

BEST PRACTICES FOR LIVE FUNDRAISING EVENTS

A Comprehensive Guide for
Nonprofits and Charity Organizers



MAXIMIZE YOUR EVENT'S FUNDRAISING POTENTIAL:

A successful fundraising event is a year-round effort. Preparation, strategy, and attention to detail are key to making every mission moment a memorable one.



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INTRODUCTION

Since 2017, **Wolf Auction Group** has been setting the standard for excellence in fundraising.

The following guidelines are designed to make your fundraiser simple, successful, and memorable. Many of these practices have been implemented through experience and education. With that said, each event is unique. There is no “one size fits all” format. In fact, we’ll be the first to acknowledge that all growth starts at the end of our comfort zone, and change is Inevitable. Innovation, strategy, and preparation will keep events fresh and guests wanting to return year after year to support your mission.

By partnering with a professional auctioneer, you’ll have insight into the latest trends and a sounding board to discuss changes and unexpected scenarios. Above all, you’ll have someone at the helm of your event that has the experience to maximize every moment of giving and work through surprises with the upmost professionalism.

Communication is key, and we strongly encourage it. Whether your event is six days away, or six months, feel free to reach out and discuss with us anytime!

Email: support@wolfauctiongroup.com

Phone: 860-859-7833

Website: www.wolfauctiongroup.com

www.wolfauctiongroup.com



AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Invitations are targeted. There is a difference between inviting “as many people” as the room can hold versus the “right people”. Invite as many of the right people who share an interest in your mission as the room will comfortably hold to attend. To achieve maximum giving for any component of the evening, people must be anticipating the opportunity to give, willing to give, and cultivated in advance. Event chairs, board members, and staff are all key to leveraging the network of the organization that leads to support the night of the event.

HOW DO WE IDENTIFY WHO IS THE RIGHT FIT TO INVITE TO OUR EVENT?

They share two things in common:
The **means** and the **intention** to support your cause.

The list of attendees will reflect the relationships cultivated with potential donors through regular engagement. At many events, several attendees are guests of corporate sponsors. The substantial and unwavering support of corporate sponsors is critical. However, individuals attending on their behalf may not always have the same connection to the mission or capacity to give as individual ticket or table buyers.

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

There are a few key steps we can take to maximize fundraising:

- In thanking corporate sponsors, ask them to share with their employees that the event is a fundraiser for a cause that is meaningful to the organization. Clearly communicate the purpose and impact of the event.
- Ensure all guests are receiving communications regarding the event. Content should be both personalized and informative. Times, attire, and information about the program and opportunities to give (silent auction, games, live auction, Fund-A-Need, etc.)
- Emphasize the goal of 100% participation during the Fund-A-Need. Your event may be the first time that a guest has even seen your organization's name or heard about your mission. The program and storytelling should be impactful and inspiring. If so, the result should be those guests participating at a level of giving which is comfortable to them.

Diverse participation should include a mix of new and returning attendees to broaden your support base. Furthermore, this ensures critical funds are raised to meet immediate needs, and sound future donor base as well. With this diversity, messaging may need to be tailored to resonate with different segments of your audience.

Follow up: Perhaps the most critical part of audience development is to thank your attendees promptly and personally for their support.



ITEM PROCUREMENT DONATION & CONSIGNMENT

Organizations often ask if they should utilize consignment items or rely 100% on donations from the community. Pure donations often result in higher margins and more money raised.

However, we understand this takes tremendous effort and many hours of time.

From a donor perspective, every dollar given is going to your cause, which they appreciate. However, certain situations justify and even flourish using consignment packages, and there can be a balance between the two. If consignments are integrated into the auction, we look for them to add exclusivity and flare, while the donated items can be 100% profit. Speak with your auctioneer to determine what's best for your event and confirm that consignments are allowed by your organization.

Three rules of thumb for consignments:

- ▶▶ The package must be appealing to guests and appropriate for the capacity in the room.
- ▶▶ Work with a trusted provider to ensure that guests will have seamless follow-up regarding their package. Nothing spoils the guest experience more than a lack of customer service after the event.
- ▶▶ Consignment packages are often exciting offerings that attract attention to the event and create a lot of buzz. But evaluation of cost versus value is critical. Ask for past sales figures and ensure that the offering is still a profitable endeavor for your organization.



REVENUE ENHANCERS

There are countless opportunities to engage guests and raise funds during an event. Heads or tails, a wine toss, or a raffle are just a few examples. It may be beneficial to use cocktail hour to have activities or exhibits that engage and educate guests. Speak with your auctioneer to find creative ways to maximize fundraising prior to doors opening.

- Keep it simple.
- Engage the audience.
- Align with the theme.
- Offer appealing prices.
- Set clear rules.
- Incorporate multiple price points.
- Limit duration.
- Highlight the mission.
- Promote friendly competition.
- Get volunteers involved in facilitation of revenue enhancers.



