

Getting Started

Planning Your COTA 5K or Fun Run

A 5K or Fun Run is a popular fundraising event. You will attract experienced runners as well as community members and families who want to support an important cause. COTA will assist you as you plan your event, keeping in mind that it is important to have something for everyone.

It is important that all of your participants know they are running or walking to make a life-saving difference for a COTA patient. To help remind them of the importance of their participation, provide all your volunteers with basic information about the patient's transplant journey. You will also want to have photos of your patient posted in the registration area the day of the event. If possible, invite the COTA family (and the patient) to attend the 5K. Also share information about COTA in the registration area. COTA Info Cards are available to help explain how COTA helps transplant-needy patients and their families. COTA Info Cards, as well as other supplies, can be ordered at no cost via the [Order Supplies](#) tab in the *Volunteers* section of COTA.org.

Recruit a Planning Committee

One of the keys to a successful COTA 5K or Fun Run is to recruit enough volunteers. You will need a chair or 'race director' to oversee the entire event. Someone who has previously planned a similar event or who has participated in one or more 5K events would be ideal. You will also need help identifying and securing sponsors and soliciting supplies such as printing, water and food. You will need volunteers to register participants, handle safety and first aid, coordinate traffic management and prepare food/chill water the day of the event. As you plan for your 5K, make sure there are enough volunteers so that the day runs smoothly. Make a list of those areas in which you need assistance and ask volunteers to select those areas where they could best serve. You may also want to seek information and guidance from local running clubs or from organizations such as USA Track & Field and Road Runners Club of America, which have online resources for local events.

Make sure you communicate with your volunteers so that there are no surprises on the day of the event. Host regular meetings and share updates by email. All will appreciate hearing progress updates, and you will find that many volunteers will have great ideas as plans are developed. If volunteers feel a part of the process, they will commit themselves to its success.

Select a Venue

Whether you plan to host your COTA 5K on city streets, in a community park, or in another location, you will need to seek approval from the appropriate agencies. Running on city roads will most likely require street closings, and you will need the approval of the municipality as well as the help of the local police. Hosting a 5K or Fun Run in a park or on local trails can eliminate the challenges of road closures; often these venues have experience helping volunteers plan their event. Make sure the venue has adequate parking for participants, spectators and volunteers as well as restroom facilities.

If you plan to attract serious runners, seek help from a specialist to ensure the accuracy of the course. These runners want to know the distance is accurate to compare times to other 5K results.

Determine the Date

The next step is to determine the date for your event. Check community calendars to ensure your event does not conflict with others -- particularly with another 5K or Fun Run. Many individuals participate in an event like this each weekend. You can also see a list of events, available by state, at [Running in the USA](#).

Seek the Help of Sponsors

The best way to ensure a profitable COTA fundraising event is to secure corporate or individual sponsors. With support from local businesses, organizations and individuals, you will be able to keep registration costs reasonable for participants and provide 'giveaways' common at a 5K. Consider businesses who have already supported the COTA campaign as well as those with whom volunteers have relationships. Some examples include:

- **Bottles of Water, Sports Drinks, Fruit, Granola and other snacks.** Ask for support from your local supermarkets or big-box stores for drinks and snacks that will be provided to participants after the race. These contributions can be recognized with an in-kind gift receipt as well as promotion at the registration table or finish line.
- **Drink Station Sponsor.** Recruit a local business to sponsor the mid-point drink station where volunteers will be distributing cups of water to participants. Include signs at the station thanking the sponsor and encourage the sponsor to have employees volunteer to help at the station
- **T-Shirts.** Providing t-shirts to participants is a great 'gift' as well as a wonderful way to promote the COTA campaign. Ask a local business to underwrite the cost of the t-shirts and include the sponsor's name in the design of the shirt

Plan the Budget

A COTA 5K or Fun Run will require fundraising expenses. You will have fees to the venue and liability insurance, as well as other expenses for items that you may not be able to get donated. As with all fundraising events, you will need to complete the [Budget Worksheet](#), outlining anticipated expenses and expected revenue. Submit this to CampaignInfo@cota.org. Once approved, COTA will be able to pay fundraising expenses from the campaign account. We will work together to keep your expenses as low as possible while maximizing the proceeds from the event. Preparing your Budget Worksheet will help you determine registration fees and is an important step in the planning process. Remember, COTA can also help you secure a certificate of insurance, which will likely be required by the venue.

