

Special Events

G A L O R E !

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MONTHLY IDEAS FOR THOSE WHO PLAN, ORGANIZE AND MANAGE EVENTS OF ALL KINDS

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Plan Community Celebrations

Will your organization be marking a milestone year? Here are ideas to invite the community to celebrate with you:

- Hold a signature party. Host a public reception and ask guests to sign and decorate a banner or 10-foot poster to display at your organization and feature as a full-page newspaper ad.
- Build a landmark. A major anniversary could be the ideal way to launch a building campaign, be it for a flower garden or concert hall. Offer options for supporters to make anniversary donations (e.g., \$100 for name on a plaque, \$500 for names engraved on a donor wall brick), scaling upward in proportion to the donation.
- Hold a greeting card contest. Ask supporters of all ages to make cards for your celebration. Display all entries; give prizes for best artwork, content and message.
- Make a birthday video. Invite volunteers, employees or donors for a celebration. Have a videographer interview guests about their roles in your mission. Ask them to sing "Happy Birthday."
- Publicize a birthday wish list. Update and redistribute it or post it online as items are received. Be flexible and creative; include small and large items. Assign dollar values with the option of cash donations.

SUCCESSFUL FUNDRAISERS

What's With Designer Bag Bingo?

Each year the Marple Newtown Football Boosters Club (Newtown Square, PA) relies on designer handbags to raise money for the Tigers, their high school's football team. While purses and high school sports may not seem to have much in common, the highly anticipated annual event has become a popular fundraiser that goes toward needs such as facility updates, helmet repairs and new headsets.

Fundraising Chair Diane Fallows says Designer Bag Bingo doubles as a social event for the entire community. "It's a local event at a nearby location for a great cause and a great price," she says. "Who wouldn't want to go?"

Guests have the option to bring their own beverages (BYOB) and snacks. Tickets are \$30, and each admission includes 16 rounds of bingo. Seventeen high-end bags are awarded throughout the night, with one going to the winner of each bingo round and the last one going to the night's runner-up during a final wild-card round.

Attendees may also purchase raffle tickets for other items and separate tickets for a 50/50 bingo game where one winner is awarded cash from half of those ticket sales as the grand prize. The last several years have attracted crowds of over 250, which are 98 percent female. This year Fallows hopes to reach capacity by selling 300 tickets.

Fallows offers the following tips for getting the most out of a Designer Bag Bingo night:

- If opting for a BYOB evening, make sure your venue allows alcohol.
- Supply water and light refreshments to round out the evening and keep people nourished.
- Wait for sales and deals when making bag purchases, or go to a nearby outlet mall that offers handbags at a fraction of the cost of department stores.
- Display the purses in their respective brand's shopping bag to preserve excitement and promote fairness.
- Secure in-kind donations from local stores and businesses for additional raffle items.
- Sell as many advance tickets as possible to maximize profits.
- Start the event on time and keep it close to attendees' homes. A 16-round night plus intermission should last around four hours.
- Consider using bingo computer software to save money on a rental.
- Sell bingo blotters and branded merchandise to raise funds and spirits.
- Consider offering table reservations for large parties of eight or more to encourage attendees to invite friends.
- Promote the event to friends and families of your organization as well as the community by printing fliers and seeking local press opportunities.
- Avoid setting dates around the holidays when people are watching their budgets.
- "Once you have a date, location and equipment, print those fliers and sell tickets," Fallows says. "Then you can procure the prizes."

Source: Diane Fallows, Fundraising Chair, Marple Newtown Football Boosters Club, Newtown Square, PA. Phone (610) 359-8139. E-mail: fallows33@comcast.net. Website: www.marplenewtownfootball.com

Get to know individual board members. Knowing a person's likes and dislikes can lead to greatly improved participation.

For example:

- Put the golf enthusiast in charge of the charity golf tournament.
- Ask the Master Gardener to help develop a plan for your facility's outdoor space.

