

RUNNING AN INTERFAITH FAST-A-THON



WHY RUN AN INTERFAITH FAST-A-THON

First created by a Muslim Student Association in Knoxville and then adopted by the National Muslim Student Association, Fast-a-Thons are events where participants pledge to fast for a day and then donate the money they would have spent on food to a social action issue. Then, at the end of the day of fasting, everyone comes together to break the fast and reflect on their experiences as a community.



They're great interfaith events for a few reasons:

- Fasting is an integral part of many religious traditions. **Fast-a-Thons open up a space for people to talk** about what fasting means to them and creates fertile ground for interfaith dialogue.
- The breaking of the fast **gives people a common experience** to bond around and dialogue about. This is great for community building.
- Raising money for a common cause gives a simple but powerful **example of what can happen if we come together** from our various religious and philosophical backgrounds around shared values to work towards the common good.

If that's why they're great events, **let's talk about how you actually do it.** In this toolkit you'll find a list of best practices along with a compendium of resources to help you run the best interfaith Fast-a-Thon possible.

BEST PRACTICES

FINDING COSPONSORS

Finding strong partners to work with and cosponsor your event is important for a successful Fast-a-Thon. Getting more groups involved means more people fasting. More people fasting means more money raised. And more money raised of course means more impact on your chosen issue, and more people impacted by the power of interfaith cooperation.

Instead of just asking people to just cosponsor, invite them to be on the planning committee for the event. People who actually have a hand in the planning of an event tend to be more invested.

You also want to make sure that you have a diverse group of people from various religious and philosophical background involved. Without that, it's just a Fast-a-Thon. Making sure there is diversity present should be one of your top priorities. An easy way to do this is to make a list of all the different religious and intentionally secular groups on campus and make sure that you reach out to each and every one of them.



ProTip: Many Muslim Student Associations already do Fast-a-Thons. Consider reaching out to them and asking if they're already planning on doing a Fast-a-Thon, if you can partner up to make it interfaith.

DONATIONS

PICK A CAUSE Choosing a cause that's relevant and timely to your campus community can make or break a Fast-a-Thon. So consider an issue that people are talking about on campus, is interfaith friendly, and can use financial support. Picking a cause should be done with your planning team in order to make sure people are invested in what you're doing.

PICK AN ORGANIZATION Find an organization that can use the funds you'll raise at your event. Consider organizations that focus on issues such as food access or hunger, as these connect well with conversations around fasting and breaking fast over a shared meal. No matter who you decide to donate to, do your research. Make sure that they use their money well and that they're actually doing what they say they're doing.



ProTip: Use something like [Charity Navigator](#) to dig deep into how effective nonprofits and charities are with their money.

HANDLING THE DONATIONS

Before you start accepting donations talk to the charity or organization about how you should donate the money. Some will have a website you can donate through but some will prefer a check. You'll also want to talk to someone who knows about your schools restrictions around student organizations and money. Some might have none at all, but others might require you to have a school sanctioned checking account of some sort. Talk to either your ally or your groups treasure to make sure that you don't get in trouble.

INCREASING DONATIONS

This is one case where more money doesn't mean more problems. Here are a few tips to **increase the amount of donations** you bring in:

- Combine physically collecting pledges (ex: tabling in high traffic public places like the main quad or outside of the dining halls) and then also having a way for people to digitally pledge by using something like a [Google form](#) and have them donate using [PayPal](#).
- Petition the dining hall to allow students to donate an extra meal on their meal card to the cause. Your administration might not let you do this, but if they do it can dramatically increase the amount of money you bring in. Discuss with your staff or faculty ally who would be best to reach out to.
- Reach out to local businesses to see if they'll sponsor people who are fasting. Ask them to donate 1 dollar for every person who commits to fasting the day of the Fast-a-Thon.
- Get a [Square reader](#) so you can accept debit cards. That way, when you're physically collecting donations people who don't carry cash will be able to donate. Plus, this is something that your campaign can use after the Fast-a-Thon as well.



