# Worksheet: Strategizing Your Event

Special events can be an important way to build visibility for your Action Coalition and introduce potential new donors and volunteers to your work. Because of the cost and time required to produce an event, it can be difficult to net a substantial fundraising return, especially compared to other means of raising money. Thus, it is important that you carefully evaluate whether it is worth the investment of resources (including actual costs, staff time and volunteer time) before you move forward with a new event or decide to continue an existing one.

This worksheet and the accompanying evaluation tool are designed to help you think through the strategy and goals of your event (whether newly proposed or longstanding) and to critically examine the return to help you decide whether to launch or continue an event[[1]](#footnote-1).

Name of Event: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Objectives of the event (check all that apply and circle one that you would consider the **primary** objective:

* Fundraising
* “Friend” raising (i.e. introducing new potential donors to the Action Coalition)
* Recognize current supporters
* Highlight the Action Coalition’s work and/or share news
* Generate publicity
* Honor an individual/individuals in the field
* Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Event Format (luncheon, dinner, etc.):

Proposed Date of Event:

Proposed Location of Event:

Decision Deadline:

## Need for Event

* What need does this event address that is not otherwise being met?
* If this is a new event, should it replace another existing event? If so, which?

## Attendance

* Who is our target audience (donors, prospects, sponsors, members, others) and how will we generate their interest in attending?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Constituency | Invited | Goal Attendance | Conversion Rate (Attendance/Invited) |
| Current donors/funders/ sponsors |  |  |  |
| Prospects |  |  |  |
| Members (if applicable) |  |  |  |
| Board/other volunteers (be sure not to double count above) |  |  |  |
| Other |  |  |  |
| Total |  |  |  |

* For existing events, include prior attendance stats below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Prior Year | Two Years Prior | Three Years Prior |
| Invited |  |  |  |
| Attended |  |  |  |
| Conversion Rate (attended/invited) |  |  |  |

## Roles and Time Required

For the staffing and volunteer sections below, consider what roles different groups will play in planning for, executing and following up on your event. Examples of roles might include:

Event chair/Co-chairs

Event planning committee

Securing sponsorships

Securing donations (In-kind event goods/services and/or donation items for prizes, auctions, etc.)

Tickets/Attendance

Publicity

Programming/Entertainment

Logistics

Follow-Up

## Staffing (if applicable)

What role will staff play:

* Before the event
* During the event
* After the event

Staff time required:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Title/Role | Anticipated Time Required |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Total: |  |

* Does asking staff to dedicate this amount of time to the event detract from their work on other activities of greater importance or value?

## Volunteers

What roles will volunteers play:

* Before the event
* During the event
* After the event

Number of volunteers required and amount of time requested of volunteers:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Role | Number of Volunteers in this Role | Anticipated Time per Volunteer | Total Anticipated Time (Column B x Column C) |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Total: |  |  |  |

* What volunteer group will assume key responsibility for the success of the event? How available is this group to dedicate time to this event?
* Does this event have one or two individuals willing to chair the effort? How available are they?
* How are volunteer roles and responsibilities determined and communicated? How will people be trained to fulfill their roles and responsibilities?
* Does asking these volunteers to participate in this event fit into their overall strategy? Does it detract from their work on other activities of greater importance or value?

## Budget

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **REVENUE** | **Budget** |
| Sponsorships | $  |
| Ticket Sales  | $  |
| On-Site Donations (gift challenges, auctions, prize drawings, etc.) | $ |
| Other | $  |
| ***Total Gross Revenue*** | ***$***  |
| **EXPENSES** |  |
| Staff Time (Salaries/Benefits proportionate to time spent on event) | $  |
| Venue | $  |
| Food/Beverage (Catering) | $ |
| Audio/Visual | $ |
| Materials & Supplies | $ |
| Vendors/Rentals | $ |
| Entertainment | $ |
| Other | $  |
| ***Total Expenses*** | ***$***  |
|  |  |
| **NET REVENUE (Total Gross Revenue-Total Expenses)** | **$**  |

* For existing events, include prior financial stats below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Prior Year | Two Years Prior | Three Years Prior |
| Gross Revenue |  |  |  |
| Expenses |  |  |  |
| Net Revenue |  |  |  |

## Messaging

* What 2-3 core messages do we want attendees to come away with?
* How will we reinforce those messages leading up to, during and after the event?

## Follow Up

* How will we follow up with event attendees? Who will lead follow up?
* How will we follow up with invitees who did not attend?
* What is the goal of our follow-up activity (subsequent gifts, future attendance, volunteer recruitment, etc.)?

# Worksheet: Evaluating Your Event

Based on the worksheet above, conduct a pre-event evaluation to inform your decision on whether to hold the event. Following the event, conduct a post-event evaluation to measure your performance, determine whether your Action Coalition should continue the event and consider how to strengthen it in the future.

