



MERLIN
OFF-THE-SHELF INSTRUMENT

Reward-based crowdfunding

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Executive summary

Crowdfunding has evolved significantly from its origins as a tool for artists into a source of funding for environmental, charitable, and other initiatives. Its appeal lies in its ability to engage a large number of “small” contributors, many donating as little as €5 to €10, allowing communities and individuals to bring meaningful projects to life without relying solely on institutional support.

This report focuses on the **use of reward-based crowdfunding for nature restoration projects**, offering a **structured and practical guide for restoration teams**. It highlights key advantages of this financing model, outlines implementation strategies and equips readers with the knowledge and tools to successfully secure funding, engage supporters, and maximise project impact. It presents real-world examples that demonstrate success across various contexts.

We begin by exploring the **key advantages** of reward-based crowdfunding as an alternative to traditional financing for environmental projects, including examining the implementation timeline, associated costs, and the prerequisites for launching a campaign. For those unfamiliar with the process, we also introduce specialised consulting firms that provide guidance and support throughout the crowdfunding journey.

Next, we examine the **leading crowdfunding platforms** for launching various types of campaigns, including environmental ones.

Building on this foundation, **the report presents a detailed framework for planning and running a campaign**. This includes pre-launch preparation, platform selection, communication strategies, and post-campaign follow-up, with guidance on how to attract and retain contributors through compelling rewards and transparent updates.

This report also includes **real-world examples and case studies** which illustrate best practices, creative reward strategies, and lessons learned from successful environmental crowdfunding efforts.

Finally, we present **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor and evaluate the success of crowdfunding campaigns**. Metrics such as conversion rates, fundraising return on investment (ROI), and donor engagement levels will help project leaders assess the effectiveness of their campaign and make data-driven improvements for future initiatives.



Introduction

Crowdfunding is a method to fund projects, including nature restoration, by asking a large number of contributors to voluntarily invest or donate a certain amount of money through specifically designed platforms. Several **types of crowdfunding models** exist:

- Donation-based crowdfunding
- Reward-based crowdfunding
- Equity-based crowdfunding
- Lending-based crowdfunding (peer-to-peer lending)
- Debt-securities crowdfunding
- Profit sharing and revenue sharing
- Hybrid models

A prominent example of a reward-based crowdfunding restoration project is the Portuguese campaign **“More Space for Nature in the International Tagus”**. The initiative aimed to acquire 80 hectares of land bordering the Tagus International Nature Park, directly adjacent to a 430-hectare property already managed by the environmental NGO Quercus. The name “Quercus” comes from the Latin word for oak – symbolic because oak forests are an important natural heritage in Portugal. The goal was to enhance habitat conservation in the region by protecting 40 hectares of cork oak forest and 20 hectares of holm oak (azinhal) forest. The campaign successfully raised €21,700 – exceeding its initial target by 109%.¹

In terms of the rewards, investments of €5 or more earned a mention on Quercus’ Facebook page. Contributions of €10 or more received a travel guide of natural wonders in the Tagus International Nature Park. For €50 or more, backers were invited on a one-day

¹ <https://ppl.pt/causas/mais-espaco-natureza>

² https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/karawater/karapod/posts?category_id=28&ref=discovery_location&total_hits=35242&utm

³ <https://www.startengine.com/blog/kara-water-case-study>

⁴ Statista Market Insights (October 2024). Capital Raised: Total Transaction Value. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/outlook/fmo/capital-raising/digital-capital-raising/reward-based-crowdfunding/europe>

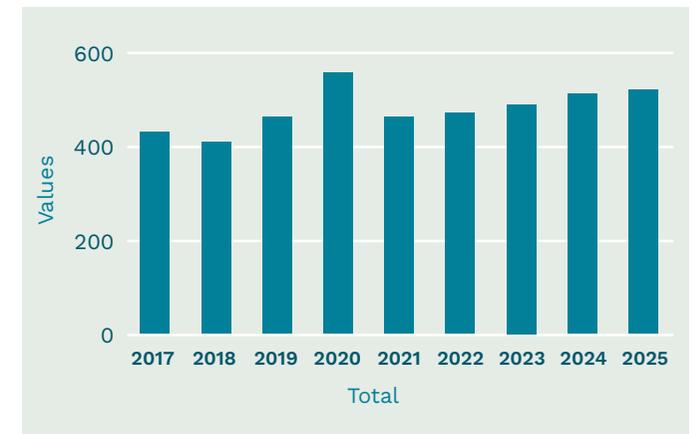
guided tour in the Tagus International Nature Reserve, whilst those who gave €150 or more were treated to a two-night stay for two people at the Retreat House in the village of Rosmaninhal in the Natural Park of the International Tagus in Portugal.

A good example of the hybrid model is **Kara Water**,² which began with a reward-based crowdfunding campaign on platforms like Kickstarter and Indiegogo. Backers, as funders or contributors are called in reward-based crowdfunding terminology, supported the development of the Kara Pod by pledging funds in exchange for early product access and exclusive perks. This approach helped the company validate its concept, engage an early adopter community, and build credibility in the climate-tech space.

Later, Kara Water transitioned to an equity-based crowdfunding model, offering shares to investors through platforms like StartEngine. Uniquely, they maintained a reward-based spirit by attaching tangible incentives to investment tiers, such as bonus shares, access to exclusive updates, personal video calls with the CEO, and free products like the Kara Pod and Kara Pure. This hybrid model appeals to both investors seeking ownership and supporters who value meaningful rewards.³ While Kara Water is not an environmental restoration project, it serves as a powerful example of how reward-based crowdfunding can mobilise substantial public support for sustainability-driven innovation. Its success illustrates key principles, like storytelling, reward design, and community engagement, that are equally applicable to nature-focused campaigns. You can read more about Kara Water in the chapter Best Practices Recommendations.

Whilst nature restoration projects produce tradeable goods, such as agricultural products or perfumes, these may also be offered as rewards. The total transaction value in Europe for reward-based crowdfunding is growing constantly. **Figure 1** illustrates a steady increase in total volume from 2017 to 2025, with the market forecasted to reach a total of €263 million by 2025.

Figure 1. Total transaction value of reward-based crowdfunding in Europe in 2017–2025 (in million Euro).



Source: Statista Market Insights (October 2024). Capital Raised: Total Transaction Value. Statista.⁴

This upward trend underscores the growing relevance and potential of reward-based crowdfunding as a viable and scalable funding tool for nature restoration projects, especially when rewards align with the values and outputs of the initiative itself.