ProTip: You can also collect canned goods and donate to a foodbank. But as a general rule, money is the best way to go since most nonprofits can stretch pretty far.

PROMOTION

On top of doing standard promotion like flyering, chalking, and personal outreach, consider doing two other specific types of promotions:

FIRST A lot of campaigns have had success giving people who pledge a shirt or a button after that they'll all wear on the day of the fast. These serve as both an incentive for people to donate and free promotion of the actual event.

SECOND Start collecting fasting pledges and donations around a week before the actual event. This way you can get a feel for how many people are attending.



Rhodes Better Together's tagline and button for their Fast-a-Thon

MAKING IT INTERFAITH

An important part of an interfaith Fast-a-Thon is giving people space to voice their religious and non-religious values. To make sure that it's an integrated part of the event, have someone whose entire job is to think about how you can incorporate interfaith into everything from your promotion to the actual event. Here are three good examples of what this person can do:

- Develop conversation cards to spark dialogue when people are eating.
- Come up with the list of who is speaking at the breaking of the fast to make sure there is interfaith representation.
- Moderate any formal dialogue that happens during the event.

TOOLS TO GET YOU STARTED

1 SAMPLE SCHEDULE

7:00pm-7:30pm (or sometime around sundown): Break the fast and let everyone eat!

7:30pm-7:40pm: Talk about the amount of money raised and the impact it will have on your action issue or cause you're donating to.

7:40pm-8:00pm: Invite diverse members of the planning committee to talk about what their religious and philosophical traditions say about the importance of fasting.

7:30pm-7:40pm: Have a Talk Better Together or some other type of dialogue with people that have come.



ProTip: Don't make people wait for food. They're hungry and can get feisty if they have to wait for food for too long.

2 SAMPLE INTERFAITH COMPONENT

The 'Talk Better Together' format ([find the full toolkit here](#)) is a great way to incorporate interfaith dialogue and reflection into your event in a fun, large group dialogue. Here is a sample set of questions that you could use:

- 1. What's your favorite food and why?**
- 2. Why did you fast today?**
- 3. What is it in your religious, philosophical, or personal background that compelled you to do this?**
- 4. What are concrete ways that we can take action together to continue to make an impact on X issue?**

Don't have room for a full scale dialogue? You can also use some of the scriptures and writings that we have compiled in our [Shared Values Facilitators Guide](#) that talk about the importance of alleviating poverty and being hospitable. You can find them on page eight and nine [here](#).

3 SAMPLE TIMELINE

September 1st: Compile a list of religious/non-religious, cultural, and service groups that you want to get involved.

September 2nd: Reach out to those groups to gauge their interest in being involved with the Fast-a-Thon.

September 3rd-15th: Have one-on-one meetings and begin to officially secure cosponsors and the planning committee for the event.

September 16th: Have your first meeting with everyone where you start talking about what cause you want to donate to, who you're donating to, and start divvying up roles. This is also a good time to start thinking about when you actually want to have the event.

September 22nd: Finalize when you're having the event, who you're donating to, and where it's happening on campus.

September 25th: Start public promotion. Chalk, flyer, and post about it all over social media.

September 26th: Reach out to local restaurants to see if they'll donate food to the fast breaking event.

October 5th: Start taking pledges online.

October 10th - 14th: Table at high traffic points on campus promoting the Fast-a-Thon and taking pledges and donations.

October 14th: Send out a press release, alerting the local newspaper and news stations about what's happening.

October 15th: Have the Fast-a-Thon!

October 16th: Celebrate your success by posting all over social media about how well you did!



ProTip: If you are actually the one running the Fast-a-Thon and you're not fasting because of religious reasons, don't fast. You'll need to have your wits about you the day of to deal with any unexpected hiccups. And it's hard to do that with hunger pangs and a hazy head.

Need more help? Head to ifyc.org/bettertogether to find more resources on how to mobilize your campus for interfaith or reach out to the Better Together support team by emailing BetterTogether@ifyc.org