SILENT AUCTION

COMMITTEES: It takes a team! Make sure your silent auction committee is adequately sized, ambitious, and equipped to solicit the best donations possible.

HOW MANY ITEMS: “Do the math”- We often see organizations having success with 30-45% the number of silent auction items as they have guests.

Example: 40% of 150 guests would result in 60 silent auction items. Use this range as a guideline.

SPACE & SIGNAGE: Make sure there is adequate space to display your items, including bidding sheets & info. Tables that are wide enough (at least 30”) can often have items displayed on both sides. Make sure you have the tables and space to display the items and allow patrons to move comfortably.

*A crowded silent auction can become
distracting & discouraging.*

Find ways to enhance and decorate your silent auction space. Make it fun, bright, and a place guests want to be before the doors open. Memorable displays draw bidder’s attention and signage can often help draw them to certain items of personal interest.

SILENT AUCTION

ITEMS OFFERED: While guests become used to events offering certain items each year, take some time to analyze items that are not performing to expectations and consider swapping them for a new item that can capture your guests' attention.

SORTING THE ITEMS: There are several methods for sorting the silent auction items, by category (sports, experiences, jewelry, pets/ animals, etc.) and by dollar value are two popular ones. Avoid putting any duplicates next to each other.

SETTING OPENING BIDS: Use the 30-40% Fair Market Value (FMV) Guideline. Remember, the goal of the silent auction is twofold: bidders should enjoy participating, and the organization should be raising money. Still use a round number for the opening bid.

Example: 33% of an item valued at \$100 is \$33. Use \$30 or \$40 as the opening bid.

SETTING INCREMENTS: It should take 5-10 bids to get from that 30-40% opening bid to 75% or more of Fair Market Value. This creates a competitive and engaging back and forth, while creating a substantial rise in value quickly.

Example: The \$100 item that opens at \$30 (as mentioned above) will take seven \$10 bids to hit the FMV of \$100.

SILENT AUCTION

CLOSING THE SILENT AUCTION: While some silent auctions close prior to the program, and some remain open online the entire weekend of the event, it is important that the closing of your silent auction does not detract from the program and the fundraising that will be taking place at that time. Do however promote the closing time so guests are fully aware of when their final chance to bid will be.

MOBILE BIDDING PLATFORMS: There are countless mobile bidding platforms available. These should be user friendly for the guests and organizations alike. Talk to your auctioneer about finding the best fit for you. Always make sure cell service is abundant inside the venue if you're putting aspects of your event online.



LIVE AUCTION

BID CARDS/ PADDLES: Firm, matte finish, white cardstock a minimum size of 5.5" X 8.5" (a normal 8"X11" sheet split in half) with bold black ink is recommended. Ensure font is adequately sized and will not create a glare under the lights. Ask yourself "Can I read these numbers from the stage if held up ANYWHERE in the room?" The answer must be YES! We advise each attendee should have their own individual bid card, giving them the ability to bid or give at any time throughout the event. These cards can be linked for couples.

Sample templates are included in this document. The 5.5" X 8.5" template provides two numbers per page printed and are highly legible. The full page 8.5" X 11" template has maximum room for sponsorship information, auction item descriptions, terms of the auction, and more. Free templates are available on our website for your convenience.

Timesaving tip: Preassign a number to each guest. Label each paddle with the guest's name and their table number for their convenience!

LIGHTING & PROXIMITY: Appropriate lighting is crucial during a fundraising auction as it significantly impacts the event's atmosphere and functionality. Proper lighting ensures that auction items are clearly visible, highlighting their features and encouraging higher bids by allowing potential buyers to fully appreciate the value of each item. It also enhances the overall ambiance, creating an engaging and professional environment that can boost attendee enthusiasm and participation.

LIVE AUCTION

Moreover, well-placed lighting ensures that auctioneers and speakers are easily seen, facilitating smooth communication and interaction with the audience. Inadequate lighting, on the other hand, can lead to a lackluster presentation, diminish the perceived value of auction items, and hinder the auction's overall success. Therefore, investing in appropriate lighting is essential for maximizing both the financial and experiential outcomes of a fundraising auction.

The room should be brighter during the live auction allowing guests to read their programs, engage with other bidders, and most importantly allow the auctioneer and staff to identify active bidders. Work with your auctioneer to ensure that spotlights are not hindering vision into the audience from the stage. Proximity is also important. The auctioneer and bid spotters should be able to walk amongst tables to fully interact with bidders.

CENTERPIECES: Centerpieces are a great first impression on attendees and appropriately sized centerpieces contribute to the overall aesthetic of the event. They can complement the theme and color scheme, creating a cohesive and visually pleasing environment.

