



Choosing the Right Event

Considering how much manpower and money it takes to produce a special event, there are only three good reasons to have one:

1. To raise money
2. To raise the group's profile
3. To attract new members/donors

In deciding what type of event to hold, first pinpoint the group's target market and then compile a list of events likely to appeal to that demographic.

Ask people who attend a lot of events which they found most memorable. Look at other events held locally and further afield to figure out which are the most financially successful and whether they might be a good fit.

Look for fundraisers that have succeeded elsewhere by searching the Web for major charity events in comparable communities. Check the society or lifestyles sections of newspapers and magazines in those areas, as well as those in major metropolitan areas, such as New York City, Chicago, Denver, and Los Angeles. Look in their archives for events held at the same time the previous year.

Groups just entering the fundraising arena should limit their choices to events that require a modest amount of manpower and up-front money.

Choosing an event that has some novelty to it yet appeals to a broad range of ages and interests can take lots of brainstorming, but that's what most groups should aim for.

That's why auctions have become such popular events in recent years. An auction of sought-after goods—celebrity items, special dinners at private homes, travel packages, jewelry—combined with an *hors d'oeuvres* or dessert buffet, has the potential to raise as much or more money than the standard dinner-dance. An auction with *hors d'oeuvres* costs substantially less than a sit-down meal with dancing. The pace of an auction is livelier so guests are apt to enjoy it more. That's likely to translate into more generous bids and greater profits. (For more details, see Chapter 8, Auctions and Other Profit Boosters.)

Because of the nature of auctions—the ability to make them longer or shorter based on the number of items available and to offer a range of items that appeals to many tastes—they fit easily into many other events. With appealing prizes and a motivated work force, an auction can generate a substantial amount of money. However, live auctions require lots of workers and lots of items and so aren't the best choices for novice groups.

For a first-time event, choose one that area residents would attend even if it weren't for charity. That makes promotion easier. So does coming up with something different from the pack, possibly a performance by a high-profile, in-demand speaker.

Bringing in a well-known personality to speak can be relatively easy to do and can also provide a welcome change of pace from dances and galas. It's an effective way to attract new donors and offers loads of opportunities for corporate sponsorship. Next to auctions, it ranks among the most profitable events there are. A noteworthy speaker can quickly and easily sell out the house.

If a group member is acquainted with someone who would draw a crowd, have that member make the request personally. For everyone else there are speakers' bureaus, such as the Greater Talent Network (www.greatertalent.com) and the Harry Walker Agency (www.harrywalker.com), both in New York City, and Celebrity Talent International (www.celebritytalent.net) in California. These networks represent hundreds of authors, politicians, athletes, artists, actors, and well-known print and TV journalists, as well as others who speak compellingly about wellness, culture, media, technology, and a host of other current topics. Such companies can help match a group with a speaker uniquely suited to its particular mission and budget.

“If it’s cancer related, Katie Couric is a good choice because she’s so dedicated to the cause,” says Kenny Rahtz, Greater Talent Network’s senior vice president. “Just about every celebrity has two or three organizations to which they dedicate a good amount of time and can be counted upon for making speeches and attending major fundraising events.”

But such luminaries do not come cheap. Couric charges upwards of \$100,000 to appear. She donates her fees to cancer research. Speaker fees start at about \$5,000 and go up, Rahtz says. The bigger the name, generally the higher the fee.

TIP *Sometimes nonprofit organizations can get a lower price. It doesn’t hurt to ask.*

Celebrity Talent International differs from other groups in that it represents the charities, rather than the celebrities, and so attempts to get nonprofits the best rates available. It has connections to many speakers, singers, and other performers that its staff helps match to a charity’s needs. It also offers advice on acquiring sponsors to offset costs, will supply prior to signing a contract a summary of average costs of the technical equipment the performer will need, and can also provide full production and technical services when needed.

The advantage to spending money on a speaker rather than another dinner-dance is that each event can be different. The group can book one speaker for an evening, or a few for a full-day event with multiple breakout sessions, or a series of speakers throughout the year.

Speakers’ bureaus help schedule events and some also coordinate advance news coverage. Members of the news media can call the network and someone on staff will arrange advance phone interviews with the speaker, significantly increasing publicity without additional cost or effort on the part of the charity’s staff and volunteers. A speakers’ bureau might also handle travel arrangements for the speaker.

TIP *Don’t be afraid to ask questions, including what the total cost will be.*

Festivals centered on popular foods generally draw good-sized crowds. Foods such as chocolate, chili, or seafood are always winners. So are gatherings of well-known area chefs or popular area restaurants offering their specialties. The charity raises money from admission fees, tickets for food and drinks, a raffle, a silent auction, a celebrity dunk tank, and a program and advertising booklet. These events can raise a sweet \$100,000 or more—assuming there's a good turnout and organizers are vigilant about keeping expenses low.

Other popular events include home tours, designer homes, golf tournaments, and other sporting events.

While the event needs broad appeal, it should also include something that will attract people with its novelty, perhaps something that's been done elsewhere but not locally or something that brings together a number of desirable elements not normally found together. And if it's something for which demand exceeds supply, so much the better.

That's what the Central Park Conservancy did when it hosted its Blue Moon Gala. The event was held at Tavern on the Green, the renowned Central Park restaurant transformed by flamboyant restaurateur Warner LeRoy, who spent \$10 million renovating it.

LeRoy underwrote most of the expenses for the gala that was to help the conservancy restore Central Park. He had thousands of sapphire lights hung throughout the restaurant. He brought in *60 Minutes* correspondents Morley Safer, Steve Kroft, Ed Bradley, and Andy Rooney, as well as Charlie Rose and the late Peter Jennings. The conservancy held an all-blue fashion show, hired the Mambo Kings to perform, and arranged for magicians and a fire-breather to roam the crowd.

The group limited the number of tickets available, making them all the more exclusive and appealing. The result: 750 socialites attended, and the event raised \$1 million for the conservancy, says Shelley Clark, vice president of Lou Hammond and Associates, who helped create and promote the gala.

Another success story is that of a long-running event at Penn State University known as THON. It began as a fairly simple weekend-long dance-a-thon to benefit The Four Diamonds Fund, which helps provide care for children with cancer, support for their families, and research at Penn State Children's Hospital at Hershey Medical Center in Hershey, PA.

