

**Tip of the Month:** If you are expecting “day of” deliveries, schedule them early to avoid mix-ups of any kind.

# Special Events

## GALORE!

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

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### Learn From Other Organizations' Events

Want to learn how various types of special events work and discover new features that you might want to add to an existing event? Make it your job to attend others' events.

Why not approach other noncompetitive nonprofits in your community or area and come up with a reciprocity agreement: If you can attend their special events for free, they can attend yours.

Having such an agreement in place will allow you to discover more about how a particular event works, and determine if such an event will work for your organization as well. And for those instances when you have the same event, you can discover special features that you may want to incorporate into your event.

You may ask, “Why would I want to share our events with other nonprofits' event planners? Why would I want them to see how we structure a particular event?”

First, there's nothing to prevent others from paying the price of a ticket to attend, so you really have nothing to hide. Second, if you have confidence in your ability to pull off successful, highly attended events, then what do you have to lose?

If you're hesitant, try a reciprocity agreement with a couple of other nonprofits to test your comfort level. Then expand your pool of partners over time.

### PROFESSIONAL OPINION

### Few Versus Several Special Events

*Do you think it's best to hold one or two highly successful events each year, or does it make more sense to plan as many events as possible to generate needed funds?*

“I think it's a matter of quality versus quantity. Two NPOs (nonprofit organizations) I've worked at had two different philosophies regarding fundraisers. NPO A held two different events that were six months apart from each other. Each one was a well-established event that was expertly planned and well-executed. For these reasons, the community readily paid the higher price of admission. Each of these events typically netted between \$25,000 and \$30,000. Considering the small size of the community, which was around 26,000 people, I consider this to be a good night.

“NPO B hosted several fundraisers — usually one per month. This schedule required a lot of hard work and upkeep. The events had a tendency to be unorganized because no one ever completed a postmortem to evaluate what worked or what didn't. It always required lot of time and energy, resulting in lots of spinning wheels for very little profit. Usually the take-away for one of these events was between \$300 and \$800. Plus, volunteers and staff were left feeling burned out.

“So the moral of my story is this: You can do a few things very well with some thought and some planning, or you can do many things poorly. I think you can understand which scenario lends itself to success.”

— Diane Hutsell, Assistant Director,  
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“Events are tempting — but only for those who don't have to plan them. Simply, one major event can use incredible amounts of staff time from all sides of the organization (marketing, planning, sponsorships, etc.), which can be easily overlooked by someone focusing on the potential benefit.

“However, if you must host many smaller events, one successful strategy is modeled by an organization in northern Virginia, Doorways for Women and Families. Instead of taking on many smaller events themselves, they equip their community to host fundraising events on their behalf. They identify donors who may be interested in hosting fundraising events and then train them on how to coordinate the events to be on-brand and on-message. By doing this, they remove the difficult work from their staff and provide a unique type of donor engagement that helps Doorways stand out from the crowd.

“Oftentimes, one or two events are a far better investment than many smaller events. But if you must hold many events throughout the year, I would suggest finding a way to use them as a donor engagement opportunity, as opposed to creating an additional burden on your staff.”

— Allison Carney, Communications Consultant,  
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## High-Visibility Roles Honor Behind-the-Scenes Volunteers

Your special event can be the perfect time to celebrate staff or volunteers who work behind the scenes throughout the year.

For instance, a Midwest women's shelter relies on two board members to oversee minor repairs to its residential facility. One Saturday a month, these men repair cabinets, move furniture, build sandboxes, paint rooms or take care of similar duties to keep the shelter in good condition.

But during the shelter's major fundraiser, these volunteers trade their toolboxes for tuxedos to serve in a highly visible capacity as doormen, greeting event attendees who include the organization's major donors, board members and staff.

Shelter staff photograph the tuxedoed duo, sharing prints not only with the volunteers, but also with their spouses, to further thank them for their service.

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## Four Tips for Negotiating With Hotels

By Megan Venzin

Because your hotel will account for a large portion of your event's budget, it's important to be aware of the items and services that leave room for negotiation. From room cost to corkage fees, it's necessary for nonprofits to consider all their costs before selecting the right venue, whether it be for an upcoming conference, gala or luncheon.