## Pre-Event Evaluation

* Are your attendance goals in line with prior attendance and conversion rates? If not, how do you plan to boost attendance this year?
* Are your financial goals in line with prior years? If not, how do you plan to boost revenue and/or reduce expenses this year?
* Anticipated cost per dollar raised (Total Expenses / Gross Revenue):

Best practices call for a cost per dollar raised of approximately $0.45 to $0.65, with a rule-of-thumb target being that you raise $1 for every $0.50 you spend on your event. However, it is important to note that this best practice is for organizations where staff members are filling a primary event function and the cost of their time is factored into the return. Because most Action Coalitions have few, if any, staff members, they will rely more heavily on volunteers and should, as a result, be able to achieve a lower cost per dollar raised. The guidelines below reflect this fact.

*If your anticipated cost per dollar raised for a fundraising event is* ***higher than $0.75****, it is probably advisable to forgo the event in favor of other fundraising activity, unless the event fulfills another vital function for your Action Coalition. If your cost is between* ***$0.50 and $0.75****, revisit your plans to scale back expenses or seek additional revenue, and consider forgoing the event. If your cost is between* ***$0.35 and $0.50****, continue to explore opportunities to boost revenue or cut expenses and conduct a thorough post-event evaluation against your goals.*

* Total cost per event attendee (Total Expenses / Total Attendees):

Best practices for cost per event attendee will vary based on the format and size of your event. The most important factor here is to track this over time to identify any “red flags.” A spike in costs indicates you may need to boost attendance and/or reduce expenses in future years.

## Post-Event Evaluation

Attendance

* Did your attendance align with goals? If not, what groups over/underperformed and why?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Constituency | Invited | Goal Attendance | Actual Attendance | Actual Conversion Rate  |
| Current donors/funders/ sponsors |  |  |  |  |
| Prospects |  |  |  |  |
| Members (if applicable) |  |  |  |  |
| Board/other volunteers (be sure not to double count above) |  |  |  |  |
| Other |  |  |  |  |
| Total |  |  |  |  |

* How did actual attendance compare to prior years? What factors do you think contributed to this?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Current Year Actuals | Prior Year | Two Years Prior | Three Years Prior |
| Invited |  |  |  |  |
| Attended |  |  |  |  |
| Conversion Rate (attended/invited) |  |  |  |  |

* If applicable, what would you suggest doing differently to boost attendance next year?

Staff and Volunteer Time

* Did staff and volunteer time align with estimates? If not, what areas required more time than anticipated and what required less? How might you change roles or practices in the future based on this year’s results?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Role | Total Staff and Volunteer Time Anticipated (not per volunteer) | Actual Staff and Volunteer Time Required |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| Total: |  |  |

* Did staff and volunteers understand and feel prepared to carry out their roles? Were they effective in these roles? If not, why not?

Budget

* Did your budget align with goals? If not, what areas were over/under and why?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **REVENUE** | **Budget** | **Actual** | **Over/Under** |
| Sponsorships | $  | $  | $  |
| Ticket Sales  | $  | $  | $  |
| On-Site Donations (gift challenges, auctions, prize drawings, etc.) | $ | $ | $ |
| Other | $  | $  | $  |
| ***Total Gross Revenue*** | ***$***  | ***$***  | ***$***  |
| **EXPENSES** |  |  |  |
| Staff Time (Salaries/Benefits proportionate to time spent on event) | $  | $  | $  |
| Venue | $  | $  | $  |
| Food/Beverage (Catering) | $ | $ | $ |
| Audio/Visual | $ | $ | $ |
| Materials & Supplies | $ | $ | $ |
| Vendors/Rentals | $ | $ | $ |
| Entertainment | $ | $ | $ |
| Other | $  | $  | $  |
| ***Total Expenses*** | ***$***  | ***$***  | ***$***  |
|  |  |  |  |
| **NET REVENUE (Total Gross Revenue-Total Expenses)** | **$**  | **$**  | **$**  |

* How did actual budget compare to prior years? What factors do you think contributed to this?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Current Year Actuals | Prior Year | Two Years Prior | Three Years Prior |
| Gross Revenue |  |  |  |  |
| Expenses |  |  |  |  |
| Net Revenue |  |  |  |  |

Return

* Cost per dollar raised (Total Expenses / Gross Revenue):
* Anticipated
* Actual
* Total cost per event attendee (Total Expenses / Total Attendees):
* Anticipated
* Actual

Other Measures

* In what ways would categorize the event as a success (funds raised, new contacts, publicity, etc.)?
* What lessons were learned, and how might they impact the event in the future?
* Do you believe the Action Coalition should continue holding the event in the future? Why/why not?
1. This worksheet primarily pertains to relatively large-scale events (such as galas, luncheons, golf outings, auctions, etc.) that have at least some fundraising component. Smaller fundraising events that are more about building personalized relationships with specific high-capacity prospects typically yield a longer-term return in the form of a major gift solicitation.

This also does not pertain to events that are primarily a means of delivering on your mission, such as educational sessions or symposia for leaders in the field—although it is worth noting that your Action Coalition should explore options for securing sponsorships and/or charging nominal attendance fees for such events to help cover their cost. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)