

Should You Have an Event?

The most common mistake in developing an event is not having a primary goal that guides all decision-making on the event. Use these questions to help you choose wisely and plan successfully.

Is an event the best way to achieve your goal?

Events are extremely time-consuming and expensive. Be certain the effort and expense are warranted.

- **What are the opportunity costs of holding an event?** If your goal is fundraising, would you be better served putting your time into other fundraising activities, such as direct appeals to major donors, an annual campaign or soliciting corporate partnerships?
- **If you want to cultivate or thank donors,** would it be as/more beneficial to your ongoing relationships to invite them on a site visit or send them an update on your work?
- **If you want to reach potential new donors,** make sure there are not other development means that would be as effective (and easier), such as one-on-one phone calls or meetings.

What kind of event should you have?

Think about the right event for your goal, organization and available resources. Keep in mind:

- **If your goal is to raise money from small and large donors,** plan an event with tier pricing, and not with only one ticket price.
- **If your goal is cultivation,** choose an event (i.e., setting, program, soft music) that encourages — and allows for — lots of conversation.
- **If you have the resources to stage a large event,** or make an existing one larger, go for it. A small event usually entails as much work as a large one.

General questions to ask of every event

- **What is the primary goal of the event?** It's critical to be able to state your main goal clearly and concisely.
- **Is the event concept consistent with the mission of your organization?**
- **Do you have the necessary resources?**
 - ✓ Board support
 - ✓ Benefit chairs and/or committees
 - ✓ Staff support
 - ✓ Volunteers
 - ✓ Money to cover event expenses

More questions to ask of every event

- **Who is your target audience?**
 - How many people do you want to attend?
 - Do you have access — or can you create access — to this audience?

- **What are your expectations, and given your resources, are they realistic?**

Will it cost too much? Do you have the bandwidth — internal or external — to execute?

 - Base expectations on *your own* resources rather than what someone else has accomplished.
 - Know what your expectations are for event leadership, board and staff, and have a plan to communicate those expectations clearly.

- **Is the timing right?**
 - Does it conflict with other fundraising activities of your organization?
 - Do you have enough time to plan and produce the event properly?
 - Have you checked for conflicts with other events in the community/region?
 - If the setting is outdoors, is it a risky season?

- **If it is a repeat event, has the previous event been analyzed?**

When is an event a failure? (Good to know for avoiding!)

- When it's a fundraiser and the expenses are more than 50%.
- When it's a fundraiser and doesn't make a reasonable amount of money in relation to effort and use of resources.
- When it interferes with the ongoing work of your organization.
- When it interferes with major fundraising programs of your organization.
- When it is poorly organized and reflects badly on your organization.
- When it suffers mishaps or embarrassing attendance.
- When it fails to attract new donors/supporters.