

eBook



HOW TO RAISE MORE MONEY WITH FUNDRAISING EVENTS

About This Guide

Fundraising events are a nonprofit mainstay, but they typically take a lot of time, money, and effort to produce.

Even the most basic events can run into the tens of thousands of dollars, it's important to squeeze every opportunity out of these big investments. All too often, though, many nonprofits see the event itself as the finish line, missing critical opportunities for more connection, insight, and inspiration (hint: all things that will lead you to more loyal donors and increased giving).

Inside this guide, you'll find tips that will help you make the most of your event and steps you can take to ensure you bring in more money than you spend.

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Network for Good combines fundraising expertise with simple-to-use technology to provide [smarter fundraising software](#), tools, and coaching that are easy to use and raise more money. Since 2001, we've processed over \$1.4 billion in online donations for more than 125,000 nonprofits. We're here to help you connect with donors and create more successful fundraising campaigns.

Clarifying the Vision for Your Event

The first step to designing your event is to take a step that is so tempting to skip: **Clearly articulate the grand plan.** You need to ask yourself:

- *Who is my audience?*
- *What venues are the best to reach them?*
- *What do I want them to do? Am I trying to educate people? Am I seeking actions supportive of my cause? Do I want to raise money?*
- *Is an event the best way to get my audience to take the action I desire?*
- *How can I streamline the process to maximize success and minimize stress?*
- *Is an event an ideal complement to my organization's other engagement efforts?*
- *What's the key theme or message for the event that will prompt the audience to take the desired actions?*
- *What should be the stated purpose of the event?*
- *Where is the best place to stage the event given the audience and purpose?*

Once you've answered these basic questions, set one overarching goal. ONE! Focus is your best bet for success. Then, define metrics and success measures for that goal. This exercise will ensure you are smart at every step of planning and execution.

Depending on the purpose of your event, you may be measuring very different things – for example, impact on local policy or growth of your supporter lists or dollars raised. **Here is an example:**

SAMPLE GOAL

Raise money by exposing existing donors to our impact and recruiting their friends/family/colleagues to our cause via the event and event-related outreach

METRICS

- Dollars raised
- % existing donors attending
- % new contacts created

SUCCESS MEASURES

- Raise \$150,000 from 500 individuals and 5 corporate sponsors
- Get 10% of our top donors to attend
- Increase giving from attendees by 25% over the course of the next year
- Get 15% of attendees to also give an additional donation

If your goal is to “raise awareness,” think twice about your goal. Is awareness your top goal as an organization? Or dollars? Is awareness what you most need right now to achieve your mission? Challenge yourself to set goals and success measures that truly advance your mission and meet the most critical needs of your organization. Your event is not a free-standing, one-off endeavor – it should be part of your over-all strategic engagement and fundraising efforts.

Now set a budget. You know how much you want the event to raise. What do you want to spend to bring in those dollars? Even super-sophisticated nonprofits sometimes forget to track exactly how much they are spending on an event and critically compare that figure to the donations the event generates.

Settle on a realistic budget and understand whether your ticket price matches the type of event you’d like to host and if your attendees will be willing to pay it. Defining your budget and amount you need to raise will help set your ticket price and structure correctly to maximize the revenue from each attendee. This exercise will ensure your event will ultimately be worth the effort – and that you’ll end up not only in a fancy black dress but also in the financial black.

What Kind of Event Will You Host?

What type of event meets your goal and budget? Consider your options and plan!

For fundraising events, you might want to consider:

- Gala / Dance
- Formal or informal meals (pancake breakfast, black-tie meal)
- Food & Wine Tasting
- Car Wash
- Art Fair
- Karaoke
- Carnival
- Tournament / Contest (Poker, Chili, etc...)
- Sports
 - Watch: local team event: football, baseball, basketball, hockey game
 - Participate: golf tournament, celebrity basketball game
- Performing Arts, Music, Comedy Show
- Milestone Event or Anniversary
- Holiday Social

TIP: *When deciding on what kind of event you will host, look at results from previous events and see which events had the best ROI. Use your donor management system to determine which event not only brought in the most funds, which event was best positioned to retain donors and bring in additional gifts during and after the event.*

When you've come up with your final options, pick the one that best aligns with:

- Your audience
- Your brand and mission
- Your goal
- Your budget
- Your available time
- Your expertise
- Your staff and/or volunteer availability and competencies

It's essential you achieve a fit in all of these areas – especially in terms of staff time and resources. If you're short on staff to produce and promote the event, consider creating a volunteer corps to help execute your plan as well as a host committee of your top supporters, board members or other well-connected fans who will commit to helping recruit sponsors and selling a certain number of tickets.

