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## University Sikh society – Financial Support and Advice

Sikh Soc is meant to be fun, supportive and inspiring for officers and members alike. Unfortunately, that means that financial prudence and efficiency is all too often a low priority. Even within successful university Sikh socs who are financially solvent, the way in which money is raised and spent needs to be planned, well-managed and reviewed regularly.

This guide is by no means comprehensive, but does give a good outline of how to control your Sikh soc finances and provides some food for thought about how the Sikh way of life considers money management.

### EXPENDITURE

- **Weekly/Monthly/Irregular Events**

These events might be simran/kirtan sessions, workshops, discussions, lectures, or simply a gathering of members to hang out. In any case, the expenses should be kept to a minimum.

University students are able to book/hire rooms at little or no cost – if you find that this is not the case, your Student Union will be able to help. If you have a recurring event, book early to negotiate better terms and to get adequate space.

Any refreshments should be kept simple: it is not the society's job to feed members for the night! But similarly, remember that a little planning and thought can go a long way too – there is nothing worse than seeing the Sikh soc president stroll in to a busy room ten minutes late, with four or five plastic bags bulging full of value biscuits and watered down cola, opening up packets and leaving them on an unclean desk in a corner. Appoint three responsible members to collectively manage the refreshments throughout the year; give them a budget to spend each month and impress upon them that presentation of refreshments will make a big difference to the enjoyment of their fellow members.

Find a member who has design skills and ask them to put together a flyer for you on a regular basis giving them plenty of notice to complete the task. Never print more than 5 flyers doing so through officers' personal university printing allowance and pin them to key notice boards only. Instead of mass printing, invest time in a digital strategy; appoint an appropriate member to manage your facebook/website/SMS directory and inform students regularly using digital tools, which cost no money and leave minimum environmental impact.

Occasionally you might find that external speakers or visitors to your Sikh Soc event charge for their time or travel – don't book them. This type of luxury is permissible only when Sikh Socs have strength in number across the country and are unified in such a way as to take decisions about who is so valuable a speaker that they deserve recompense. At this stage, no uni Sikh soc is in that position. There are many good speakers and facilitators who will voluntarily attend, some of whom can be found on the SikhSocs.com speaker directory.

- **Social Activities**

Society trips to theme parks, restaurants, cinemas and other places can be expensive, but if you are travelling as a group there is usually a substantial discount. Be sure to ask for a student AND group discount well in advance of travelling somewhere by making an easy telephone call or email inquiry. Don't assume that you can subsidise each member's portion of the costs from Sikh soc funds as these excursions might not be attended by every member. Have faith that those attending will happily pay their share for an enjoyable trip out as a soc.



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Make sure that you budget for travel, refreshments, insurance and unforeseen expenses. If you are expecting members to take responsibility themselves, say so, but where possible try to incorporate these elements so that a greater social atmosphere can be had with the least amount of worry.

- **Cultural Activities**

If your Sikh soc provides sports sessions, arts workshop groups or visits to cultural institutions, budget for them early in your academic year. Work out total and individual costs and make them clear to members. Although this means that some activities might not go ahead, rest assured that those which people really care about will be taken on by passionate members of your society. Let them take control as it is good to share responsibility, Give them a budget, but continue to oversee finances regularly.

- **Promotional Items**

Hoodies, t-shirts, badges and more recently pens, and even USB pen drives can be good promotional items to attract and remind your membership about Sikh soc. But it can come at considerable cost. Always shop around which is incredibly easy to do using the internet and get at least 3 quotes before choosing a supplier. This offers your Sikh soc transparency and the best value for money. When choosing items, think about longevity and usefulness – there is nothing worse than producing promotional items that are thrown away after a few weeks! With dearer items such as hoodies and USB pen drives think about offering them to members at a subsidised cost to recoup some of you financial outlay.

## INCOME

- **Membership Fees**

One of the simplest ways to generate income for your Sikh soc is through a paid membership scheme. This needn't be as repugnant an idea as you think! If we consider for a moment the Sikh principle of daswandh whereby a portion - based on whatever one can afford - is taken from income and put towards work that benefits the needy and the wider community, we can see how the Sikh community has gained a reputation for generosity and charitable deeds. As a result, it should not be inconceivable that a Sikh student put some of their daswandh towards the good of their community at university, in this case their Sikh society and allow the sum of their individual parts to generate a cooperative mass.

The major issue here is one of how much: too high and it puts off potential members, too low and it doesn't yield a significant amount. But perhaps that shouldn't be a consideration at all. By setting a membership fee based on daswandh, an assumption is made that all students are equally well-off which in all but the rarest of circumstances will be false. £5 for a year's membership might seem paltry, but for some students it can be a week's shopping. Each university will be different; what is important is that officers discuss this well in advance.

- **Donations**

How many of us know a wealthy uncle, at the Gurdwara or in our family? Perhaps the local Gurdwara itself might have money to donate towards the next generation? The idea of a donation is intriguing. Theoretically Sikhs flourish because of donations, but does that imply



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that we should go out seeking them? Guru Nanak lived the life of a householder never relying on another to make ends meet. A Sikh donates, but soliciting donations is another matter – or at least it once was. Today the sight of five uncles walking along your driveway, hands folded, is enough to make you hide behind the sofa and pretend that nobody is home. Funny as that may sound, it is probably not an unfamiliar notion, such has the door-to-door knocking of the once great Khalsa increased.

Clearly, I would suggest that this is not an avenue of exploration for any Sikh soc... ever! But it doesn't preclude the opportunity of donations altogether. Nobody asks us to place a coin in the box in the Guru's Darbar, but largely we all do it. Every Sikh soc has some kind of online presence be it a website, Facebook page or email address which could incorporate the briefest of information for the benefit of alumni, interested well-wishers or simply your mum and dad. Sikh socs with year-on-year stability might consider setting up a paypal account and embedding a link to make credit/debit card donations, whilst those who don't have the luxury of financial integrity might simply suggest a donation in their text.

In particular, creating an Alumni association for your Sikh soc can yield practical and financial benefits. It offers previous Sikh soc members a chance to stay in touch with their old university, help guide future generations and enhance their own path of Sikhi. Similarly a Sikh soc will have access to expertise, financial assistance and potential mentors who now work in a range of fields. Our SikhSocs.com website has more information about setting up an alumni association.

- **Corporate Sponsors**

Accepting financial support can be a tricky means of securing funds. There will be some companies and organisations whom it is inappropriate for a Sikh soc to deal with (purveyors of alcohol, questionable agenda) and should not even be considered. Largely corporate sponsorship will bring in a sizeable donation for relatively little in return. NAUJAWANI.com offers financial support subject to a few simple-to-meet requirements that are quite easily met by Sikh socs. However, this format of raising money can be time consuming and leave a negative impact on the independence of your Sikh soc. If sponsorship is 'on the table' with few demands, unquestionably in line with Sikh ethics and substantial, take it. If not, look to put your time into establishing an alumni association.



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