"Consider needs versus wants," says Chief Experience Officer of TCG Events Cassie Brown. "Identify the deal-breakers first, as it is best to get those on the table at the beginning of the planning process." Through her several years working in event planning, Brown has developed her own rule book for getting the best hotel at the right price. She shares four tips for negotiating with hotels.

1. **Ask for a copy of the policies and procedures in advance.** By doing so, you will be able to determine your hotel's guidelines for construction, cancellations, using outside vendors, provided services and logistical information like check-in/check-out times. "Ask people what the venue has been doing well and what problems have come to light recently," Brown says. Knowing these details will ensure the hotel is the best match for your particular event.
2. **Always send out a request for proposal (RFP).** "Make it known that you are shopping various properties," Brown says. When hotels are aware they may lose your business to a competitor, they are likely to be more flexible when negotiating fees associated with bartenders, chefs, parking, audiovisual, access to amenities, corkage and other contract terms.
3. **Confirm that the group-hotel-room rate is the best rate.** Refer to online sites like Expedia, Booking.com or Priceline to confirm that the group rate offered directly by the hotel is actually the most cost-effective option. "Call the hotel directly and ask for the rate during that period of time, then follow up by calling the 800 number," Brown says. "You should check the rates multiple times prior to signing the contract."
4. **Effectively communicate how hosting your event will benefit the hotel.** The best way to get good rates is to show the hotel how your event will help it financially, by attracting free publicity or filling the space in a time when business is otherwise slow. "You may be able to negotiate better prices if the hotel recently lost an event and needs to fill the gap rapidly," Brown says.

Source: Cassie Brown, CSEP, Chief Experience Officer, TCG Events, Charlotte, NC. Phone (704) 376-1943, ext. 3089. E-mail: [cbrown@tcgevents.com](mailto:cbrown@tcgevents.com). Website: [www.tcgevents.com](http://www.tcgevents.com)

## Become the Hub of Event Information

Want to get more people viewing your website before, during or after a major event? Become the hub of information about your nonprofit's events by doing the following:

- Post all event details plus PDF images of your event invitation at your website.
- Create an online event journal posted on your Web page where event organizers and volunteers enter new details about the event as they develop.
- Post videos during and after the event to generate interest.
- Tweet about the event before, during and after, signaling Twitter followers to view new details at your Web page.
- Create a comment or notes section at your nonprofit's website available for attendees to comment on the event or offer ideas for the next event.
- Create an online photo album for attendees and for those who could not attend to witness the value of the event through visual images.
- Be sure to post your thank-you note to attendees and donors on the Web page.
- Invite those who couldn't attend to donate online.
- Tally results from the event and share the final details online.

## How to Select a Celebrity Speaker for Your Fundraiser

By Megan Venzin

Award-winning actress Laura Linney portrayed the role of a schoolteacher with incurable cancer in the hit Showtime series, “The Big C,” but she has ties to the disease off-screen as well. Linney’s father passed away in 2011 following a short battle with lung cancer, just before she received her first Golden Globe.

For these reasons, Linney was a perfect celebrity speaker to feature at the 2016 Methodist Cancer Center Luncheon in Memphis. “She spoke about losing her father as well as her two grandfathers to cancer at a young age,” says Director of Development for the Methodist Healthcare Foundation Bob Plunk. “Her presentation was flawless.”

Over the past 15 years, the same annual fundraiser has welcomed an impressive collection of presenters including Queen Noor of Jordan, Tom Brokaw and Michael Douglas. Despite their diverse backgrounds, these people have common ground in experiences with cancer. Some have battled it personally, while others have lost close friends and family. Every one of them had a compelling story to tell the luncheon’s 1,200 attendees.

Plunk shares his tips for selecting the right celebrity speaker for your next fundraiser.

1. **Opt for name recognition.** “You have to pick a person whom you don’t have to explain or describe,” Plunk says. “When selecting a presenter for a big event we always want to feature a name that people will know right away.”
2. **Avoid celebrities with personal agendas.** “The last thing you want is for the presentation to turn into someone’s political or social campaign and distract from the purpose of your event,” Plunk says. “The audience should relate to the speaker and get a sense of their personal connection to your cause.”
3. **Work closely with agencies that represent public speakers.** “I’ve worked with national speaker agencies in New York, Boston and Washington, and they’ve always done a good job in helping us select the right presenters for our fundraisers,” Plunk says. Developing close relationships with agencies can ensure they recommend the best speakers year after year.