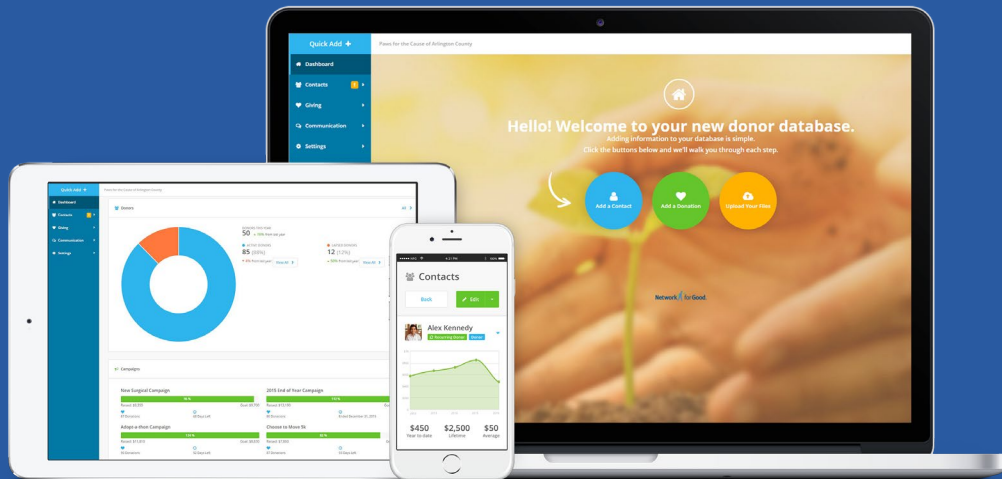
Once you have determined the type of event you wish, set a time and place and get that logistical planning underway. Create a plan for the event itself – from start to finish. And select the tools that will help you manage it.

FEATURED BLOG POST

[Two Questions You Must Ask Before Planning Your Next Event](#) by *Barbara O'Reilly, CFRE*



READY TO PUT THESE TIPS IN ACTION?



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Network for Good combines fundraising expertise with simple-to-use technology to provide **smarter fundraising software** that's easy to use, with all the support and coaching you need to get the most out of your investment.



**DONATION
PAGES**



**DONOR
MANAGEMENT**



PEER-TO-PEER

Our suite of tools includes everything you need to grow results, not expenses. Schedule a time to talk with a fundraising consultant today!

SCHEDULE A DEMO NOW

Securing Corporate Sponsors

So how do you get corporate sponsors on board with your event? First, identify prospects. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Companies that know and/or have supported your organization
- Companies where your board members, vendors or supporters work (or have other ties)
- Companies that have a philanthropic and/or business agenda well-matched to your organization
- Companies that can deliver on funds and promotion
- Companies whose employees have volunteered for your organization on a regular basis

Next, answer the #1 question you need to secure a corporate sponsor: What's in it for the sponsor? If your answer is "their logo on a tote-bag," or "the good feeling of helping out my charity," that's not good enough. A corporate sponsor is looking for benefits such as new business, more customers, a halo effect with their customer base that promotes brand loyalty, or visibility. Corporate sponsors are like other donors: This isn't about what you need – it's about what you can deliver for your partner. When you approach prospective sponsors, listen more than talk, asking them all about their goals and priorities. Then show how it's of big benefit to that sponsor to be in front of your audience.


That's the real thing you're selling: a benefit to the sponsor. The cost of that benefit is your sponsorship package:

Event Package + Promotional Package + Donation = Sponsorship Package

That means you should lead with "Here's what we can do for you – let's make this win-win happen together," not "Here's our sponsorship package – please support us."