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Raise the Bar for Your Recognition Event

By Kerry Nenn

With the right approach, you can transform your next awards luncheon, dinner or annual recognition from a forgettable event to a memorable experience. Kristine Ortiz, president of KLO Events, offers five key strategies to raise the bar.

1. **Add something new.** "A lot of awards dinners are template-driven," notes Ortiz. "A format can be followed, but make it fresh. For annual events, create change every year. This can be done without breaking the bank. Something as subtle as changing the room flow can add an element of newness."

Additional ideas:

- Book a celebrity.
- Use a string quartet for live music.
- Sell balloons attendees can purchase and pop, with a prize ticket inside. This adds excitement and a revenue generator.

"The main idea is to choose something that fits your theme but is different and memorable," advises Ortiz. "You can use it for promotion or as a surprise at the event."

2. **Go high tech.** The registration/check-in process can be a negative first impression if not done well. Consider using tablets for streamlining and post staff with iPads to check in guests. They should be greeted personally and get in quickly, with no lines or hassle.

Sticking to your timeline at the event is also important. "You lose control when someone hits the podium," notes Ortiz. Prepare a video that can be played at the event rather than handing over a microphone. It adds an interesting multimedia element and helps control your program. "It also becomes a living resource that can be used again," points out Ortiz.

3. **Perfect your printing.** Proof, proof, proof. Programs or other literature at the event must be flawless. Do thorough fact checking. Are all names and titles correct? "If I'm receiving an award but my name is spelled wrong, that will be what I remember," warns Ortiz. "This is not what you want but, especially for smaller nonprofits, those are the kinds of things that can slip through the cracks while you're putting out other fires," she notes. She recommends having all materials proofed by multiple people by sending it out to staff and clients for review.

4. **Make a timeline and prepare for the breakdown.** Create a planning timeline and stay true to it. "This is important because if you skip something, you often can't make up the time, such as a print deadline, and then you may not get that piece for your event," Ortiz notes. "Constantly comb through the details of the event and anticipate what may happen. Ensure nothing has changed or been forgotten. Hold regular planning meetings. Do two walk-throughs before the event, the second with vendors. Throughout, keep the timeline updated to use for next year's planning."

5. **Consider a consultant.** An event planner can free up development staff to focus on their main objective — raising money. Ortiz points out, "If hiring an event planner is not financially feasible right away, you can work with one to develop a plan to get there."

Source: Kristine Ortiz, President, KLO Events, Easton, PA. Phone (610) 923-9300. E-mail: kristine@klo-events.com Website: www.klo-events.com

If Your Event Calls for an Ice Design

By Shelley Hexom

They can be a major “Wow!” factor. Ice sculptures are an intriguing way to make your event even more memorable.

Each ice carving starts with a block of ice. One block is 40 inches tall, 20 inches wide, 10 inches thick and weighs 300 pounds. In general, an ice sculpture looks good for four to six hours and is usually set up about one hour before an event starts. “Whenever we go to set up at an event, everyone stops to watch what we are doing. Most people find them very fascinating. They really are a neat way to make a great first impression at your event,” says Jim Duggan, lead sculptor and owner of Ice Sculpture Inc. (Marietta, GA)

Duggan says there are some things to keep in mind if you are considering one of these chilly displays. He offers these tips:

- Size** – The type and size of sculpture should depend on the size of the room where your event will be held and the number of attendees. “If your event is in a big room with lots of people, make sure the sculpture is big enough and prominently displayed. If the sculpture is too small it can get lost among everything, and people might not even realize it is there,” Duggan says.
- Price** – Prices can vary, but Duggan says on average a one-block sculpture such as a swan costs about \$400 to \$500. “In a big room you’d probably need a two-to three-block piece. And if you need a 12-foot-long piece, those generally cost around \$4,000.”
- Location** – Make sure your sculpture is displayed in a place where everyone will see it right away when they walk in. “Also, a non-air-conditioned tent in the middle of summer probably would not be the best place for an ice sculpture,” Duggan says.
- Designs** – If you can think of it, chances are it can be made into ice. “We can do anything! Generally nonprofits ask for their organization’s logo or a sign to thank their sponsors,” Duggan says.
- Event date** – The busy season for ice carvers is typically October through January, so if your event takes place in those months, make sure to call ahead.