#### 4. Go for a hometown angle.

Academy Award-winning actress Kathy Bates proved to be an excellent luncheon presenter, not only because of her personal battles with cancer but also because she is a Memphian. “Our event was a big homecoming for her,” Plunk says. “We actually called the agency and requested her, because we knew about her roots in Memphis.”

5. **Spring for your top pick.** “You can’t just mail out four requests and then pick the speaker you want most,” Plunk says. “Always be sure you go for the person who you think best represents the mission of your organization, and lock down contracts well in advance.”

Source: Bob Plunk, Director of Development, Methodist Healthcare Foundation, Memphis, TN. Phone (901) 516-0502. E-mail: [Bob.Plunk@mlh.org](mailto:Bob.Plunk@mlh.org). Website: [www.mlh.org](http://www.mlh.org)



Producing eye-catching event flyers is still one of the most cost-effective ways to advertise your event. Flyers need not be complicated; a few unique aspects can have your flyer drawing lots of attention. Try these tips when creating your next event flyer:

- ❑ Create a flyer unique in size and shape. Cut flyers into shapes such as stars for a dramatic impact. Go with a larger-than-standard size, thinking beyond 8 1/2 x 11 inches.
- ❑ Get your complete message on the flyer, but allow for white space, which lets the reader absorb the information without feeling inundated with details.
- ❑ Use clean, easy-to-read fonts in a large point size for easy readability.
- ❑ Don’t forget the details. Include the who, what, when, where, why and how of your event.
- ❑ Align flyer images, shape and style with other print advertising to develop a common theme and recognition for your event.
- ❑ Post flyers throughout your region the week prior to the event. This effort, along with other publicity, creates a double dose of advertising sure to draw guests.

## Keeping Your Events Fresh Avoids Complacency

Complacency, according to Ira Rosen, assistant professor and director of the event leadership executive certificate program at Temple University School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management (Philadelphia, PA), is one of the event industry's biggest foes.

"In this business, if you become complacent, you stop growing. If you stop growing, you will ultimately shrivel up and die," he warns.

But how do you avoid this? Rosen shares his tips for keeping events fresh.

1. **Back to the basics.** Start from the beginning and review how you have incorporated your mission and vision statements into your past several events. "Looking backward enables us to look forward," Rosen says.
2. **Compare.** Rosen recommends looking at other nonprofits and asking what they are doing well in regard to their events — what they could improve on, and what you can learn from their experiences.
3. **Review trends.** What's happening on TV and radio? What about in print? And, of course, don't forget social media. "Trends, by definition, define what's current in society, so if we want to keep our event fresh, we need to understand trends," he says.
4. **Employ a mystery shopper.** According to Rosen, using the concept of a mystery shopper to analyze your event can prove beneficial as it can give you an unbiased view of your event.

"We live in a highly competitive environment," Rosen explains. "People do not have to attend events. They can choose to go to other events or activities or, very often, just choose to stay home. You must give them a compelling reason to get off the couch and leave the comforts of their homes to attend your event. If your event is not new and fresh, what compelling reason do they have?"

*Source: Ira Rosen, MA, CFEE, Assistant Professor and Director of the Event Leadership Executive Certificate Program, Temple University School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Philadelphia, PA. Phone (215) 204-6124. E-mail: [irosen@temple.edu](mailto:irosen@temple.edu). Website: [www.sthm.temple.edu](http://www.sthm.temple.edu)*

## Beer, Guys & Cigars at Golf Tournament

When staff at the Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) of the Coastal Empire realized the potential of their annual Wine, Women & Shoes fundraiser, they decided to create a similar event geared toward men. In 2015, RMHC launched Beer, Guys & Cigars, a unique two-day gathering featuring beer tastings, local food, cigar girls and a full Monday dedicated to playing golf.

"Our event is more than just another golf tournament. Savannah has plenty of those, so we wanted to create a frenzy that everyone talks about," says Executive Director Bill Soroachak. "When people are talking about your event, it means they are talking about you!"