Aim of the instrument

The primary objective of reward-based crowdfunding campaigns, as an innovative financing mechanism, is to raise funds (e.g. for a freshwater restoration project) **without the requirement of offering a financial return on the investment to the funders** (backers). This approach can still be attractive to potential backers. The main idea is that private supporters (and occasionally corporations) donate to fund a specific initiative in exchange for a reward. These campaigns are usually led by individuals, groups of people, or non-governmental organisations. **In addition to the satisfaction of supporting an environmental cause, funders also receive non-financial benefits**, such as thank-you postcards, free entry to natural parks, helpful video or audio content, and merchandise. These incentives can boost interest in the initiative and improve the likelihood of a campaign reaching its funding goal.

Moreover, **personalised rewards can act as an effective marketing tool**. Funders who are pleased with their rewards may share them with their friends or on social media. This significantly **raises awareness** about the campaign and **attracts new backers**.

By aligning financial contributions with meaningful, personalised recognition, reward-based crowdfunding can create a **sense of ownership and emotional connection between the donor and the restoration effort**, helping to turn supporters into long-term advocates for nature.



Potential beneficiaries

Running a reward-based crowdfunding campaign involves stakeholders on both the supply and demand sides. These stakeholders include:

- **Project creators and managers:** Individuals, teams, businesses, or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who design, manage the project (e.g. freshwater restoration project), and seek funding.
- **Contextual stakeholders:** Indirectly involved parties, such as local and national governments, and the state’s regulators.
- **Crowdfunding platforms:** Platforms that connect campaign creators with potential funders.
- **Project funders:** Contributors who not only fund the campaign but also help spread the word amongst peers, thus raising awareness of the project. However, it is important to note that in legal terms, funders in reward-based crowdfunding campaigns are often treated as customers. The reward is considered a commercial sale, and in many jurisdictions, including across the European Union, this means that the fundraiser is required to charge and pay VAT on the value of the reward.

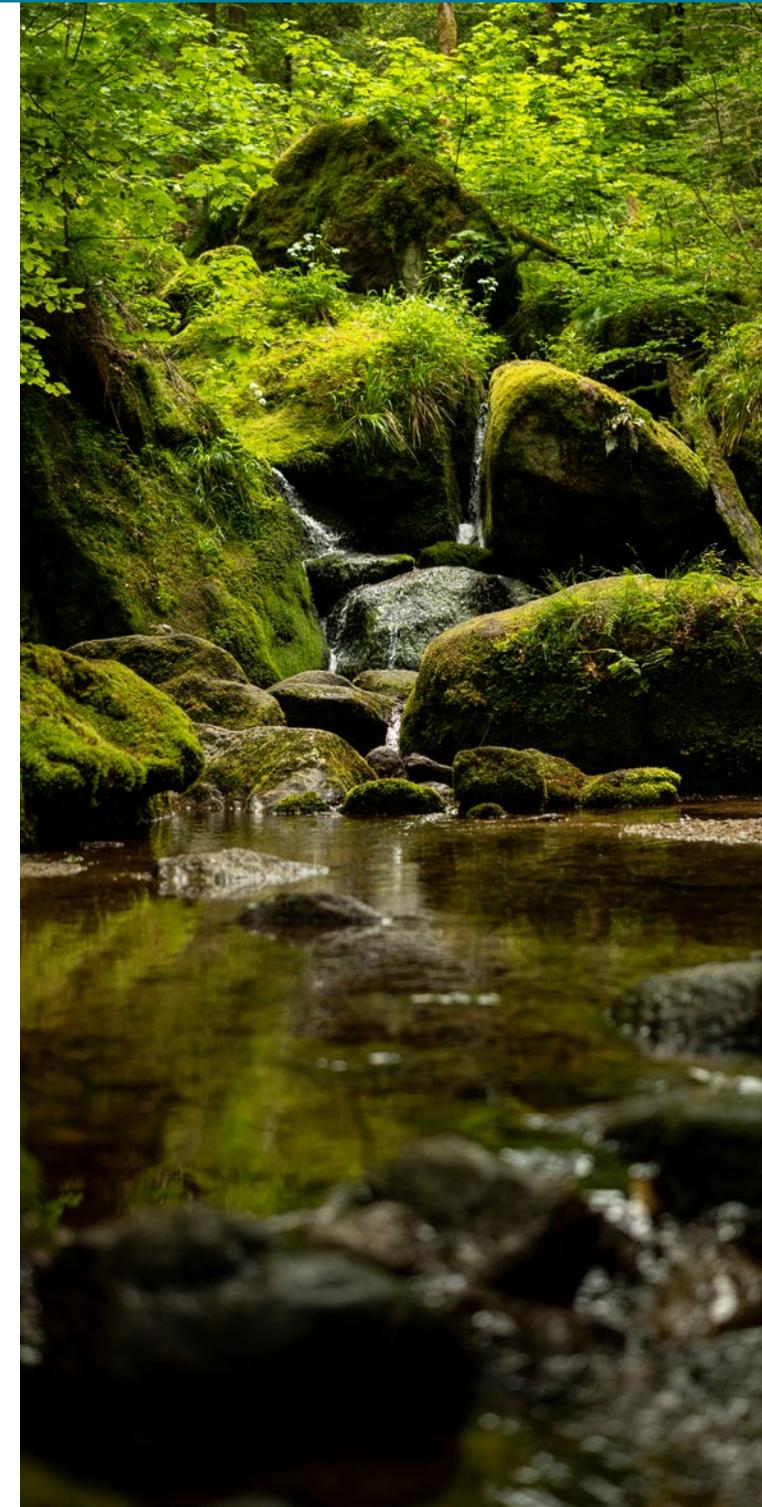
Furthermore, because these transactions are considered distance purchases, they typically fall under consumer protection laws. For example, under EU law, backers have the right to withdraw and return the “purchase” within 14 days, even in a crowdfunding context. As such, project creators must be prepared to handle returns or cancellations in accordance with these legal obligations.

Understanding this dynamic is essential not only for campaign compliance but also for building trust and credibility with backers, who expect clear communication, timely delivery, and respect for their consumer rights.

Each stakeholder group benefits either financially or through personal satisfaction from the reward-based crowdfunding. **Table 1** shows the benefits certain groups of stakeholders receive.

