

# 10. Special events recipe

## Fundraising special events

When you decide to organize a fundraising special event, you will have at least three objectives:

- To raise a specific amount of money for your organization or for one of your projects;
- To provide fun to your audience;
- To provide marketing opportunities for your sponsors.

Having these objectives in mind, define your event by thinking about the next five key ingredients for success. In other words, use this “recipe” for your event:

## Special event plan

### **Audience:**

*Who are they?*

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*How many people you want at the event?*

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*What will they buy? (tickets, tables, minimum donation) and what is the price/ticket or table, etc.*

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*How will you reach them?*

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*In which other way you want them to make donations during the event?*

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*What kind of other information you want to collect from them and how you would collect the information?*

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*How much money do you estimate you can bring in from the audience?*

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### **Sponsors:**

*What companies do you have in mind?*

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*What are their marketing objectives that could be connected to the event audience or to the event itself or to your cause or to the promotion you can provide with the event? Or what is appealing to them from your event?*

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*What kind of support you need from them?*

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*What sponsorship packages you can provide?*

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*How much money do you estimate you can bring in from the sponsors?*

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**The organization:**

*What is the cause you want to be supported through the event or the project?*

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*How is this appealing to your audience, your sponsors and the performers?*

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**The performers:**

*What performers connect with your mission/cause?*

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*What will be appealing to your audience?*

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*What will be appealing to your sponsors?*

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*How much do the performers cost you?*

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**The promotion plan:**

*What message you want to deliver to the audience to make the event appealing to them?*

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*What message you need to develop to support the sponsors' marketing objectives?*

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*What channels of promotion are appropriated to reach your audience?*

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*What channels of promotion are appropriated to enhance the sponsors' marketing objectives?*

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## The “special event recipe” explained

### **Audience**

These are usually the individual donors for your event - people that will buy the tickets to your event (concert, play, show, gala, exhibition, party, fair, etc.), but they could also be businesses that will buy tables to your special gala dinners or special gala event for their employees, for instance.

First, think what will be of interest for this audience to attend, what will be fun for them; also, think in terms of numbers - how many current donors do you want to be involved in this event, or how many new donors will you need?

Second, think what ways of raising more money, during the event, you could design for this audience: will be they interested in an auction with some art objects or things donated by famous people? Will be they interested in a raffle with a prize sponsored by one of the sponsors, such as a city break or a bike or a free coaching session or a special dinner with a well-known person from your community? Will they buy nice merchandise products of your organization or products made by your clients?, etc.

Third, think how this audience connects to your mission, your cause, and how you could collect information from them, mainly if they are new donors, so that you can build a relationship with them, and transform them in constant supporters or donors of your organization.

### **Sponsors**

You need the sponsors to cover at least some parts of your costs, providing them sponsorship packages, through which they can provide money or in-kind support. Think of categories of sponsors, such as main partner, golden sponsors, silver sponsors, and regular sponsors, based on their interest and capacity to be involved in the event. While they are helping you to reduce the risks of organizing the event, by covering a big part or all the costs of the event, they expect you will help them with their marketing objectives and targets they have. So, think about what kind of marketing opportunities your event can provide and choose the event type in accordance to that. They might be interested in reaching more clients, in reaching new segments of clients, in promoting their products or services, in developing their business networks, in motivating their employees, or in increasing sales, etc. Find out what concrete marketing objectives they have, and develop sponsorship packages and an event that looks appealing to them.

Finally, have in mind that when you make the budget and you calculate how much money you can bring in from sponsors and from your audience, you need to have at least twice more incomes than expenses, otherwise the event cannot be considered a worthy fundraising event - it is an event for promoting, for marketing, but if it does not bring enough money in, then it cannot be considered really a fundraising one.

### **The organization**

To attract the sponsors, the audience and the “performers” (people, artists, arts, places, technology, etc.) you need to have a relevant cause/relevant project and a very good profile in your community. Also, your mission needs to match the content of the event. To exaggerate a little bit, but only to get the point, if you are an organization that protects animals and promote animals’ rights, then a Circus with animals event will not be a good idea for your organization.