While the event was originally crafted as the counterpart to Wine, Women & Shoes, Soroachak says that Beer, Guys & Cigars attracts about a 70/30 percent split of the 300 male and female attendees. On Sunday night, guests are invited to a local clubhouse to sample bourbon and beers from 24 breweries, dine on bites from local restaurants and puff on premium cigars. Day two is dedicated to a golf tournament, in which individuals and foursomes compete in a single flight.

Soroachak offers his advice for planning a male-focused event.

1. **Remember, men like to bring their significant others.** "We could have shot ourselves in the foot when we named our event," Soroachak says. "We quickly realized that men want to bring their wives and girlfriends along, so we included phrasing like, 'It's not just for guys!' in our fliers to reinforce that everyone is welcome."
2. **Make your event feel like a vacation.** Soroachak says the Sunday–Monday schedule is attractive to guests who long for a mini-vacation. "It gives people a chance to get out of town for a couple of days and spend time in a resort-like atmosphere," Soroachak says.
3. **Include a wow factor.** In lieu of a silent auction, Beer, Guys & Cigars features a Code to the Locker giveaway where guests can purchase locker tags for \$100 dollars each. Of the limited tags sold, only one holds the winning combination. The winner takes home \$10,000 worth of prizes including high-end clothing, premium liquors and even furniture. "We only sell 100 of these, so they always go quick," Soroachak says.
4. **Offer a VIP experience.** In addition to offering general admission tickets, guests also have the option to upgrade to VIP. VIP access includes an hour of private bourbon tastings, an extra cigar and the first opportunity to purchase locker tags for the Code to the Locker giveaway.
5. **Add on to your event every year.** "We are adding a Texas Hold 'Em Tournament to the Sunday portion of our event next year," Soroachak says. "We kicked off the golf tournament with Bloody Mary and mimosa bars too. We want Beer, Guys & Cigars to stand out and get better every year."

*Source: Bill Soroachak, Executive Director, Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Coastal Empire, Savannah, GA. Phone (912) 350-7641, ext. 304. E-mail: [bill@rmhccoastalempire.org](mailto:bill@rmhccoastalempire.org). Website: [www.rmhccoastalempire.org](http://www.rmhccoastalempire.org)*

## Offer Higher-Priced Tickets

When planning a special event, consider offering a ticket priced higher than those of other guests that includes exclusive benefits for anyone willing to pay the higher price.

Examples of benefits might include:

- Photo taken with a celebrity speaker.
- Invitation to a pre- or post-event reception.
- Special parking, seating.
- A book autographed by your celebrity author.
- Additional menu or refreshment choices.

## Give First-Year Grads a One-Year Reunion

When Harvard Business School (HBS; Boston, MA) launched its first ever One-Year Reunion in 2010, the event welcomed a modest group of 94 alumni. Since the inaugural event, this program has grown by almost 900 percent, helping HBS to achieve its goal of pushing greater graduate participation.

“We saw there was a lack of programming between graduation and the traditional five-year reunion,” says Assistant Director of Student and Young Alumni Engagement Kathryn B. Tripp. “This significant time gap posed challenges for us when asking alumni to engage in fundraising opportunities, so the One-Year Reunion became part of our on-going initiative to get our graduates involved at an earlier point in their alumni experience.”

Tripp says One-Year Reunions show graduates the value of their education and what it means to be an alumnus. “We are encouraging them to come back, volunteer on committees and develop a habit of giving,” Tripp says. “Our numbers have shown that those who engage at an earlier age are more likely to participate later on.”

Tripp and Director Lindsay McConchie share their tips for planning and executing a successful one-year reunion.

1. **Create alumni-focused content.** “We are thoughtful with our programming, because most of these graduates still feel a bit like students,” McConchie says. “We make sure the content is very reflective, giving alumni a chance to talk about what they expected from their post-HBS experience, what it’s actually like and how they are crafting their career trajectories.”
2. **Include social events and interactive presentations.** HBS’s One-Year Reunion kicks off with a welcome reception on Friday night. On Saturday, attendees are invited to breakfast before breaking into social events and presentations from faculty. The event also features a Start-up Showcase during which alumni highlight new ventures and personal projects. Attendees then break off into smaller group dinners and then reconvene at night for a closing party with the entire class.
3. **Allow ample time for catching up.** “These graduates really just want to see each other and connect, because their experience of the school at this point is each other,” Tripp says. “If there’s too much content, attendees are less likely to be engaged.”
4. **Set a reasonable price point.** Alumni can purchase early-bird tickets for \$99, with prices topping off at \$120 closer to the date. HBS subsidizes around 50 percent of reunion costs. “You must engage young populations in a way that’s not financially taxing on them,” Tripp says. “We feel the investment that HBS is making on their behalf will be returned by greater future participation.”
5. **Enact alumni-driven committees.** HBS encourages engagement through alumni-led programming and fundraising committees. “These committee members give us a sense of who this class really is, which helps us tailor content,” McConchie says.