Over the years, it has become one of the largest student-run philanthropic groups in the country, raising close to \$42 million over 30 years. THON 2006 brought in a record \$4.21 million, the result of a year-long fundraising effort that involved some 10,000 students and supporters.

Long before the main event in February, organizers stage several other events to raise money. There's a phone-a-THON to alumni, a THON 5K, a family carnival, a kickoff dinner, and fundraising workshops. They sell THON family and friends' cookbooks, stickers, and blue plastic THON wristbands that read "For the kids."

The fundraising year culminates with hundreds of students participating in the no-sitting, no-sleeping, 48-hour dance-a-thon, while thousands of spectators cheer them on. (See www.thon.org for details.)

While THON has taken on a life of its own that helps keep momentum flowing from year to year, most events need a serious push and careful oversight by organizers. The best way to ensure a successful charity event is to treat it like any other business undertaking: Assess the market, develop a detailed plan and budget, and continuously build the donor (customer) base. Read on for ways to do this.

MARKETING

What do mood rings, pet rocks, and Cabbage Patch dolls have in common? Each enjoyed monumental, if fleeting, popularity. The makers of these products struck upon something novel that appealed to consumers, albeit briefly. That's the challenge today's charities face in raising money: figuring out what the public wants and then delivering it.

That's what market research is all about and it's every bit as important for charities as it is in the private sector. The organization has to make a profit or, like any other business, it will fail.

Long before a charity stages an event, the leaders must assess the community, its tastes, and spending habits. Knowing the market will make all of the group's events more successful.

First, look closely at the organization:

- How many reliable volunteers are there?
- How much experience does the group have at fundraising?
- What events has the group successfully produced before?

- Who attended those events?
- Which is more important to the group right now: raising money or building awareness of the cause?
- How much corporate sponsorship is available?
- What about individual major donors?
- How successful has the group been in conveying its cause and mission and has the community signed on?
- What has the group invested (spent on specific events) versus what it raised?

Besides holding fundraising events, keeping the organization in the public eye is vitally important. Set up a schedule of written news releases as well as TV and radio public service announcements. Look for local cable shows with logical tie-ins and use a Web site, blogs, and e-mail to get the word out about the group's cause, goals, and successes.

Animal Haven Shelter (www.animalhavenshelter.org) in Flushing, N.Y., raised \$60,000 in Katrina relief donations, in large part because of blog entries by the organization's executive director, Marcello Forte, who participated in the rescue efforts and wrote about it from the field. The group also sent out a series of e-mails in the weeks after the disaster that included special reports and pictures from the field. And it maintains a Web page called Success Stories that displays photos and stories of rescued Katrina animals with their adoptive families. To educate donors as to how their money is spent, the cover story of *The Animal Haven Journal* Winter 2006 edition was entitled: "Volunteers S-T-R-E-T-C-H Donor Dollars." Also on the Web site is a place to click to donate money. This is an organization that makes it easy for supporters to give.

Other ways to keep the group's name in front of potential supporters include:

- Hold regular information meetings and awareness-building events for the public and news media highlighting the charity's mission.
- Sponsor a sports team or youth group.
- Encourage supporters to host small gatherings at their homes to introduce friends and colleagues to the cause. If members have already

educated others about the cause, earning their interest and loyalty, they can concentrate on raising money when event time comes.

When setting out to raise money, a charity sells its image right along with tickets.

So how does a group come up with that one event that will make a splash? There are lots of resources available. Search the Internet for successful events. Use a search engine to research terms such as “fundraising events” or “charitable events.” Read the society pages of local newspapers and magazines. Flip through magazines such as *People*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Us*, and *In Style*. Check out what’s covered on television programs such as *Entertainment Tonight*. All should provide fodder for interesting, creative events.

Pay attention to which celebrities and corporations actively support which efforts. Make a list and update it regularly. (More on celebrities in Chapter 9, Reaching for the Stars.)

SAMPLE EVENTS

Following are some fundraising ideas (listed alphabetically). Each idea includes some pros and cons, an estimate of staff and planning time required, and costs associated with that particular event.

To estimate actual costs, put together a preliminary budget using the worksheet in Chapter 2, Money Matters. Make sure to add any special costs associated with the event under consideration. Completing the budget accurately is essential for determining whether the event is within the organization’s means. There are lots of variables: whether it’s a first-time event or a repeat of an event that’s built a following; how much underwriting or sponsorship the group can obtain; and whether insurance, such as liability, fire, and weather, might be needed.

Drawing up a preliminary budget will help determine the amount of staff and volunteer time required. Count the number of committees and the tasks each one must complete. Figure out how many people each committee will need to get the work done, then add 10 percent, so work loads won’t be overwhelming and there will be enough manpower even when some volunteers drop out and others prove less productive than expected.

TIP

Plan on one worker for every 50 participants for an event listed as “moderate” in people needs. Add more for events requiring “high” amounts of manpower, less for those listed as “minimal.”

Don't dismiss smaller events out of hand as not worth the effort. It might be more lucrative and less taxing for the group to stage several, less-complicated events over the year, bringing in \$10,000 each time, rather than spending six months planning a huge, expensive event that might bring in only marginally more than that. Given the uncertainty of the nation's economy in recent years, many people are reluctant to attend high-end balls and concerts, and many major companies, which have traditionally provided the bulk of underwriting and sponsorship money, may be downsizing personnel and philanthropic efforts.

Considering how ubiquitous the Internet has become, don't forget to examine the group's potential for raising money online, both through its Web site and those of others, such as eBay (more on that in Chapter 8, Auctions and Other Profit Boosters).

Here's a sampling of events that are possible, but there are far too many to include them all. Roam the Internet for more examples of what others have done.

Antique Show

Sign up as many area antique dealers as possible. Charge each for a booth or space. Charge an admission fee to the public. On opening night, set a higher ticket price for those who want the first shot at merchandise. Sell food and beverages. Hold a raffle and create a program book.

Planning time: Three months for a small show, as much as 12 months for a large one

People needs: Moderate. One person to round up vendors and dealers, another to manage the site and publicity, one to acquire raffle items, one or more to sell ads in the program book. Others to help staff the event, set up and clean up afterward.

