

CONSIDERING EVENT FUNDRAISING



Robust fund development includes hosting some in-person events throughout the year where representatives of your organization can interact with members of the community. The events you choose will depend on time, resources, local interests, and identifying the areas in which you have expertise. Large events demand impeccable organization, patience, and attention to detail, so the workload can be heavy. A successful event that can be replicated annually, however, has the potential to be a consistent source of funds as well as a beloved tradition in the community.



Friendly sporting events are a fun and entertaining way of bringing the community together while raising funds and awareness of your program. Examples include:

- golf tournaments
- running or bike races
- bowl-a-thons
- 3-on-3 basketball tournaments
- field day obstacle courses or yard games

An advantage of sporting events is involving people as both participants and as spectators, so you are **appealing to more than one population**. They are often appropriate for all ages, or can have children's activities accompanying the adult portion, so entire families are able to attend.



For a more sophisticated evening, some organizations host a cocktail hour, formal dinner, dance, or combination of all three, and often accompany it with a silent auction, live auction, or both. **This type of event is generally reserved for situations when you know high level donors are available and will help fill tables with others committed to donating and bidding beyond their ticket price.** Tickets may be sold singly, or donors may purchase entire tables as a sponsor and invite friends or colleagues to comprise their group.

Due to the formal nature, you should not contemplate this type of function unless you have thoroughly evaluated the potential cost vs. payoff and have found it to be a worthwhile investment. If space rental, catering,

decorations, or entertainment could be donated, the risk is considerably reduced.

Informal Picnics or Parties

Many nonprofits have found relaxed and low-key picnics or parties to be successful, if a formal gala is not the right fit for your budget or community's interests. **There is still the opportunity to provide a meal, entertainment, and auction items, but the initial costs are lower.** Ticket prices might not be set as high as with a formal gala, but you could still plan to auction the same valuable items and concentrate efforts there instead. An added advantage of an informal gathering is the option to include children, should you want to make it a more family-friendly occasion.

Stand-Alone Auctions

Anything can be auctioned off! The more creative the better. Pies, gift baskets, birdhouses, art, holiday decorations, services, clothing, travel – they can all be fund developers! If you have a building that can be easily viewed, you may consider displaying your items right in your own space. If not, the donation of a store window or a public space such as the library, hospital lobby, school gymnasium, or community recreation center can help you showcase the goods. People enjoy the competitive nature of auctions, even on something small like preschool crayon drawings, so encouraging friendly competition between bidders can make it exciting.

Business Donation Nights

A great start to partnership development with a local business is to ask them to host a special night where a portion of all sales goes toward your organization. It helps them boost revenue, get free advertisement, and earn new customers. For you, the effort is minimal, just promoting and encouraging attendance. These evenings are frequently arranged through restaurants or ice cream shops. **Be creative in your ask and always think of the future.** If a 15% night is successful for a business, they would agree to 25% next time.

Entertainment

A talent show, concert, dance performance, or play can be a great fundraising option. **If your organization works with children or teenagers, a production developed and performed by them can be beneficial on multiple levels.** It gains donations, but also brings learning, accomplishment, and pride to those you serve.

You may also approach a performance venue or artist about already scheduled shows and ask them to partner with your organization. Much like the arrangement with a business who hosts a donation night, you would agree to provide promotion, advertising, and possibly volunteers in exchange for a portion of the proceeds. This helps you raise money with

little effort, and helps them fill the seats, show a charitable image, and gain new fans.

General Themed Events

In the same way you can plan any level of party in between formal gala or a casual picnic, **you can also brainstorm across an infinite spectrum of possible themes for fundraising gatherings.** Consider the following and let your imagination run:

- Upcoming holidays
- Community traditions
- Upcoming sporting events – local or professional
- Popular movies, television, books – both for children and adults

Once you've tried a few topic starters, the possibilities of themes are endless. Casino night, gingerbread house competition, luau, carnival, coloring contest, skating party, holiday parade, wine and beer tasting, cookie decorating, and on and on and on...

Examine what already happens in your community and try to offer something new and unique. Conduct some surveys to see what is lacking in your area, and don't be afraid to branch out with an innovative idea!

Across All Events

Regardless of the event(s) you choose to plan, you'll want to increase the opportunities for fund development at every one by having multiple avenues for giving. Try not to think of it as hitting up people repeatedly at the same event, but rather as providing them with options. Just as was discussed in **Drafting a First Contact**, **varied sponsorship levels can help donors feel they've been given more choice in their involvement.** This same theory applies to having many activities where people can give at a single event. You might include:

- a raffle
- small auctions
- food or drinks
- merchandise for sale
- tickets for games or services (face painting, bounce house, beanbag toss)
- pre-arranged sponsorships of the event or of individual booths

It is also worth considering sponsorships for personal participation in competition events. For example, you could give your 5K runners the option of soliciting their own donations from friends or family in support of their effort. This casts a wider net for donations, often including people who live out of town and might never have heard of your event otherwise. It maximizes your resources by having your participants spread the word and help build your donor database.