Source: Lindsay McConchie, Director, Student and Young Alumni Engagement, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA. Phone (617) 495-5694. E-mail: [lmconchie@hbs.edu](mailto:lmconchie@hbs.edu). Website: [www.alumni.hbs.edu](http://www.alumni.hbs.edu)

Source: Kathryn B. Tripp, Assistant Director, Student and Young Alumni Engagement, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA. Phone (617) 496-6713. E-mail: [ktripp@hbs.edu](mailto:ktripp@hbs.edu). Website: [www.alumni.hbs.edu](http://www.alumni.hbs.edu)

## PLANNING PROCEDURES

### Set Quantifiable Objectives

Whether you’re planning an open house, a conference or a fundraising event, get started right by establishing key quantifiable objectives:

- To increase attendance over last year’s event by 10 percent.
- To net \$40,000 in total revenue.
- To enlist no fewer than five sponsors at \$5,000 each.
- To have an active group of at least 100 volunteers.

Having quantifiable objectives helps to ensure success, and gets everyone involved on the same page.

## Strive to Avoid Event Evaluation Mistakes

What mistakes should an organization avoid when conducting an event evaluation?

“Always remember the reason for creating an evaluation is to assist in making the event better,” says Keri Kujala, manager of special events and donor relations at Saint Mary’s Foundation, Mercy Health (Grand Rapids, MI). “Feedback is not meant to point blame; it is a tool for your organization to view your event through the eyes of the participant. Regardless of the feedback or the information you collect, it is the reality of the participant. Taking feedback personally or discounting the feedback of a participant does nothing to enhance your ultimate goals.”

Kujala notes a few other mistakes she sees organizations making and recommends the following:

- “Make it as short as you can while still collecting the information you want. Surveys or evaluations that are too long will have a low completion rate.
- “Make answering the questions simple. Provide multiple choices with options to comment. This will not only allow you to share statistics but also (allows) the participant to explain if they wish.
- “Use questions that do not prompt a biased answer. Again, you gain nothing if you don’t get the real answers you are seeking.”

Source: Keri Kujala, Manager, Special Events and Donor Relations, Saint Mary’s Foundation, Mercy Health, Grand Rapids, MI. Phone (616) 685-1891. E-mail: [kujalak@mercyhealth.com](mailto:kujalak@mercyhealth.com). Website: [www.mercyhealthsaintmarys.com](http://www.mercyhealthsaintmarys.com)

### Build Anticipation

- Build excitement for an upcoming event by communicating with your audience during the days leading up to it. Use varied methods of connecting with them (e.g., e-mail, mail, Facebook, Twitter).

## Six Tips for Successful Event Evaluations

Your organization's big fundraiser is over, but don't forget an important step — the event evaluation.

"All too often event professionals think they know what their participants are experiencing, but giving participants an option to share their opinion can reveal aspects we never considered," explains Keri Kujala, manager, special events and donor relations at Saint Mary's Foundation, Mercy Health (Grand Rapids, MI). "Asking participants also shows that their opinions are valued."

