



# GETTING STARTED

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

*“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 Schoensted,  
Volunteer Contest Director,  
Mankato, Minnesota

## 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, or representative of the superintendent), public officials, business leaders (and their spouses), community leaders (members of service clubs, community organizations, or youth groups), 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.)?



- ❖ Who will organize the judging process?
- ❖ Who will coordinate the awards event?
- ❖ Who will take care of publicity for 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, Volunteer Director, Georgia Laws of Life Essay Contest, and Arthur C. Franzreb, Fundraising Consultant, McLean, Virginia.*

Raising money to fund your *Laws of Life* 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. Remember, the Foundation is ready to help you strategize the best way to secure funds for your 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.”

**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.

### 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 of Life* 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 of Life* 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.



### FUNDRAISING TIP #3:

Link specific contest activities to individual 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 benefits of the contest and is a wonderful promotional tool. Contact the Foundation to request free copies of the Contest Brochure.

- ❖ Potential donors may wish their donation to be tax-deductible. In such cases, you should approach local civic groups, non-profit organizations, 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.
- ❖ 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.



## 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 event	March 15 - April 9		Nov. 15 - Dec. 9
Awards banquet/reception (Announcement of winners)	April 10		December 10

**MAKE SURE** that when you are designing your contest timeline you ask for feedback from a teacher or school official. Teachers manage a variety of required activities throughout the school year, such as standards testing programs, and they will greatly appreciate a contest timeline that is school-friendly!

### 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 the 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 community organization, local business, youth or civic group, local foundation, or 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.

*“We’re ecstatic that the YMCA sponsors the essay contest. Our kids benefit, and so does the entire New York community.”*

—Contest Sponsor Paula Gavin,  
President, YMCA of  
Greater New York

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

- ❖ The cash prizes awarded to the student winners
- ❖ The awards banquet 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, donors 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!



## SAMPLE BUDGET — A

### BUDGET “A” ASSUMPTIONS:

- ❖ For its first year, contest is implemented in one school only
- ❖ Contest volunteers and organizations donate considerable time, expertise, and services (in the case of organizations, they may donate facility space for the awards event)
- ❖ Miscellaneous contest expenses are donated (photocopying, cost of printing flyers, telephone use, etc.)
- ❖ An awards reception (not a sit-down awards banquet) is held to recognize students
- ❖ Raising funds for the first year of the contest will be a challenge for contest volunteers

### STUDENT PRIZES

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1st prize	\$300.
2nd prize	200.
3rd prize	150.
4th prize	100.
Honorable mentions (8 students @ \$50.)	400.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,150.</b>

### TEACHER PRIZES

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English teacher of first-place student	\$100.
English teacher of second-place student	50.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$150.</b>

### AWARDS RECEPTION

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Produce and mail invitations	\$50.
Produce certificates	100.
Light appetizers and refreshment costs	200.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$350.</b>

### ESSAY PUBLICATION

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Produce and distribute winning essays	\$100.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$100.</b>

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<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 1,750.</b>
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## SAMPLE BUDGET — B

### BUDGET “B” ASSUMPTIONS:

- ❖ Contest is implemented in three to five schools
- ❖ Contest volunteers and organizations donate considerable time, expertise, and services (in the case of organizations, they may donate facility space for the awards event)
- ❖ Miscellaneous contest expenses are donated (photocopying, cost of printing flyers, telephone use, etc.)
- ❖ An awards reception (not a sit-down awards banquet) is held to recognize students, and a banquet hall has been rented for the event
- ❖ Funding for the contest has been secured by a local civic group or a single individual
- ❖ A school coordinator promotes and implements the contest in each of the schools
- ❖ Contest is implemented at both the high school and middle school levels, and the schools at each level are competing for their own grand prizes
- ❖ Each school is guaranteed to have one top finalist
- ❖ A screener is hired to read all of the essays submitted

### STUDENT PRIZES

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#### High School

1st prize	\$300.
2nd prize	200.
3rd prize	150.
4th prize	100.
Honorable mentions (8 students @ \$50.)	400.

#### Middle School

1st prize	\$200.
2nd prize	100.
3rd prize	75.
4th prize	50.
Honorable mentions (8 students @ \$25.)	200.