Costs: Budget money for security because of the value of the items involved.

Arts and Crafts Show

These range from small, simple affairs featuring homemade crafts, to grand showcases, such as Miami Beach's Art Deco Weekend, which attracts thousands of people every January. A small show can come together in a couple of months, while large-scale events such as Art Deco Weekend are year-round projects. Go to other craft fairs and give out registration forms for the group's forthcoming show, collect cards from vendors, and search on the Internet for craftsmen and artists who travel to shows outside of their area. Use these to create a master list.

Planning time: Three to four months

People needs: Minimal to high. Two or three people can handle a small show, with one signing up artists and one handling staging. A larger show might require 20 to 40 workers divided into committees to handle artists, publicity, staging/set-up, entertainment, food vendors, raffles, program book, and cleanup.

Costs: Long before the event date nears, the group will need money and publicity to attract and sign a sufficient number of artists.

A-Thons

There's hardly an activity that hasn't been made into an "a-thon." Aerobics, bowling, car racing, bicycling, cooking, running, rocking, haircutting, dancing, jumping rope, kissing, singing, swimming, skating, skateboarding, walking, wheelchairing, and wheelbarrowing have all been used to good effect. Participants solicit pledges from people prior to the event. Generally the amount pledged depends on how long the person performs the designated activity or it is calculated by score (ten cents per bowling pin struck down or swim lap completed). Obviously, the more participants who collect pledges, the larger the profit will likely be. To stimulate friendly competition, encourage people to enter as teams (friends, co-workers, members of other groups), each with a captain, with prizes for both individuals and teams that raise the most. There are a couple of drawbacks to consider: Weather can wash away the competition for some of the activities. Another is that this is an often-used activity and boredom may set in among those who would ordinarily take part. Check around to see if other, more established, local groups are sponsoring these. If so, consider changing

events or partnering with a group that already stages one. This type of event relies heavily on publicity and word of mouth and tends to grow each year. One way to boost media coverage is to get one or more media personalities to participate.

And one more caveat: Some cities are not as welcoming to walk-a-thons and the like as they once were. Having hundreds—or thousands—of people coursing through the streets creates traffic interruptions, puts walkers at risk, and creates logistical nightmares for law enforcement. Groups wishing to stage a walk-a-thon should first look for a large park or other off-the-street venue in which to hold it. That's likely to make officials more welcoming—and more likely to grant the group's request to hold one. However, some cities are even limiting these because the large events keep others from enjoying the parks. Check to make sure it's possible to hold one in a specific spot before scheduling the event.

Planning time: Three to six months

People needs: Moderate. This requires volunteers to line up participants, distribute pledge forms, make follow-up calls, conduct signup, and track pledge sheets and donations.

Costs: Allow ample money for advance costs, such as insurance, permits, site expenses, T-shirts, giveaways, sign-up and pledge sheets, advertising and publicity, and awards. Save some money for an accountant if there isn't one in the group and always leave several thousand dollars for next year's start-up expenses.

Auctions

These can center on celebrity items, tickets to concerts or sporting events, cars, people, travel, food, restaurant meals, art, jewelry—whatever a committee can convince people to donate to a worthy cause. Live auctions are among the most labor-intensive fundraisers, especially if there are a lot of items for live auction as well as a silent auction. Always make sure that the auction items match the spending power of those attending. Far less costly and less laborious is an online auction, via a program such as eBay's Giving Works, which allows charities to auction items and lets individuals who are selling items designate that a particular charity receive a set portion of the sale price. (See Chapter 8, Auctions and Other Profit Boosters, for details.)

Planning time: Six months or more for the live variety; about a month or two for online (including collecting items to sell)

People needs: High for live events. Auctions require many people to procure the items, set up and work the room, and make sure people with money to spend attend the event. Online auctions require several people collecting items, some to e-mail donors alerting them to the auction, someone to handle the online listings, and a few to handle billing and shipping.

Costs: Because items must be collected in advance of the event, include money in the budget for storage rental, security, and liability insurance.

Balloon Races

This is an event that is totally dependent on Mother Nature's mood. It requires a big open field, several hot-air balloonists and their balloons, perfect weather with no wind, and a good crowd. These are sometimes held on the site of a shopping mall before construction begins. Other possibilities include farm fields, large parks, and the lawns of large estates. Sell sponsorships on balloons, charge admission to watch, sell food, hold a raffle, sell photos of people standing in the balloon baskets. A caveat: This can be a risky event, given the vicissitudes of the weather.

Planning time: Three months

People needs: Minimal by hiring a professional group of balloonists or a balloon club to handle things; don't even think about doing this one without the experts.

Costs: Insurance and site rental. Set up food booths at the beginning and ending sites (although landing sites are notoriously difficult to predict). A major corporate sponsor is essential for this event's success. Approach new stores, hotels and restaurants, radio or television stations and ask that they pledge money to pay for the event, with proceeds going to the charity.

Beach Party

This one's a no-brainer for coastal communities. It's an ideal event for attracting families and younger people who may then choose to get involved

in the cause as a result. If there isn't a handy beach nearby, truck in a load of sand and create one, complete with potted faux palm trees. When using real beaches, make sure to acquire all the necessary permits from whichever agency oversees that particular stretch of sand. Line up popular bands to perform. Charge admission. Organize a volleyball tournament with entry fees and cash prizes. Depending on the crowd, hold an ugly bartender contest, and perhaps a "babes" and "hunks" competition, in which people pay \$5 to vote. Bring in vendors to sell refreshments. The beer concession can be a major moneymaker so a beer sponsor can make a big difference in how much the charity makes, especially if the sponsoring beverage company donates all or part of the beer proceeds in exchange for being named a sponsor in advertisements and banners. Get a radio station to broadcast live to encourage greater turnout. Some stations will serve as sponsors and provide free on-air publicity for the event.

Planning time: Four or five months

People needs: High. People are needed to set everything up and procure sponsors, vendors, and music. On the day of the event, there must be workers to handle security and crowd control, staff booths, sell food and T-shirts, collect tickets, direct parking, and clean up.

Costs: Weather is the biggest risk so buy inclement weather insurance along with a liability policy.