Table 1. Benefits of stakeholders during reward-based crowdfunding

Stakeholder group	Benefits of the group
Project creators and managers	→ Project owners hold legal and financial responsibility for the project, including compliance with environmental standards and delivery of outcomes. While this role carries liability, it can also bring significant benefits such as enhanced reputation, access to future funding, leadership recognition, and, in funded projects, compensation or salaries.
Contextual stakeholders	→ Tax revenues on raised funds; enhanced country image in supporting environmental initiatives; economic inflows; improved ecological outcomes.
Crowdfunding platforms	→ Campaign set-up fees (fixed) and commission as a percentage of donations.
Project funders	→ Personal satisfaction from helping a worthwhile project. Personal image marketing through followers, media, and other channels.





How does it work

A thriving reward-based crowdfunding campaign begins with a compelling and concise title that communicates the project's aim and presents the key idea of the initiative.

After finalising the campaign's title, the **campaign description** should include:

- A **brief introduction** of fundraisers and leaders of the campaign.
- **Identification of the target beneficiaries** (e.g. residents of a specific area).
- A **breakdown of how the funds will be used and where they will be invested**.
- A **project implementation timeline** and an **estimate of funds** needed for each stage.
- A **list of funding rewards** to make the campaign more appealing.

After successfully creating a description of the campaign, it is important to include **photos and videos of the initiative**, ideally **showing how the site is today and how it will be after the project is implemented**. High-quality, eye-catching images are essential for capturing the attention of potential backers.

Setting the right funding goal is also crucial in the next part of the pre-launch phase. Avoid setting high goals that make individual contributions feel insignificant. If large sums are needed, it is recommended to divide the campaign into multiple, connected phases. This approach increases the relative impact of each funder's donation and helps build confidence in achieving the funding targets.

At the beginning of a crowdfunding campaign, secure early support from friends, colleagues, or aligned organisations. This initial momentum helps create buzz and increase the chances of exposure, thus attracting prospective donors.

Platform algorithms used on crowdfunding websites list successful campaigns on the front page. Hence, **initial traction is essential to capture the algorithm and bring the campaign to the eyes of a vast new community**. This visibility creates a feedback loop where early success draws more backers – success feeds success.

Promotion on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X is essential. Consider creating a unique hashtag for the crowdfunding campaign to help potential contributors easily find campaign-related content.

Ongoing communication with funders is key. During the initial steps, keep potential backers informed about how much money has already been raised (e.g., if a campaign has raised 75% of the target amount, potential backers will be more willing to invest than if only 1% has been raised).

Regular updates on fundraising progress and the following steps help maintain trust and interest. Even after the campaign, it is essential to keep all stakeholders informed on the project's implementation. Failing to do so may stir doubts and damage your credibility, jeopardising future crowdfunding initiatives from the project leaders.

Last but not least, backers should be rewarded according to the amount of investment they have made. **Rewards should be delivered promptly**, as delays can cause frustration, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and distrust, ultimately damaging the project's reputation. Additionally, reward-based crowdfunding should be considered similar to a commercial sale of a service or product (the reward), and many tax authorities and courts will treat it accordingly. As a result, it is important to account for the possibility of managing returns; even if they are rare, they can occur.

Pros and cons of reward-based crowdfunding

Reward-based crowdfunding is a practical approach to raising modest funds. Like all funding tools, it has its pros and cons.

Advantage of reward-based crowdfunding (PROS)



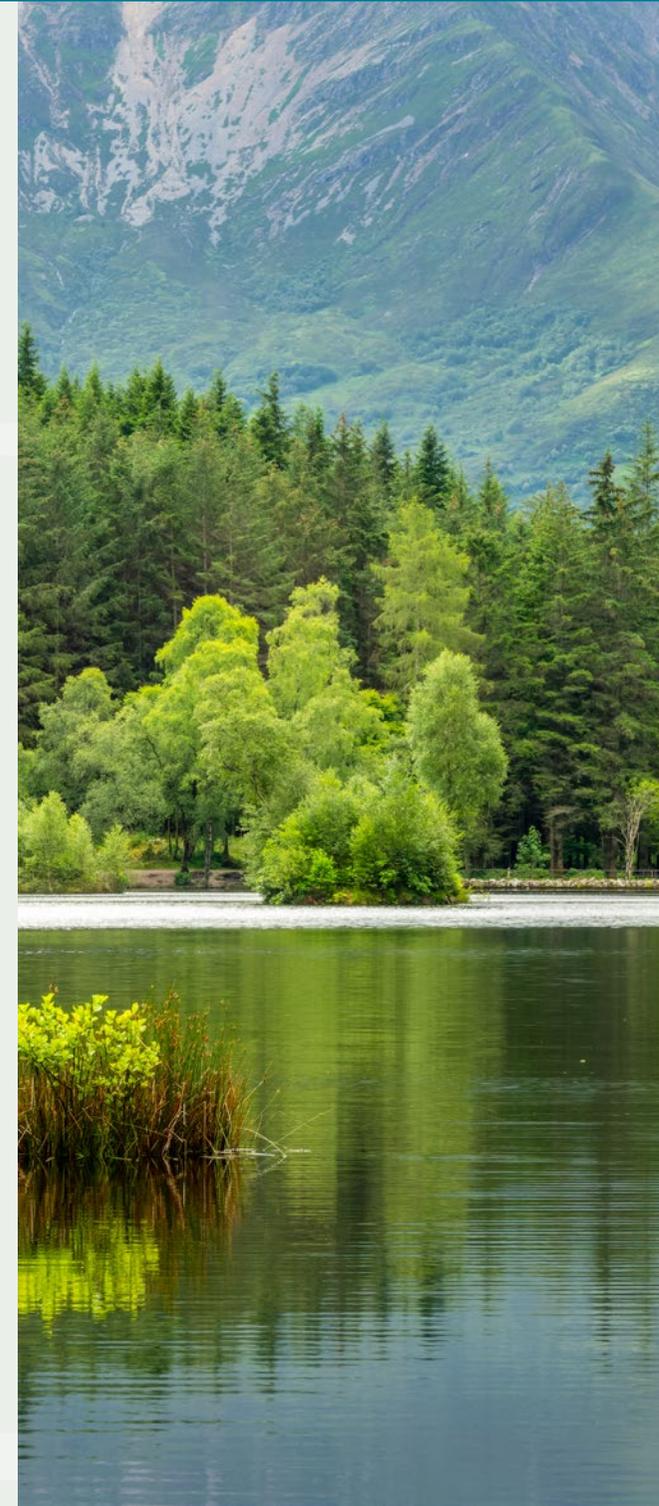
- Increase the backers' willingness to fund, as they will receive something in return.
- Rewards (e.g. merchandise, postcards) serve as an additional venue to advertise and raise awareness about the project.
- There is no need to repay the funds raised, as is the case with traditional loans, or to give away equity to backers. However, you must comply with consumer protection laws and consider potential returns.
- Rewards are a valuable source of connection with backers, and they can be leveraged for future initiatives. Backers may volunteer to work on the project for free (e.g. lawyers) or can also make other in-kind contributions.
- offsetting, more can find the required financial resources to implement their restoration projects.



