friends when they walk and talk together.
- It promotes good health. Everyone gets out in the fresh air and moves.
- It's fun. You're throwing a big theme party outdoors.
- It appeals to all ages. There's plenty to do for children, and the calmer set can sit and watch the walkers go by.
- It's great publicity. Your local newspaper will probably pick up the story and the photos can look great on a web site.

Cons:

- It requires a large team of organizers and lots of community participation. If your organization has a number of other activities, it may be too much. If you opt to move forward, it needs to be the top priority for the committee chairs and the main event for your school or organization during that week.
- It requires upfront costs including insurance and supplies such as lap cards, T-shirts and concessions. Often you can get sponsors to cover that cost.

Yes, it's a lot of work. My vote is that it's worth it.

## Early Decision Checklist

So, it's a go... Now your group leaders will need to decide on the following early on:

-  Goals
-  Specific, tangible cause
-  Date
-  Location
-  Route
-  Basic participation fee
-  Flat fee vs. donation per mile, or both
-  Items included for all participants, such as T-Shirts
-  Online technology vs. all on paper or email
-  Insurance requirements
-  Celebration plans

### Walkathon Goals

Together, write down which of the following are your goals for your walkathon:

- To make money? If so, how much? If you average that amount out per person, is it a reasonable expectation, or do you need to augment the event via sponsorships, concessions, recycling, a raffle, a silent auction, or other money raising efforts?
- To build community? If so, what fun ideas can you implement to encourage lots of interaction between people?
- For health awareness and exercise? If so, how can you give positive reinforcement for the walkers' efforts?
- To gain public awareness for your cause? If so, what will you do to draw the maximum amount of attention to your walkathon and the reason you walk?

Brainstorm a bit. Is there anything else you want to be sure to achieve? Keep this list at the top of your planning notebook.

### Getting Specific with Your Cause

Most walkathons already have a larger cause like the school, animal shelter, or another charity. However if you have the option, be more specific by pinpointing tangible and visible items that will be purchased with the money raised. That way your community can see the results of their efforts. Here are four criteria for getting specific:

- Walkathon participants agree this is a worthwhile need.
- Your leaders agree this is a priority to fund.
- The items are very concrete, and can be purchased, put to use, and then publicized within a few months. This is great if you plan to do another walkathon the following year.
- There are options for purchasing more or less, or finding partial financing elsewhere, depending upon the final profit. For example, if you opt for your school library as your cause, you can purchase much needed seating first, then use remaining funds for books. It also works fine to have two causes, such as “site beautification” and “technology center” to give you plenty of flexibility for use of funds.

Over the years, your community will see the cumulative effects of their walkathons as the organization spends the funds on a growing collection of visible results!

### **Date, Location, Route**

In setting the date, consider complimentary and conflicting events. If you are a school, try to plan your walkathon for the same date as major events for other schools in your town if possible (of the same aged children, not schools where siblings go). That way the sports leagues can cancel the one day's events rather than losing one or two players per team each week.

If you are a community organization and want maximum publicity and participation, be sure your date doesn't conflict with higher profile activities.

Consider the following factors when you choose your site and route:

- It should lend itself to setting up a route that is a loop so that people can walk varying distances.
- For children, an ideal length for your route is  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile. For adults it can be longer.
- Is the area safe?
- Is there adequate parking?
- Are there adequate facilities or can you augment appropriately, including restrooms, shade, seating, concessions, and electrical power?
- Is the neighborhood amenable to having a large event?

Reach agreement between your leaders and any outsider who controls the site on the date and exact location, and if necessary, obtain written permission from those responsible. Be sure you inform other groups who would normally use that site, such as sports leagues, that it would be unavailable or shared that day. If you are a community organization in a small town, consider presenting to your town council to obtain moral support and keep them informed.

### **Minimum Fee, Flat Fee, Donations per Mile**

Typically, prior to the day of the walkathon, the walkers obtain pledges from their supporters based on how many miles they walk that day. The walkers gather pledges using a pledge card which ensures they carefully document the details of their pledges. There is usually also the option to donate a flat fee up front regardless of how far the person walks. After the walkathon, the walkers collect from their donors based on amount pledged and miles walked.

If you will give away T-Shirts and a few items and prizes, consider having a minimum participation fee to cover those expenses. Walkers can collect that from donors as well.

After the walkathon, it is a large effort to get the walkers to collect on donations and then turn in those funds. Some groups emphasize flat donations paid up front as a way to minimize this work.

### **Celebration Plans**

It can be fun and motivating to give awards to people who walk the farthest. You can have separate awards by gender or age groups. If you opt to do this, explain the plan ahead of time in your publicity materials.

Also, would you like to have a party and slide show to celebrate the event and announce the total earnings? If so, try to line up photographers to take pictures of as many walkers as possible.

## To Do Now: Check Insurance & Inform Local Officials

Most non profits should have commercial general liability insurance that would extend to a walkathon fundraiser. PTA, for example, probably provides the coverage for school events if your parent group is part of the National PTA.

