

# EAGLECLIFF ASSOCIATES

## CHOOSING YOUR FUNDRAISING EVENTS

### Introduction

How nonprofits decide to undertake a fundraising event is oftentimes a strange and mysterious process. The choice of paper stock for the organizational letterhead or a new brochure will usually get more systematic analysis and review than choosing what fundraising events the organization should do. It's not unusual for a nonprofit to pick a fundraising event because a member of the Board of Directors, or a highly valued volunteer, has a burning desire to see the group hold this particular event. Whether or not the event is the right choice in light of the organization's budgetary needs and available resources to carry it out is not always factored into the decision making process.

This handout is designed to help your organization size up potential opportunities for undertaking fundraising events, and making choices that are in the best interests of the organization's short and long-term needs.

### Determining the Right Purpose

Creative thinkers can find a whole lot of good reasons to hold an event if they are already convinced it should be held regardless. The tough question is determining the number one organizational need that the event must deliver on. Once this priority is agreed upon, the decision making can follow much more easily.

#### **Examples of different purposes:**

- getting more visibility and name recognition for the organization
- meeting a short-term cash flow need
- introducing the organization to new funding audiences
- re-connecting to past supporters
- developing a sustainable revenue source to replace a source that is ending
- training new Board members and/or volunteers who are not experienced at events fundraising
- recognizing and thanking key donors before asking them to renew their support

### Determining the Financial Goal

Hoping the event will raise "as much money as possible" is not exactly the preferred notion for goal setting. The organization needs to set a financial goal that addresses its overall budgetary needs (both the actual dollars needed and timing of when those event revenues arrive). The fundraising plan should provide a yardstick for matching up the proposed event workplan with the organization's monthly revenue projections. Then the event planning committee should be

able to assess whether the plan is the correct one or needs reworking.

Simply put, this part of the assessment is intended to help the event planning committee determine two things:

1. What scale of a fundraiser is needed?

- \$1,000 event?     \$2,500 event?     \$5,000 event?     A miracle?

2. How much time does the event planning committee really have to plan, organize and conduct the event before the organization really has to have the cash in hand?

- 2 weeks?     1 month?     2 months?     3 months?

### Determining Capacities

Now that the purpose, dollar goal and timing of the event are all established, the next set of questions really have to do with assessing what organizational capacities are in place for organizing and conducting the event. There are several key questions to address.

#### **Staffing**

Hopes, expectations and realities of staff assistance on the fundraising event need to be clarified. What level of staff support truly is available to help with the event? Are there potential developments on the horizon that could draw staff away from helping with the event?

#### **Volunteer Leadership**

Every good fundraising event needs a core of volunteers who are at least somewhat experienced fundraisers, dedicated, willing to take on responsibility, and either have the time to do the job -- or will somehow make the time that's needed.

#### **Worker Bee Volunteers**

Most fundraising events have a ton of details and need lots of worker bees to get them all done. What's the nature of your organization's pool of worker bees? How large? How readily accessible?

### Identifying Possible Events

Finally! The fun part.

#### **Special Guests**

The event planning committee should schedule a working session that includes the organization's executive director and/or chief staff fundraiser, and the chair of the organization's fundraising committee. These individuals have the dual roles of being informational resources regarding the annual fundraising plan, availability of staff and so forth, and being the devil's

advocate asking tough questions of the event planning committee to challenge their assumptions -- if needed.

### **Brainstorming**

The event planning committee members then begin brainstorming the events that they are most interested in organizing. Once that list is complete, the initial screening should be based on whether there is someone in the group that's ever played a significant leadership role in organizing each event. Events that lack available, seasoned leadership probably should be deleted from the list of possibilities.

### Matrix Analysis

The next step entails developing a list of "considerations" to be reviewed against each proposed event. Prepare a newsprint sheet with the list, and then prepare individual sheets of newsprint for each proposed event. Fill in the answer for each consideration to the fullest extent possible. What are these "considerations?" Here is a starter list for you.

#### **Event Considerations:**

- ☞ what will be the average amount of revenue per participant?
- ☞ how many participants might attend the event?
- ☞ how much money might the event raise altogether?
- ☞ what priority audiences will be attracted to this event?
- ☞ what will be the financial costs to hold the event?
- ☞ what will be the structure of the event planning committee?
- ☞ what special skills will be needed to make the event a success?
- ☞ how many volunteers altogether will be needed?
- ☞ how much lead time is needed to organize the event?
- ☞ how attractive will the event be to potential new supporters?
- ☞ additional considerations: \_\_\_\_\_?

### Conclusion

The Matrix Analysis doesn't automatically give you the final answer. Instead, it gives you useful information for comparing one event to another, and helps the organization make a more thoughtful and informed choice. Most importantly, make sure that the leading choice is something that the entire event planning committee can enthusiastically get behind. It will make a world of difference.