Drawbacks of reward-based crowdfunding (CONS)



- Some platforms are goal-oriented, and the inability to reach a pre-defined fundraising goal may result in the fundraiser being obliged to return all gathered funds.
- Producing and delivering rewards may consume a significant portion of funds.
- Delays in reward delivery can damage project credibility and discourage future support.
- Some rewards may not be of high quality, as the project may depend on third parties to produce them.



Expected time to implement

Deliberate planning is a priority task for any project leader. Poor time management can lead to unexpected additional costs, which may cause the initiative to fail.

Typically, it takes 4 to 7 months on average from the initial planning phase to utilising the raised funds and delivering rewards to contributors.

The actual duration may vary depending on the level of complexity of a project and the experience or readiness of the project team.

On average, the timeline of a reward-based crowdfunding campaign is as follows:

1) Preparation of the campaign (2–4 months)

- Adapting the idea and mitigating potential risks.
- Creating thorough social media content and sharing information about the campaign among friends, followers, and other potential funders.
- Preparing high-quality photo and video content.
- Designing rewards for each funding level.
- Calculating approximate arrival dates for rewards.
- Choosing the most suitable platform based on where the majority of potential backers are active.
- Understanding the platform's specifications and preparing the campaign accordingly.
- Obtaining validation of the project from the crowdfunding platform's administrator.

2) Running the campaign (4–6 weeks)

- Launching the campaign after approval and verification by the platform's administrator.
- Providing constant updates to the audience as certain milestones are reached.
- Actively using social networks, creating unique hashtags, and encouraging frequent sharing amongst the target audience.
- Sending personalised thank-you letters to every donor.

3) Finishing the crowdfunding campaign (2 months)

- Publishing a post about the campaign results, emphasising how the raised funds will be used.
- Collecting the money raised from the platform and sending pre-defined rewards to every eligible contributor, concluding what is effectively an online sale of goods and services.
- Keeping backers informed about the project's progress. The progress should also be shared on social media, allowing contributors to follow it and feel more involved.
- Upon project completion, send a certificate to donors confirming their contribution to the project's success.

**Preparation of the
crowdfunding campaign
2–4 months**

**Running the
crowdfunding campaign
4–6 weeks**

**Finishing the
crowdfunding campaign
2 months**

Set-up and operational costs

Launching a reward-based crowdfunding campaign involves more than just creating rewards and promoting them. **To run a smooth and trustworthy campaign, it's essential to understand the set-up and operational costs that come with it.** This chapter outlines the key expenses you should plan to cover to stay on track and fulfil your commitments.

Set-up costs

Refer to the expenses involved in launching a reward-based crowdfunding campaign. These costs may vary depending on the project size, funding needs, and complexity. The main cost categories are summarised in the following table:

Transactions costs category	Elements	Approximate costs
Photos and videos	Photo and video content of a project (varies by project type and size)	Varies from €100 to €10000. In some cases, some photographers volunteer.
Crowdfunding platform	Crowdfunding platform fees	On average, 5% of the total funds raised. Some platforms also charge a minimum set-up fee, depending on the services required. More information can be found in the chapter main players and platforms on the market .
Administration costs	Salaries for project team members (possibly on a part-time basis)	This varies substantially dependent on if some tasks are outsourced or not, but, on average, administration costs vary from 5%–15% of the total funds raised, according to the different sources and specific deals which were contacted.

Operational costs

Operational costs occur before and after the crowdfunding campaign is launched. And usually, they increase during the campaign's lifetime. Set-up costs and operational expenses vary depending on the campaign's complexity and the size of the financial goal. Therefore, these costs can be divided into the following categories, as described in below:

Transactions costs category	Elements of the category	Approximate costs
Marketing costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Email marketing → Promotion via landing pages and blogs → Advertising on social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → €0–€299/month → €70–€400 (may increase significantly if the landing page is professionally designed) → 5%–15% of the fundraising goal
Conferences and exhibitions participation (best with sufficient capital)	→ Pitching the campaign at expos and shows	→ Varies by exhibition priority (€0–€5000+)
Crowdfunding platform	→ Payment processor fee	→ 2%–4% of total funds raised (in addition to platform commission). More information can be found in the chapter main players and platforms on the market .
Payments to the government	→ Taxes on raised funds	→ Varies depending on a country's tax regulations. Please check with your accountant to know if your campaign is subject to any tax. In some countries, such as the UK and France, NGOs do not pay taxes on raised funds.
Production of rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Payment to the manufacturer of the rewards (if the producer is a 3rd party) → Cost of raw materials and additional salaries (manufacturers/project team members) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Varies based on project size and reward types (should not exceed 10% of total funds raised) → In many cases rewards are produced voluntarily, or have no direct costs (e.g., donors' names on a website)
Rewards shipping costs	→ Cost of shipping rewards to funders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Varies by the recipient's country (should not exceed 0–2% of funds raised) and the location from which the rewards are shipped. → If rewards are digital, shipping costs are zero

Prerequisites to implement

To mitigate potential risks and ensure the campaign runs smoothly, specific prerequisites must be in place before implementation begins. Some of the **most important prerequisites** are:

