



## Special Event Fundraising

### Challenges Associated with Special Events

Special events can:

- Be expensive. If not planned correctly, special events can lead your organization covering some costs that it may not be able to recoup.
- Require too much work and lead to volunteer or staff burnout. Some events require a lot of work for very low return, in terms of funds raised.
- Be time-consuming.
- Have the potential for unfavorable publicity.

Say “Yes” to a special event when you:

- Are sure you can't *lose* money.
- Have a good volunteer pool.
- Know the event will generate lots of positive media.

## Key Elements for a Special Event

### Goals:

1. Raising **Money**
2. Re-visiting your **Mission** statement
3. **Motivation** of your volunteers
4. **Interaction** with the community you serve
5. **Involvement** of your boards
6. **Recruitment** of additional volunteers
7. Developing **Valuable Networks**: expanding your constituency
8. **Media Visibility** – marketing your organization
9. Solicit **Endorsements**

### Planning:

1. Draft an event **timetable**
2. Write a **strategic plan** for this special event (amount of funds organization wants to raise, how and from whom?)
3. Specify **responsibilities** for event leadership
4. Write a **tactical plan** for utilization of volunteers
5. Construct an event **budget**
6. Develop a specific **marketing plan** for your event

### Organization:

1. Recruit a **chairperson** for your event
2. Define **committees** for the event (job descriptions and committee descriptions)
3. **Recruitment** of committee members
  - a.) current contributors
  - b.) past contributors
  - c.) prospects
  - d.) honorary members (past honorees, political and prominent community leaders)

### Administration:

1. Documents
2. Contracts
3. Insurance
4. Printing
5. Ambiance
6. Acknowledgments (fundraising software)

## Successful Event Planning

### Select an Appropriate Event

1. **What kind of event will best reflect the organization's mission?** To obtain commitment from the organization's key players, hold a brainstorming session at which board, staff and volunteers provide initial input into the kind of event that could be sponsored.
2. **What resources are available?** Having the requisite resources to effect a particular event is an important reality check. Key players from your organization should be involved in making the final "cuts" by critiquing and prioritizing the more popular ideas and making a final decision on one event to implement.
3. **Which event will raise the most funds to enable the organization to advance its mission?** If you have not run an event before (or like the one that is being proposed), project conservative revenues and high expenses (plan for the unexpected). Develop a preliminary budget which includes several streams of revenue, so that if one falls short you will still raise some money; suggested revenue sources may include tickets (several pricing levels), a raffle, auction, ad book and sponsorship. Expense items may include catering, site rental, entertainment, prizes/gifts, decorations and invitations (design, printing, postage). Once a budget has been created, you will have to decide if this event is worth doing in terms of projected income.
4. **What event would serve as a positive force in marketing your agency?** You may decide to run the event regardless of income projected. This decision will most likely be based on your assessment of the fund-raising aspect, or cultivation potential of the event in question. Is there an opportunity to meet, mix, and mingle with donors and others who may be interested in helping to advance the organization's mission.

### Determine Who Will Make the Event Happen

1. **Who will serve on the committee?** The committee will be composed of one or more board members, one of whom should serve as chairperson. It is also a good idea to include non-board members (your organization's volunteers, friends of board members, etc.) who "like to throw a good party." Also, a staff liaison (development or marketing staff or executive director) is needed to help convene meetings, coordinate activities and move plans forward. The committee's role includes overall planning, obtaining sponsors, and determining the invitation list.
2. **Who will work on the event?** While committee members may be the "worker bees," some events require additional people to make things happen. As you recruit volunteers make clear what your expectations are regarding their volunteer time.

*Sources: Special Events: Proven Strategies for Nonprofit Fund Raising, Alan L. Wendroff, CFRE  
How to Get the Most Out of your Next Special Event, Pennsylvania Nonprofit Report  
Susan Walling, CFRE*