Consider a Theme

What is particularly great about 5Ks and Fun Runs is that you can plan them with a theme. Here are some themes you could apply to your next COTA 5K or Fun Run:

- **Color Run.** One of the most popular fun run options, runners dress in all white and barrel through clouds of vibrant paint powder, which is tossed by volunteers at each kilometer marker. Two rules: wear white at the starting line and finish plastered in color. Take a

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look at [The Color Run website](#) for more suggestions on planning a COTA Color Run in your community.

- **Zombie Run.** This 5K is perfect around Halloween. You will want plenty of COTA community campaign volunteers to serve as zombies. Consider enlisting the help of a makeup artist to deck out your volunteers as terrifying zombies who are stationed at different locations throughout the course and who chase human runners to steal their 'life flags.' Participants who end with at least one of the 'life flags' received at the starting line receive Survivor medals. Regardless of whether or not participants 'survive,' they will be allowed to finish the race ... but runners will receive an 'infected' medal if all life flags are lost. Additional life flags can be purchased for an additional contribution! [The Zombie Run website](#) has more suggestions for making this COTA fundraiser a success in your community.
- **Turkey Trot.** Held around Thanksgiving Day, these fun runs intend to burn off calories before the big meal. Runners can even dress up in turkey costumes for extra fun! First prize for winning a turkey trot is often an actual frozen turkey (donated by the local grocery store) the winner can use for his or her family's upcoming Thanksgiving meal. The giving season makes this 5K a great COTA fundraising event.
- **Electric or Glow Run.** Plan a 5K after the sun sets and light up the night with this COTA fundraising event. Runners get decked out in blinking, glowing and shining lights for an electrifying run. Provide glow sticks and have runners wear bright, neon-colored clothing. Consider lighting up the path with colored lights or black lights, and holding an electric dance party at the finish line to celebrate. Check out [the Electric Run website](#) for more ideas on planning a glowing COTA fundraiser.
- **Costume Run.** This fun run can be planned any time of year and provide even more creative opportunities. Runners are encouraged to dress up according to the costume theme. Consider holding a Costume Run around Halloween for people to dress up in their best Halloween costumes. Or encourage runners to dress up based on a movie or TV show theme. A Superhero Scramble can bring out fantastic capes and masks while a Disney Run may be perfect for the princes and princesses in your community. The possibilities are endless!

Promote, Promote, Promote

Once you have confirmed the venue, selected the date and recruited sponsors and volunteers, the most critical step in planning your 5K or Fun Run is promotion. You will want to have a plan to recruit as many participants as possible.

Brochures, which include a registration form, as well as flyers will be important tools in promoting your event. Ask volunteers to distribute these within the community and provide several to local parks, running clubs, schools, churches and other community organizations. Send a flyer and/or press release about the event to your local newspaper, Chamber of Commerce, radio stations and television stations and ask them to help publicize and promote the event.

Remember to promote the event on the COTA community campaign website, as well as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social media platforms. Consider setting up a [COTA Event Thermometer](#) to accept online registrations. Remember, when using a COTA Event

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Thermometer 100% of funds raised go to the COTA campaign and registrants' donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

The Day of the Event

Have volunteers arrive early to ensure the course is outlined, registration tables are set up and everything is ready for a successful event. Recruit enough volunteers for registration so the process runs smoothly as you will be distributing numbers and (perhaps) t-shirts as well as collecting last-minute registration fees. You may want to set up tablets or laptops to register last-minute runners. Consider using a [Square Credit Card Reader](#), which allows you to accept debit and credit card payments via your cell phone or tablet and direct those contributions to your COTA community campaign. Square Readers have been helpful to community campaign teams for 5Ks, particularly for registering participants the morning of a run. If your team would like to utilize a Square Reader for an upcoming event, please contact CampaignInfo@cota.org.