- **Choose the team and their roles in the campaign.** If some skills – such as marketing, design, financial planning, entrepreneurial mindset as advocated by Connectology, or legal expertise – are missing, it is better to fill these roles before starting the campaign.
- **Identify similar campaigns that were launched previously, successful and unsuccessful.** Understand the key factors that contributed to their outcomes.
- **Identify your target audience.** Analyse potential backers and their willingness to fund. This information will help you tailor your campaign to reach the desired goal.
- **Identify the platform you want to work with.** Before proceeding, communicate directly with the selected platform to confirm all conditions and gather useful tips. More information can be found in the chapter Main Players and Platforms on the Market.
- **Consider external expertise.** If you lack in-house expertise, pre-select consultancy firms that can support the campaign.
- **Set up a bank account.** Most crowdfunding platforms require a legal bank account in a jurisdiction that the relevant authorities have approved.
- **Establish a legal entity if necessary.** Depending on the amount to be raised, some platforms require a legal entity to be established before launching the campaign. To avoid bureaucratic delays, you may use an already established and reliable entity, such as an NGO, as the "face" of the campaign. However, be aware that using a third party as the official recipient of the revenues may make the campaign subject to platform-specific restrictions or require formal agreements. The transfer of funds to the actual project manager should be transparent, documented, and compliant with applicable tax laws to avoid legal or fiscal issues.
- **Design reward packs** tailored to the audience and within acceptable costs. Ensure rewards meet funders' expectations without inflating the costs or creating unrealistic expectations for future campaigns. Before drafting the reward packs, it would be wise to talk with potential backers and understand which rewards may work better than others.
- **Plan for marketing contingencies.** If your marketing campaign slows down or its traction in acquiring backers is not achieving what was initially expected, be prepared to implement a Plan B to maintain campaign momentum.
- **Review government regulations and taxes.** In some countries, income from reward-based crowdfunding campaigns may be subject to taxation. Check regulations in your jurisdiction in advance to avoid surprises.



Consulting companies that support reward-based crowdfunding set-up and management

For some people, launching a reward-based crowdfunding campaign can be a challenging and complex task. Therefore, if your organisation doesn't have internal expertise on reward-based crowdfunding campaigns, it may be better to engage experienced consultants who have already supported multiple successful crowdfunding campaigns.

Some crowdfunding platforms, such as the internationally renowned crowdfunding platform Kickstarter, **have dedicated sections on their websites to promote experts and consulting organisations**. These professionals, for a fee, will help set up successful crowdfunding campaigns.¹

The **core services offered** by these experts and consulting firms include:

- **Creating a step-by-step campaign schedule.**
- **Raising awareness of your campaign** among a large group of potential backers.
- **Thoroughly analysing your idea and implementation plan** to identify weaknesses and reduce risks.
- **Designing a flexible and eye-catching marketing strategy**, using all key tools to raise awareness and maximise outreach. Assisting in the design of your campaign's front page, including selecting appropriate and appealing photos.
- **Generating a table of affordable desired rewards for contributors**, which may increase potential backers' willingness to invest in an idea.

Below are some examples of consulting companies that specialise in reward-based crowdfunding projects, and their contacts:

Consulting firm	Subsidiary	Address	Contact email/phone	Website
Brakeley AB		c/o Convendum, Vasagatan 160, Stockholm	info@brakeley.se , +46 70 444 23 49	brakeley.se
	Germany	Emil-Riedel-Strasse 18, 80538 München, DE	kontakt@brakeley.de , +49 89 / 46 13 86 86	www.brakeley.de
	UK		info@brakeley.uk	www.brakeleyltd.uk
CCS Fundraising	UK	Thomas House, 84 Eccleston Square London, SW1V 1PX	info@ccsfundraising.com , +44(0)207 240 3822	www.ccsfundraising.com/europe
	Ireland	13-18 City Quay, Dublin 2, Ireland	info@ccsfundraising.com , +353 (0) 1 676 0041	
CrowdfundingHub		Amsterdam, The Netherlands	info@crowdfundinghub.eu , +31 850 640 972	www.crowdfundinghub.eu
Eurocrowd		EUROCROWD BV/SRL, SQ North, BD Roi Albert II 4 BE-1000 Brussels	info@eurocrowd.org , +32 2 533 0498	eurocrowd.org

It is also a good idea to search for **freelance experts** on platforms like www.fiverr.com or www.upwork.com. These experts have extensive experience assisting various reward-based crowdfunding campaigns and stable connections with potential backers. You can select an expert based on your marketing budget, campaign complexity, and the urgency of your project.

¹ Kickstarter (2025). Kickstarter Experts. <https://www.kickstarter.com/experts>



Main players and platforms on the market

Before launching a reward-based crowdfunding campaign, take some time to analyse the key features of each platform, as not all of them will offer the right tools to support your specific campaign type. Platforms vary in terms of fee structures, campaign launch procedures, and the size of the audience that will have an opportunity to invest in your initiative.

You can use the information from the **list of platforms** below to identify a suitable platform for your campaign, or to draw inspiration for what may be possible with your project.

Platform	Countries in which it is operated	Platform fee, %	Transaction fee, %	Website link
Kickstarter	The UK, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Sweden, etc.	5% of the total funds raised	Via Stripe: For pledges over €10: 3% + €0.20 per transactions; for pledges under €10: 5% + €0.05 per transaction	www.kickstarter.com
Indiegogo	More than 200 countries all over the world	5% of the total funds raised	3% + €0.20 per transaction	www.indiegogo.com
Crowdfunder UK	The Netherlands, the UK, Ireland, Norway, France, Italy	0% for non-profit and charity projects;	3% + €0.20 per transaction	www.indiegogo.com
GoFundMe	16 European countries, four around the world	0%	Generally, 2.9% + + €0.25 per donation	www.gofundme.com
PPL	Operates locally within Portugal	5% (+VAT) of the total amount raised	2% fee (+VAT) of the total amount raised	ppl.pt
BuonaCausa	Italy only	No platform fees	Paypal: 3.4% + €0.35 per donation (VAT included) Lemonway: 0.9% + €0.20 per donation (VAT included)	www.buonacausa.org
FundSurfer	The UK, Italy, Germany, Malta, Slovenia, Spain, etc.	3% of the total amount raised	1.40% + €0.24 through Stripe or using a credit card, and an additional €10.00 processing fee for donations made by cheque or bank transfer.	www.fundsurfer.com
Ulule	Multinational (based in France, can be used by a person of any nationality)	6.67% of the total amount raised by credit card (4.17% of the total amount raised by check)	3% per transaction	www.ulule.com
Startnext	Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Switzerland	6% recommended (voluntarily)	Average 5%	www.startnext.com
Produzioni dal Basso	Operates primarily in Italy	5% of the funds raised (+ VAT)	PayPal: 3.4% + €0.35 per transaction (or 1.8% + €0.20 for a registered non-profit) / Lemon Way: 0.9% + €0.20 per transaction	www.produzionidalbasso.com

Note: This table provides a general overview of typical platform and transaction fees across popular crowdfunding platforms. Actual costs may vary significantly depending on factors such as the type of organisation (e.g. individual, business, charity), the country of registration, the payment method used, and any applicable taxes (such as VAT). It is essential to consult the specific platform's terms and fee structure before launching your campaign, as conditions may change or differ based on your unique situation or market conditions.

