

FIRST® Fundraising Toolkit

Section 8 – FIRST Team Fundraising Examples

(FRC 291 – Murder Mystery Dinner Theater)

BASIC TEAM INFORMATION

FIRST program, team number & name	FRC 291 – CIA (Creativity In Action)
Rookie year	1999
Location (City, State)	Erie PA
Type of area (urban, suburban, rural)	Urban
Number of events attended in 2013 (Regional/District/Champs)	2 Regional & Championship
Number of students on the team	21 (expecting more after fall recruiting season)
Number of Mentors on the team	15
Range of money fundraised by the team each year	<u>\$15,000 – \$19,999</u>

GENERAL FUNDRAISER INFORMATION

Name of fundraiser: Murder Mystery Dinner Theater

Short description (3-5 sentences): At the outset of the dinner, guests are told they are part of a particular premise (a wedding, a high reunion, etc) but somewhere in the course of the evening a murder is revealed to them. Each of ~6 actors playing suspects play out their roles among the tables

(which means you don't need an actual "theater") trading accusations and rebuttals over the course of three acts. Printed clues are revealed to the guests at various times (a map, a receipt, a note, a photo, etc) to help them in solving the mystery. At the end of the third act, guests are invited to submit a ballot with their guess as to who did it and why. A prize is awarded to ballots randomly chosen from the correct answers.

Total amount of money raised: ~120 guests/performance, 4 performances, \$25/person, meal cost covered by our primary sponsor → \$12000 total in funds raised;

Number of students & Mentors/parents needed to run the fundraiser: 7 actors (6 suspects and a detective – can be students or adults), 6-10 cooking personnel (depending on the complexity of the meal) – probably parents or other adults, 2-3 student ushers (ticket takers, etc)

PREPARATION & SET-UP INFORMATION

List of materials & costs needed for preparation & set-up (identify any materials the team was able to have donated):

Material	Single Material Cost	Number of Materials Needed	Multi-Item Cost
Hall Rental	\$0	1 / show	\$0 (always donated – use school cafeteria, local fire hall, etc)
Food	\$7-\$25/meal	120 meals / show	\$840-\$3000 / show (often donated)
Ballots/clues	<\$1	120 ballots etc /show	\$100 / show (often donated)
Prizes	\$25 / prize	1-4 / show	\$25 - \$100 (usually donated)

Total cost to run event: \$1000 - \$3000 / show

Advertisement needed for the event: Word of mouth was enough to create a sellout

Amount of time needed for preparation & set-up: 20 hours rehearsal, 1 hour set-up for tables/clues/ballots, 5 hours to prep and set-up dinner, 2 hours for dinner and show

Number of students & Mentors/parents needed for preparation & set-up: 6

Additional comments on set-up: This fundraiser can be customized to fit your situation. Scale the meal down to something simple like spaghetti, for example. For that matter, you don't really even have to serve dinner – you could just make it a dessert "reception" (cookies and pies, etc) but still use the same premise.

TAKE-DOWN/WRAP-UP INFORMATION

Amount of time needed for take-down/wrap-up: 1 hour (includes dish washing, etc)

Number of students and Mentors/parents needed for take-down/wrap-up: 8

Additional comments on take-down/wrap-up:

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Total money raised at fundraiser: \$12,000

Total team cost for fundraiser: The total team cost is actually \$0 since we get everything donated – the meal, the paper for the clues, the playbills, the prizes, etc. However, if you were to have to actually pay for everything, you'd probably look at a cost of \$7 - \$25 per plate for the food (depending on how fancy the food was), paper supplies – clues, ballots, etc - \$100.

Net fundraiser income: \$12,000

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Comments: Our team has created sixteen different scripts for these dinners and all are available as kits to other teams free of charge. One thing we have offered as an option to teams who use them is that (if the team wants to and can afford to do so) the team can send a percentage (10% usually) of the team's profit to our team as a way of saying thanks for providing the information and materials needed for such a lucrative fundraiser.

Tips & best practices:

The How-To Guide for FIRST Murder Mystery Dinner Theaters

The Casting

While casting requirements vary from script to script, there are usually roles for seven to ten people (usually a pretty even mix of male and female roles). The characters, of course, vary depending on the premise of the play. Previous experience is not required as evidenced by the fact that about 80% of the time an actor doing one of our shows will never have had previous theatrical experience – they only thought it would be fun.

The Sequence of the Mystery

We have performed these for various functions and the formula that has worked for us has been to combine the mystery with a dinner. Most of our scripts play out as follows (Brannigan's Birthday Brew-haha is only exception):

1. Perform Act One
2. Serve dinner
3. Perform Act Two
4. Serve dessert
5. Perform Act Three
6. Have people guess the culprit's identity and collect ballots
7. Reveal the culprit

The Cost of Tickets

We have typically performed this for about 120 people at a time although we've stretched that a little in the last few years as the dinner's popularity grew. (The seating diagram we send to any folks who request a kit has a capacity of 121 if you assume eight people per table and don't include the characters themselves in the headcount.) We recently raised ticket prices from \$20 to \$25 per person (includes both the dinner and the show). If possible, get the cost of the dinners picked up by a sponsor or get the food donated. We have done this for the past eleven years and have made over \$90,000 averaging over \$2000 per night.