Walkathon Guide does not assume any liability for your event or the accuracy of this document. Please check with your organizations leaders or legal counsel about liability and whether there are other areas to address.

The Insurance and Legal chair is responsible for checking with various experts on any insurance and legal issues, then getting appropriate coverage and approvals. Legal requirements vary based on your location.

If you are holding the event on public property, check with your local police and fire and the person who manages the location to see if there are any specific requirements such as submitting a use application. If you control the property where you'll hold your event, such as a school or church, make sure you keep your director in the loop regarding your plans.

Even with the best of intentions, accidents can and do happen. You can help protect your organization by collecting a Waiver and Release of Liability from each of your participants before the event. **Appendix 3** provides a sample waiver that includes basic language to help inform participants of the risks, while at the same time, reducing liability to your organization. As this is a sample form, you should consult a local attorney for further advice specific to your organization and geographic area. The sample waiver was provided courtesy of DoJiggy (<http://www.dojiggy.com>).

## Volunteers

Go all out on getting volunteers. The recruiting effort pays off later when the work is divided between many hands. Use many methods of communication and continue to recruit over time.

Get leaders (“committee chairs”) who can run their entire area, so that as the event approaches, you are free to solve unforeseen problems that span areas. When people agree to any given task, define it clearly in writing and double check that they are comfortable with it. Continue filling committees throughout the planning cycle, with the help of your leaders.

### Volunteer Recruitment Timeline

When to Start	What to Do
<b>1 Year before Walkathon or as soon as possible</b>	<p>Get your chair or co-chairs in place. One to three people should be in charge of a walkathon if you have about 200 – 500 walkers.</p> <p>If you are part of a school or other organization that operates on a cyclical calendar, put out signup sheets at all beginning of the year events, even if your walkathon is at year end.</p>
<b>2 to 6 Months before Walkathon</b>	<p>Whenever your group meets, put out volunteer signups if at all possible. Don't miss any opportunity to reach potential volunteers.</p> <p>In your signup sheets, include the opportunity to sign up for the major chair jobs. However, at this point you should directly ask people who you think have the time and aptitude for these major jobs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If your group has a web site, post an announcement and signup sheet.</li> <li>• If you have a group-style web service, like <a href="http://www.groupvine.com">www.groupvine.com</a>, <a href="http://www.bigtent.com">www.bigtent.com</a>, or Google or Yahoo Groups, post a flyer there and send a group email and use online signup sheets if possible.</li> </ul>
<b>8 Weeks before Walkathon</b>	<p>Now your signups double as publicity for the event so combine efforts with your publicity team. Continue putting out volunteer signups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If there is regular communication such as a weekly newsletter, get the signup sheet into that for two or three weeks</li> <li>• Put out signup sheets at all group parties and picnics</li> </ul>
<b>2 Weeks before</b>	Put out a note to fill in any remaining gaps.
<b>1 Day before</b>	Call on your pinch hitters for any last minute issues.