How to implement a reward-based crowdfunding campaign

The step-by-step implementation of a crowdfunding campaign is crucial for raising the desired amount of funds. Restoration teams must consider various factors that can influence the outcome.

Throughout this report you will find tips on how to implement some of the phases mentioned in the table below. To avoid making this report too long, additional details on specific phases are included in the references at the end and also in the next chapter on best-practice recommendations. **Table 2** is a general overview of a campaign's implementation:



Table 2. Phases of implementation



Pre-launch phase

During the pre-launch phase, campaign creators must address several important factors (mentioned in a chapter in this report), including:

- **Mitigating potential risks**
- **Constructing a complete and flexible marketing campaign** that attracts backers to the crowdfunding page (e.g., through email packs and Google/Meta Ads)
- **Designing an adequate and appealing reward base** (as rewards might be the strongest motivators for leads to donate)



Crowdfunding platform selection phase

After completing the preliminary actions, it's time to **select a crowdfunding platform**. They differ in terms of the audience size they cover, their fee structure, and the campaign tools they use. On your chosen platform, **upload photos and videos**, and **include a complete and catchy description of your initiative**. **Be honest and authentic to build trust with potential backers.**



Launch phase

With everything in place, you are ready to **launch your campaign**. In the first few days, **it's crucial to convert the gathered leads into real backers to receive the initial donations**. Early momentum will make your campaign more appealing to undecided prospective funders. Don't forget to **adapt your marketing campaign if needed**, and **regularly update your audience on your project's progress**.



Post-launch phase

Once you have reached your financial goal, it's time to thank your backers and everyone who supported your campaign. It is also essential to **keep your audience informed about how the funds are being used and how the initiative is developing**. **Deliver rewards to your contributors as promptly as possible**. It is essential to have constant updates on your progress after fundraising. Maintaining close connections with backers and ensuring the timely shipping of rewards can significantly increase your credibility before the next crowdfunding campaign.

Best practice recommendations

To build a well-developed and successful reward-based crowdfunding campaign, consider the following recommendations:

- **Analyse the features and requirements of the platform** you plan to use. Each platform operates differently, so it's best to become familiar with them in advance.
- **Develop your campaign narrative carefully.** Utilise persuasive content to engage potential funders and motivate them to support your cause. For a nature restoration project, persuasive content should connect both emotionally and rationally with the audience; appealing to their values, sense of urgency, and desire to be part of a meaningful impact.

You may include, for example, before-and-after visuals; personal stories from local communities, landowners, or wildlife experts about how restoration changes lives and ecosystems; description of clear benefits; why the work must happen now, and what could be lost if it's delayed; tangible supporter impact; endorsements from scientists, conservationists, or trusted community figures.

- **Develop a compelling marketing campaign that is authentic, visually engaging, and easy to share.** Use short videos, local champions, and key awareness days to boost reach, and ensure you have the capacity, transparency, and permissions in place to respond effectively if it gains rapid attention.

- **Posting consistent updates enhances your campaign's credibility** among actual and potential donors.
- **Create a campaign-specific hashtag** to allow people to find and follow updates on social media easily.
- **Be grateful for every donation** and write a thank-you letter to every donor.
- **Communicate with people who are interested in your campaign, gather their feedback, and find like-minded individuals who may become long-term advocates for your project.**
- **Provide an approximate delivery date for rewards** and strive to meet that deadline. Research shipping options in advance to avoid delays.
- **Create a compelling and engaging rewards pack** to increase donation amounts and attract more supporters.

Examples of reward packs:

The **Langholm Moor Second-Stage Community Buyout**, led by the Langholm Initiative in southern Scotland, **raised £2.2 million** (about €2.6 million) in 2021–2022 to purchase an additional 5,300 acres (around 2,104 hectares) of moorland and three properties from Buccleuch Estates, doubling the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve to 10,500 acres (about 4,250 hectares). Funded through a mix of Scottish Land Fund support, major private donations, and a large public crowdfunding effort, the project focuses on restoring peatlands and woodlands, protecting rare wildlife like hen harriers, and creating nature-based jobs – serving as a leading example of community-led conservation and ecological restoration. **This campaign offers a strong**

example of how creative and meaningful rewards can be used to engage supporters. You can find more information about the Langholm Moor Second-Stage Community Buyout in the chapter [successful case studies](#). Their tiered approach included:¹

1. **A public thank-you on social media**
2. The **donor's name displayed** on a welcome sign at key entry points to the community-owned land
3. **A virtual update pack and the dedication of a personal tree**
4. An invitation to a **guided visit** to the land
5. **Access to an annual community dinner** held in Langholm

This example illustrates how rewards can be both symbolic and experience-based, fostering a sense of personal connection and long-term involvement.



Like many successful reward-based crowdfunding campaigns, **Kara Water** encourages contributions by offering awards to backers. Kara Water is a tech-forward company that manufactures air-to-water devices – such as the Kara Pure and Kara Pod – that extract moisture from the air, purify it, and enrich it with essential minerals. These innovative systems deliver clean, alkaline drinking

water directly at home or office without relying on plumbing, plastic bottles, or external water sources. The technology is inspired by biomimicry, specifically the Namib desert beetle's method of harvesting moisture from the air. Kara Pure can produce up to approximately 10 liters of water per day while also functioning as a dehumidifier. During the crowdfunding campaign, all Venture Club Members earned 10% equity shares in addition to value-specific rewards:²

- €867: 1% bonus shares, access to the Champions Group Newsletter, and early access to new products.
- €4.335: 3% bonus shares, Champions Group Newsletter, a 30-minute personal video call with CEO Cody Soodeen, and a free Kara Pod.
- €8.617: 5% bonus shares, Champions Group Newsletter, a 30-minute personal video call with CEO Cody Soodeen, and a free Kara Pod.
- €21.677: 7% bonus shares, Champions Group Newsletter, a 30-minute personal video call with CEO Cody Soodeen, a free Kara Pod, and a free Kara Pure.
- €43.355: 9% bonus shares, Champions Group Newsletter, a 30-minute personal video call with CEO Cody Soodeen, a free Kara Pod, and a free Kara Pure.
- €87.611: 10% bonus shares, Champions Group Newsletter, a 30-minute personal video call with CEO Cody Soodeen, a free Kara Pod, and a free Kara Pure.
- €130,067: 12% bonus shares, Champions Group Newsletter, a 30-minute personal video call with CEO Cody Soodeen, a free Kara Pod, and a free Kara Pure.