Bingo

In places in which bingo is legal, there are usually bingo halls—places that do nothing but hold bingo games. In most states, a portion of every session must benefit a charity. Check those in the area to see if there's a session open that the group could claim.

Planning time: Four months

People needs: Minimal if using an established bingo hall. Usually a volunteer from the charity must be present during the session. People needs are higher if there are no bingo halls and the group has to produce its own game and attract the players.

Costs: Allow a generous publicity fund. Bingo does best with lots of advance notice.

Book or CD Signings

Many major book and music stores sponsor signings by artists and authors. These generally aren't great moneymakers, but can be good vehicles for promotion. Tie in a raffle, perhaps awarding a meal with the featured writer or artist. Other possibilities include signed copies of the person's book, CD, limited edition poster, or original work of art.

Planning time: One to three months

People needs: Minimal. Someone needs to set the time and location, book the author or artist, handle publicity, and help out at the event. If there's going to be a raffle, people are needed to gather the items.

Costs: Check to see if the store or person appearing requires that the group purchase a minimum amount of merchandise. If so, include that in the budget.

Business Opening/Store and Mall Events

A store, restaurant, nightclub, supermarket, office building, or mall can be a great place to stage an event. In some cases, the company's employees or advertising firm will handle the planning and publicity, leaving the charity to concentrate on delivering guests with significant disposable income. In return, many businesses will pay for printing, ads, giveaways and sometimes even the food. The more successful the charitable organization is in bringing in well-heeled potential customers, the more likely it will be asked to participate in future openings. If the charity can't attract 600 affluent people for a grand opening, don't try this. This is an easy event to produce so there's usually stiff competition. The group needs a top-notch, professional proposal to present to the business and the ability to deliver the turnout and sales it promises in order to successfully compete against other charities. If the group can't muster the requisite number of customers, consider partnering with one or more other nonprofit groups. Whatever profit there is gets divided evenly among the groups but so, too, do expenses.

If the charity can bring in a celebrity (local or otherwise), so much the better. (See Chapter 9, Reaching for the Stars.) When working with a mall, make sure there's one person in charge who speaks for all the stores.

Shopping Day: A variation on this is a shopping day, in which supporters of a particular charity are invited to shop (or dine) on a specific day, with a percentage of proceeds to benefit the charity (or charities). The business promotes the event in its ads and may offer discounts on some or all of its merchandise to shoppers who have special passes. The charities sell one-day shopping passes (priced at \$5 to \$10) to supporters for that day, with a different color pass for each group, allowing the stores to properly credit sales. Supporters can take advantage of discounts and help their favorite charities by shopping during the event.

Planning time: Three months

People needs: Minimal for the charity if the business' employees get involved. Moderate if group members must to do the advance work themselves.

Costs: Minimal. The new business should pick up most of the costs.

Car/Bike Shows

Antique, vintage, specific makes, RVs, sports cars, or motorcycles all have passionate devotees. Get the local club of car or motorcycle enthusiasts involved or find a promoter who will organize the show while group members handle publicity and sell tickets. Don't forget to include the always popular—and lucrative—raffle and program book. If there's someone in the group who's a particularly good negotiator or has ties to a local auto or motorcycle dealer, have that person approach the company management and ask them to donate a vehicle to be raffled off. In exchange, the company gets prominent mention in all promotional material and at the event itself. Sell raffle tickets for \$100 each, limiting the number sold (to 500 or so). It's a great way to boost the event's bottom line.

Planning time: Three to six months

People needs: Minimal. The group will need to be on hand to guide crowds and parking, as well as supervise and collect money at the event.

Costs: Take out inclement weather insurance and coverage for the cars.

Casino Nights

Most organizations hire a company that does this professionally. That's because it's apt to cost more for the group to rent the equipment and hire the

dealers on its own than to engage a firm that does this on a regular basis. It's a somewhat pricey but easy event to hold because the organization is essentially buying it whole. The group will have to arrange for the prizes, printing, publicity, and sale of tickets. If there are casino boats in the area, check on chartering one for an afternoon or evening, or charging a higher price than usual for a designated sailing with the extra money going to the charity. Then the group just has to sell tickets.

Planning time: Four to six months

People needs: High for self-produced casino nights on land; moderate if using a pro; minimal for a gambling cruise.

Costs: Don't skimp on security.

Celebrity Appearances

This is for seasoned fundraisers only. Novices should not attempt this on their own. Finding a celebrity (such as a singer, musician, or dancer) who will appear at a price the group can afford is the key to success here. Consult a lawyer (one who donates time to the group is ideal, but hire one otherwise) to make sure the contract is suitable. Scour the fine print for hidden expenses and clauses that may allow the celebrity to cancel at the last minute, if offered a film role, TV appearance, etc. Deploy as many volunteers as possible to sell tickets.

Groups new to large-scale fundraising might want to purchase a block of tickets to an appearance someone else is producing, then sell them at a higher price with the difference going to the charity. Check with large local venues for a group sales department. Purchasing tickets through that department means the group will get a discount, the amount of which varies according to the group size and date of performance. If possible, boost fundraising by holding a meet-the-celebrity reception following the show, charging an additional fee.

Planning time: At least six months

People needs: Moderate. Volunteers or staff must book the location and the celebrity, handle contracts, and tend to the celebrity's needs. Others are needed to sell tickets and publicize the event.

Costs: Make sure there's money available for advance publicity and deposits.

Chili Cookoff

Connect with a regional or national chili competition, then line up contestants, each of whom pays an entrance fee, and find a spot to hold it. If the public is going to purchase samples of the food, the site will have to meet health department guidelines, which isn't easy to do outside the confines of a commercial kitchen. It's best to hire a restaurant known for its chili to come in and serve portions customers can buy. (This also works with gumbo, chowder, baked goods, and other popular foods.) Charge admission, hold a raffle. Enlist a radio or television station to serve as a sponsor. Getting a corporate sponsor to cover the cost of entertainment is always a plus. Try connecting with a beer or bottled water company looking to promote new products to serve as yet an additional sponsor.

Planning time: Four to six months

People needs: Moderate to high. This isn't a good event for a two-person office to try to pull off. Cookoffs require committees to sign up competitors, handle publicity, site acquisition, entertainment, security, and parking.