Make sure participants are at the starting line several minutes before the start of the event. Ask runners and walkers to line up according to their ability with the fastest participants in the front of the group. It will be helpful to have a sound system (or other voice amplification) at the starting line so everyone can hear instructions.

Be sure to have volunteers available to help with first aid for illnesses or accidents. Check with the local fire department to see if they can help provide this service. Have a water station set up at the half-way point of the 5K and volunteers to distribute water in cups. Have appropriate trash containers on site to collect these cups when finished.

When the COTA 5K or Fun Run is complete, celebrate the results by announcing winners. Post results on the COTA campaign website, on social media and send them to the local media.

On Your Mark. Get Set. Go!

You are now ready to begin planning your 5K or Fun Run. COTA is ready to help you put your plans in motion and assist in any way to help ensure your fundraising event is a success. Please contact CampaignInfo@cota.org with any questions or for assistance.

Planning a Virtual 5k

Rather than gather participants on a single day for a fun run/walk, allow them to complete a 5k on their own terms by hosting it virtually.

Why Host a Virtual 5k?

Virtual 5ks provide flexibility. Supporters can choose to run, walk, bike or swim the distance in honor of your local COTA patient. They are not constrained to a specific date allowing them to complete the 5k in their own time.

Because it can be completed anywhere, a virtual 5k allows your COTA campaign to expand its fundraising reach outside your community. Plus, virtual 5ks are great for racers of all levels; they can provide the perfect stepping stone for first-timers to participate in a live event while simultaneously offering veterans a flexible alternative to traditional races that require training for a specific date.

Virtual 5ks can also boost your event fundraising income. They are easy to scale up with the right promotion and marketing strategy. Adding a virtual component can also help maximize live events. In addition to hosting a live race for in-person runners, would-be attendees can donate to participate wherever they are.

Virtual Race Logistics

While hosting a virtual 5k poses very few logistical challenges, there are still elements to consider:

- Work with COTA to set up a [COTA Event Thermometer](#) to accept online registrations. Remember, when using a COTA Event Thermometer 100% of funds raised go to the COTA campaign and registrants' donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.
- Promote the virtual 5k like you would a live event. Design flyers, add an Event to the COTA campaign website, post on social media, and email/text friends and family inviting them to participate.
- Offer event swag like custom bibs, medals and t-shirts with the COTA campaign name and logo. These are not necessary, but they provide a nice touch to help participants feel like they are at a live event. Send bibs and t-shirt upon registration and medals upon completion. Keep in mind not everyone finishes a virtual race on the same day, so efficiently mailing out medals is a bit of a balancing act. Additionally, you may need to increase registration prices to compensate for the cost of these items. To lower expenses, consider sending participants electronic versions of bibs and/or medals to print themselves or post to social media. Before ordering any event swag, complete and submit a [COTA Budget Worksheet](#) to CampaignInfo@cota.org.
 - Remember to upload photos of participants completing their 5ks in event swag to your COTA campaign Facebook page and the COTA campaign website.
- Plan for the costs of shipping event swag. You can estimate costs by using weights and dimensions you get from suppliers for each item, or you can visit the local post office

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with samples of your items and confirm how much they would cost to ship. Be sure to include this expense on the [COTA Budget Worksheet](#).

Remember to send all promotional materials to CampaignInfo@cota.org for approval prior to printing or distribution. Please contact CampaignInfo@cota.org if you have questions about hosting a virtual 5k for COTA.

**For more ideas or for help implementing COTA 5Ks or Fun
Runs that will work well for your fundraising volunteers,
service group and your community, contact COTA at
800.366.2682 or CampaignInfo@cota.org.**