When conducting your event evaluation, Kujala offers the following advice:

1. **Look at goals.** Focus on whether the goals of your event were met, as well as the why or why not.
2. **Include all groups and all participants.** "All audiences that take part in your event should be invited to provide feedback," Kujala says. "This means attendees, volunteers and vendors. I often see event follow-up only sent to guests, but other participants, such as volunteers, are an extension of your organization. Their feedback on their experience is extremely valuable, as they are ambassadors of your event." Additionally, to ensure a fair evaluation, Kujala recommends surveying everyone rather than just a select few from each group of participants. However, she adds that if it directly relates to your event goals, you may want to target a specific group, such as first-time guests or sponsors.
3. **Survey those who did not attend your event as well.** "It is equally important to find out why people attend versus not attend," Kujala says. "Perhaps you discover you have quite a large following who would like to attend your event but the timing doesn't work. Other factors to evaluate can be cost, location or lack of marketing. Having an understanding about your audience can assist you in making decisions that can focus on your audience."
4. **Offer the survey while the event is fresh in the memory of participants.** While Kujala e-mails participant evaluations the day following an event, she says some organizations do so at the conclusion of the event. But she cautions, "While I find that this timing produces the most responses, I also find that sometimes participants rush to finish on their way out, and this doesn't always allow them time to reflect. Sometimes a participant's biggest takeaway happens after leaving and thinking about their experience."
5. **Create a quality evaluation.** "There is a science to creating a good survey," Kujala says. "If you don't know where to start, there are many online services that can assist with collecting data, crafting questions and comparing results to other similar organizations."
6. **Celebrate.** While you certainly want to know how to improve your event, Kujala says organizations should also recognize and celebrate their successes.

Source: Keri Kujala, Manager, Special Events and Donor Relations, Saint Mary's Foundation, Mercy Health, Grand Rapids, MI. Phone (616) 685-1891. E-mail: [kujalak@mercyhealth.com](mailto:kujalak@mercyhealth.com). Website: [www.mercyhealthsaintmarys.com](http://www.mercyhealthsaintmarys.com)

## Make Your Chapter Launches Something Special

By Megan Venzin

Following Cambridge College's (Cambridge, MA) 45th anniversary, the institution began exploring new ways to serve its 36,000 nontraditional alumni. Staff decided chapter launches could serve as a fun and effective way to recruit members and raise awareness for the burgeoning alumni association.

"We chose to coordinate an alumni association and organize chapter launches to increase enthusiasm for the work we do here," says Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Fund Kevin Driscoll. In the past 12 months, the college has hosted four chapter launches across the New England region, where about half of their alumni currently reside, and a fifth one is planned for spring of 2017. One of the previous launches took place in Puerto Rico, where Cambridge College's satellite school is located.

Driscoll shares his tips for making your next chapter launch an exciting event.

1. **Launch in locations where you have connections.** "Start with a small, core group of alumni in the region who are already invested in your college or association," Driscoll says. "You can partner with them on finding venues, as they should have a good sense of where people might want to gather." For Cambridge College, the contacts informed the selection of venues like the Yale Club in New York and the Union Club in Boston — prestigious spots that were aligned with the association's mission.
2. **Plan your launch around a local celebration.** Cambridge College's Puerto Rico launch took place in December during the Feast of the Three Kings. Designing the event around a holiday helped organizers create a festive event that featured a folkloric dance trip, authentic Puerto Rican cuisine and traditional music.
3. **Include key leaders at the launch.** New President Deborah Jackson welcomed attendees at the New York City launch and Provost Catherine Koverola was involved in the Puerto Rico launch. "We wanted alumni to feel like they were connected to the things currently happening at the institution," Driscoll says. "Their presence was integral to the success of these events."
4. **Create an atmosphere ideal for networking.** "You want to make sure people are up and moving during these events," Driscoll says. "People are more likely to come when they see the networking benefits they will get from being in attendance." Driscoll recommends hosting your event in a spot that can provide cocktails and passed hors d'oeuvres to create a relaxed and social atmosphere.
5. **Apply a multiple-contact form of engagement.** Driscoll recommends sending save-the-dates and e-mail updates and making personal calls to ensure all bases for invitations are covered. "Within two weeks of the event, we like to make phone calls to alumni on our list who we know we want in attendance," Driscoll says. "Make sure donors to your annual fund also rise to the top of this call list."

Source: Kevin J. Driscoll, Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Fund, Cambridge College, Cambridge, MA. Phone (617) 873-0475. E-mail: [kevin.driscoll@cambridgecollege.edu](mailto:kevin.driscoll@cambridgecollege.edu). Website: [www.cambridgecollege.edu](http://www.cambridgecollege.edu)

## Make Detailed Checklist for Week, Day Before Your Event

With all of the major arrangements made for your gala event, it's time to concentrate on last-minute and sometimes overlooked details and give yourself and your committees a chance to correct potential snags.