Duggan also says when talking to a company about price be sure to ask if a drip pan is included in the cost. That can sometimes be an additional hidden cost. “Remember you get what you pay for. While it’s a good idea to call around to get quotes from several sculptors in the area, don’t necessarily go with the cheapest. A lot of times the cheaper companies are doing it part-time, and sometimes their quality and service isn’t the best. Make sure to ask for recommendations,” he says.

Source: Jim Duggan, Owner, Ice Sculpture Inc., Marietta, GA. Phone (770) 384-8977. E-mail: jim@icesculptureinc.com. Website: www.icesculptureinc.com

Draw Out-of-Towners To Your Special Event

Does your agency ever plan events directed at people who will need to travel from out of town (e.g., college days for prospective students, a continuing education conference for nurses, etc.)?

To create more pull, select a date that piggybacks with a special concert or festival or some other entertainment that is already taking place in your city.

Persons from out of town may be more inclined to participate in your program or event if they can take in the added entertainment as well.

You may even wish to contact the organization putting on the “big-draw” event to see if you can purchase a set number of tickets to offer at a discount or in a package with tickets to your event, or to offer as door prizes to your event’s attendees.

Find an Ice Carver Near You

Considering an ice sculpture at your next event? Since every ice sculpture will eventually melt, it’s a good idea to find an ice carving company nearby to ensure your sculpture looks its best. Check out these two websites to find a company near you:

- www.icesculpture.com (IceSculpture.com)
- www.nica.org (National Ice Carvers Association)



Five Ways to Make the Most Of Grazing Stations

So you've determined that rather than subject your guests to a sit-down dinner, you'd like to cultivate a modern and social atmosphere with the help of grazing stations. This type of layout has become increasingly popular and can help you do the following:

- 1. Encourage networking.** "Networking is king, and a food function of this type inevitably serves as an ice breaker that enhances meaningful connections," says Planning Consultant Sharron Campbell. "It is so much easier to enter a room where food stations beckon and create a comfortable ambience, making it natural to approach and speak to others casually without the need for immediate introductions."
- 2. Save time.** This type of layout offers itself nicely to double-setting the event for food stations and theatre-style seating. Experienced event venue staff can seamlessly swap food items while programming is in session, allowing for dessert or coffee to be ready directly after a presentation. This second round of snacking may encourage attendees to stick around for additional networking. "Double-setting a room like this should be done only when you have confidence that the service staff is well-versed in working silently so as not to disrupt the program," Campbell says.
- 3. Introduce a multisensory experience.** "Some chefs and restaurateurs are taking this concept to a much higher level than standard specialty lighting and background music," Campbell says. "They are 'experimenting with relationships between food and perception' with things like diffusers that control wafting aromas such as a grassy seashore, for example, to enhance the perception of seafood items being served." Multiple stations offer ample opportunities to introduce multisensory experiences with uplift tables, images displayed on hanging glass shards and more. Campbell recommends visiting <http://www.baumwhiteman.com/trends.html> for ideas to consider from the latest restaurant trends.
- 4. Maximize your use of space.** While Campbell notes some grazing station layouts can be as space intensive as banquet style, you also have an opportunity to save space. Eliminate the need for seating by scattering high-boy tables throughout the space so guests can eat and socialize while standing in different areas of the room.
- 5. Create multiple themes within the event.** Because grazing stations can be located in different areas of the room, you can theme these tables to give guests varied sensory experiences that create powerful, emotional and memorable ties using different aromas, visuals and colors that complement the different tastes and appeal to a diverse crowd.

