

# Best Practices for Successful Special-event Execution

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# NonProfitPRO

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By Judy Allen

Poor event planning, preparation and day-of performance can result in your special event running at a loss, failing to attract new sponsors, being unable to pull in media attention and leaving committee members struggling with ticket sales not just this year but for future events as well. Not knowing what to ask or what red-flag areas to look out for can have serious repercussions -- and they can be costly. For example, organizers of one event -- after an "estimated" costing contract was signed off on -- found themselves facing more than \$100,000 in unexpected costs -- and that was from just one line item; many other hidden costs were revealed as their event progressed.

In order to receive maximum results and meet and exceed event expectations, fundraising event chairs, their committee members and volunteers need to be willing to invest time and provide training in the art of successful event planning and execution. There are many places to turn to for guidance, everything from books to classes to expert consultants. If you got the last route, be sure to do more than simply hire a consultant to do the event; learn from the pros so that you and your team can become fully informed on the principles of event planning.

In addition to the creative side of event design and coordination, there's a business side that is often -- but should not be -- overlooked, which requires sales, marketing, strategic planning, negotiations, budget management, timing and logistics savvy. When selecting your committee heads and chairs and assigning volunteers, look at the skills they bring to your organization and how, where and when they can be best utilized for event success.

Special events -- on their own -- require expertise with all or some of the following event-planning elements:

- Event theme and design, tabletop and room decor
- Strategic planning, contract negotiation and review, budget blueprint development and management

- Venue selection and event operations
- Teaser campaigns, printed material (invitations, menus, programs, etc.)
- Accommodations, transportation, food, beverage, floral, gift bags, entertainment and entertainment riders
- Photographers/videographers, special effects, audiovisual, stage lighting
- Fire Marshal regulations, permits, event insurance, stage insurance (covering all who will be on stage during your event)
- Function sheet preparation, pre-cons, speechwriters, emcees/master of ceremonies, show production, show flow, call sheets, show books
- Technical directors, stage managers, dry tech, teleprompters
- Recipient awards, live event and industry media coverage
- On-site orchestration, final reconciliation

Fundraising events require an added understanding of details such as ticket sales, sponsorship, silent-auction item procurement, silent-auction management and event advertising.

It's essential that each fundraising event you do is better than the last and has met your fundraising objectives and provided a return on your -- and your sponsors' -- investment of time and money. This will give you a solid foundation on which to launch your next event. Your media and sponsors will be focused on the financial results that your last event produced, the guests that came out and supported your cause and how well your event was received. Remember, strategically planned, this year's event can be successfully used as a marketing tool for your next fundraising event. One sponsored event, if favorably received, can result in additional sponsors lining up to be part of the next event, which is something to aspire to.

Organizations that have continued to grow their events find that new sponsors don't wait to be approached but instead inquire about sponsorship opportunities for the following year even as the current event is taking place.

It's not hard to build your event with that kind of response as well as to receive extensive television, newspaper and magazine coverage. Making the time and creating opportunities to become highly skilled in the business side of successful event execution will set you and your organization apart and raise the level of sponsors, attendees and the media -- and ultimately the fundraising money and awareness to your cause -- you bring in.

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