As you're working to win over your sponsor, make sure you're clear on what their role will be. It's critical to establish clear parameters that are ethical and appropriate from the start.

If you follow this advice carefully, you'll get sponsors who will say yes. When they do, follow-up with a contract – and create with your sponsor(s) a plan to make you both successful. Involve the sponsor in planning and promotion so they feel like an



integral part of your event – and so your event feels like part of their overall outreach strategy. The deeper the thought you put into the partnership, the deeper the partnership will be.

Not only are corporate sponsors great partners for funding your event, but they lend your event more reach and recognition within your network. Knowing that a well-reputed business supports your cause not only helps the sponsor, but gives your organization legitimacy in the eyes of a potential attendee or donor. Take advantage of this strategy for the long-term with your organization-your sponsor's for-profit savvy and business sense can be a powerful tool beyond your upcoming event.

Creating a Great Donor Experience

The most important way to ensure lots of ticket sales, happy participants in your event and achievement of your goals is this: Make your event a dynamic, engaging experience from start to finish.

Do that by focusing on the experience of the invitees and putting together a full communication plan for them. It should not only include a great invitation but also cover a fun acknowledgment process, a dynamite series of interactions at the event, lots and lots of gratitude along the way and ongoing engagement after the event.

Ready to start inviting people?

Think about going green and doing it all electronically. It's far less pricey, easier to track and kinder to the planet than print invitations. Plus you can do lots of fun interactive things online to make your event engaging from the start.

Here's what makes for a great invitation:

- It compellingly and emotionally reminds people of why they should care about your organization (with online invites, you can convey this with photos and video very inexpensively!).
- It makes a clear case for why the event is worth the invitees' time.
- It's clearly branded to the organization.
- It shows how much impact the event will have on something important.
- It's personal.
- It's clear: the critical elements of price, time, place, etc. are easy to find.
- The price tiers make sense for the audience – and there's incentive to buy now (early bird specials, etc.).
- You collect everything that's key to know from attendees (shirt size, food preference) without overwhelming them with questions.
- It's incredibly easy to RSVP and buy a ticket or register online.
- There's a chance to add a donation – or a way for people who can't attend the event to donate.
- It gives invitees a way to spread the word if they want to let others know about the event – through social networks, links, badges and buttons.

- Ask questions that help you tangibly make the event great for your attendee, like dinner choice, golf handicap or t-shirt size, but don't forget the intangible things that will help you better engage them now and in the future.
- Why are they there?
- How can you get them involved?
- How can you use your event, other attendees and resources to really impact that person?

Here's who you might want to invite:

- Past donors
- Past event attendees
- Volunteers to your organization
- Program alumni
- Your board members
- People on your email and other lists
- Family, friends, social contacts of your board members and your staff
- People identified by your sponsors
- People identified by your host committee
- Friends of any of the above

Securing RSVPs and Making Sure Guests Show Up

So how can you influence the ticketing life cycle and encourage more people to attend your event? Leverage these lessons on social media and promotion from Ritu Sharma of Social Media for Nonprofits.

1. Create a calendar and a plan

- Begin planning your social media campaign 6 to 8 weeks before your event, plan backwards from the date of the event, and keep track of your digital communications with a social media manager like HootSuite.
- You already know the name of your keynote speaker, where the event will take place, and other key details, so capitalize on this knowledge: Pre-scheduling messages now will save time as the event nears and let you focus on other areas. You should also begin posting this information to your website and local community calendars.

2. Use social media to maximize engagement and tie it all together with data

- Create a digital ticketing and donation page with your branding using a tool that includes social sharing such as Network for Good's event ticketing solution. It's this last part—social sharing—that's the key: People are 60% more likely to share your event registration after they've signed up.
- Create unique links for each of your social media sales sources (email campaigns, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) so that you can track registrations and donations from each.
- You can also create unique links for partners so that you'll be able to identify which ones were the most helpful, drove the most traffic, and brought in the most registrants and donations.
- Measure your results throughout the campaign in order to tweak your outreach strategy.

