

Advancing Your Skills: Rethinking Events as Part of Your Fundraising Plan

The current situation has been hard on all nonprofit organizations, but for those that rely heavily on event fundraising, the impact could be catastrophic. For proactive organizations, the current challenge can be viewed as an opportunity to rethink events as part of their overall fundraising plan. Board members and volunteers love big events, but fundraising staff know that it is not an effective or efficient way to raise money and not a good use of resources. Now is the perfect time to reevaluate events in your fundraising plan and develop new strategies that can replace event revenue and build more sustainability.

TIP: Talk to Your Donors

Take a look at who has been attending your event and supporting your mission. Talk to them, they want to know how they can help. Reach out and talk to the high level and consistent supporters of your event. Consider a survey of all past event participants. Find out why they participated, what they got the most out of, what they won't miss, and use that information to develop new strategies to engage them in your mission.

TIP: Other Ways to Leverage Corporate Support

Many nonprofits rely on events as a strategy to engage corporate donors, but there are other ways you can leverage corporate support for your mission. Ask your corporate event sponsor to provide a challenge grant for a special public appeal. Feature them in the direct mail piece, on social media, and all collateral promotion; they may gain greater visibility and goodwill than they did from their event sponsorship. Ask a corporate donor to underwrite your website for a year, your annual report, or the latest edition of your newsletter. Use their support as an opportunity to revamp and update your communications. Add video. Incorporate corporate donor testimonials. Feature corporate engagement on LinkedIn. Switch from event attendance to hands-on employee volunteer opportunities, underwritten by employer grants.

TIP: Smart Strategies to Replace Event Revenue

You already have donors in your donor base that care about your organization and are committed to your mission. Use this opportunity to start a formal major gift program with your high-capacity donors. Focus on building meaningful relationships with your best donors. For consistent event participants, consider a monthly or recurring gift program. Develop benefits for monthly giving based on donor feedback, try to replace the value that event attendance provided. Major gifts and monthly giving are both low-cost, high-return strategies that can have a significant impact on your bottom line.

TIP: A Truly Special Event

Events still can play a role in a comprehensive fundraising plan that focuses on diverse funding streams. If you still feel that an event is a good return on investment for your organization, consider changing your event from yearly to every other year. Or to create a truly "special" event, plan it for every five years. If you are planning for an event in the next year, it will be necessary to include a strategy for converting to digital. Be creative, consider moving your event outdoors, scheduling shifts to reduce crowd size, or creating a series of mini-events.