Source: Sharron Campbell, CMP, Founder & Owner, Planning Helper, Mission Viejo, CA. E-mail: Sharron@planninghelper.com. Website: www.planninghelper.com

Hone Your Negotiation Skills

Conor Lawrence Callahan, co-owner of 514 Studios, a unique event space and photo/video rental venue in downtown Minneapolis, says confidence is key when it comes to negotiating rates. "Our venue is happy to bring in nonprofits at a reduced rate, as it is a way for our space to give back to the community, expose our space to other potential clients and build relationships with vendors we may not have otherwise been exposed to," he says.

Why is it important for nonprofits to know how to negotiate rates?

"It is important for the nonprofit to pursue the reduced rate as it is not something generally advertised due to the conflict it causes with full-rate clients. When all of your income goes back into your organization, we understand that every dollar counts."

What are some easy techniques nonprofits can learn to help them hone their negotiation skills?

"Confidence goes a long way. If someone is asking me for something and making it seem like an awkward situation, then it makes it difficult for me to help them out. Don't be arrogant about it, but don't be a 'church mouse' either."

What kinds of fears are associated with negotiating pricing, and how can those fears be overcome?

"I would think people believe they are being insulting when they ask for a reduced rate. So long as a nonprofit isn't expecting a freebie then they shouldn't worry about asking for something other companies have almost certainly asked for before them."

What specific tips can you give to nonprofits that are negotiating rates for the first time?

"Don't be afraid to ask for a rate that fits with your budget. Be completely honest about what you can afford to spend. The worst that can happen is the venue or vendor says no."

Are there any items/goods/services that should not be negotiated? When is it best to just pay the full price?

"Catering and liquor are ones that inherently seem a bit more difficult to negotiate since there are hard costs involved."

What are some ways nonprofits can leverage a negotiated rate?

"Our venue is always more inclined to work with someone who is willing to offer something in exchange for the reduced rate. Try bartering services, or even just offering a plug on your website or social channels, because something is better than nothing."

Source: Conor Lawrence Callahan, Co-Owner, 514 Studios, Minneapolis, MN. Phone (612) 520-1514. E-mail: conor@514studios.com. Website: www.514studios.com

Pick a Theme That Drives Your Message Home

Whether you're looking to put a fun spin on an existing event or to build a new annual fundraiser from scratch, a theme can help you set boundaries and drive your organization's message and mission home. "What drives return and increased attendance is an event that differentiates itself from the sea of other events," says Cassie Brown, chief experience officer and owner of TCG Events. "Your attendees may develop 'event fatigue,' so it's important to surprise them."

For 12 years, Brown has helped clients integrate their own themes to create memorable and successful events. Not only can themes inform your event, but they can also help you stay within your budget. She offers her tips for getting the most out of your themed events:

- 1. Adapt items already included in the budget.** Take your basic food and entertainment and subject them to your theme for a budget-friendly event transformation. "Food and drink are the most obvious," Brown says. "A themed playlist at the guest entrance and throughout the event space is very inexpensive." Brown says moving the stage location is another way to create an interesting, new feel for your event.
- 2. Focus your energy on major components.** "A mistake many nonprofits make is spending their budget on too many things," Brown says. "It is often better to use the money toward one memorable thing that costs \$2,000 versus 10 smaller things that cost \$200 each." This tactic can help focus your theme, making for a tighter event overall.
- 3. Don't let theme and decor overshadow logistics.** "People won't remember how pretty the centerpieces were if they had to wait in line for 30 minutes to get a drink," Brown says. Planning a theme can be fun, but don't forget to make sure your event is still staffed correctly and highly organized. Avoid clinging to cliché and expected themes, such as tropical theme nights with pina coladas and palm trees. The novelty wears off quickly when guests know what to expect.
- 4. Hire an outside event planner to amp up your themed event.** Brown says even basic events can take more than 150 hours to plan. Companies like TCG Events can help to suggest "themescapes" that directly serve the mission of your organization, saving you time and money.
- 5. Incorporate your theme into the overall message of your nonprofit.** "If the theme overtakes your event's message, then it probably wasn't the right theme," Brown says. Instead, pick a theme that speaks directly to your organization's mission. If you're planning a fundraising event for a children's hospital, incorporate elements that illustrate the joys of childhood. For example, a superhero-themed evening not only encompasses a child's imagination, but it can also be utilized to recognize donors who are heroes to your organization.