3. Launch your event

- Once your event ticketing page is live, make sure people know about it by sharing the announcement on your social media profiles and invite conversation about your event.
- Create a Facebook event and cultivate your community with active posts and responses.
- If your weekly reports show that a specific platform is leading to the highest number of donations and ticket sales, focus your efforts that, on what's working.

4. Continue to leverage social channels

When others interact with you, even to find out about an event, they want to know what's in it for them. By posting more useful, beneficial, and educational content than promotional material, you'll see the greatest response and be perceived as a group with value.



Promote on Facebook:

- Announce your event and broadcast it to all of your fans!
- Share pictures of last year's event and attendees, as well as this year's upcoming performers and activities.
- Update your wall with the latest news about sponsors and to tease special activities.
- Invite attendees to RSVP on Facebook after they register.
- Tag VIPs, attendees, and partners in your Facebook posts.
- Post to create urgency by telling fans how many days are left to register.



Tweet it out:

- Spend time cultivating a relationship with your cause's influencers. Re-tweet their content and send them messages so that they'll take note of who you are and you'll build brand recognition with them. When you're ready to promote for your event, they'll be more willing to share it.
- If you send these influencers a pre-made tweet, chances are high that they will share your message, but not if you haven't cultivated a relationship with them.

- If you have the resources, tweet multiple times per day (about three to five depending on your audience). You can post more often on Twitter than on Facebook because Twitter's feed moves faster.
- Create a hashtag for your event to include in all posts, such as #NFGgala. That way, your attendees can easily follow your event and tweet about it, too.
- Don't forget to say thank you. Manners are always important, so remember to acknowledge everyone who helps promote your event.

Link up:

- LinkedIn is great for reaching communities. Members form groups based on shared interests and similar careers.
- Before you start posting in a group, look at the culture, and then look for ways to add value so that members will view you as a contributor and not as self-serving.
- You can also create your own groups for your community, organization, and event. Invite all attendees to your group on LinkedIn and share exclusive content with them.

5. Don't forget other forms of promotion

- Outreach to local media.
- Call influential supporters.
- Put a prominent registration button and ads on your website.
- Email supporters about your event.
- Include event details in your print and e-newsletters.

6. Keep the conversation going

- On the big day, prominently display your event's hashtag and project the Twitter conversation in real time using free services like Twitterfall.com.
- Ensure that you post a few photos and updates during the event to help those who can't attend feel a part of the excitement.
- After the event, post videos and attendees' stories on Facebook, ask for feedback or share an email survey, thank your attendees on Twitter, and write recaps of the event on LinkedIn.
- As a final step, analyze your results to determine which channels were the most effective for getting registrants and keeping supporters energized.

5 Ways to Get More RSVPs

Your fundraising event's success depends on the quantity (and quality) of guests who RSVP (and actually show up). Getting guests to let you know that they're coming shouldn't be so hard, right?

If you're busy fighting responses like, "I'm too busy that week," "I lost the invite," and "I don't know anybody else going," don't lose hope! To help you get more RSVPs, try these five ideas for your next fundraising event!

- 1. Designate hosts to invite 10 of their friends:** Ask your long-time donors to serve as hosts for your fundraising event. The host role can mean whatever you want, such as simply listing host names in the program or, for a more involved role, asking them to share why they've supported your organization for so long. Hosts should invite their friends and colleagues to the event so that they can learn about your organization (and hopefully become new donors).
- 2. Send a paper invite and an email invite:** Some donors are constantly checking their email and other donors might never glance at their overflowing inbox. To accommodate all types of event attendees, send traditional and digital invitations. **BO-NUS:** Network for Good's Event Ticketing software can help you make purchasing a ticket easy and tracks ticket sales.
- 3. Make it easy to RSVP:** The easier it is for invitees to RSVP, the more likely people are to let you know if they're coming. Keep guests excited about your upcoming event (and encourage more people so say yes) by updating them on behind the scenes planning and special guests. Plus, don't forget to remind them of the date a few days before!
- 4. Send a special invitation to recurring donors:** We always encourage nonprofits to make their donors feel like superheroes. To make your most loyal donors feel super special, treat them to a handwritten invitation or a phone call from a board member.
- 5. Follow up with past attendees who have yet to RSVP:** Review the guest list from last year's event about 2 to 3 weeks before RSVPs are due. How many of these guests are planning on coming this year? Follow up with them personally, and if they can't make it, ask them to make a gift to help host the event and fund your programs.