Making Tickets

We have used pre-made business cards that are sold as sheets of 10. They look semi-professional and they're easy to make (a little cut and paste magic with a computer and then it's off to the Xerox machine).

The Room Layout

The seating diagram we send to those who request a kit shows sixteen eight-person tables – the cast should be strategically positioned throughout the audience. The seating arrangement should allow performers to answer questions and interact with the audience (in character) between acts. The characters are positioned along the inner perimeter so as to allow them easy access to the "center of the action" when they need to interact with the other characters during the acts. The tables have been positioned so that all audience members have a decent line of sight to the action and so that a minimum of action takes place completely behind someone's back. We have used a small to medium sized dining space at the sponsoring corporation's facility but a school cafeteria would work fine, too.

Technical Aspects

Whatever can be done to spruce up "the performance area" is, of course, complementary to the event. One recommendation (depending on how well your performers can be heard) would be the use of wireless body microphones – some of the evidence needed to solve the mystery will be spoken and if the acoustics are a hindrance to understanding the dialogue, the evening may suffer. That being said, we don't use wireless

microphones anymore – they can present technical difficulties (feedback, etc.) and may result in the actors becoming overly dependent on them. Get your actors to speak up and project their voices – it's not that hard to do.

The Summaries of the Acts

At the end of each act there are often summaries that are indirectly delivered by one of the characters (or the detective at the very of the evening) just in case someone missed part of the act (they were in the restroom, they just weren't paying attention, whatever). Because these summaries should both be factual *and* because they can be a bit longer than just a couple sentences, we have allowed the actors delivering those lines to use a note pad with the script pasted into it as a reference – don't read right from it, but you can certainly refer to it. We have always had the detective use one of these at the very end since that is the one time that all the details really have to line up and be well explained so that the solution to the mystery is shown to be clear and logical.

Clues

Each table gets two complete sets of paper clues (most scripts have 6 clues per set). The clues are the same for each table and are typically things like letters, news articles, or photos that come with the kit. Each individual clue is folded almost in half so that the words "*Clue #X – Do Not Open Until Told To Do So*" can be read at the top. As the script is performed, the respective characters direct the audience to open the appropriate clues. The clues are shared by all of the people at the table.

Ballots and Prizes

Each place setting should begin the evening with:

1. A ballot (it's one of the pages in the file called "clues")
2. A page with all the suspects and their descriptions on it – this is in the script (you could even print this on the back of the ballot to save paper)
3. One of those little golf pencils so they can write down clues and so forth

At the end of the mystery, audience members are allowed about ten or fifteen minutes to complete their ballots, after which time they are collected (usually by the reporter since he or she is not really a suspect). You can come up with whatever scoring method you want to determine which submissions are "winners". One suggestion: if you have *two* prizes to award, for example, select *more than two* ballots as "winners" and then have someone who did not have a winning guess pick from the *more than two* (concealed) ballots. That way, if someone doesn't win a prize, they can walk away thinking that theirs could have been one of those entries that simply didn't get picked. In short, it avoids any "sore losers" who thought their answer was good enough.

Using the Robot in the Performance

While it is certainly not needed, there is no reason not to have the robot present so people can see what they're supporting by their attendance.

Content

We do our best to keep the content of the characters and the plot (murder notwithstanding) family friendly. There is never profanity used by any of the characters and they are seldom involved in anything more objectionable than having a few too many drinks or the occasional extramarital affair.

Pictures & descriptions:



The Folly of the Felony at the Fiasco
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

For those that love the world of the stage, this mystery puts the tragic death of an actor legend in the limelight. Set in the West Coast of cinema, this mystery sets everyone's "theater" into question. Can you "read" the rest of the murder case? Be prepared for the next case for it is "up" or you could be the next victim.

1



Parties, Platforms and Pistols
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

Just when you thought politics couldn't get that much more exciting, the murder of a Presidential candidate's favorite aide, needs to be the evening has been upset tremendously by this tragic development. Can you read the deadling vote and send the killer to the summit? The country is depending on them.

2



SABOTAGE AT THE SIMPSON SCHOOL OF SCIENCES
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

Dr. Steven Simpson's invention may be the bomb for FBI IT teams, but at least one person has been behaving suspiciously. When the President's 2008 has been upset tremendously by this tragic development, someone really attacked it. Can your audience find the nut who did it? Does the guilty party have a some loose? Figure it out before the vendetta.