Source: Cassie Brown, CEO and Owner, TCG Events, Charlotte, NC. Phone (704) 376-1943. E-mail: cbrown@eventwithtcg.com. Website: www.eventwithtcg.com

ASSESS EVENT STRENGTH

Give Your Event the 'Drawing Card Appeal' Test

Want to attract large numbers of guests to your event? Analyze its drawing card appeal by asking yourself:

- Why would I want to attend this event as it presently exists?
- What existing components could I enhance to make the event more desirable?
- What one (new) component could I add that would "blow their socks off"? — anticipated celebrity in attendance, pre-announcement of a major announcement, chance to win a major prize, etc.
- Who among those invited could we advertise as "planning to attend," which would, in turn, attract others?
- What other events in this community have drawn large crowds and why?

Make Hats Part of Your Event

Napoleon, Abraham Lincoln, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Charlie Chaplin are just a few famous people known for their trademark hats.

Your organization can also celebrate hats by including the accessories as part of a special event. You could even create a new event that's sure to generate opportunities for photos and even media coverage by placing hats center stage.

Here are ideas to get you started:

- **Use hats as centerpieces.** Hats can be integrated into nearly any event or holiday theme for any age group. Hats from children's books like Madeline or Dr. Seuss, sports figures, film stars or fictional characters like Sherlock Holmes are just a few options.
- **Hats off to our supporters.** Order baseball caps, stocking caps, cowboy hats, knit beanies or other popular styles to give as party favors at your next fundraiser. Visors or ball caps work for summer events, cowboy hats are popular for barbecues, and knit styles go over well for winter-time events.
- **Pair international hats and food.** Mexican sombreros, French berets, Spanish matador styles and the Greek fez not only inspire themes and decorations, but also help determine menu possibilities.
- **Wearing different hats.** Think of the "different hats" your organization wears in the community, and hold a contest for supporters to create hats that match each facet of your mission to wear to your event.
- **Plan a hat costume party.** Full costume balls are fun, but the effort they take may discourage some supporters from attending. People can usually find or create fascinating hats to match attire they already planned to wear. So send out invitations for a hats-only costume party in which people don chapeaus that reflect certain characters or celebrities.
- **Hold a hat auction.** Donors can supply hats of all styles, shapes, historical significance or price range for you to auction as part of your event. Winning bidders can enjoy wearing their purchases for the rest of the event.

Add a Photo Booth to Your Next Event

Adding a photo booth to your next event provides guests with a memento to take home, but did you realize it can also be an innovative way to generate brand awareness? “Everyone loves having their picture taken,” says Nick Kehler, owner of Connected Entertainment. “We see everyone from children to great-grandparents use the booth, and everyone enjoys a keepsake to remember the event.” In addition to providing guests with another fun activity at events, Kehler says he has also seen nonprofits use photo booths as a way to market their event, promote their missions and give back to corporate sponsors.

