

THE TWELVE STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL FUNDRAISING EVENT

1. RECRUIT

Develop a list of potential event chairpersons, co-chairpersons, ticket sellers and additional volunteers. Consider people who have been contributors in the past. Networking will add the maximum number of potential names to your list. A good incentive is to have the individual who sells the most tickets or raises the most money serve as Honorary Chairperson, be seated at the head table, or receive some other kind of recognition.

Once you have your team or "steering committee" in place, it is time to get to work. Plan a meeting at a mutually convenient time for everybody to outline your event. This should take place about 8 weeks prior to the fundraiser. Be sure that everyone understands their roles - to sell tickets, to generate enthusiasm, and to ensure that you have a successful event. Ask each of them if they are willing to make this commitment. Many events have failed due to an unmotivated, unfocused steering committee.

2. SET THE GOAL

How much money do you want to raise from this event? It is much easier to sell tickets to an event when you can tell your prospective donor what the goal is, how much has already been raised, and how their contribution will help you reach it. In addition, the level of excitement and enthusiasm increases for everyone (volunteers and donors) as you get closer to achieving your goal.

3. TARGET

Decide the level of investment you will ask for, being careful not to price the tickets out of your target audience's reach. This will help you determine the size of the event you will plan. It will also ensure that your goal is realistic in relation to your target donors. When considering this, it is a good idea to "tier" your event to raise the maximum amount possible. For example, if you are planning on having a dinner and charging \$100 a person, why not have a private reception prior to the dinner for individuals that contribute \$250. If you are having a VIP give an address at dinner, ask him/her to attend the private reception. If the VIP is willing to do that, ask if he/she wouldn't mind having a photo opportunity for \$1,000 donors.

The VIP reception may also be a benefit of membership in one of your investor groups. If someone is already a Sterling R or Capitol Club member, they will receive preferential treatment because of their support.

4. DETERMINE A THEME

Why are you raising this money? Where does it go and what is it being used for? These questions will undoubtedly be asked by the individuals you are soliciting, and can prove to be a unifying force among volunteers and attendees. If your goal is to raise the most money of any association in the state, the theme could be "All Aboard the State's Largest Board". You may also consider having an "Awards Banquet" to honor major investors and/or your own organization's accomplishments over the course of the year. The theme you choose does not have to be specific, just something to serve as a rallying point and to generate support.

Special guests - such as local, state or national elected officials and celebrities - you wish to invite and potential event locations should also be discussed and decided upon at this point.

5. PLAN

It's time to finalize the basics. The actual date of the event may be contingent upon who you wish to have as a guest speaker. Be sure that you don't plan an event when a VIP guest or potential donors cannot attend. Check the calendar for holidays or other events (local fairs, community outings, etc.) going on that may conflict with your event. The different tiers of your event should also be finalized at this point. Also, develop a written budget of estimated income and expenses. You must know the maximum amount you can spend in order to make this effort worthwhile.

You should also create a written organizational chart that explains the different roles and responsibilities of each individual for the event. As discussed earlier, the more the merrier - Chairperson, Co-Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Ticket Captains, Promotions Chair, etc. - be creative and do not tolerate any "slackers" on your steering committee.

6. SECURE THE VENDORS

After your first meeting, secure all of the arrangements for the event: venue; food and beverage; entertainment; decor (flowers, centerpieces, decorations, etc.); special guest; and anything else you have decided. It is a necessity to make sure these items are taken care of to avoid last minute chaos.

7. DEVELOP A TIMELINE

Now that the logistics are set, it is helpful to create a week by week, day by day breakdown of the steps you need to take and deadlines that need to be met in order to reach your goal. This should also be written down and distributed to your steering committee.

8. PROMOTION, PROMOTION, PROMOTION

Ideally, heavy promotion of your event should begin 4-6 weeks prior in order to give everyone ample time and to cut down on the "I have something else planned" response. Give everyone who is on your team a packet of tickets and an information sheet. Be sure each seller knows the details and theme of the event, what the fundraising goal is, and what the money is being used for. Publicize the event in your board newsletter, contact major investors via phone and ask if they would like to be an event sponsor. Hand out flyers, buttons or pins. Send out promotional pieces via email and ask that the recipient pass along this opportunity to fellow REALTORS®. Again, the more members that know about your event, the greater number of attendees you will have. Be creative and cost efficient.

9. GAUGE YOUR PROGRESS

Set up a system so that each member of your steering committee and other individuals who are selling tickets is contacted each week. This will keep each updated as to how close (hopefully not how far) you are to attaining your goal. Set up a thermometer chart or some other visible indicator of how sales are going so when people stop by the office further enthusiasm is generated. Ask if anyone has encountered questions they weren't sure how to answer or if more supplies (tickets, flyers, buttons, etc.) are needed. As mentioned earlier, offer prizes/rewards for the most productive sellers.

10. EVENT TIME

Now that the big day is finally here, it is time for RPAC to shine. Everyone should know their role for the evening. Be sure to announce during some point in the program how much money was raised. Thank everyone for their support. There should also be a brief explanation of RPAC - our mission, our accomplishments, and our goals. If there is a lengthy program, try to keep it on schedule. You do not want your guests to get "antsy."

11. FOLLOW UP

Although the event is over, your work is not. Now is the time to ensure that all of the possible loose ends are securely tied up. Most importantly, the day after the event begin to follow up on any outstanding pledges for the event. There may have been several people who came to the event without a ticket and you graciously let them in because there were a few extra seats. Well, nothing in life is free - and certainly not drinks or dinner. Make sure they get invoiced - either over the phone, by email or through the mail. Also, maybe some of the attendees wanted to go to the VIP reception but hadn't purchased a ticket yet. Let 'em in now and make 'em pay later.

12. THANK YOU

Lastly, but most important, thank everyone who attended or volunteered for the event. If things went as planned, and surely they did, you will probably be having another event next year (or sooner). A successful event could become the annual highlight of your fundraising program. Everyone who enjoyed themselves and was thanked for their support, as an investor or as a volunteer, is sure to answer the call the next time around.