Raising More Money Before, During, and After the Event

Introduce a peer-to-peer fundraising element.

Your fundraising event is likely a big highlight of the year for your staff, board members, community and donors. You can capitalize on that excitement and attention to extend your event's fundraising impact far beyond your event date or reception hall.

An easy and fun way to do this is to use a peer-to-peer fundraising campaign to allow your event to go virtual and reach new donors through the passion (and connections) of your supporters' networks.

You can launch a peer fundraising campaign in tandem with your event to run before, during, or after the occasion. This can be a smart way to help board members and table leads fulfill their fundraising commitment.

To learn more about peer-to-peer fundraising campaigns, [download our peer-to-peer fundraising campaign planner worksheets](#).

Allow guests to make a additional gift or, if they cannot attend, make a donation instead of purchasing a ticket.

Not all guests will be able to attend your event. On your event ticketing page, make it easy for donors to give a donation instead of purchasing a ticket.

Make on-site giving easy.

This might sound obvious, but it's often overlooked by many nonprofits: Make sure to give attendees the option to give more during your event.

Be appreciative of those who have purchased tickets and are attending your event, but recognize that a portion of your attendees will be ready and willing to do even more. Here are a few simple strategies for opening the door to more donations at your next event:

Auctions & Raffles

Auctions, games, and raffles are popular ways to raise even more money. The best raffles and auctions feature items that tie back to your cause or reflect your community's unique interests.

Mobile Donations

Channel supporters' good feelings into more gifts by reminding them that they can give on the spot via their mobile device. (Don't have a mobile-friendly donation solution? [Check out the modern and easy-to-use mobile giving features of Network for Good's donation pages.](#))

Recurring Donations and Memberships

Create a "Donation Station" or membership kiosk that will help your loyal supporters set up a recurring gift or become members of your organization. Be sure to staff your booth to make this process personal, easy, and fun.

Illustrate Your Impact

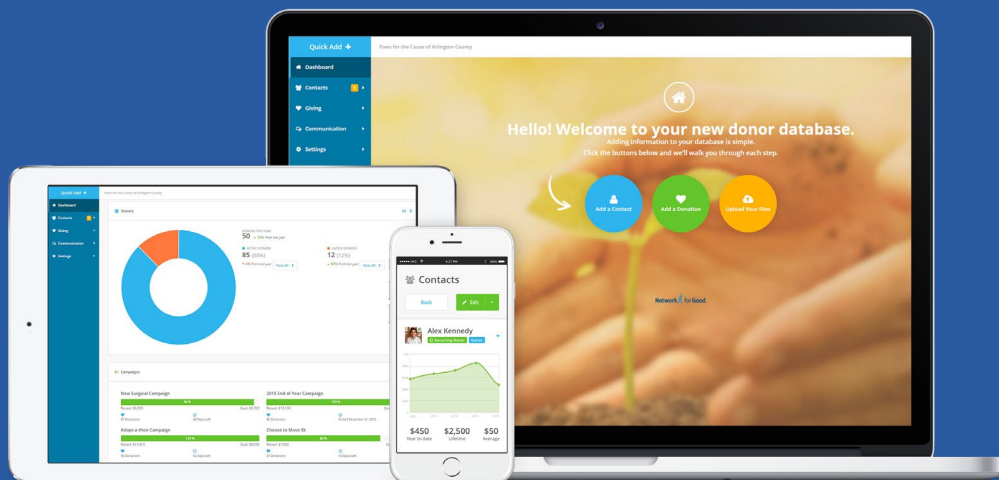
When your donors feel like there is a real, tangible benefit as a result of their donation, they'll be more likely to give again.