Kehler says it’s important to inform the photo booth company up front of the length of your event and the number of people attending. Additionally, be aware of the graphics you want to include on the photo “frames” so the actual photo size can accommodate those visuals and information. Also consider the following five ways you can use photo booths to benefit your nonprofit:

- 1. Offer photo white space as an incentive to sponsors.** Back On My Feet Philadelphia has utilized the photo booth services of Connected Entertainment at several of its fundraisers, including its annual gala. Pennsylvania Dutch-style baking company Stroehmann is one of their main sponsors, and their logo appears on every photo strip printed. This is an added incentive for corporate sponsors who want name recognition on event marketing materials.
- 2. Use the photo booth to maximize social network exposure.** “We use an app called PicPic Social that allows guests to post their photo booth images directly to Facebook and Twitter with the event’s custom hashtags,” Kehler says. When people share the images on their social networking pages, their friends see that they were present at your event, creating awareness.
- 3. Use QR codes to turn your photo into literature.** “Some nonprofits print QR codes on the photos with a note indicating people can learn more by scanning with their smartphones,” Kehler says. “It’s a great way for people to get more information about your organization they may not have looked at otherwise.”
- 4. Use open-air photos and banners to brand your event.** Kehler says many nonprofits opt for an open-air photo booth with a Step and Repeat banner featuring the organization’s logo. This is a great way to promote your organization at the event, and when friends see the photos they’ll also be exposed to your brand.
- 5. Use a photo booth to solicit additional donations.** “I’ve seen nonprofits promote the photo booth by asking for a small donation around \$2, and then guests get the photo strip keepsake right away,” Kehler says. Using the booth in this way can help you pay for the rental, with basic packages starting at \$399 for two hours of unlimited photos and prints.

Source: Nick Kehler, Owner, Connected Entertainment, Turnersville, NJ. Phone (856) 287-3525. E-mail: nick@connectedentertainment.net. Website: www.connectedentertainment.net

Get the Most From Your Registration

“The registration process is the first interaction your potential attendee has with your event, and much like when an individual checks in at the front desk of a hotel, that initial meeting will influence the perception of their entire stay,” says Vicki Johnson, owner of Vicki Johnson & Associates, LLC (Arlington, VA), a full-service event planning company specializing in assisting understaffed nonprofits for nearly a decade. Johnson says a streamlined registration process not only gives your attendees a good first impression of your organization but can also help you gather important information that can be used toward marketing future events.

Johnson offers the following tips for getting the most out of your registration process.

- 1. Gather pertinent information from attendees.** “When selecting a registration software system, often nonprofits consider the cost instead of what they will receive for that cost,” Johnson says. “The information you can gather from a really robust registration form can help you market your event in future years.” Use the registration process as an opportunity to capture information like demographics and special needs requirements to get a better sense of your audience.
- 2. Participate in weekly registration check-ins.** Whether you’re working with a consultant from Johnson’s team or monitoring registration on your own, weekly check-ins are critical to maintain momentum. “We provide weekly updates on both how the registration is going as well as housing pickup and compare the two to determine what drives people to act,” Johnson says. “We like to communicate with not only people in the planning area but also those in marketing so we can cross-inform those players on how to best utilize their skills internally to drive attendance.”
- 3. Survey past attendees to improve future registration.** Johnson’s team implemented a brief phone survey for a nonprofit that had seen decreased attendance over the years. By calling previous attendees and asking what it would take to get them to attend again, they were able to build the registration process and the program simultaneously around their responses. The nonprofit saw their highest marks ever in terms of attendance and satisfaction with the content delivered. “Unless you really go out and chat with the stakeholders about what it is they want to see, people feel like their concerns aren’t being heard,” Johnson says.
- 4. Don’t try to reinvent the wheel.** “In many cases, you’re not creating something new,” Johnson says. Talk to attendees and other organizations about their positive experiences with effective registration software and techniques. Streamline the registration process so it’s easy to understand and user-friendly, and ensure confirmations are sent immediately to avoid confusion.

