

MEETING THE MATCH: EVENTS

Even though other types of individual fundraising have been discussed previously, this section will only cover special events, since grantees are more likely to benefit from this technique compared to other individual donor strategies. Keep in mind, though, that given how quickly you need to raise matching funds, in most cases you will be more successful at meeting your match if you attempt to raise large contributions from a few funding sources rather than amassing moderate or small contributions from a much larger constituency. You may only want to consider holding a fundraising event if you are close to reaching your goal and need a new source for obtaining the last piece of your match.

The event components outlined below are for large events, but the concepts will hold true for smaller events. For example, if you have an individual hosting a fundraiser for you, that person should be responsible for raising the money for the event. Do not fall into the trap of partnering with someone who merely wants to provide the use of his or her home without doing the fundraising.

Event Committee

“People give to people” is the rule that is central to special event fundraising. Fancy invitations, fabulous locations and celebrities are NOT draws. While these details should be done nicely, they very rarely sell tickets.

It does not matter how wonderful a mailing list someone gives you, you will only receive a 1 percent response from the mailing of invitations to a list of prospective donors who do not have a direct connection to you or your organization. If you make follow-up calls to this list, you may be able to increase the response rate to 2 percent. The bottom line is you need to develop an event committee whose primary role is to sell tickets to their personal and professional networks. A committee member will get a 30 to 50 percent positive response when reaching out to their personal network.

Everyone on the committee should receive the same assignment—selling a minimum number of invitations. It is very important that every committee member feels they have to meet the same expectations.

To develop a committee, look first to those individuals who have a direct relationship to you or your organization, such as board members, coalition members, corporate partners, employees, previous donors, personal contacts, volunteers and vendors. To expand your reach as widely as possible, try to make sure that your committee is comprised of a diverse group of people who have personal and professional connections in different communities.

You will need to educate, guide and encourage your committee members throughout the planning process.

- Provide the committee with talking points about your organization’s mission, programmatic goals, financial needs and successes.
- Guide them on potential prospects they can reach. For example, if you recruit a company executive, encourage them to reach out not only to their personal network, but also their professional network, including the company’s vendors. Once a member solicits his or her personal list, share with them other prospect lists you have to see if they may be able to expand upon their own list.
- Suggest ways they can solicit. It is your role to educate committee members that the most effective methods of fundraising—both in terms of response rate and dollar amount—are: bullets below are not consistent with others in the document:
 - Face-to-face solicitation
 - Personal letter on personal stationery followed by a phone call
 - Phone call alone

Each committee member should include a personal note in the invitations to their personal list. At a minimum, they should include a business card with “Hope you can make it” written on it. Once the invitations are mailed, each committee member should personally call each person on their list to ask them to attend.

- Check in with committee members weekly for status reports on their efforts and to provide encouragement. If you feel like you are pestering the committee members, remember that you do have reasons to call, such as needing to give the caterer a head count or needing donors’ names for the program. More importantly, you want to encourage your committee members to collect the pledges prior to the event because it is very difficult to follow up on pledges afterwards, particularly if the person who makes the pledge does not attend.
- After the event, make sure each committee member knows who attended because of their efforts and whether they contributed. This allows the committee member to thank attendees personally and encourages them to help you collect the pledge.

How many committee members do you need? First, decide what your fundraising goal and ticket price for the event are. Divide the goal by the ticket price to determine how many tickets need to be sold. Assume that each committee member will deliver only 40 percent of their commitment (e.g., if they agree to sell 10 tickets, expect that they will sell only four). Divide the number of tickets by this realistic projection to determine how many committee members you will need. For example, if you have a goal of raising \$25,000 and the ticket price is \$250, you need to sell 100 tickets. If each committee member is asked to sell 10 tickets, you should budget for them selling four. One hundred divided by four is 25, so you will need 25 committee members to reach your goal. Of course, you should not share these projections with your committee members since they may not appreciate the seemingly cynical but realistic 40 percent estimate.

