

Spare Change Drive Manual

How to run a spare change drive end to end - choosing a format, building and placing the containers, keeping it visible while it runs, and the counting and handover routine that keeps volunteers and the money safe.

Planners & Worksheets · ultimatedonations.org/resources/spare-change-drive-manual

A spare change drive is the fundraiser with the lowest barrier there is. Nobody has to decide how much to give, nobody has to find a card, and nobody has to be asked twice - the container does the asking, quietly, for weeks at a time. That is also its weakness: a container nobody notices collects nothing, and a drive with no end date never ends.

This manual is the whole drive in order: choosing a format, building containers people will actually use, keeping the thing visible while it runs, counting safely, and closing it out. It names no amounts and promises no totals, because what a drive brings in depends entirely on how many containers you place and how visible you keep them. For the wider picture, see [how to ask a company for a donation](#), and browse the rest of the library at [free fundraising resources](#).

What a spare change drive is good at

Be clear about what you are choosing before you commit volunteers to it.

- **It reaches people who would not respond to a letter.** Loose coins are given without a decision, by people who would never fill in a donation form.
- **It runs alongside everything else.** Containers sit on counters while your team works on the asks that need real attention.
- **It gives every supporter something to do.** Classrooms, teams, and families can all take part without anyone writing a check.
- **What it is not is a substitute for the ask.** A drive fills gaps and builds habit; the items and the larger gifts still come from asking companies directly.

Step 1: choose a format

Pick one shape and run it properly rather than running all of them thinly.

Format	How it works	Best when
Classroom or team competition	Each group has its own container, and the standings are posted somewhere everyone walks past.	You have a school, league, or troop where the groups already compete at something else.
Container network	Containers placed with local companies who agree to keep one by a counter for the length of the drive.	Your group has adults who can visit, restock, and collect on a schedule.
Event-night collection	Containers on every table at an event you are already holding, collected before the last guest leaves.	The drive is a bonus on top of an event, not the main effort.
Take-home containers	Each family takes an empty container home and returns it on a named day.	Your group's reach is households rather than storefronts.

Whichever you choose, fix the end date before the first container is placed. A drive with an announced closing day gets a final push; a drive that just stops gets forgotten with coins still in the containers.

Step 2: build containers people will use

The container is the entire ask. It has to answer, in the time someone spends looking at it, who is asking and what for.

- **Make it obviously yours.** Group name, what the money supports, and a photo or logo if you have one.
- **Keep the opening coin-sized.** A wide open bowl invites people to take from it, and it invites a spill.
- **Make it visibly filling.** A clear body shows progress; a sealed opaque tin shows nothing and gets no second thought.
- **Weight the base.** A container that tips on a counter gets moved behind it, where nobody sees it.
- **Label the end date.** "Collecting through [date]" turns "later" into "now".
- **Number them, and keep a list of where each one is.** A container you cannot find is a container you cannot count.

Step 3: keep it visible while it runs

Most drives fail here rather than at the start. Attention decays, and the container becomes furniture.

1. **Announce the start and the end together.** Both dates, in the same message, everywhere your group already communicates.

2. **Post standings if you are running a competition.** Somewhere physical and somewhere digital, updated on a fixed day each week rather than whenever someone remembers.
3. **Restock and check placements.** Visit each host location during the drive, straighten the container, and thank whoever is minding it.
4. **Tell one specific story.** What the drive pays for, named concretely - the equipment, the trip, the classroom supplies - not "our programs".
5. **Give a final push.** In the last week, say plainly that it closes and where the containers are.

Step 4: count and hand over safely

This is the part groups improvise, and it is the part where a volunteer ends up alone with a bag of coins in a parking lot. Write the routine down before the first container is collected.

- **Two people, always.** Collection, counting, and transport all happen with two adults present. No exceptions, including for the person who organized the drive.
- **Count in one place, at one time.** A single counting session with a table, sleeves for rolling, and a written tally is faster and safer than a dozen kitchen-table counts.
- **Log every container as it is opened.** Container number, where it came from, and the tally from it. That log is what lets you thank a host location specifically, and what settles a competition without an argument.
- **Bank it promptly.** Arrange the deposit with your bank in advance - many have a preference about how coin arrives, and finding that out at the counter costs an afternoon.
- **Keep the money out of anyone's home.** Coin sitting in a volunteer's garage overnight is the single most avoidable risk in this whole fundraiser.
- **Reconcile once, publicly.** One person counts, another verifies, and the total is reported to your board or committee in writing.

Where and how you may collect in a public space is a question for whoever owns the space: a school, a district, a mall, or a town office may require a permit or its own approval, and those rules are local. Ask before you place anything. *This is informational, not legal advice.*

Step 5: close it out and thank everyone

- **Announce the result.** Say what the drive brought in and exactly what it funds. A number people helped make is the reason they help again.
- **Collect every container.** Cross each one off the placement list, and pick up the ones at host locations yourself rather than asking a manager to hold them.

- **Thank each host company by name.** A written thank-you to the manager who kept a container by the counter for weeks costs nothing and is why the answer is yes next time. The [donor thank-you kit](#) has the wording.
- **Record who said yes.** Next year's placement list starts from this year's, and a company that hosted once is a company you approach warmly rather than cold.

Drive planning worksheet

Fill this in before the first container goes out.

Detail	Your answer
Format chosen	
What the money supports, in one sentence	
Start date	
End date	
Number of containers	
Who builds them	
Where each one goes	
Who visits and restocks	
Counting date and location	
Two adults counting	
Bank arrangement made	
Who announces the result	
Who writes the thank-you notes	

When to ask a company instead

A drive is a supplement, not a strategy. When your group needs items rather than coins - prizes, gift certificates, product for a raffle table - that is a direct ask, and it goes to a company whose program actually gives that thing. Look the company up in the [donor directory](#) first: we track 4,000+ companies, and each page describes what that program has historically offered and where to check its current status. Then use the [donation request letter workbook](#) for the wording and the [donation request tracker](#) to keep hold of who you asked and when.

Common questions

What is a spare change drive?

A collection drive where supporters drop loose coins into containers placed where they already stand - a classroom, a counter, a lobby table - over a set stretch of weeks. It asks for the least of any fundraiser, because giving takes no decision and no wallet.

How long should a spare change drive run?

Long enough to be noticed, short enough to stay urgent. Groups commonly tie one to something already on the calendar, run it for a few weeks, and end it publicly rather than letting it fade out.

Will a local company host a collection container?

Many will if you ask the manager in person, bring a container that is already built and labeled, and say exactly when you will come back for it. Check the company's page in our directory first for how its program has historically handled local requests.