Source: Vicki Johnson, CMP, Owner, Vicki Johnson & Associates, LLC, Arlington, VA. Phone (703) 532-3166. E-mail: Vicki@vjmeetings.com. Website: www.vjmeetings.com

Form Helps Avoid Seeking Sponsorships Haphazardly

Whether you want businesses to underwrite a special event, a new program you intend to launch or an existing budgeted project that can bring in additional revenue, your success will increase by doing some planning prior to approaching potential sponsors.

Make use of a Sponsorship Project form to help evaluate sponsorship opportunities and map out an action plan rather than haphazardly contacting prospects with little forethought. Here's a brief description of the form:

A. Description of program/project — summarize the purpose of the program or project and what it entails.

B. Anticipated start and duration of project/program — when will the project begin? Will it be ongoing or is there an end date? Will the project/program be repeated? When and how often?

C. Project/program components that could be underwritten — besides finding a major sponsor whose name might be associated with the overall event (e.g., The XYZ Summer Camp for Kids, The XYZ Golf Classic), are there individual parts within the project/program that could be sponsored as well — a reception, training materials, exhibit area, lunch, dinner, etc.?

D. Date, actions and person(s) responsible

— outline anticipated steps that need to be taken in securing needed sponsorship support for the project/program and who is responsible for doing what by when.

E. Project/program component, potential sponsors and solicitation target dates — identify and prioritize who might make the best sponsor candidates for each component of your project/program, and set deadlines for approaching them.

EVENT MARKETING

Make Sure Invitations Set the Right Expectations

Why are invites so important? What can you do to make sure they set the right expectation with guests?

When you're working with a tight budget, for example, for a fundraiser, one area where you might think to cut costs is invitations. But Marsha VanArk from Distinctly Yours Wedding & Event Planning, says invitations are crucial to your event.

The main purpose of invites is to share information about the event, including location, time, schedule of events, directions, travel information, how to buy tickets, how to RSVP and any other pertinent details. When planning your invite wording, put yourself in the attendees' shoes and tell them what you would want to know.

Invitations need to share all this information, but they also serve one other important purpose: They provide a first impression of the event and help the attendees understand its theme, purpose and formality. If the event is formal, the invitation needs to represent that. Finally, make sure your invitations fit the theme and are consistent with the programs and other events.

Source: Marsha VanArk, Owner and Lead Planner, Distinctly Yours, LLC Wedding & Event Planning, Stevens Point, WI. Phone (715) 347-3566. E-mail: marsha@stevenspointweddingplanner.com. Website: www.stevenspointweddingplanner.com

SPONSORSHIP PROJECT PLANNING FORM																								
Description of Program/Project _____																								
Anticipated Start _____		Duration of Project/Program _____																						
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Auction Item Getaways

Looking for imaginative getaways for your auction event? Turn to friends and businesses to line up a slew of donated getaway possibilities:

- A weekend on a houseboat.
- Overnights at five bed and breakfasts.
- A white-water rafting trip.
- A week on a dude ranch.
- A stay at a unique hotel (The Library Hotel, NY www.libraryhotel.com).
- A group stay at a Y or church camp.
- A romantic night in a castle.
- A week at an exclusive spa.
- A scenic train ride.
- A week at a real farm.
- A fall foliage tour.

Planning for a Visit From the White House

Jane T. White, director of convention services for the Virginia Beach Bureau and Visitors Center, is responsible for coordinating a number of major events. In 2012, White had the role of event manager and was in charge of making arrangements with Secret Services to accommodate a Tallwood High School graduation visit from Vice President Joe Biden. She says communication and a knowledgeable team were responsible for the success of this 5,000-person event.

"In general, if FBI or Secret Service is coming to your venue with a guest, you'll receive the details within seven days of when they'll show up at your doorstep," White says. "It's very immediate, and they have very specific requests for the event." Because rapid turnaround is a factor, White says it's imperative to be familiar with your space.

"The best thing you can do is be a great resource to the point of contact at the FBI and Secret Services," White says. She offers her tips to prepare for a visit from the White House.