3



Calamity at Carver's Creek
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

Nobody thought it was gonna be like this. I mean, after all, things were a little uncomfortable back in the seventies, but this is 1988 for Peter's sake! You'd have thought people would get the killer outa their bloodstreams by now. But you just go on explaining that to local well-to-do inventor Winston Payne. You'll have a rough time of it with him 'cause 'stead of it but don't let me stop you from going ahead and give' it a shot. 'Course, maybe your audience would figure out who does it. That is, if it's not a little time to kill. You'll get the expression.

4



Revenge
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

When the invitations for the Rocky Ridge 10th year reunion, they promised it would be a "fun" party. That's exactly what it was. Two alumni, U. S. Marine Major Bill Bull and retired fitness expert and businesswoman Iona Treadwell, were shot and killed by an unknown assailant. This good notion, do your homework, and maybe you'll get an "A" in police work.

5



The Grave Goggles-on of the Garden Greenhouse
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

The elite community of Eden, Georgia just suffered a major loss. Herb Gordon, CEO of the lawn and garden store Eden's Garden of Eden, was found shot in the garden table and is now picking up pieces rather than growing them. Can you find out who the bad seed is?

6



Homicide in Hollywood
The Silver Screen Slays
It was his last acting role.
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

The year is 1988, the place is Hollywood, and the crime is murder. Not that Truman Lee Dwyer has been headlines like this.

Can you diagnose what job person did this? Is this possibly a great movie, comedy, heave of suspense, and a trailer (or a trailer) production. Make your appointment now.

7



Murderous Malpractice
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

Dr. Neil Jensen used from being a GM to being OGA and he did it PGD. Can you diagnose what job person did this? Is this possibly a great movie, comedy, heave of suspense, and a trailer (or a trailer) production. Make your appointment now.

8



Very Very Vicious Vegas
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

Someone's luck has just run out. Formerly a Las Vegas ring dealer, Bruce Dyer invited friends and rose through the ranks to actually become the number of the Nevada casino in town - the All State. Unfortunately, rumors has raised the dice for the bad time. Can you figure out who dealt him the death card?

9



The Mystery Machine Murders
WDOA
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

Something just isn't really equal. Something is being done to the station. Broadcasting is the only way to describe this story. When station WDOA ended its news broadcast last night, nobody (except of an WDOA) expected the biggest news story the next day would be the murder of a homicide station owner, Bart Dwyer.

Maybe you can sharpen your pencil and figure out what really happened that night. Get out your notebook, interview the suspects, get the scoop, and then call the cops.

10



A Killing in the Kingdom of Kookabull
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

Sometimes medicine is just plain evil. You might say he got royally worked over. Last night, Charles, the Duke of Earl fell to his death from one of the windows of Cumberland Castle. As far as the kingdom's broke, there is no way to describe the funeral this merry troupe has has caused in the kingdom of Kookabull.

Even more shocking are the suspicions that his death was anything but accidental. Consider the facts, examine the evidence, then send the guilty party to the royal dungeon - you just might be crowned the wisest of all Kookabull's subjects.

11



Luxury Liner Lunacy
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

Expansions, intrigue, assassinations, deals, and rumors - and that's just the ending. The reception which follows is guaranteed to be every 50 as exciting.

Olivous Cruise Lines offers what is sure to be the event of the season when Captain Rex Zoffen sends his daughter down the aisle for the first, and hopefully final, time.

Come witness what happens when a stony (stony) singer, a fabulously wealthy, a combative attorney, and a host of others come together for one of the most memorable crimes ever.

12



Internet Infamy
The Digital Dating Debacle
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

123m4chma.com, the well-known matchmaking service, is being to find ever internet dates' victim.

But before the evening is over, someone's heart will be worse than broken. Will it be the budding actress, the wealthy heiress, the equally powerful criminal, or one of the other hopeful singles who must meet and instead of their perfect match?

13



Brannigan's Birthday Brew-haha
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

When New York City pub owner Brian Brannigan was murdered, they almost decided to cancel his birthday party until they realized they could just postpone it as his wife. The rumors are still swirling as to what really happened that night. Can you figure out whose profession of innocence is just a lot of Blarney?

14



Zany Zoo and Zoot Suits
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

Blarney has just got the big pipe on the hoodlum and - Prince of Peace - Todd on the floor! The hit on the street was if they have been someone that he knew. Can you put the pieces together and bring peace to Little Chicago?

15



Trick or Treat Treachery
A Murder Mystery by Mike Hayes

When Silhouette Brothers and candle mogul's Doug Debraeva and Steve Debraeva host a party, it's scary how much fun it is. This year's Halloween party with special decorations and also in remembering their late father, archaeologist Rob Debraeva.

But when a message comes from beyond the grave, everyone gets to startling thing to figure out if this is a little bit of fun or they're being treated to something more sinister. Can you figure out which one it is?

16



“Murderous Malpractice”



“Luxury Liner Lunacy”