Costs: Equipment and booth rental quickly add up. Event and liability insurance are musts.

Concert (Local Talent)

Count on this sort of show to be more of a profile builder than a money-maker. Hold it in a school auditorium or church sanctuary and publicize it through the school or church newsletter, in addition to the standard spots (newspaper, radio, newsletter, Web sites, e-mail). To boost profits, sell beverages, baked goods and/or candy and hold a raffle before and after the show (and during intermission if there is one).

Planning time: One to three months

People needs: Moderate. There must be people to sell tickets, book the talent and location, and orchestrate the raffle and food sales.

Costs: Moderate. If the venue isn't donated, there's the site rental plus the usual printing of tickets and programs.

Concert (Celebrity)

For groups just starting out, it is far easier and less risky to purchase a block of tickets to an already scheduled performance. Sell them at a higher price, with the difference going to the charity. Only a well-established organization with ample advance money available and a loyal base of supporters should attempt to produce its own concert.

Planning time: Three months to sell tickets to someone else's show; six months or more for the charity to produce its own

People needs: Moderate with a few people needed to sell tickets to an already scheduled show; high for groups going it alone.

Costs: Moderate to high. The group will need to pay for a variety of items, including advertising, site deposits, and such if going it alone. If selling tickets to someone else's concert, the group will have to buy tickets in advance.

Cooking Demonstration

Arrange to have chefs appear at a local department store (in the housewares department) or at a restaurant or cooking school when the establishment normally is closed. People pay to see the demonstration. The charity might pick up extra money if it gets a percentage based on the value of merchandise sold during the show. If the chef has published a cookbook, have the author sign copies there and try to get a percentage of the book sales, too.

Planning time: About three months

People needs: Minimal

Costs: Very little if the store or restaurant will pay for advertising, or will contribute to the cost of producing and sending out invitations.

Costume Party

Allow guests to choose any identity they wish or use a theme (TV characters, colors, a time period) or occasion (Halloween, Mardi Gras, Christmas in July, etc.). Increase profits with a program book, raffle, and auction.

Planning time: Three to six months

People needs: Minimal to moderate depending on how elaborate the party is. The group needs people to address invitations, serve refreshments, find a site, and handle publicity, as well as some to oversee the party itself.

Costs: Moderate. Invitations (generally done in-house on the office computer), tickets, postage, renting a site, refreshments.

County Fair/Carnival/Street Fair

Have a variety of booths featuring arts and crafts, food, and music. Volunteers can construct the booths. To boost attendance, bring in other attractions, such as 4-H displays, appearances by local school choirs, orchestras, and marching bands. Have pig or crab races. This will do more to promote the group's image than increase its operating revenue. Consider tying in with another organization's festival or "a-thon" to cut costs and expose more people to the cause. Some municipalities help sponsor such events by waiving rental fees on a park or recreation center.

Planning time: Two to four months

People needs: High. Lots of volunteers are needed to set up booths, attract vendors, arrange for entertainment, handle tickets, parking, and cleanup.

Costs: Enough upfront money to cover booth rental, site cleanup, security, and insurance.

Cow-Chip Bingo

This simple event requires one well-fed cow delivered to a football field or other large area divided into one-square-yard plats. Sell plats for \$30 and include a meal (barbecue, subs, etc.) in the price. Release a well-fed cow onto the field and allow her to wander at will until she drops her, uh, chips. The owner of the splot-upon plat wins. Charge non-plat holders admission, sell refreshments, give away prizes, hold a raffle.

Planning time: Two months

People needs: Moderate. Workers are needed to find the site and arrange for a cow to be delivered (and returned), sell tickets and plats, handle publicity, and run things during the event itself.

Costs: Cow rental, possibly site rental, weather insurance.

Cruise

There are four variations:

1. **A full-length cruise.** Arrange with a cruise line or travel agent to sell tickets for a particular cruise with a percentage of the price going to the charity. To attract wealthy older people, pick a longer cruise that travels to exotic, out-of-the-ordinary ports. For a young crowd, opt for a shorter, less costly voyage.

Planning time: Four to six months

People needs: Minimal. The group supplies people to publicize the trip and sell tickets. The cruise line takes care of virtually everything else.

Costs: Private parties and shore excursions will add to expenses. Include them in the ticket price.

2. **A cruise with special benefits for the group.** Some cruise lines offer charities special packages. The cruise line might arrange for a celebrity appearing on the ship to attend a cocktail reception, dinner, or a private question-and-answer session. In some cases, the charity gets part of what each person in the group pays and may earn free berths when booking a larger group. Then sell the free berths, too.

Planning time: Six to twelve months

People needs: Minimal. A few people are needed to sell cruises, publicize the trip, and coordinate with cruise staff.

Costs: Minimal. Getting the word out is critical so paid ads may be worth the expense.

3. **Charter a boat for a day.** Rent out the whole ship for a day-long cruise to nowhere (cruise lines are especially happy to do these when launching a new ship or re-launching a refurbished one). Casino boats are good bets, too. Some regions are well-suited for famous-house cruises, in which passengers get a gander at celebrities' homes from the waterways.

Planning time: Four to six months

People needs: Minimal. The charity handles publicity and ticket sales.

Costs: See budget worksheet in Chapter 2.

4. **A meal on board.** Cruise lines sometimes donate a meal to a charity to get potential customers on board. The charity brings in the people and the cruise line does the rest. This event is limited to the number of seats in the ship's dining room. People pay to attend. Add a raffle or mini-auction.

Planning time: Three to five months

People needs: Minimal. The charity handles publicity and ticket sales.

Costs: Minimal. Publicity, invitations, and postage are the main expenses.

Dance

Without a meal to worry about, this can be an easy event to produce. All that's needed is a place to hold it, music (live or recorded), light refreshments, and some publicity. Tailor it to a particular crowd with the music. It could be '50s, '60s, country, rock, polka, hip hop, techno, big band, etc. Consider asking a radio station with a format compatible with the event to serve as a sponsor and, if possible, set up a live remote broadcast, which is likely to attract more people. Dances aren't generally large moneymakers but it's possible to boost profits with a program book, sponsors, raffles, and a mini-auction.

Planning time: About three months

People needs: Minimal to moderate. The group needs people to secure a site and equipment, handle decorations, find a DJ or band, publicize the event, and sell tickets.