### *To do a week before the event:*

- ❑ **Check the weather forecast.** Will you need a canopy for the entrance or a place to store rain boots and umbrellas? Review logistics for vehicles dropping off guests in covered areas.
- ❑ **Call the caterer and florist.** Check with them to ensure that they are still able to get the planned fish, seasonal ingredients and floral centerpieces you selected. If difficulties arise, you can be more involved in choosing substitutes.
- ❑ **Connect with special guests and speakers.** Call your honorees, entertainment and emcees to ask if you can assist them in their final travel or preparation arrangements.
- ❑ **Visit award or gift vendors.** Be sure any engraved trophies or plaques you will be presenting are complete and correctly spelled. Allow time for possible corrections.

### *To do the day of the event:*

- ❑ **Meet setup volunteers at the venue.** Offer a continental breakfast and a box lunch for those who may need to spend the day decorating or greeting vendors.
- ❑ **Confirm special transportation requests.** Call limousine or car services to reconfirm schedules and locations for everyone (speakers, entertainers, guests who use wheelchairs) who is important to the program.
- ❑ **Review safety procedures.** Meet with the facility manager and volunteers who are assisting with emergencies for fire exit and extinguisher locations, parking lot lighting and even concrete damage that should be fixed or blocked.
- ❑ **Gather the clean-up crew in advance.** Review which people will cover responsibilities including sending leftover food to charities, collecting stray items for a lost-and-found box, and determining items that are to be discarded or saved for future use.

## PROGRAMMING TIPS

### Five Rules for Selecting the Right Speaker

If it's your job to find the right speaker for your event, remember these five important rules:

1. Look for a speaker who embodies the purpose of your event. Do you want to entertain? To educate? To motivate? Does the person you have in mind conflict with your organization's mission and values in any way?
2. Recognize that experience matters. What types of audiences has your intended speaker addressed in recent months? What specific topics has he/she covered? How long has he/she been doing public speaking?
3. Seek a speaker whom your intended audience will accept. If your audience is politically mixed, avoid a speaker whose reputation is too far to the left or right of center.
4. You generally get what you pay for. You often pay many times more for the meal than for the speaker (on a per capita basis), when in fact, the program is probably more important than any meal being served.
5. Weigh speakers' personalities before making a commitment. Some speakers are difficult to work with, so trust your instinct. If you're bothered in initial contacts, chances are you'll have your work cut out for you from beginning to end, and beyond.

## Create a Tropical Paradise

A tropical-themed event lends itself to colors, textures, shapes and scents that naturally create an inviting atmosphere for your guests. Here are some ways to lend some island flavor to your party:

- ❑ **Buy or borrow potted plants from a nursery or garden store.** Rhododendron or azalea bushes, hibiscus or palm trees work well in most temperate climates, indoors or out. After using them for your party, plant them on your facility grounds. Use pricier plants, like orchids, as centerpiece accents.
- ❑ **Consider using water features for scent and sound.** Attractive glass containers with brightly colored water and floating candles make affordable and beautiful centerpieces while providing soft light and fragrance. Use portable indoor-outdoor lighted water fountains in strategic locations.
- ❑ **Bring in brilliantly colored birds.** Local pet stores or supporters may be willing to allow their friendly parrots, toucans or other exotic winged pets to attend your event. They provide entertainment, real sound effects and natural color. Help make arrangements for safe transportation, and even help the pet store make a sale if a parrot and a guest form a bond.
- ❑ **Make or buy tropical light strings.** You may already have strings of tiny white lights in your event supplies closet. Add parts of deconstructed silk flowers to each bulb. Online party supply vendors also offer dozens of lantern and flower string selections for affordable prices. While flaming tiki torches may break fire regulations, a variety of solar- and battery-operated versions are available.
- ❑ **Make the most of lighting and backdrops.** A blank screen and projected lighting can create a tropical sunset in any setting. A simple spotlight placed behind an arrangement of palms and ferns works in nearly any dull corner.
- ❑ **Select complementary fabric and materials.** Bamboo poles and cloth in a tropical pattern can go a long way to creating a tropical paradise. Floral patterns can range from sophisticated white palm leaves on green to funky flip-flops and sunglasses, depending on whether your crowd is all adults, or if children and family are the main audience.

