

ANSWER THESE 15 QUESTIONS

and Turn Your Next Fundraising Event into a
Frenzied Outpouring of Donor Generosity



Fundraising Event Planning Guide

Introduction

Whether your organization has done fundraising events in the past, or you're ready to try it for the first time, you've probably got a twinge of nervousness. What if we bomb? What if no one comes? What if people complain? What if the food is terrible?

There are a ton of scary questions, but there are 15 that matter more than all the others.

The 15 questions you're about to read should become the guiding pathway for your fundraising event planning process. These are the questions you should ask at the very beginning. Before you buy anything. Before you hire anyone. Before you start looking for volunteers.

Some of these questions you can answer once and be done. Some of them you'll want to return to from time to time to make sure you're still on track.

Walk through these 15 questions – ideally with the group of people who will be planning your event – and answer them all to the best of your ability. The ones you can't answer, find someone who can help.

Once you've finished, you'll be in much better position to work on the actual planning for your event. And those scary questions in the back of your mind will start fading away, because you'll have the foundation in place to produce your best fundraising event ever.



So move ahead and get started with fundraising event question #1.

01 *What is the primary goal of our event?*

- Make money
- Get more supporters
- Gain recurring donors
- Spread awareness
- Meet a specific need or project goal
- Other



This is the first and most important question. Everything else gets built around this. You must know why you're doing this event. Your goal is how you'll measure success. If you want to reach new supporters, for example, you should be able to measure how many new supporters your event produces.

Can you have more than one goal? Yes, but the others must be secondary to the primary one. Otherwise the purpose of your event will not be clear to the attendees. If you're raising money, don't be embarrassed about it and try to make it seem like something it's not. Guests who don't want to give won't come.

02 *Do we have the right venue?*

Venue is crucial. Are you expecting 100? 50? 500? Is your audience filled with wealthy people? Younger? Older? Your venue must fit your audience, as much as that's possible, while being within your budget. Don't invite a bunch of doctors or business professionals to a school cafeteria.

Even more important: Does the layout support the kind of event you want to do? Are you planning games or activities? A video presentation? A live performance? Do you have the right audio and video capabilities? Room for silent auction tables? Where will guests be greeted? Not every venue can handle all these. Know what your venue's layout can accommodate.

Most important – is there room for everyone to sit, and do they have enough tables?

03 Do we have a volunteer coordinator?

You better. Volunteers are like hamsters. Once you get them on the wheel, they just keep spinning, and it's great. But if they're not on the wheel, hamsters don't get much done. Your coordinator knows all the wheels that need to spin, and puts people in a position to succeed.

Your volunteer coordinator must understand all the various activities going on, and should be shown the venue well before the event. She must be able to give clear instructions, communicate well, and ideally be good at finding volunteers, or at the minimum, following up with the ones you send her.

04 Do we have a foolproof system for collecting contact information?

Paper and pencil aren't the way to do this, unless you still enjoy deciphering the handwriting that's supposed to be an email address or a phone number. But registering people and getting their contact information is essential so you can follow up with additional communications and send them giving receipts.

You need a software system to administer your fundraising event – often referred to as a CRM, for customer relationship management. You may also want a separate platform that focuses exclusively on the auction portion of your event, if you're doing an auction.

05 Do we have at least one good story to tell?

What makes a good fundraising story? Drama, emotion, and in the very best cases – unresolved endings. Though we love to share our happy stories (and should do that as well), you need guests to know their reason for being there: To meet specific needs that hang in the balance.

06 ***What is the first thing people will see when they arrive? What is the first thing they will do?***

A smiling greeter? A banner or visual display? A drawing they can enter? A celebrity they get to meet? A garbage can?

Wait a minute – a garbage can? Hey, it matters. If you don't think about this question, you might end up with a really unattractive and uninviting welcome that turns off visitors.

And after they've registered, is there something they should do first? Think this through. It's the beginning of their event experience. The worst feeling you can give them is confusion, as in – where do I go? What do I do with all this stuff they just gave me? Confusion is bad. Direction is good.



07 ***Is our event going to be boring?***

Do you know who to ask to find out? (Hint: not your board, and not your staff). A boring event is the death knell to live fundraising. What can you give your attendees to hear, see, and do that will keep them engaged? Who is speaking? What will they say? Is there enough to do throughout the whole event?

Surest sign your event is boring: Half your attendees are checking their phones instead of participating.

If your presenters are up there talking about the history of your organization, that's boring. Don't be boring.

08 *What is our follow-up plan after the event?*

Have one. Don't let all these people disappear. Whether it's with direct mail, email, or phone calls, follow up with a thank you note as soon as possible. Then keep them active with ongoing marketing.

09 *Do we have a price strategy? Is it better than last year's?*

Yes, you should have a price strategy for getting people in the door. A lot goes into this question, like audience demographics, prior events, and the goal of your event. Price can play a huge role in who comes, and how many.

