

Ten Tips for Healthy Special Events

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If you feel your group has fallen into this special event “holy grail” quest, try these tips from ***do good Consulting*** for bringing things back on track.

1. **Populate your special events committee with a diversity of people** to maintain membership and reduce the impact of turnover. Include people with a variety of skills to help build solid events that are fun, but also practical.
2. **Develop an evaluation tool** before you hold the event. How many people would you like to see attend? How much would you like to make (or can you afford not to make)? What will people come away from the event knowing, doing, or wanting? Write all of your evaluative measures down and use this tool to build an event that is in alignment with your goals and use it post-event to measure your success and lessons learned.
3. **Keep great records** that meld with existing internal operations. Be sure your committee knows the protocol for record-keeping and data sharing. Maintaining strong records is key to successful future events, and for integrating event supporters into your long-term work and communications.
4. **Special events should be aligned or themed with your mission.** Nothing makes potential donors, supporters, and friends feel more like they are being used as ATMs than special events held solely to raise money with no tie to your core values. That is not to say that an annual dinner can't be used to support an arts organization: just be sure to include the idea of “the arts” in your dinner's theme.
5. **Infuse education appropriately.** People don't attend special events to feel like they are at a seminar, but most would find some education mixed in with the fun appropriate. Use posters that share success stories, programs that infuse progress updates, and very short presentations from staff, board, and clients. Think photographs over text; levity over somberness. Your goal is to have attendees leave with a heightened level of support for your group, its work, its needs, and its successes.
6. **Focus on friend-raising, not fund-raising.** While the bottom line is important, so is a focus on sustainably developing your organization's growth for the long haul. Remember your special event's purpose: to bring people in, educate them, and keep them coming back - both as donors and event attendees in the future. If your sole focus is on money, attendees will sense this and your attempt at developing them as friends feels to them more as using them as ATMs.
7. **Stick with it.** Plan to lose revenues the first two to three years in order for pay-offs to begin after this investment time. In those years, document

and learn from your experiences, tweak, and grow. Don't make the mistake of starting over from square one, every year, with a brand new type of event in an attempt to find the 'holy grail' of special events that will pay off big.

8. **Plan meticulously.** Think of every angle - signage, publicity, program, evaluations, food, decorations, etc. - and give each the consideration it needs. Engage in dry runs and envision the event as an attendee. Do you know how to get to the location and where to park? Which door to go in? The cost? The attire? Where the restrooms are?
9. **Staff your event well.** This is not a time to skimp on human resources or training. All board members, staff, and key volunteers should be trained in what to expect during the night of the event, what is expected of them specifically, and how to execute their role. They must be given the tools they'll need to do their job well (name tags, pens, notepads, business cards, etc.) They are your ambassadors and their message, demeanor, and energy will dictate what your attendees take away from the event just as much as the program you may have planned for the evening. They will either simply be "attendees" alongside other guests, or spokespeople cultivating new - and possibly lucrative or hard-working - friends.
10. **Evaluate and thank.** Just because the streamers are down, the money is counted, and you've kicked your shoes off doesn't mean your work is over. Evaluating your successes and lessons learned - and using them to build a better event in the future - is absolutely crucial to building a solid and successful event that will grow over time in both revenues and popularity. Also, be sure you take the time and energy to thank guests, staff, and volunteers appropriately for their help and support. Attention to these important post-event details will help guarantee your event stands the test of time.