



Planning a Special Event

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Special Events for Nonprofit Organizations

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For many small organizations and those just getting started in the nonprofit world, special events appear to be the way to raise substantial funds for your organization. In actuality, while many special events raise a considerable amount of money, the funds are fairly small in proportion to the needs of the organization that is hosting the event.

The Ten or So Commandments of Special Events 1

A special event, technically defined as an activity or series of activities, specific to an identifiable time and place, most often produced in conjunction with community organizations, has two primary goals:

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- Increase awareness of organization’s vision and mission
- Create ample volunteer opportunities

In general, special events do not:

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- Raise a considerable amount of money in comparison to the time and energy they require to organize.
- Happen overnight. It takes at least six months to plan a special event that will be successful.

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The Ten or So Commandments of Special Events

(compiled by Gerald M. Plessner, CFRE)

1. The response card must fit inside the response envelope.
2. The entertainment must be auditioned.
3. There shall be an honoree for every special event - even a garage sale.
4. Thou shall count the tables and chairs before the first guest arrives.
5. The price of the ticket must provide net income to the causes.
6. Publicity will not be expected to sell one ticket, for only people sell tickets.
7. The honoree must genuinely deserve the tribute, and the chair must be a person of stature.
8. The honoree must know about the cause - even if they learn about it only when they are recruited.
9. The event must be of the quality expected for the ticket price. Thou shall not take your donors for granted!
10. A lousy program will not hurt this year’s participation, but as surely as night follows day, it will kill you next year.
11. Promises count for nothing, but cash (and sometimes pledges) do.

Covering the Basics

When you are thinking of creating a special event for your organization, make sure to keep these basics in mind:

- Pick an event that aligns with the mission of your organization--and make sure it's fun!
- Create a Special Events Committee with both external community members and internal staff and/or volunteers.
- Evaluate the potential for net revenue. Have a preliminary budget of your income and expenses. Get the approval of your board.
- Recruit sponsors--this is the only way to make a profit.
- Have a solid marketing plan. Remember that no matter how much money you spend to market your events, if you have tickets, they must be sold by your committee, volunteers and board. If they aren't interested in selling tickets, your event will never be successful.
- Keep copious notes and detailed record keeping. It is likely that you will have high turnover in committee members. Make sure the next committee chair can take over with no problems.

Acknowledging the Lifespan of a Special Event

Special events have a lifespan, and dragging them past their most effective date will ultimately drain the organization of its best volunteers, best donors and put any other future special events in jeopardy.

At the end of your event, make sure to have a debrief about what went right and what went wrong. Once you get final numbers on profit, ask the hard question about whether or not you'll have the event the following year. Consider your event past its worthiness if:

1. You did not turn a profit.
2. The event interfered with your ability to perform your normal fundraising activities.

If you answered 'yes' to any of the above responses, it is time to think about removing the special event from your fundraising efforts, rest a year and then start from scratch with new ideas.

More Resources

For more resources, contact the Kerri Burrows, Alaska Food Coalition Manager, at afc@foodbankofalaska.org or 907.222.3103.

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Case
Statements**

