

FIELD NOTES

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Special events can and should be a vital part of your fundraising strategy. But...

Keeping the “Special” in Events

For many nonprofits, the formal gala, golf outing, or 5K run/walk is a key component of their annual fundraising strategy.

While these events can be a great way to raise money and garner new donors, too often the “event” takes precedence over the “fundraising.”

Here are some things to think about before your next fundraising special event.

IS IT REALLY SPECIAL?

While this may be your 17th annual gala or 35th annual golf outing, is it really a “special” event in the eyes of your donors? What about it makes it any different from other black-tie dinners or fun runs in your community? Remember that your donors likely give to many causes in the community and attend many special events each year. Make sure your special event really is **special**.

DID IT EXPAND YOUR RANKS?

One of the great things a special event can do is to introduce your organization to new donors. However, in order to do this, you need to do more than just sell tickets – you need

to sell your cause. Consider every part of your event to find ways to better tell your organization’s story, and to articulate why you need and deserve community support. ***Make sure attendees leave your event talking more about your cause than what you served for dinner.***

Every aspect of your event – from the tickets to the food you serve to the silent auction items you choose – **is an opportunity to tell your story.** Waste those opportunities and risk your event being entirely forgettable in the eyes of the donor.

In addition, rethink your post-event evaluation process. Often, events are only evaluated by staff and the planning committee. Before you congratulate yourself on a job well done, consider surveying attendees to see if their understanding of your cause and willingness to support it have increased as a result of their participation.

DID IT MAKE MONEY?

This should be the most obvious, but too often non-profits refuse to look carefully at this measurement.

Do the math!

- Total amount raised
 - Direct costs
 - Opportunity costs of staff & volunteer time
 - Lost donations in place of ticket purchase
- Did you really net as much as you thought?

Could you have acquired the same amount of money in less time by asking your donors for contributions? Ask yourself, “If a donor walked in and gave us a check for the full amount that we made at the event, would there still be value in holding it again next year??”

Like every other thing you do, your events need to be both efficient and effective at increasing awareness, bringing in new donors and soliciting gifts. Don’t settle for anything less!

For information on how Donor by Design can help you evaluate or strengthen special event opportunities,
e-mail info@donorbydesign.com.



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