LIVE AUCTION

However, there are practical considerations to consider. Centerpieces that are too large (such as ostrich feather centerpieces or extravagantly tall florals) can obstruct guests' views across the table, making it difficult to see and interact with other attendees. This can hinder conversation and reduce the overall enjoyment of the event. Furthermore, they can obstruct the view of the auctioneer and bid spotters which could detract from the primary goal of raising awareness and funds. Finally, an appropriately sized centerpiece maximizes safety, stability, and table space utilization.

SOUND: A professional, loud, and clear sound system should reach all corners of the room and allow the auctioneer to clearly communicate the bids/ donations even with chatter or commotion in the room. Have a minimum of one wireless microphone so your auctioneer can move freely around the room, with separate mics for your emcees or other speakers.

RECORD KEEPING: We advise two dedicated individuals to remain seated, away from any distractions. Their sole jobs will be to record the winning bidder numbers and prices for live auction items as well as gifts made during the Fund-A-Need. As a backup, we advise making an audio recording on your phone of all live fundraising. Your AV team may have the capability to record as well, just ask them in advance.

LIVE AUCTION

BID SPOTTERS & TRAINING: Bid spotters vary based on the size, layout, and capacity of the room (generally 1 for every 50 guests). Professional bid spotters may be provided by the auctioneer if discussed in advance. Volunteers should be cordial with guests and enthusiastic about capturing every bid or gift. Training can be provided prior to the event to best prepare volunteers. Discuss with your auctioneer in advance regarding the need for bid spotters at a particular event.

TIMING SHOULD NOT BE TOO LATE: From experience, we find that fundraising should be complete by 9:00 PM, or shortly thereafter. Avoid conducting the auction or Fund-A-Need too late in the evening. We want to raise money when we have full engagement from the audience. Work with your auctioneer to strategically develop the run of show.

SHUT DOWN DISTRACTIONS: Specifically, the silent auction, the bar, as well as any games should be temporarily closed to maximize attention on the stage.

HOW MANY ITEMS: 3-8 items is our recommended range. Quality comes first, and if there are excess items, add them to the silent auction or build up your live auction packages. This is an opportunity to highlight your most exclusive items without using excessive time in the program. Work with your auctioneer to sequence these items.

LIVE AUCTION

A KEY QUESTION: CAN WE SELL ANY OF OUR ITEMS MORE THAN ONCE?

If the answer is yes, we don't want to publicize this information. Work with your auctioneer to discuss how to handle items selling multiple times.

PUBLICISING VALUES: We do **NOT** advise publicizing the values of your live auction items to guests. This can create a ceiling of perceived value for a guest and cap their bidding. Values should be discussed between the auctioneer and the organization ahead of time.

Advertise live auction items in advance as they are often worth substantial value and bidders may wish to share unique experiences with other guests, friends, or family.



FUND-A-NEED

AKA: Paddle raise, appeal, live ask, fund-the-mission, Open Your Heart, Fund-A-Cause, Bid for a Cure, Bid from the Heart, etc.

A component of the program where guests are encouraged to give at a variety of levels. Guests give once, or multiple times, at the levels with which they are most comfortable.

Our goal is 100% giving.

If a guest wishes to give during a certain level, they simply raise their paddle and hold it up until the auctioneer reads off their number.

Placed either before or after the live auction (if there is one) and preceded by preparing the crowd with a powerful and emotional message, such as a brief speaker or video. This should be a pinnacle mission moment in the program with clear and compelling storytelling and engaging presentation.

The timing of the Fund-A-Need should be discussed.

The amounts to ask for should be discussed between the organization and the auctioneer and based on event history, combined with current year information.

Bid Spotters will be critical to **encourage guests to keep their paddle raised until the auctioneer has called off their number.**



FUND-A-NEED

Individuals who are record keeping will record Fund-A-Need gifts. Like the live auction, an audio recording should be kept as well.

We want 100% participation, capturing every gift, and thanking every donor. While the live auction may have a handful of active bidders, and only one winner per item, this is an opportunity for everyone to participate and support the mission.

Speak with your auctioneer about unique ways to enhance this portion of the event.

Discuss with your auctioneer what visuals would be best for this portion (dollar levels, reiterating the cause, running total/thermometer, etc.)

FUND-A-NEED

Questions to ask:

- ▶▶ What program or need is our appeal specifically for?
- ▶▶ What is our financial goal to raise through the appeal?
- ▶▶ How does it compare to previous years?
- ▶▶ What dollar levels are appropriate to reach this goal?
- ▶▶ What would be the best strategy for creating an emotional connection with guests immediately prior to the Fund-A-Need?
- ▶▶ At what time in the program will we schedule the Fund-A-Need?

LOOK AT THE DATA:

Every event is different.

In many cases, the Fund-A-Need is responsible for raising the majority of the funds in the room.

Keep this in mind when developing the run of show, as we want optimal audience attention to align with our optimal fundraising opportunities.

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