Don't Forget this Crucial Ingredient

When you host an event, have your speaker issue a call to action that people can heed in the next 5 minutes. Make it something people can do right away to translate their emotion and support into tangible help, such as send a text to a policymaker. Or sign a pledge to help you. Or donate. So many nonprofits wonder how to build an email list. How about by asking the people who're tearing up for their address so you can keep telling them amazing stories?

People want to help, so help them help you by giving them a way to translate inspiration into action.

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Three Easy Ways to Bring Your Mission to Life at Your Event

by Terry Axelrod

Do your events raise awareness but no money? Are you struggling to turn participants into fundraisers? Here are three steps to move the focus of your event from attendance and awareness to fundraising:

1. Live testimonial

Who has your organization touched? What lives have you changed? Invite one of those people to share his personal story! This method is not reserved for only human services organizations. Say you're an eco-conscious nonprofit who's saved public lands from development: Invite a family who hikes there!

2. Quick speech from leadership

Your executive director or CEO is the visionary leader of your organization for a reason. Where does her passion lie? What changes have previous supporters enabled? Where is your organization going in the next year and how will that affect those in attendance at your event?

3. An invitation to come back for seconds

We're not talking about the buffet here. This step is your call to action! Have a board member invite folks to take a tour of your nonprofit's facilities, or provide a way for guests to learn more about next year's plans.

Keep event attendees engaged after the event.

Not sure how to follow up with your event's guests? Here are some tips from Claire Axelrad, J.D., CFRE and principal of Clairification.com:

Your event is not just an event. It's an opportunity to move folks along a relationship continuum and "what's next" when it comes to their involvement with your organization. Think of this involvement in four levels:

- Awareness
- Interest
- Involvement
- Investment (every fundraisers' favorite)

For example, some of your event attendees may be involved with your organization as volunteers. So your next goal is to get them to invest, or to invest more than in the past.

On the other hand, this may be other attendee's first encounter with your organization. So your next goal with them is to get them interested by signing up for your email list or following you on Facebook.

So, how do you make those changes happen? To start, think of hosting an event as planting a seed. Once that seed is planted, it's your job to nurture the seed and make it grow through your work. Here are six steps to guide you through this process: On the other hand, this may be other attendee's first encounter with your organization. So your next goal with them is to get them interested by signing up for your email list or following you on Facebook.

So, how do you make those changes happen? To start, think of hosting an event as planting a seed. Once that seed is planted, it's your job to nurture the seed and make it grow through your work. Here are six steps to guide you through this process:

Build follow-up into your event timeline.

Don't make event follow-up an afterthought, or something you push to the back burner. Block out time on your calendar ahead of time for writing thank you notes or making phone calls. Events without follow-up are like trees that fall in the forest when no one is there. It happened; so what? Big thud.

Say thank you.

When it comes to an event, you can never thank too much. From attendees to vendors, it is time well spent. I recommend the following thank you activities for different event stakeholders:

- **Attendees:** The very least you can do is send a thank you email, which you can easily automate and set up in advance with the help of a donor database system. Don't forget to segment your attendee list and send a slightly different email to different groups (e.g., first-time attendees who paid; first-time attendees who came as guests; repeat attendees; table buyers, etc.).
- **Volunteers:** Don't forget to call and thank the folks who worked so hard to make your event possible. For those who worked especially hard, send a bouquet of flowers or give them a special gift (e.g., a framed photo from the evening or a scrapbook of event memories).
- **Sponsors and Vendors:** These folks all need thank yous, too. Perhaps send them a copy of the program, or a photo from the event, which shows off their logo. Prepare copy in advance so you can get these out as soon as possible. Impress these investors so they'll renew their support next year.

Share event results.

Everyone wants to know how much the event raised and what you, together, accomplished. Tell them!

Send an email and also put this information up on your website. Wherever you previously promoted the event is a great place to showcase the results and say thanks. Consider a big photo showing off your mission. Try to stay away from photos of people standing at podiums speaking or sitting at tables eating. Here's a great example:

Remind donors they were there.

