

“Go Golf” Events Management

Your Organization's Next Special Event: "Fund-Raiser" Or "Friend-Raiser?"

Should a special event be focused on making friends for an organization or bringing in money? On the one hand, every organization needs friends to help promote its mission and to be there for future fund-raising needs. But on the other, there are bills to be paid today. The short answer is most charitable and not for profit events must make money! Putting on a special event is a substantial effort that requires the dedication of important resources and committed hardworking volunteers from the community. Those commitments should be made only when the primary goal is to make money.

When properly conducted special events can be a valuable source of additional contributions that compliment a nonprofit organization's traditional fund-raising campaigns. They also can be a way to increase volunteer involvement with an organization, resulting in a larger pool of more committed volunteers to draw upon for future fund-raising campaigns.

Special events should always help publicize and promote an organization. They can be useful tools for developing public awareness of an organization's contribution to the community. But that should all be secondary to the goal of raising money. By focusing your special events on fund-raising, you make the measurement of their success clear-cut. By not trying to accomplish two or more differing goals, developing a plan for a special event becomes an exercise in getting from point A to point B by the shortest route possible. A special event with the straightforward primary goal of making money is a special event much more likely to be successful.

Key Criteria For Successful Fund-raising Special Events

1. They make significant amounts of money.
2. They have a high ticket-price structure.
3. Tickets are pre-sold.
4. They are deliberately targeted to a well-defined market.
5. They promote community involvement and continuing support.
6. They are carefully planned and executed to the last detail.

When a Benefit Isn't A "Benefit"

Special events have no guarantee of success. They can and do go off the tracks and cause controversy and distress in an organization, if the committee is not committed to success. Special events that are not tightly managed and are not held to high accountability can damage ongoing fund-raising efforts and an organization's continued vitality. A professional Event Producer will help keep your event on track; however, they do not fundraise for the event committee, merely offer timelines

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Pitfalls of Special Event Fund-Raising Efforts Include:

- Taking your eye off the fund-raising ball. Too often, instead of being a secondary or even tertiary source of contributed income, they are relied upon as a primary source. When that happens, they get in the way of tried and true fund-raising methods. Organizations concentrate their energy on the next special event rather than on directly asking for money from corporations, foundations, and individuals. Organizations that do this are "putting all their eggs in one basket," and it is the smallest of the fund-raising "baskets" available to them.
- Too little return for your efforts. More often than not, the net proceeds from such special events simply do not justify the time, effort, and expense expended to produce them.
- Paying too high a price for success. Some of an organization's best volunteers, the ones capable of raising larger amounts of money on a one-to-one basis, become involved in a special event. Since they're often an organization's most committed and best workers, their time goes to making the event a success, instead of asking donors for needed larger gifts.

In short, a fund-raising benefit event is anything but a benefit when:

1. It does not make money.
2. It fails to use that opportunity to make new friends.
3. It diverts attention from and interferes with other fund-raising.
4. Volunteers and staff fail to communicate effectively.
5. It fails to secure enough underwriting to reduce expenses.
6. It is marred by avoidable mistakes and poor participation.

Special Events Must Fit Into An Organization's Fund-Raising Mix

Before considering any fund-raising special event, a nonprofit organization should determine the shortfall (the deficit) between what income is earned, if any, from fees and other charges for its programs and services --- compared to its annual operating expense. That shortfall has to be the organization's annual fund-raising goal. It is the amount which must be raised to help carry out the organization's basic mission, to pay for new and down-the-road initiatives emanating from the organization's long-range strategic plan, and to balance the budget. Once that number is known, income goals can be established for the special event, annual campaign, and other efforts to bring in operating income. But those goals are not developed in a vacuum. They must take into account the organization's capacity to effectively develop multiple contributed income streams, and they must be prioritized. How do the goals fit with the organization's other fund-raising endeavours - campaigns for endowment, capital, sponsorship, and underwriting? Having ascertained all that, the organization is in position to determine how it can come up with the resources to produce a special event, and how that event fits into its overall fund-raising strategy.

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Making The Event Profitable And Worthwhile

A fund-raising special event should not be produced if it will not make enough money to justify the effort. It is poor fund-raising strategy to put on an event with the primary goal of having attendees become good prospects for future giving. This is not very likely when those in attendance often have little real interest in the organization's mission; are attending an event held at a site other than the organization's location; and are eating, drinking, and socializing.

Relationship building is further limited by the added distractions of auctions, other spending opportunities, and entertainment. Even if informational handouts are supplied, a video of the organization's services is shown, or some other display of what the organization does is presented, the exposure is fleeting at best and has little lasting impact. Remember, event attendees are there to have a good time. **They just want to have fun.**

Another point to consider is that volunteers working on behalf of any fund-raising endeavor are goal driven. If they are producing an event that has an announced dollar goal, they do all they can to achieve that goal. When the goal of an event is to "friend-raise," or is otherwise indistinct, volunteers working on the event are unlikely to take away a sense of accomplishment. Volunteers need and want stated, measurable, obtainable goals. Give them that, and you give them the opportunity to be winners. If they feel like winners, they'll be back to help again.

Most successful event planners will tell you that to justify staff and volunteer effort, out of pocket expense, and the other necessary resources required to produce successful benefit events, the event should net at least 50 percent after expenses.

What Type Of Special Event Is Right For Your Organization?

The most important factor in finding the right special event for your organization is finding the right fit for your organization. Finding the right fit means not only the activities of the event itself, but also looking at the time, talent, and resources it will take to make the benefit a success.

If you have a predetermined money goal, be sure you choose an event that has the potential to net that goal. Learn from events you have produced in the past. Determine what worked, what didn't, and why. Choose an event that reflects not only the age and wealth of your constituents and potential attendees, but also their social and business demographics. You can get additional ideas from fund-raising special event publications found at your library, in bookstores, and through the Internet.