- Determine a safe entryway for the high-profile guest.
- Have four to five exit options should the guest need to be escorted to another location.
- Prepare safety signage and have metal detectors inspected prior to the event day.
- Designate a special lot for Secret Services to stage their vehicles.
- Keep contact information on hand for the operations manager (so they know how to access water supply, HVAC, etc.).
- Prepare roof access for Secret Services in case they need additional space to station agents.
- Act as a mediator by filtering conflicting requests between office staffers and Secret Services.
- Know where the media platform will be positioned. "You could end up with 30 TV cameras in a spot where people need to walk if you don't ask the right questions up front," White says.
- Be prepared to accommodate media outlets and their representatives. "Have a designated area for TV trucks to park so it doesn't mess with general attendee traffic," White recommends.
- Be prepared to create a makeshift communications office for the White House team. "We had to use a storage area in the exhibit hall because we lacked another physical room," White says.
- Prepare for early arrival on event day. "Secret Services arrived at 6 a.m. that day, and we had to do a detailed walk-through before the 11 a.m. event start time," White says.
- Provide Secret Service agents with help from venue staff during ticketed events to avoid potential issues.
- Pull additional staff to help before, during and after major events. "You may want to ask people who aren't necessarily involved with event planning but are experts on the venue," White says.

Source: Jane T. White, Director of Convention Services, Virginia Beach Bureau and Visitors Center, Virginia Beach, VA. Phone (757) 270-6458. E-mail: jwhite@vbgov.com. Website: www.visitvirginiateach.com

Recognize the Life Cycle of Annual Events

By Megan Venzin

Some events grow with their organizations, while others begin to lose their sparkle over the years. Annual events have natural life cycles, and at a certain point you may be faced with the decision to discontinue or rework the event to cut your losses.

Krista Berry Ortega, director of strategic partnerships for Kids Included Together (KIT; San Diego, CA), helped lead the decision to discontinue the annual fundraiser, Over the Edge for KIT, when it became clear the event was no longer netting enough for the effort and was failing to promote the organization's mission at the highest level. Ortega says the event was very successful and served an important purpose in the organization's history, so it was critical to end on a high note. "By discontinuing the event, we've been able to allocate more resources to cultivating and retaining donors, partners and true champions of our work, which has resulted in improved outcomes," Ortega says.

Instead of replacing the void with another large fundraiser, KIT implemented several smaller, low-cost stewardship events and activities and an online peer-to-peer fundraising campaign that targets its current donor audiences better. "As a result, we increased our philanthropic income by 98 percent in two years, which directly impacts the youth and communities we serve," Ortega says.

Chris Wesselman, associate producer for the Cincinnati Fringe Festival, also has experience reworking events to maximize their impact. After performances conclude each night, patrons attend the Fringe Bar Series to enjoy drinks and conversation with fellow artists and audience members. When audience surveys indicated performance-based programming during the Bar Series, such as karaoke and a 24-Hour Play Project, were inhibiting their ability to relax with friends, Wesselman and his team knew it was time for a makeover. "We've made a direct effort to devise Bar Series events that promote a more laid-back atmosphere, where people don't feel like the event itself is obstructing their ability to have a good time and reflect on the festival with others," Wesselman says. This atmosphere has also encouraged patrons to attend the Bar Series more often and for longer periods of time. "By introducing craft beer events and a game night, our efforts have been rewarded in a clear upswing in satisfaction from patrons and sales at the bar," he says.

Wesselman says you can learn a lot by simply talking to your attendees or gathering feedback through simple surveys.

Sources: Krista Berry Ortega, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Kids Included Together, San Diego, CA. Phone (858) 225-5686. E-mail: Krista@kitonline.org. Website: www.kitonline.org

Chris Wesselman, Associate Producer, Cincinnati Fringe Festival, Cincinnati, OH. Phone (513) 300-5669. E-mail: CincyFringe@knowtheatre.com. Website: www.cincyfringe.com