People like you to show them you know them. This is especially true if they already gave to your organization, and you're asking them to give again. You may know that most of the cost of their ticket, or their auction item purchase, wasn't technically a charitable gift, but they don't think of it this way. They want to be thanked for their generosity.

Create a special segment in annual campaigns for event attendees. All these folks get a special note from a volunteer that thanks them for attending the event, and encourages them to join the annual campaign this year as well.

Ask donors to get involved with you in other ways.

This is a good strategy for any prospective lead, including folks who are simply following you on social media. Always ask yourself "What do I want this supporter to do next?" You can ask them to:

- Subscribe to your blog.
- Share your event video with their friends.
- Follow you on Pinterest or Instagram.
- Sign a petition or pledge.
- Watch a new video on YouTube or Vimeo.
- Become a volunteer.

Build a long-term donor journey.

You are a Sherpa. A journey guide. Supporters will engage with you in multiple ways, at multiple entry points, in their journey towards passionate investment in your cause. Your event is but one stop along the way. Your job is to assure it is not the last stop – but just a stepping stone towards the next destination.

Your Post Event To Do List

The actual event may take place on a single day, but that's not the end of it. The good news and the bad news is the engagement with your supporters never ends. The week after the event is a great time to solidify – or clarify – relationship with these donors and prospects.

Don't forget these critical steps AFTER the event.

1. Use your reporting tools and feedback from staff, sponsors and attendees to assess what worked – and what didn't. Record and share this information within your organization so you can follow up on any loose ends, smooth any ruffled feathers, celebrate any successes, and define what to repeat or change next time.
2. Re-engage with everyone who participated – from sponsors to volunteers to attendees to staff and donors. Share photos or results and give them the credit for the impact you had.
3. Call every attendee and start a dialogue using these 4 tips from Terry Axelrod (*Notice that none of these steps involve asking for money – this part is about trying to develop a relationship with a person, not an ATM!*)
 - Thank them genuinely for attending. Ask them what they thought of the event—and be quiet and let them talk.
 - Listen and identify their “hot buttons.”
 - Ask if there's any way they could see themselves becoming involved with your organization in the future.
 - Find out if there's anyone else they think might be interested in getting involved or attending a future event.
4. Now reach out to the new people who became part of your prospect list as part of the event or the post-event calls and share photos or results from the event and invite them to the next one (or to be on the list for the next one).
5. In a few months, use your donor management report back to everyone the impact of the event on your key issue and goal. If a shelter was built or a life was saved, they need to know about it!

CHECKLIST

Plan a Successful Fundraising Event

Define the vision for your event

It's important to keep in mind what you hope to achieve, who your audience is, what you want them to do, and what metrics you'll use to measure success.

Determine the best type of event for your organization

Your event should align with your audience, brand, mission, goal, budget, expertise, available time, and resources. Decide if you should have a gala, auction, benefit dinner, concert, tournament, reunion, etc.

Draft a realistic budget

Create a realistic budget and be prepared to stick to it! Consider whether your ticket prices match the type of event you'd like to host and if your attendees will be willing to pay them.

Pull your committee together and start planning

Create a step-by-step plan for yourself from today until the day of your event that lays out everything from when you'll send out invites to how often you'll send reminders and emails.

Secure corporate sponsors

Define your value and look for sponsors through your board, supporters, and vendors.

Send invitations—ideally online

Make sure you invite the right people and pay attention to your invitation! Inviting people online will make selling tickets easier, cheaper, and greener—plus, non-attendees will also have any easy way to contribute.

Promote your event as much as possible

Now is the time to use every means possible—social media, sponsor's websites, newsletters, emails, print ads—to promote your event and increase attendance.

Make it easy for donors to give before and during the event

Include online giving options in addition to online event ticketing. Include other ways for donors to give at the event. And, don't forget a straightforward call to action to give!

Thank attendees and share recaps

Keep the party going by thanking everyone who attended or contributed to your event. Plus, share recaps in newsletters and on social media.

Assess your goal and event

After your event, analyze each step from budget to promotion to determine what worked, what didn't, and what you'd like to do differently next time.