### **The performers**

The performers are the people or the moments or the things that bring the fun to your event. They could be a band that your audience appreciates it, or they could be some art objects or special Christmas trees that your audience will buy, or they could be some special high tech games that your audience would like to try out, or some special cars that your audience would like to drive, or some special food or wines that your audience would enjoy, etc. The performers could be everything that makes your audience happy, and it is appealing for your sponsors. Keep in mind that it is on their performance that the success of the event depends, and because of that, be ready to give them the money they ask for or try to obtain a discount, as it is for a good cause, by explaining that the profit made by the event is used in your amazing projects, and that they associate their names with a good cause/community cause.

### **The promotion plan**

The online and offline promotion you or your media partners can provide for the event will help you in two directions: first, achieve some of the marketing objectives of the sponsors; second, reach the audience of the event; finally, enhance your profile in the community, bringing more visibility to your cause and to your work. Spend time to find the most appropriate promotion channels to reach all these objectives, and keep in mind that more does not necessarily mean better, target your audience and build powerful and relevant message.

## **How to use the results of “cooking” the special event recipe?**

**Once you make all your decisions in regards to the recipe to use for your fundraising special event , follow the next steps to organize and implement the event:**

### **Identify specific objectives**

How much money do you want to raise through the event?

How many donors would you like to have? How many they should be new donors?

How many sponsors do you want to have?

What are your promotion objectives or raising-awareness objectives?

### **Create a calendar and budget**

Depending on the size of event, you will need three to six months to plan and arrange everything for the event. Design a calendar going backwards, from the day of the event you would like to take place. For budgeting, put down all the costs, see what kind of incomes you can bring in (from the audience - tickets and other methods of giving; from the sponsors) and: “If you don’t project raising at least twice as much as you spend, then don’t call it a fundraiser. That’s not to say you shouldn’t do the event, but think of it as a “friend raiser” or networking event to manage expectations” (Heyman, 2016, p. 119).

### **Recruit key people**

Make sure you assign a team to organize the event, then to implement it, and then make sure you have the right number of volunteers to the event, who are well prepared for the event.

### **Secure performers**

Contract the performers in time, talk with them what you want to do, obtain discounts, if it is possible, and sign a contract to make sure they will be there on the day of the event. If you have like performers things/technology/experiences, make sure everything is contracted,

arranged and possible to be delivered in time. Keep in mind that without the performers, you have no event.

### **Secure sponsors**

Identify the companies, send them the sponsorship packages, negotiate and sign the partnership contracts.

### **Find the right technology for selling tickets, for promotion, for sending invitation, for registration, for follow-up, for donation etc.**

Choose this technology and the steps you want to make in accordance with the type of event, your audience and your sponsors.

### **Promote your event**

Choose a powerful and relevant message for your cause, for your audience and sponsors, and the promotion channels that make sense for the audience and for the sponsors; also, develop a promotion plan that you agree with your sponsors. Keep in mind that a research conducted by Eventbrite showed that “email is the most effective way to recruit event attendees” (Heyman, 2016, p. 122). Also, it seems that typically people need to hear/see information about an event about six times before they decide to register/buy the tickets, etc. (Heyman, 2016, p. 122).

### **Create an agenda**

Think to the agenda or the journey of your event - first from the audience perspective, how they will interact with your event, with the performers, and with your cause; what they will enjoy, how they can make donations, how will you thank them, how would you collect more information from them?, etc.; and then from the organizer’s perspective, all the steps you need to take and what resources you need, what staff and volunteers you need and at what time during the event you need all these. Make sure you have everything in detail, and also plan Bs for some parts of the agenda that looks more risky not to happen as you plan for them.

### **Maximize your ask**

Think and design additional ways of raising money from your audience, during the event (auctions, raffles, donation boxes, etc.). Also, think of ways of collecting information from the new donors, so that you can build the relationship with them, and make them recurrent donors.

### **Follow-up and debrief**

After the event, say thank you to your audience, sponsors, performers, partners, and send them results of the event, and show them how the raised money will impact the people your organization serves and how the funds help your cause. Also, debrief the event with the organizing team, evaluate the event, see the profit you got for the cause/the project you want to implement, identify the things and steps to improve for the next event, and make the plan of cultivating donors and sponsors of the event.

*This “recipe” for organizing fundraising special event was developed based on CoOp project partners in organizing special events, and on theory on organizing special events from:*

*Darian Rodriguez Heyman, [Nonprofit Fundraising 101](#), John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016.*

*Michael Norton, [The Worldwide Fundraiser’s Handbook: A Resource Mobilisation Guide for NGOs and Community organizations](#), 3rd edition, Directory of Social Change, 2009.*