#### Best of School Prizes

(5 winners, one per school, each receive a \$150. prize)

School 1	\$150.
School 2	150.
School 3	150.
School 4	150.
School 5	150.

**Sub-total (for all student prizes)                    \$2,525.**



### SCHOOL PRIZES

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(Cash awards are sometimes provided to schools and teachers who have worked hard to ensure a large number of students participate in the contest.)

School with greatest percentage of student participants	\$200.
Teacher with greatest percentage of student participants	200.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$400.</b>

### SCHOOL COORDINATORS

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(Coordinator at each school receives a \$100. honorarium)

5 school coordinators	\$500.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$500.</b>

### TEACHER PRIZES

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Teacher of 1st Place high school student	\$150.
Teacher of 2nd Place high school student	100.
Teacher of 1st Place middle school student	150.
Teacher of 2nd Place middle school student	100.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$500.</b>

### ESSAY SCREENER

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(Qualified individual reads all essays and selects those that the judges will read. For more on the essay screeners, see the section “Judging the Essays.”)

Contest screener (25 hours x \$10./hour)	\$250.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$250.</b>

### AWARDS RECEPTION

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Produce and mail invitations	\$200.
Produce certificates/medallions	250.
Light appetizers and refreshment costs	500.
Banquet hall rental costs	500.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,450.</b>

### ESSAY PUBLICATION

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Produce and distribute volume of winning essays	\$500.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$500.</b>

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<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 6,125.</b>
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## SAMPLE BUDGET — C

### BUDGET “C” ASSUMPTIONS:

- ❖ Contest is implemented in five to ten schools
- ❖ Contest volunteers and organizations donate some time, expertise, and services (in the case of organizations, they may donate facility space for the awards event)
- ❖ No contest expenses are donated (photocopying, telephone use, etc.)
- ❖ A sit-down awards banquet is held
- ❖ Funding for the contest has been secured, perhaps by a single individual
- ❖ A school coordinator promotes and implements the contest in each of the schools
- ❖ Contest is implemented at both the high school and middle school levels, and the schools at each level are competing for their own grand prizes
- ❖ Each school is guaranteed to have one top finalist
- ❖ Two screeners are hired to read all of the essays submitted
- ❖ Top student prize is \$1,000
- ❖ Judges are awarded gifts for their participation

## STUDENT PRIZES

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### High School Division

1st prize	\$1,000.
2nd prize	400.
3rd prize	300.
4th prize	200.
Honorable mentions (8 students @ \$100.)	800.

### Middle School Division

1st prize	\$500.
2nd prize	250.
3rd prize	150.
4th prize	100.
Honorable mentions (8 students @ \$50.)	400.

### Best of School Prizes

10 winners, one per school, each receive a \$300 prize	\$3,000.
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**Sub-total** (for all student prizes) **\$ 7,100.**



### SCHOOL PRIZES

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(Cash awards are sometimes provided to schools and teachers who have worked hard to ensure a large number of students participate in the contest.)

School with greatest percentage of student participants	\$250.
Teacher with greatest percentage of student participants	250.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$500.</b>

### SCHOOL COORDINATORS

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(Coordinator at each school receives a \$100. honorarium)

10 school coordinators	\$1,000.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,000.</b>

### TEACHER PRIZES

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Teacher of 1st Place high school student	\$200.
Teacher of 2nd Place high school student	100.
Teacher of 1st Place middle school student	200.
Teacher of 2nd Place middle school student	100.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$600.</b>

### ESSAY SCREENERS

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(Qualified individuals read all essays and select those that the judges will read. For more on the essay screeners, see the section “Judging the Essays.”)

2 contest screeners (each screener @ 25 hours x \$10./hour)	\$500.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$500.</b>

### AWARDS BANQUET

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Produce and mail invitations	\$200.
Produce certificates/medallions	250.
Dinner costs (100 x \$30./person)	3,000.
Gifts for judges (\$25./gift x 10 judges)	250.
Miscellaneous Expenses	1,000.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$4,700.</b>

### ESSAY PUBLICATION

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Produce and distribute volume of winning essays	\$1,000.
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>\$1,000.</b>

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<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$15,400.</b>
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