



Fundraising Tips

Non-profits are reliant on fundraising; most do not have a revenue stream from sales. Fundraising in and of itself is exhausting, and when not done properly can result in support burnout. Losing loyal supporters could devastate any non-profit, and overly asking for support is a sure way to do that.

Budget

The first step to fundraising is to first review the budget. How much money are you expecting to raise from a fundraiser? How many years have you been fundraising? What is the average support fundraisers provide to your organization? Has your budget outgrown your organization? Is it time to reduce on unnecessary expenses rather than raise your fundraising goals? Ensuring your fundraising goals are realistic will ensure a successful event. If you have reached a point where your fundraising goals feel unattainable, it is time to start economizing.

Quantity

The next step is to define the number of fundraising events planned annually. Do you have more than 5 planned? Do you invite the same people to each? Is it possible you are exhausting your funders? Unless you have a unique experience, inviting people to more than one major fundraiser a year can begin to create feelings of disenchantment and cause people to pull back, to not want to support your organization any longer.

Remember quality is much more important than quantity. I have worked with one organization who decided they would host 12 events annually. I quickly stopped supporting them. It was overwhelming and exhausting, it also made me question why they needed to host so many. I was a member of one organization who in one week sent 5 emails requesting sponsorships for different events. That week, I decided I needed to join another organization. The number of sponsorship emails exhausted me, and several of my peers.

Designing Engaging Fundraisers

Once you determine the total fundraising amount and the number of events you are going to host, here are some pointers to help you get the most for your investment.

1. Don't feel obligated to plan the same fundraiser year after year. If you see attendance begin to drop, or people are not as engaged, survey your loyal attendees and determine what they would enjoy.
2. When calculating the overall cost of a fundraiser, don't forget to calculate the cost of employee time. You should have a committee to plan the fundraiser, and only the administrative team should be expected to assist with the planning of the event. All other staff should be present at the event and have a role, but program staff should not be pulled away from their day to day obligations to plan a fundraiser.
3. Keep a calendar of all community events for a year. Note what the fundraiser is, when it is and what the theme is. If possible, gather data on attendance and total amount raised. This data collection will ensure you have the most current information and trends at your fingertips to ensure effective planning.



4. Remember donors and funders could be present, if the event is over the top, they may reduce their annual donations assuming you do not need the money.
5. Make it as easy as possible for people to donate money through the event. You want to collect donations or signed donation cards at the event. If people leave the event without making a donation, they are less likely to make a donation.
6. Fundraisers can be fun. They should be fun. Don't hesitate to plan a fun night out, or date night. Some of the best fundraisers I have been to have had higher ticket prices but once I was at the event, I was able to relax and enjoy myself. There were no additional costs.
7. Limit the number of additional costs at events. It is greatly disheartening when we have paid \$70 a person for an event, arrive and are asked to purchase raffle tickets, participate in a silent auction, wine pull, balloon pop, live auction and who knows how many other events. Many attendees see events as a way to celebrate the great work done, not spend their children's college savings.
8. Keep the program short. Most people are at your event to network, to mingle or as a night out. Do not make them sit and listen to a long program which is not necessary.
9. Silent auctions are fun, but live auctions can become boring and isolate portions of your attendees very quickly. Novel ideas like a bread auction or dessert dash never work. NEVER. People will participate in the event because who doesn't want the bread and cake, or because they feel obligated, but no one will appreciate it and will leave with a bad taste in their mouth.
10. Having a live auction in a separate room or prior to the event can help keep the mood of celebration and engage more people.
11. Never agree to the committee idea of some new fun game. People come to events dressed up, asking them to race around a room on stick horses will kill your event immediately.
12. Limit drawings. Dragging drawings out, making a 5-minute event into an hour event will cause people to check out and leave. Also, be sure to keep all drawings to one time in the program.
13. Find innovative ways to share information and create a fun relaxed environment where people will mingle and want to learn more about your organization.
14. Look at your target audience, what is something they want. For instance, would they appreciate an opportunity to mingle and network more than a program or live auction?
15. What is your overall goal? To raise money, awareness or supporters?
16. Would a lunch fundraiser work in your area? We all have so many pulls on our time, would your audience appreciate a luncheon rather than a night out?
17. What is unique about your fundraiser? How is it different from others? One of the best fundraisers I attended had no program, a silent auction, good food, a great cover band. My husband and I had so much fun dancing and eating we made it a point to make a donation.



18. How many of your target audience members are not in attendance because of a lack of childcare? Would partnering with a local daycare to provide daycare increase your attendance?
19. Be sure the planning committee is the same demographic as your target audience. If your target audience are young families in their 30's and 40's your planning committee should not be made up of people in their 60's.
20. If you are giving awards at the event, consider giving those earlier in the evening, at an invitation only cocktail hour and then announce the winners at the event.
21. Before you decide to create a program and sell ads, ask yourself what the return on investment for your sponsors is. How can you collect information to show them the data to make it an easy sale? What can you include in your program to make it something the attendees will take home and use again?
22. When looking to set the price for event sponsors, be sure to remember that many sponsors will want data showing the return on investment. Also, what can you add for the sponsors to add additional value to the event for them? Can you host a thank you lunch or cocktail hour for them to provide them with an opportunity to network or even hear a speaker or learn a new skill? What can you do to show you value their time and investment?

Fundraisers should net more than \$15,000 per event to make them worth your time. However, your goal should be to raise 10%-15% of your total annual budget at the event. You should see your numbers increasing annually, or if you have reached \$60,000 or higher, you may see your numbers remain steady. If this is the case, ask what you can change without damaging current relationships to increase your net profits.

At the end of the day, fundraising will exhaust you, but the overall return should prove worth your energy.