

Crowdfunding a Citizen Science Project, by Eva Lewandowski

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There seems to be a natural link between citizen science, which relies on members of the public to conduct research, and crowdfunding, which relies on members of the public to fund a business or project. Like citizen science, crowdfunding has exploded in popularity in just the past few years, due in large part to the ubiquity of the internet in our day-to-day lives. There are dozens of popular crowdfunding websites where organizations or individuals can describe their projects and ask for donations from the public to fund them.

Crowdfunding is unique because it relies on large numbers of donors, sometimes tens or hundreds of thousands, to support a project, and in many cases those donors have no prior relationship with the projects they choose to sponsor. Often donations are just a few dollars, with projects relying on the large number of donors rather than the size of the donations. Furthermore, many crowdfunding sites use an all-or-nothing funding strategy, meaning that projects must set funding goals, and supporters must only pay if that goal is met. When the goal isn't met, the project receives no money. This strategy is appealing to many donors because it means they aren't spending money on a project that simply doesn't receive enough donations to operate or complete its mission. Like with most fundraising, projects on many crowdfunding websites incentivize donations by offering small gifts or rewards to donors, with big donors sometimes receiving the opportunity to have a hands-on role in the project.

Crowdfunding hasn't become a substantial part of citizen science just yet, but there have been a number of successfully crowd funded citizen science initiatives. Considering the growth of both fields, it's likely that we will see more crowd funded citizen science projects in the future. Below are a few of the websites that seemed primed to host citizen science projects in search of crowdfunding.

- [Kickstarter.com](#)- Kickstarter is arguably the largest and most successful crowdfunding site, and it is home to "creative projects" that are all-or-nothing funded. It doesn't have a large contingent of science projects; instead, the site has funded tens of thousands of music, film, game, and technology projects. Some of these campaigns have received millions of dollars in donations, such as the endeavor to provide free access to Reading Rainbow to schoolchildren, which brought in more than five millions dollars from a total of over 100,000 supporters. There have been a few funded citizen science projects, including Yellowstone Wolf, which tracks wolves at Yellowstone through visitors' photographs.
- [Indiegogo.com](#)- Indiegogo isn't a science-specific fundraising website, but they have hosted successfully funded citizen science projects, including local coral reef surveys and an initiative to gather information on Caribbean birds from local people. The site is unique because it allows projects to choose between fixed and flexible funding. Fixed funding is the same as all-or-nothing funding, while flexible funding allows unsuccessful projects to keep a portion, but not all of their pledged income.
- [RocketHub.com](#)- This is another site that supports projects of all types, including some cool citizen science initiatives. One funded citizen science project examines nocturnal pollination by moths, while another seeks to study the genetics of red foxes in Colorado. RocketHub funding is not all-or-nothing, so even projects that don't meet their funding goal can receive support.
- [Experiment.com](#)- This site specializes in science projects, making it a good fit for citizen science. The funding is all-or-nothing, and backers do not receive any sort of gift or reward after they contribute, just the joy of having supported scientific research. Successfully funded citizen science projects on experiment.com have ranged from studying pollinator services in community gardens to using DNA testing to identify species in Alaska, as well as the Pieris Project, a global cabbage white butterfly project.