1 Mayer, K. (2021). Langholm Moor Second-Stage Community Buyout [Fundraiser]. GoFundMe. <https://www.gofundme.com/f/langholm-moor-community-buyout-2>

2 Kara Water (2024). Kara Water: Innovative Air-to-Water technology [Reg CF offering page]. StartEngine. <https://www.startengine.com/offering/karawater>

Successful case studies

Reforestum (Spain)

People worldwide are launching their reward-based crowdfunding campaigns to help the environment. One **successful example is Reforestum, a Spain-based environmental project that focuses on mitigating climate change through reforestation.**

Reforestum aimed to restore and protect original forests by combining crowdfunding with technology. The team developed a mobile app that enables users to create a digital forest, which is then translated into real-world tree planting by forest engineers. The app's usage was relatively simple, yet quite effective – an app user, based on their payments and preferences, could choose the number of trees they wanted to plant, select a preferred location, and even set a donation frequency. Users could also donate money every time they took a trip by plane or taxi. With these payments, app creators purchased land for reforestation and planted trees. Reforestum used a **private ownership model**: app contributors gained actual, indefinite ownership of forest plots on private land, co-owned by members, with the first 25 years of management and tax obligations included in the purchase price.

Reforestum began as an environmentally oriented reward-based crowdfunding campaign on January 15, 2017, with a **predefined goal of €31,000**. On February 9, 2017, **less than one month after launching the project, campaign creators posted a confirmation that the desired amount had been achieved.**

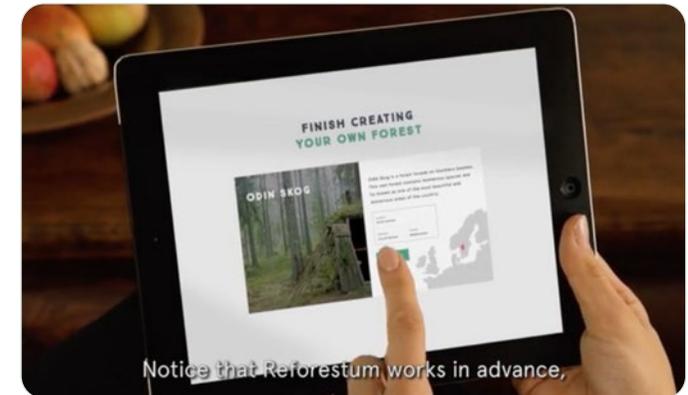
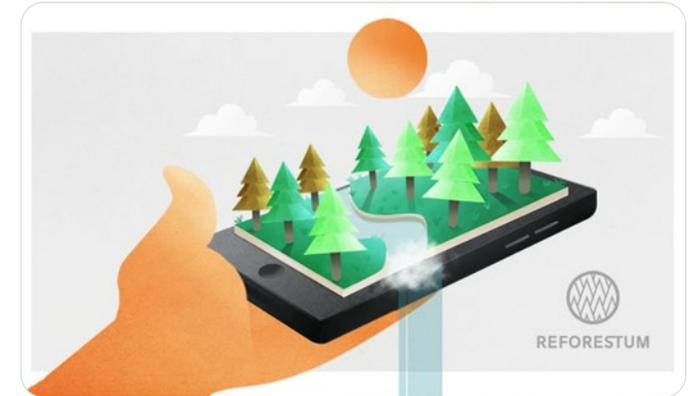
The campaign's success was primarily driven by its well-designed rewards, which included project t-shirts made from organic cotton and guided tours to the forest, among other benefits. Moreover, for every sum, contributors received a thank-you letter from the creators.

Following the success of its crowdfunding campaign, Reforestum continued its growth. In 2020, it launched a campaign that successfully raised €750,000 in the first round of funding. The Reforestum team successfully reforested 40.89 hectares in Spain and France, planting over 31,000 trees. Moreover, the company managed to strengthen ties with multinational corporations, including L'Oréal, Microsoft, Sylvestris, and Ecosphere+, among others.

On December 15, 2024, Reforestum concluded its operations, celebrating the significant milestones achieved during the journey. These accomplishments include 13 successful afforestation projects across Spain, France, and the United Kingdom, collectively spanning 116 hectares and involving the planting of 103,867 trees. Additionally, the organisation supported forest conservation in South America and Asia by purchasing 27,250 carbon credits. These efforts helped protect a combined forested area of 3.9 million hectares and neutralised 68,539 tons of CO₂ emissions. **The Reforestum team expressed heartfelt gratitude to their dedicated donor community, recognising their remarkable support as the key to achieving these impactful results.**

Contact information – Reforestum:

- Official website: www.reforestum.com
- Kickstarter campaign: kickstarter.com/projects/575364783/reforestum
- Dealflow profile: discover.dealflow.eu/companies/reforestum



Reforestum developed a mobile app that enables users to create a digital forest, which is then translated into real-world tree planting by forest engineers.



Langholm Moor Second-Stage Community Buyout (Scotland)

Another example of a successful project was promoted on the GoFundMe website. The project is called **Langholm Moor Second-Stage Community Buyout** and is being implemented in South Scotland. We already mentioned it in the chapter “Best practice recommendations”¹.

This project aims to buy, restore, and improve the quality of an area of upland moor, ancient woodland, meadows, peatlands, and river valleys, which are being developed into the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve. In 2019, the local community owned 2,104 hectares of this land. In May 2019, Buccleuch Estates announced its decision to sell 10,117 hectares of Langholm Moor and the Tarras Valley in its Borders Estate.² **The Langholm Initiative decided to launch a fundraising campaign to purchase 4,250 hectares of this land.** Initially, for the firm, it seemed like an almost impossible task, but with **strong support from the community, trust funds, and foundations, Langholm managed to raise the necessary funds to purchase 2,104 hectares in May 2021.** Moreover, in October 2021, **the Langholm Initiative began conducting environmental education classes for primary school students on community land.**

After achieving the goal for the first stage, the Langholm Initiative set up the second stage of their plan: to purchase the remaining 2,245 hectares and close the deal by May 2022.