Costs: Virtually everything should be donated or underwritten or don't do it.

Designer Homes

This project is large and complex and requires seasoned fundraisers to produce successfully. It usually entails finding an empty house (either a new model or an older one now for sale), and several interior designers, each of whom decorates one room. Ticket prices are higher than for home tours (discussed a little later in the chapter). Designer homes take massive

amounts of planning and coordination and can easily lose money. Increase profits by holding an opening night preview for VIPs, fashion shows, electronics/media show and demonstration night, garden and landscaping events, luncheons, auctions, raffles, a gift shop, and sessions with the designers.

Planning time: Six months to a year

People needs: High. Many people will be needed to coordinate with the designers, sell tickets, publicize the event, produce the side events, and staff every room of the house whenever it is open to the public.

Costs: Moderate. Designers cover the expenses of decorating the rooms and the labor involved. Sponsors should underwrite ads, promotions, printing, food, and other expenses.

Dine-Arounds

These can work three ways:

1. Arrange for three to five restaurants to each produce one course of a progressive meal in the restaurants. (They should be relatively close to one another to prevent long commutes.)
2. Ask several restaurants or well-known chefs to each produce one course at a variety of interesting homes. Participants travel from house to house for each course.

Arrange for a tram, trolley, or bus to shuttle guests around.

3. Ask several restaurants to each stage a cooking demonstration and meal, preferably on different evenings. Participants may buy seats at one or more restaurants. Sometimes the establishments will donate a course or portion of the meal, leaving more of the admission for the charitable cause. Add to profits by holding a raffle in advance (sell raffle tickets while selling meal tickets) and possibly a mini-auction at each restaurant.

Planning time: Two to four months

People needs: Minimal. The group needs someone to handle publicity/advertising as well as a sales committee in which each member commits to sell 10 or more tickets or purchase the tickets themselves. Have another committee that sells raffle tickets at \$10

each or \$50 for a book of six tickets. Winners need not be present to win.

Costs: Liability insurance is essential.

Food Festivals

An event that celebrates a local specialty food—or a universally loved one—can be a fine reason for a festival. Obviously chocolate is top among those but countless communities hold festivals celebrating shrimp, garlic, strawberries, tomatoes, etc. It can be a group of restaurants competing against one another. Ask local restaurants to serve a signature entrée, appetizer, salad, or dessert. Restaurants can compete for honors by having a panel of judges vote on which had the best entree, best appetizer, best dessert, best booth display, etc. Have a people's choice award, too, allowing the public to vote for favorites as well. Charge each group or restaurant for the space, table, and electrical service. The charity handles publicity. People purchase tickets to be traded in for food. Add a raffle and program book that includes the layout of the event, thanks to each of the vendors, and ads (quarter-, half- and full-page) sold to participating vendors and anyone else who wants to support the cause.

Planning time: Three to six months

People needs: Moderate. Volunteers need to line up vendors, handle publicity, sell program book ads, gather raffle items, monitor the site the day of the event, and clean up afterwards.

Costs: Upfront costs include weather and liability insurance, site rental, set up and clean up, and specialized personnel, such as an electrician, plumber, fire department/emergency transport at the site throughout the event.

Fur Ball

Animal devotees love this event. A Washington, D.C. animal welfare group held a fur ball, in which those wearing fur were dogs that escorted their well-dressed (and presumably furless) human companions to a gourmet dinner, plus games such as bobbing for bones. This is basically a dinner event with a twist on the entertainment. All dogs must be leashed and have proof of current vaccinations. Add to profits with a doggy gift shop, raffle, and auction.

Planning time: Three months

People needs: Moderate. Volunteers must find a site, handle decorations, plan the meal and entertainment, and be on hand at the event to supervise and register guests.

Costs: Besides site rental and set-up and cleanup costs, plan on lots of security. Consider hiring professionals to supplement volunteers and both a veterinarian and medical professional (nurse, emergency medical technician, etc.) in case of mishaps.

Gay Bingo

This event won't work in all communities, but it's been enthusiastically received in larger cities, such as Philadelphia, Seattle, San Francisco, Dallas, Miami, and New York, where the games easily sell out. Seattle's games have taken place monthly since 1992. According to its Web site, upwards of 750 people attend each session. Admission is \$20 and players must be 21 or older. Guest host and speakers appear. Bingo winners get \$100 for each regular game. Drag queens (roller skates are optional) and celebrities serve as hostesses and number callers. Those who attend are encouraged to dress in appropriate costume for the evening's designated theme, which might be cowgirls, mistletoe, cops and robbers, Halloween, etc. In recent years, organizers have started selling dinners just prior to the games as well as beer and wine. Proceeds benefit the Lifelong AIDS Alliance.

Planning time: One month

People needs: Moderate to high. The event requires people to find the site, the entertainment, and the equipment and to be on the floor the night of the event.

Costs: Don't skimp on publicity. Hand out flyers, send e-mails, urge supporters to spread the word to friends, advertise in hip periodicals.

Haircuts

The first step is to get a local hair styling shop to commit a certain number of stylists and a specific amount of time to the charity. During that period, a percentage of sales goes to the charity. This one's particularly easy to produce.

Planning time: One month

People needs: Minimal. One or two people to handle publicity and someone at the salon to answer questions about the charity and, in the best of all possible worlds, recruit new volunteers. Someone should also ensure that food and beverages are available for the stylists and the customers. Get this underwritten whenever possible.

Costs: Minimal

Home Tours

Arrange for several private residences to hold open houses. Use historic homes or several houses in one interesting neighborhood. The biggest obstacle here is convincing homeowners to let scores of people traipse through their houses. People buy tickets to tour the homes. Add a program book and sell raffle tickets.

Planning time: Three to five months

People needs: High. There must be trustworthy workers in every room of each house, as well as people to handle publicity, and sales of tickets, raffle tickets, and program book ads.

Costs: Minimal. Buy plenty of liability insurance and make sure every home has lots of security.

Iron Chef

Have two or more chefs sign on to compete in a manner similar to that on the popular TV show. Each one gets a box with the same ingredients (they don't know what those are ahead of time) and they must create a dish with them in a specified amount of time. The public gets to watch the competition, then eat the results. Sell tickets to the event, add a raffle and program book.