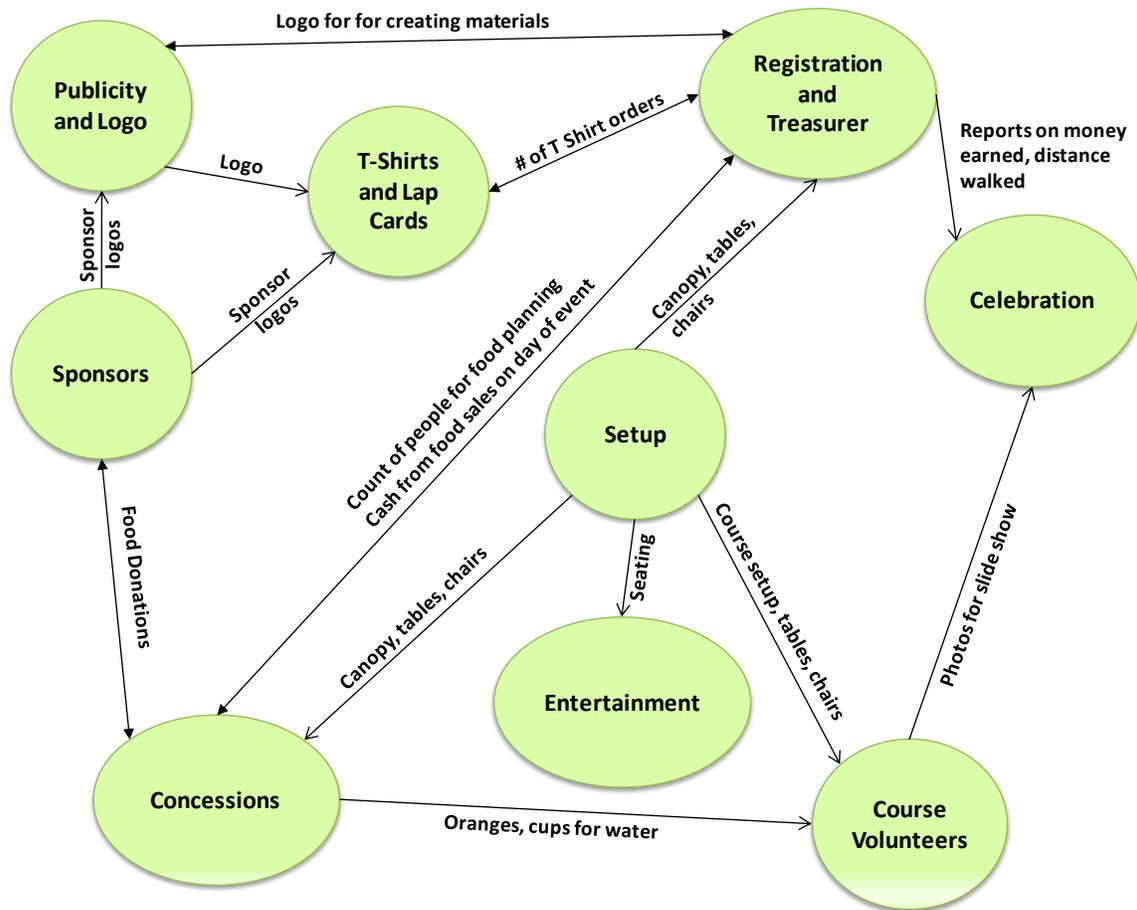
## Master List of Volunteer Committees

Committee sizes shown include the chair, and are based on a walkathon for a school of about 300 kids. Adjust the number of volunteers based on your number of participants. The suggested start date shown is relative to the date of the walkathon.

Committee	Size	Start Date	Description
<b>Walkathon Chair</b>	1 - 3 people	ASAP or 6 months before	Recruits committee chairs and helps fill committees with volunteers. Determines specific cause. Provides backup to all committee chairs. Manages overall timeline.
<b>Insurance and Legal Liaison</b>	1	3 months before	Addresses city government, police and insurance issues.
<b>Technology</b>	2	3 months before	Selects and sets up online fundraising system. Works closely with Registration and Treasurer.
<b>Sponsors and Donors</b>	2	3 months before	Gets sponsors who pay for T-Shirts, etc. Publicizes sponsor names.
<b>Publicity</b>	2	6 months before	Creates slogan and logo. Creates flyers, emails, newsletter articles. Works with the press, maintains blog.
<b>Printed Materials</b>	3	9 weeks before	Creates, sells, and distributes T-Shirts, lap cards, and any other printed materials.
<b>Registration and Treasurer</b>	17	2 months before	3 people make sure all have registered at the beginning and checked out at the end. Create registration forms. 15 people, including chair, manage registration at event. 2 people handle all finances.
<b>Concessions</b>	26	3 months before	1 – 3 people plan & purchase food, prepare orange slices. 25 people prepare, sell and serve throughout event.
<b>Entertainment</b>	3	4 weeks before	Organizes any music, dancing, etc, and gets necessary furniture and equipment for entertainment. Finds volunteers to do crazy hair or other fun activities.
<b>Course and Site Layout, Setup and Cleanup</b>	13	4 weeks before	Designs the course. Sets it up prior to event. Takes down at end. Maps the rest of the site – where to place check in tables, food, music, etc. 1 – 2 people responsible for first aid. Must be CPR certified and available the entire day of the event.
<b>Course Volunteers</b>	41	5 weeks before	Organizes all course volunteers (lap card punchers, awards, squirters), keeps water and orange slice tables stocked. Purchases supplies for course related activities like awards, hole puncher tools, lanyards or strings for lap cards, etc.
<b>Celebration</b>	Varies based on plans	5 weeks before	Photo team: Tries to get a photo of every participant. Creates slide show. Creates certificates for participants including miles walked. Organizes presentation, awards, announces earnings.
<b>Pinch Hitters</b>	2	3 days before	Help you pick up anything that falls through the cracks.

## Dependencies between Committees

Some committees need to start earlier than their own needs indicate in order to supply items to other committees who depend on them. Make sure committee chairs are aware of others who depend on them. The following chart shows some of the dependencies between committees to illustrate the coordination required. Check the “Dependencies” section for each committee in this guide for more detail and further explanation.



## Technology

There is a wide variety of online services that will save organizing time and improve communication as you plan your walkathon. I recommend using one of these options if you and your group members are fairly accustomed to using technology and people have Internet access. It will pay off in efficiency. You will save work and most likely end up with more profits because of the convenience of donating online.

To take advantage of one of these services, you should have one or two volunteers with the time and expertise to support the technology. If they have experience with, say, blogging, setting up social networks, or using products that are about as complex as Microsoft Excel, then they have the aptitude for some of the more ready-made services.

Hand [Appendix 2](#) to your Technology Leader for a list of options and more resources for making your technology decision.