## Let Clients Show the Value Of Your Services at Events

The audience your organization serves may be the best community ambassadors you have to attest to your value. While it's not always possible to involve those you help in your special events or activities, there are occasions when it's both educational and appropriate.

**Highlight your children's talents.** Your organization helps children through after school programs, mentorships or educational assistance. Hold a community arts show for their paintings, a concert for the choral group, or publish a booklet of their poems. Show off your facility with an open house where the public can see them spending their time in happily productive ways.

**Support clients who want to give something back.** A decaying neighborhood has a fresh new look because your volunteers painted homes and planted trees — homeowners are thrilled. They may welcome the idea of a community block party where they can show and tell with the public about the positive difference you made.

**Hold a job fair or networking event.** You have helped dozens of single mothers find meaningful career paths, trained volunteers in animal rescue techniques, or shown active retirees how to use new computer office programs. Invite local business owners to meet and match their needs with those you have helped learn marketable skills.

**Celebrate your anniversary.** Regardless of your mission, an anniversary or community birthday party provides endless opportunities to involve those you served. Honor babies born at your hospital through the decades, students from every graduating class, or accomplished individuals who once lived in your children's home. Ask them to share their photos, stories or memories of your organization.

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## Multifaceted Event Demonstrates Appreciation, Educates

Gonzaga University's (Spokane, WA) annual Tomorrow Made Possible event educates its current students about donor support while showing appreciation to donors and laying the groundwork for future donors.

"Tomorrow Made Possible is an event to showcase the everyday people who selflessly give to support current students' education," explains Stephanie Rockwell, director of individual giving. She adds, "(It) is important to creating a culture of giving and to help our students see that they, too, can be a future supporter and that gifts are real and direct to the Gonzaga experience."

The daylong event features a variety of stations, including how to get involved with student philanthropy, a photo booth, games, as well as life-size cutouts of alumni and messaging from graduation decades. According to Rockwell, the cutouts include why that particular alum gives to the university and one of the messages shows how a 1973 graduate is giving to a program that he participated in as a student.

Donors are notified of the event via a student-signed postcard thanking them for their support. Additionally, they are e-mailed a slideshow allowing them to see what is happening on campus to honor them. Donors who follow social media also have the opportunity to see and share posts with the hashtag #ZagDonorLove.

If your university is considering a similar event, Rockwell says, "I would encourage partnering with Financial Aid and Donor Relations to create a comprehensive 'thanking' experience and to allow for even more education of students on how donors affect their experience. We also leaned heavily on student volunteers and let the students guide the programming, so it met our goals while being relevant to the current student mentality."

*Source: Stephanie Rockwell, Director of Individual Giving, Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA. Phone (509) 313-6404. E-mail: [rockwell@gonzaga.edu](mailto:rockwell@gonzaga.edu). Website: [www.gonzaga.edu](http://www.gonzaga.edu)*

## GET PROFESSIONALS TO VOLUNTEER

### Bring Experienced Leaders to the Table, Solicit Their Expertise

Attracting busy and sought-after community leaders to volunteer for your next important event is a tall order that requires understanding the background and interests of those individuals, and taking time to learn about their philanthropic priorities. Here are some ways to start making contacts and building relationships:

**Identify five people with whom you hope to work.** Remember that while these individuals might be admired, popular and capable, they may already be involved with other organizations. But if it's clear that their skills and passions have a place in your programs or services, write them a letter citing specific examples of how your organization needs them — and why their time will be well-spent with you.

**Host a volunteer summit to identify community needs.** Start with your own board members and volunteer leaders to spearhead the event, but leave the format open for input from other leaders. Invite 50 or 100 representatives from business, government and other nonprofits to hear your long-range goals and make recommendations. Once they have become familiar with you, an invitation to become more involved is a natural transition.

**Offer complimentary event tickets to get acquainted.** Begin planning your next gala by inviting possible future chairmen. They may have attended with friends before, but make sure these complimentary seats come directly from your office. This will give you an opportunity to introduce yourself before the event, to make contact at the party, and to make a follow-up call asking if they enjoyed themselves or have suggestions for improvement. Their feedback will help you to determine where their expertise can be best utilized.