Planning time: Two to five months

People needs: Moderate. The group needs people to sell tickets, get raffle items, sell program book ads, find a site, acquire all the equipment and supplies, serve food during the event, and clean up.

Costs: Moderate to high. Costs are lower if done in a restaurant where kitchen facilities are available; higher if the group has to bring everything in.

Jail

“Arrest” well-known local personalities then have them phone friends to post bail, the proceeds of which go to the charity. Advertise heavily so people know it’s coming and make sure the people you arrest are amenable to it.

Planning time: Three months

People needs: Moderate to high. The event requires lots of drivers to pick up and return people and a bank of phones for bailout calls.

Costs: See budget worksheet in Chapter 2.

Mystery Night or Hunt

Participants solve a mystery, either by watching actors perform or by going on a hunt to gather clues and evidence themselves. There are professional companies that produce these and, unless someone in the group knows how to do it, hiring the experts usually pays off in this case. There are lots of site options: a shopping center, amusement park, empty building, estate, or farm would work well. Businesses might sponsor locations of items on the route, refreshment stands, and T-shirts. It’s a good way to get people involved because a lot are needed to pull it off. This is an event that can grow over the years. Most only break even the first year.

Planning time: Three to six months

People needs: High if the group produces it on its own, moderate if a professional company handles it.

Costs: See budget worksheet in Chapter 2.

Non-Events

Send out cards inviting people to donate without attending an event. Donors will save money on clothing, gasoline, parking, and babysitters. This can be a great change of pace for a well-established group that has conducted the same sort of event for several years. New groups without a solid donor base should skip this one.

Planning time: Two months

People needs: Minimal. Volunteers send out invitations and collect donations.

Costs: Minimal

Pancake Breakfasts

This is an easy and inexpensive event to produce, but doesn't generally raise a lot of money. To add profit, hold a raffle, silent auction, or pass-the-basket. Send invitations by e-mail, phone, and flyers, signs at the fire station, and announcements in the news media.

Planning time: One or two months

People needs: Minimal to moderate, depending on the crowd. Workers cook, hold games, handle publicity, ticket sales, site procurement, and cleanup.

Costs: Minimal

Phone-A-Thon

Ask a local firm that has a phone bank or large room with lots of desks and phones if the charity can use it for a set period of time so volunteers can call people and solicit donations. This can raise a significant amount of money, especially from people who don't give on a regular basis. For this to be successful, gather a lot of volunteers to make calls—some during the day, others at night—and lots of phones. Award prizes to those who collect the most money.

Planning time: Three to six months

People needs: High. The more people making calls, the more money they will gather.

Costs: Office rental and meals for volunteers can be additional costs (unless the group secures a business to serve as sponsor).

Races

If it moves, it can race for money. Possibilities include boats, planes, cars, dogs, horses, turtles, crabs, skunks (de-scented please), rubber ducks, beds, cardboard crafts, etc. Weiner dog (dachshund) races are brief, funny, and very popular. Even the lowly cockroach has been known to race for charity.

Planning time: Six months

People needs: Moderate to high. Workers will need to arrange for the site, publicity, round up participants, and sell tickets.

Costs: Minimal

Sidewalk Sale

Sell candy, baked goods, rummage items, plants, or crafts. It's a good first-time event because it gets people involved and builds a following. Volunteers can procure items from home or collect them from garages and attics. This event requires a prime location (such as a busy shopping center), lots of people donating items, good promotion, and enough workers to handle the crowds on the day of the event. It won't raise a lot of money, but can be held regularly, serving as a solid source of revenue. An alternative is to have individuals list their items online at a service such as MissionFish, specifying that a set amount of each sale go to the charity. (See Chapter 8, Auctions and Other Profit Boosters.)

Planning time: One to two months

People needs: Moderate to high for a live event in which there must be setup and cleanup, collection of items, publicity, and someone to line up vendors and sellers. Minimal for online sales.

Costs: Budget money for permits.

Speakers

Bringing in a single well-known speaker, or a series of them, can result in big profits for relatively little effort. Either call upon someone with a connection to the group or consult a speakers' bureau, which helps match the right celebrity to the event, cause, and budget. Be sure to get written permission prior to the event when planning to video or audio tape a speaker.

Planning time: Depends on the group's choice of speakers and how much money would have to be raised for advance costs, but factor in at least three or four months. A speaker's availability can also dictate the date the event is held. Check with a speakers' bureau for possible speakers prior to setting a firm date for the event.

People needs: Moderate. People are needed to secure a location and speaker, sell tickets, round up sponsors, and publicize the event.

Costs: Local speakers generally cost very little or nothing, while nationally known speakers can command upwards of six figures.

Telethon

While the Muscular Dystrophy Association telethon with Jerry Lewis and periodic telethons on public television are by far the best known, lots of groups hold these with good results. They require a tremendous corps of volunteers, a bank of phones, lots of publicity, and a station willing to broadcast the program. If the group has limited funds, approach cable or community access channels, which are generally less expensive. This is an event for which it often pays to hire the professionals. A group can spend a lot of money staging a telethon before the first donation comes in.

Planning time: Six months to a year

People needs: High. This event calls for people to staff the phones, arrange for and guide speakers and guests, send pledge envelopes, and follow up.

Costs: Moderate to high (depending on how much is underwritten). The group will need a phone bank, TV time, advertising, and transportation.

Themed Meal

Pick an appealing site, stick to a budget, and get as much of the event's requirements donated as possible. Theme the meal around something such as a luau or country hoedown. If it fits the theme, add a fashion show. Tie in a raffle or gift shop that fits the theme.

Planning time: Four to six months

People needs: Moderate to high

Costs: See budget worksheet in Chapter 2.

Touring Shows

Plays, circuses, and other traveling shows afford great tie-in opportunities for nonprofits (see Exhibit 1.1). First, find a touring company coming to the area. Buy a block of tickets and sell them at a higher price, with the difference going to the charity.

Planning time: Six months

EXHIBIT I.1

SOMETHING TO ROAR ABOUT WITH BROADWAY TICKET

Lion King Special Prize Program
Here's Your Chance to See Broadway's Sold-Out Sensation...
The Lion King

If you donate \$100 or more you will be eligible to
win two (2) tickets to the *Lion King*
 and join over 250 other supporters of the Jewish Community Centers
 of Greater Philadelphia on Sunday, April 11 at 6:30 pm in New York City!