They created a campaign on the [GoFundMe.com](https://www.gofundme.com) website on October 20, 2022, to raise £150,000 (approx. €176,000). **The Langholm Initiative achieved this target on May 19, 2022. Moreover, they have exceeded their goal**, and as of May 30, 2022, their campaign had raised approximately £153,000 (€179,000). **To make the crowdfunding process more appealing to potential investors, the Langholm Initiative created a special reward tier for every donor.** Backers of the campaign could receive a big “thank you” on social media for their donations, have their name featured on a welcome sign, receive a personal tree, and receive regular updates over five years, as well as a guided visit to the land and an invitation to the annual dinner hosted in Langholm. The organisation also managed to postpone the purchase deadline until the end of July 2022 to secure the remaining funds from major donors (crowdfunding made up a small portion (approx. €289,39) of the £2.2 million (€2.5 million) needed). However, based on the Langholm Initiative’s previous success in raising funds and uniting people around community-driven initiatives, this challenge was expected to be overcome by the deadline.

Contact information – Langholm Initiative:

- **Official website:** www.langholminitiative.org.uk
- **GoFundMe campaign:** www.gofundme.com/f/langholm-moor-community-buyout-2

To make the crowdfunding process more appealing to potential investors, the Langholm Initiative created a special reward tier for every donor.



¹ The Langholm Initiative www.langholminitiative.org.uk / Mayer, K. (2021). Langholm Moor Second-Stage Community Buyout [Fundraiser]. GoFundMe. www.gofundme.com/f/langholm-moor-community-buyout-2
² <https://carboncopy.eco/initiatives/tarras-valley-nature-reserve>



Suggested Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Choosing the right evaluation metrics is an essential part of running a successful project. These Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) may reveal issues that could seriously harm your funding prospects and jeopardise the entire campaign. Let's look at some of the **most useful KPIs** that you should always consider:

1) Pre-launch guaranteed funders

To ensure a positive initial reaction to your campaign, it is essential to **secure guaranteed funders before the official launch**. Achieving 30% or more of the crowdfunding campaign goal within the first few days creates momentum and positive “buzz” around your project.

2) Conversion rate

The conversion rate is the **percentage of prospective donors who complete a specific goal**, such as making a contribution or subscribing for updates. To calculate this, **divide the number of people who completed the action by the total number of people who had the option to complete it** (total traffic), then multiply the result by 100%.

$$\text{Conversion rate} = \left(\frac{\text{Total donors}}{\text{Total visitors}} \right) \times 100$$

Conversion rates of 5% and higher are considered healthy. This metric is especially valuable for your marketing campaign, as it helps assess how effectively your messages resonate with your audience. A low conversion rate may signal that your efforts are not persuasive enough to drive action.

3) Fundraising Return on Investment (ROI)

Fundraising ROI is a **measure of your campaign's financial efficiency**. It shows how much you have raised for every dollar spent. To calculate this, **divide the total amount raised by the total costs of the campaign** (including platform fees, marketing costs, cost of producing rewards, etc.).

$$\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{Funds raised}}{\text{Total campaign cost}}$$

A number greater than 1 means the campaign made a profit, while a number less than 1 indicates a loss. This metric is helpful for campaign creators who are planning future fundraising and want a benchmark for comparison.



Conclusion

Reward-based crowdfunding is more than just a way to raise money; it's an innovative tool that brings people together around shared environmental values. It can support freshwater restoration projects by empowering individuals, grassroots organisations, and communities to take action for nature and by directly engaging the public in the mission.

As this report shows, **running a successful campaign requires careful preparation**, from selecting the right platform and designing compelling rewards to building momentum and keeping backers engaged. While it's not a quick fix, the effort can result in more than just funding; it can create a sense of ownership, visibility for your restoration project, and a lasting network of supporters.

In a world where traditional funding can be limited or slow, **reward-based crowdfunding offers a fresh, creative approach to drive nature restoration forward.** Done right, it turns passion into participation, and ideas into real, visible impact.

This report is not intended to be an exhaustive guide to running a successful reward-based crowdfunding campaign; such a document would easily become a 900-page encyclopedia. Instead, it aims to **spark inspiration** and **provide you with the confidence to explore this powerful tool** as part of your restoration journey.

Now, it is up to you to decide if a reward-based crowdfunding initiative suits your funding needs for your restoration project.

Good luck with your project!



Glossary

Audience	All people who may see or interact with a crowdfunding campaign.	Fundraiser	A person or group that seeks financial support for a project, campaign, or cause.
Backer	A person who contributes money to support a crowdfunding campaign.	Hashtag	A word or phrase preceded by a "#" symbol, used on social media to group content by topic.
Contributor	A synonym for funder; a person who donates money to support a crowdfunding campaign (reward-based crowdfunding terminology).	Hybrid crowdfunding	A crowdfunding model that combines elements from multiple types of crowdfunding (e.g., reward-based, donation-based, equity-based, or lending). For example, a project might offer non-financial rewards (like early product access or merchandise) alongside equity shares, allowing both donors seeking rewards and investors seeking financial returns to participate.
Crowdfunding	A method of funding a project by collecting small contributions from a large number of people, usually through online platforms.	Launch a campaign	The act of starting and publishing a crowdfunding campaign.
Crowdfunding platform	A digital platform where individuals, groups, or organisations can post campaigns to raise funds from the public.	Lead	A potential supporter or donor who has shown interest in a campaign.
Donation	A voluntary monetary contribution given to support a campaign or cause.	Lending-based crowdfunding campaign	A model in which individuals lend money to a project or business in exchange for repayment with interest.
Donation-based crowdfunding campaign	A type of campaign in which contributors donate money without expecting any financial return.	Non-profit campaign	A campaign where most of the funds raised (excluding necessary costs) go directly toward the project's goals, with minimal or no personal gain for organisers.
Donor	A person who gives money to support a specific campaign or cause.	Perks	Synonym for rewards, particularly in U.S.-based platforms like Indiegogo.
Equity-based crowdfunding campaign	A crowdfunding model in which contributors receive equity (shares) in a business in exchange for their financial support.	Reward-based crowdfunding	A model in which contributors receive non-financial rewards based on the amount they contribute.
Fee	A fixed amount of money paid for the use of a service or platform.	Reward pack	A set of goods or experiences offered to backers as recognition for their support.
Freelancer	A person who works independently on specific tasks or projects, often without long-term affiliation to an employer.	Transaction fee (or payment processing fee)	A small percentage or fixed fee charged on each contribution to cover payment handling costs.
Funder	A synonym for contributor; a person who contributes money to support a crowdfunding campaign (reward-based crowdfunding terminology).		

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