Look at what other organizations have done. Obtain examples of their invitations, publicity, and menus. What sort of entertainment did they provide? What were their budgets? Ask other non-profits for event themes which worked for them. Don't reinvent the wheel. Do borrow liberally from other's successes. Learn from their mistakes.

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Finally, do you have a "hook" on which to hang your event? Is your organization soon to celebrate a special anniversary or other milestone? Is there a homegrown celebrity (entertainment, sports, etc.) willing to be a special guest at your function? Or perhaps you will want to produce an auction, ball, dinner, premier home tour, pizza party, barbecue, or walking, running, and cycle "thon." These and many more ideas have all worked for other non-profits. Ask around, and you'll find all of the information, material samples, and guidance you need to get a running start for your event.

Developing A Fund-Raising Special Event Plan

Every special event succeeds or fails largely on the strength of its planning. Good organization is the special event planner's "road map," agenda, and justification. It assesses the event's goals, develops strategies, appoints committees, sets timelines, and determines tactics. A realistic fund-raising event cannot succeed without a well-drawn, fully conceived plan. You are ready to plan a special event when:

1. You have a chairperson who is qualified and will work hard
2. You have volunteers who are organized and ready to help.
3. You have an active, dedicated and supportive board.
4. You have enough time for the volunteers to do a thorough job.
5. You have adequate staff support (A volunteer committee is not staff. Professional event planners are the administrative staff that volunteer committees need for support and success)
6. Your organization has an up-to-date mailing list.
7. Your organization is well recognized in the community.
8. You have enough potential sponsors and patrons to make a strong profit.
9. The benefit planned is the only request for funds you will be making at that time.

Progress: Reports, Meetings, And Sharing The Information

How do you keep a fund-raising benefit event on track? By being well organized, constantly monitoring progress, and informing all event planning participants of that progress. You should structure the event committee to encourage accountability similar to that found in an organizational management chart.

The best way to make sure that information is being shared is to schedule weekly or monthly progress meetings. Committee members and others know they will be expected to report on their area of responsibility. They need to report what has been done, what is being done, and what is yet to be done. You want people leaving an event progress meeting with a clear understanding of where the event stands relative to its timeline, and with a renewed, reinvigorated commitment to get the job done.

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Write A Final Wrap-Up Report Of The Special Event

Once your event is over, you have to do something crucially important for your next event. Convene a meeting of the leaders of the event to conduct a final critique of what happened and to plan for the future. This should happen as soon as possible. Delay and people will begin to forget important details. A review of the event starts simply with the questions: What went right? What went wrong? The replies to those questions will contain the answer to the next question. Will we do it again next year? There are other questions you need to answer. They include:

- Did the event make a significant enough amount of money?
- Were the tickets priced just right?
- Did we pre-sell enough tickets?
- Did we target a well-defined market?
- Will the event help promote community involvement and continuing support?
- Did we really carefully plan and execute to the last detail?
- Will we use the event as an opportunity to make new friends?
- Did it divert attention or interfere with other fund-raising?
- Did volunteers and staff communicate effectively?
- Did we secure enough underwriting to significantly reduce expenses?
- Did we experience avoidable mistakes?
- Was our chairperson qualified and did he/she work hard?
- Were our volunteers well organized and ready to help?
- Did we have an active, dedicated, supportive board?
- Was there enough time for the volunteers to do a thorough job?
- Did we have adequate staff support?
- Did our organization have an up-to-date mailing list?
- Did we have enough potential sponsors and patrons to make a strong profit?

Get answers to those questions

You will have the substance of your post-event final report.

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Thanking Sponsors and Underwriters

If you raised sponsorship or underwriting money for your special event, you need to issue a special thanks to the organizations and people who provided it.

Ask yourself how you would have liked to be thanked if your company had been the event sponsor. It's almost that simple. If you had seen to it that your company gave funds to a nonprofit's event, what would you like to have from them once the event was completed? What is it you could show to your colleagues to let them know their company's gift was appreciated and that it was money well spent to build better public relations and goodwill in the community?

Be sure to ask event coordinators from other nonprofit organizations for their advice. Get examples of everything they do, including their versions of sponsorship recognition, credits, and acknowledgments. If you ask a rather geographically distant and non-competing nonprofit, I doubt you will have any problem getting cooperation. Most folks in our business are happy to share with colleagues.

A sponsor of a special event would want and would appreciate:

1. Prompt acknowledgement --- not months after the event. To know the event was a success and that "we could not have done it without you."
2. Being told how much net profit was realized. (Only if that number is significant. If it was not, refer to the net proceeds in a general way.)
3. Being informed of the real good the sponsorship money will do to help carry out the organization's mission.
4. A notebook, scrapbook, or folder containing examples of all promotion and publicity for the event, especially with liberal mention of the sponsoring company.
5. Receiving an official thank-you letter signed by the chair of the event, or by the organization's Board President. Not a staff member. The best way to present your organization's thanks and acknowledgments is in person. See if representatives from the sponsor would like to meet with your organization's officials for the presentation. If that is not possible, simply do so by mail.

Will There Be A Next Time?

Now there's the final and maybe biggest question. To answer it the first thing you do is to carefully assess the true value of the net profit gained by the event. Just what amount of contributed income did it provide to help balance the organization's budget? How the event exceeded, met, or did not meet, the goals established at the start will help to answer:

1. Will the event be repeated next year?
2. If so, will it be done in the same or in a different way?
3. If to be done in a different way, how different?

Most important is that the event did not interfere in any way with your organization's ability to carry out its other essential fund-raising campaigns. A fund-raising event should only be

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produced as an additional source of contributed income to those traditional campaigns.
Absolutely never as an alternative to them.