Tiered Events

It is easier to reach your goal if you develop tiered sponsorships in addition to the individual ticket price. For example, for your \$25,000 event, you may have the following structure:

Gold	\$5,000
Silver	\$2,500
Bronze	\$1,000
Tickets	\$250

Assuming you found one sponsor at the Gold level (\$5,000), one at the Silver level (\$2,500) and two at the Bronze level (\$2,000), your committee would need to raise \$15,500.

Keep in mind that sponsors should be:

- Recruited prior to the printing of the invitation, so you have the option of including their names on the invitation
- Given several tickets for the event and, if applicable, receive priority seating
- Thanked in the printed program for the event and during the speaking program
- Invited to serve on the event committee (Often, top sponsors feel invested in the success of the event and may sell tickets over and above their contribution.)
- Presented with a list of benefits they will receive based on the size of their gift (Sponsorships may be attractive to major donor prospects who are motivated by public acknowledgement of their gift.)

Staffing

Staff will be responsible for:

- Event logistics
- Supporting and monitoring the committee's fundraising efforts
- Selling tickets
- Maintaining lists
- Designing, printing and mailing invitations
- Sending thank you notes to donors
- Organizing the speaking portion of the event
- Seating assignments, if applicable
- Registration at the event
- Ensuring that the event stays within budget

You may consider hiring a special events consultant who can help you avoid costly mistakes with your logistics and motivate host committee members.

Budget

Budgets for events can range from 8 percent of the gross (which would be bare bones and probably include in-kind donations) to 50 percent of the gross. Remember, it can take five years for events to reach their full potential, so your net may be much smaller in the first year. A good rule of thumb is to keep direct costs (not including staff/consultant time) to 15 to 25 percent of the gross. For your \$25,000 event, the budget will be between \$3,750 and \$6,250 for printing, postage, catering and entertainment.

Expenses to anticipate include: site rental, catering, audio/visual, entertainment, decorations, graphic design, printing, postage, and possibly a special events consultant. To be safe, add a 20 percent contingency fee to cover any unanticipated costs.

A few tricks to keeping budgets under control:

- If a prospect says, “maybe I’ll come,” they won’t, so do not include them in your firm head count for the caterer.
- If a committee member tells you that they do not know whether someone is coming, assume that they are not coming and do not include them in your firm head count for the caterer.
- Give the caterer a guarantee that is 10 percent less than your firm head count. For example, if you think you will have 100 people, guarantee 90 with the caterer. There will always be no shows and experienced caterers always prepare a little extra food.

Printed Materials

Some organizations go to great lengths to develop elaborate invitations. While this is a nice luxury, it is by no means a necessity.

That being said, it is helpful to provide written details about the event. Depending on your budget, you can hire a designer and printer or develop the invitation in-house on a desktop computer. Some organizations forego printed materials altogether and rely on electronic invitations. This is by far the cheapest alternative if you have access to e-mail addresses. Regardless of the design, the invitation should include:

- Name of organization
- Time, date and location of event
- Ticket price
- RSVP information
- Brief information on your organization
- Host committee list
- Sponsors (optional)
- Response card that asks for the number of people attending, and their names, addresses and phone numbers (This information is useful for pledge follow-up as well as for your database.)

- Response envelope
- A note certifying that your organization is a 501(c)(3) organization and that contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law

Determine the number of invitations you will need by adding together the names on your list and making an allowance for each host committee member (e.g., if committee members are responsible for 10 tickets, assume they will need 20 to 25 invitations). If you are sending your invitations to a printer, order more than you think you will need because you invariably will run out if you are too conservative.

One money-saving tip is to ask the printer who prints all of your organization's materials if they will give you a discount on printing the invitations. At the minimum, ask your printer (and each of your vendors) to buy a few tickets to the event.

Speaking Program

The event will be your opportunity to connect with new donors as well as keep established donors energized about your cause. You should carefully strategize about what messages you want to deliver during your speaking program and who is best able to deliver them. Remember that the donors are there to enjoy themselves, so try to keep the speaking portion short. Each speaker's presentation should be a maximum of two to three minutes.

Timeline

Depending upon the nature of your event, the lead time needed to plan and execute a successful event will range from three months to one year. See Appendix V: Event Planning Timeline on p. xxix.