To purchase more chances, please call (215) 545-0153.

All proceeds benefit the programs and services offered by the JCCs of Greater Phila.
** Includes show only. Transportation not included.
 Tickets must be reserved in name of user only. Non-transferable.*

Please complete and return to the JCCs in the BSEP envelope.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home Phone _____

Work Phone _____

People needs: Low to moderate. Volunteers are needed to line up the show, sell tickets, and arrange for tie-in activities.

Costs: See budget worksheet in Chapter 2.

Tournaments/Sporting Events

Tennis, golf, and car racing are among the most popular tournaments successfully used for fundraising. These require lots of manpower to find a site, line up sponsors, and handle publicity, not to mention the activities on the day of the event. The more sponsors, celebrities, and media time the group can secure, the more money it's likely to make. Advance expenses are apt to be greater than for many other events because of deposits required for the site, printing, and sponsor information packages.

Planning time: Four to six months

People needs: Moderate to high. Workers must sell tickets, find a site, arrange for refreshments, recruit competitors and sponsors, and publicize and staff the event.

Costs: If there will be VIP seating for major sponsors, add liquor, food, gifts, and other benefits to the budget.

THINKING IT THROUGH

Once there's a list of possible events, narrow it down to no more than three and complete the preliminary budgets for each (see Chapter 2, Money Matters). This should help narrow the field to one event that fits the group's goals and budget. Then assess, step by step, what it will take to produce:

- Determine where the event will be held.
- Reserve the date.
- Set ticket prices.
- Prepare tickets, invitations, and news releases.
- Draw up a schedule of tasks to be completed and deadlines.
- Based on that schedule, figure out how many people will be needed to produce it.
- Determine what committees are needed, how many people it will require to accomplish everything, and how many are available. Factor in that some people work full- or part-time, have children, and may have limited time to help. If the usual volunteers aren't able to handle it all, ask them to recruit others.

Factor in the time the manager will spend on developing and producing an event. For development officers and professional fundraisers, an event can eat up half of their working time over a six-month period. If there's an active committee with a competent chairperson, the manager's role should be reduced. Look at the big picture and decide if the manager can commit sufficient time and energy to this event. Sometimes it's better to skip the event. Instead, spend a few hours calling corporations or wealthy patrons and ask for large donations.

For those considering holding a different type of event than the group has staged previously—perhaps moving from several small events to a larger, more costly one—choose something that warrants a bigger ticket price, such as a dinner-dance/cruise or a concert with a big-name star.

Look at the types of events that are successful in the community. Even those that haven't been strictly fundraising events might be altered to raise money. If there isn't an existing event to which the group can tie its charitable fundraiser, consider holding an event that's already proven popular in the area.

Figure out the expenses, then add 10 percent for unexpected costs. Organizations that set standards for charities maintain that a properly run fundraiser should leave at least 60 percent for the charitable cause, with 40 percent or less devoted to expenses. There's no law that requires it, but public opinion can be just as effective an enforcer.

Remember what a hit the American Red Cross took after 9/11 when the head of the organization told Congress that of the \$500 million the public donated to the charity's Liberty Fund for victims' families, about \$200 million might be spent on other terror-related causes? Many donors were furious that every dollar wasn't going to the victims' families. The president of the Red Cross resigned. The charity ultimately changed its plans and pledged all the money to the families with an apology to donors. Nonetheless, it took a while for people to forgive the Red Cross and to resume giving.

That's a far more public meltdown than most groups are likely to experience. But it's vital that the charity be forthcoming with financial information. Make sure donors know that the charity understands, and adheres to, the industry's standards of ethics.

TIP

Let contributors know exactly how much of what they pay would be considered a tax-deductible donation to the charity.

TIME AND DATE

Proper timing is vital to success. A group can produce the best event of the social season, fashion it to the exact tastes of the target audience, and have lots of money and people to pull it off, but still fail if it isn't properly scheduled.

Most communities have some sort of social calendar or events schedule. (It's great to have someone in the group maintain a calendar on the computer so it can be updated regularly.) Check the Web sites of the local chamber of commerce as well as the convention and visitors' bureau and local newspapers and magazines.

Call the largest hotels and events venues (convention centers, arenas, etc.) and check with the director of sales or catering who will have bookings scheduled six months to a year in advance for major conventions and events.

Check such schedules to make sure the date the group is considering has not already been taken by a large event. Also ensure the date doesn't fall on a religious holiday. In college towns, make sure there are no big sports or social events that day.

When considering an outdoor event, check with weather experts for the possibility of bad weather. *The Farmer's Almanac* and the weather bureau are good sources. So is www.weatherunderground.com. The Web is a great source of historical weather information, enabling the curious to check weather on that date in previous years. Depending on the location, it seems obvious that it's unwise to schedule events during periods that are prone to bad weather, such as August through November during the height of Florida's hurricane season or February in snowy Minnesota. Of course, there are no guarantees no matter when the event takes place, but a little thought in advance can help lessen the chances of problems.

Consider other seasonal factors, too. An outdoor event held in Texas on a blazing September day isn't going to entice a big crowd. Schedule events during the most temperate months.

Some days of the week are better than others, depending on the event. Previews and other small events work best when held right after work on Tuesdays or Thursdays, before people go home. Schedule a Friday night event late enough that people have time to go home from work, change, and get to the event. On Sundays, set the time early enough that people will have time to get home and prepare for the coming workweek.

Where the event takes place counts, too. If the group expects 50 people to attend, don't rent a hall that holds 500. Similarly, a room that holds 50 won't work if 20 more people turn out. (Read more on this in Chapter 6, *On Location*.)

Before committing to take on a special event, make sure the group has the money and manpower it needs to make it fun and profitable. Read on for ways to ensure this.

And finally: Sometimes it's best not to have the event at all if the group can't muster the resources. First line up volunteers and sponsors. Then prepare a detailed budget that includes a worst-case scenario—how much could the organization afford to lose?—and determine how many people and how much sponsor support is needed. If the numbers don't add up, don't do it.