10 *What will someone who knows nothing about our organization think and feel?*

Do not assume everyone attending already knows what you do. They don't. You must plan their experience so their feelings make them want to help your cause.

11 *Are we prepared to track all the data?*

Your CRM is part of this. You need a way to track all the giving data, signups, table captains, contact information, and so much more. Before, during, and after the event.

If you want to track the data, you can't start planning your event two months before it happens.

12 ***How many income streams (ways to donate) do we have?***

Not everyone likes to give in a live auction. Not everyone can afford it. You need multiple ways people can give money so everyone can participate. This means games, giveaways, special items for sale, drawings, dessert dashes, photo booths, and many other creative ideas you might have.

If your main goal is to raise money, do not rely on just one or two giving pathways. This is the place to get creative!



13 ***When is our event?***



I saved this question for near the end for a reason. In light of the previous twelve questions, if you already have a date set – can you be ready in time? If not, then either find a way to move it, or scale down your expectations.

Planning a successful fundraising event takes months – at least six. Nine or more is ideal. Any less than that, and you'll very likely come up far short of what you could have done.

14 ***Are we doing the same thing we did last year?***

People are creatures of habit and routine. If your event is predictable, and people know what to expect, they won't feel as much. They'll start to intellectualize and analyze it. Emotions lead to giving. Thinking leads to distracted comments like, "Hmm, that speech wasn't quite as good as last year's."

You don't want them knowing what to expect around every turn.

At the same time, some familiarity is good, because it makes people comfortable. So you need a balance between surprising new additions and tried and true traditions that people look forward to each year.



If your fundraising planning meeting begins with looking at last year's schedule and trying to fill all the same slots, and you never ask reflective questions about new stuff you could try this year or activities you could leave off, you are falling into a rut of predictability. Your attendees will notice, and it will cost you.

Surprise them. Keep them guessing. And make them feel at home.

15

A collage of various social media icons including hearts, speech bubbles, thumbs up, stars, and profile pictures, representing digital communication and social networking.

A collage of various social media icons including hearts, speech bubbles, thumbs up, stars, and profile pictures, representing digital communication and social networking.

If you have an email list, you can't just put out one email and expect everyone to show up. If you have a mailing list, now is the time to use it. Today's world has far too many distractions. You have to break through the noise and make them choose your event over everything else. You have to make them want to come.

ProActive Content founder and author Dan Magill (***The Ultimate Fundraising Case Study***) has done event marketing and copywriting for several nonprofits. His work includes email marketing, direct mail, strategic planning for the event itself to help you maximize the dollars that come in, and so much more.

One event for a small nonprofit in 2015 pulled in just over \$30,000. After hiring Dan to plan and write the email campaign and event web pages, and to help create an event that would maximize donations, the next two years surpassed \$60k and \$75k, respectively.

The more people who show up, the more money your event will raise for your cause.

To get a free 60 minute consultation about your event, reach me here:

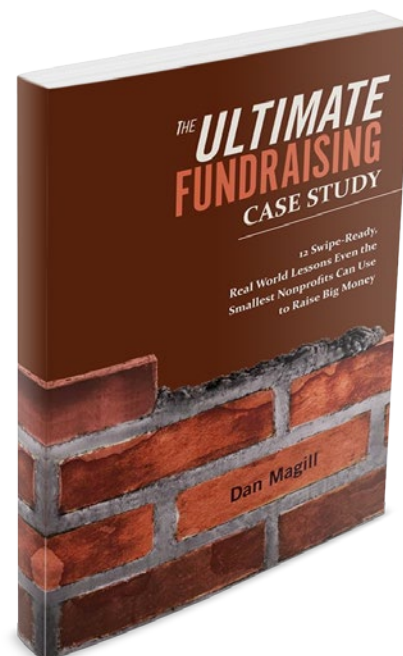
Get Fundraising Event Help

You can also email me directly at copydan@proactivecontent.net

Your Free Gift

After our 60 minute consultation, I'd like to thank you by sending a free copy of my book – ***The Ultimate Fundraising Case Study***. Just be sure to mention this free guide, and you'll get the most practical and useful fundraising book ever written. No fluff. No theory. Just hard-nosed, real world, action-ready ideas and insights.

Again – even if all we do is talk for 60 minutes and you never speak to me again, you'll still get this free book that you can use to elevate your fundraising for as long as your nonprofit exists.



Claim Free Book

Print Out Your 15 Questions – Use this Printable Sheet

1. Goal of Event _____
2. Venue _____
3. Volunteer coordinator _____
4. System for collecting contact information _____
5. Good story ideas _____
6. First thing to see _____
First thing to do _____
7. Boredom detector(s) _____
8. Follow-up contact plan _____
9. Price strategy _____
10. First Impressions on new people _____
11. Data tracking system _____
12. List out ways to give/participate _____
13. Date of event _____
14. What's new this year? _____
15. Who is our marketing help? _____



www.proactivecontent.net