

HOW TO PLAN A NONPROFIT EVENT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Planning an event is an event in itself. It takes organization and commitment to see an event through from start to finish, but this three-part e-book is designed to prepare your organization on how to effectively plan and execute an event. Learning objectives are as followed:

- How to start the planning process and each necessary step involved.
- Analyzing the most important tasks leading up to the event and when to execute them.
- Effective ways to properly wrap up an event.



PART 1: THE PLANNING PROCESS

The essence behind planning any event is that the planning process happens before — not during. We'll help you plan accordingly so you can spend the day of your event executing your plan instead of creating one.

Planning an event is achievable and successful when the necessary steps are set in place and followed. This may sound like a clinical approach, but anyone who has ever tried planning an event, or even a vacation with a forgetful husband and three small children, will agree that most plans have steps, and they should—and must—be done to achieve your goal. Outlined below are six important steps to take when planning your event, and should occur in this order.

1. SETTING YOUR BUDGET - How much do you actually have to spend on this event?

Before you think about hopping on Pinterest to plan what table arrangements you want, first you'll want to figure out your financial situation. How much money do you have allocated for this shindig? Your budget will determine how much you can actually plan, what your limitations are, and how financially creative you have to be. Ever hear of DIY dollar store crafts? Yes, that's a thing. And remember, the event is supposed to make you money, not replenish the money you spent.

2. BRAINSTORM YOUR IDEAS – The Wish list and Realistic Items.

Now that you know how much money you have, this is the time to start getting quotes for venues, pricing out rentals, decorations, food, handouts, etc. This part is fun because it's the most creative part of the planning process. This is a time to distinguish your "wish list" ideas and your realistic items, such as food, venue, and entertainment. I name these items because they are the most crucial part of any event. For instance, you won't plan an outdoor event at 5 pm in the middle of August in Fresno, California (I dare you to check the weather history). The venue you choose will certainly determine the environment you create for your guests. Your food and entertainment will also determine the mood. Hangry and bored are less likely to donate. Remember that.



This is a time to story board your wish list items—things that may not be a necessity, but you think will illustrate who you are and why your organization needs support. For example, a local nonprofit in Fresno, WAVS, is focused on raising awareness in the Congo. For their events, they like to create an environment that makes guests feel as though they are a part of the culture. Their organization does a great job of illustrating the people they are supporting through works of art, pictures, food, and music. Don't forget to consider wish list items.

3. CREATE A PLAN - Run with your best ideas.

Now that you've brainstormed your ideas, now it's time to actually choose a direction and run with it. Plan what that night will actually look like from start to finish, such as how you will check your guests in, which form of entertainment you are leaning toward, or how you will encourage your donors to give while they are there. Be specific and decisive.

4. FIND YOUR CREW FOR BEFORE AND AFTER THE EVENT - Find people who are reliable.

Events are not a one-person show. You may have planned everything alone up until this point, but now it's time to start relinquishing some control and asking for help. Create a team, crew, squad, elite force, or whatever you choose to call it, and fill it with reliable people who are available and willing to help you. Be sure to get their BEST contact information (not just an email). Don't just think about your crew for the day's set up, but also consider the clean-up crew. Who will stay behind to help you tear it all down?



5. SET YOUR SCHEDULE AND TASKS - Be specific and have a communication plan.

The writer of this eBook has OCD tendencies when it comes to organization, and let me start by saying this step is ALL about organization. Have you ever mapped out a day in your head, and perhaps created a physical checklist with timestamps of when you needed to have things finished? No? Dig deep and find that little planner in you so you can create what I call "The Timeline." If you think this is merely a timeline for the day of your event, you'll be very wrong.

Creating a timeline starts from the day you conceptualize it to the day you send out your last thank-you note. This will circumvent the horrible feeling of doing everything in one day. Set a schedule for when things have to be done, and stick to it. It will mean avoiding last minute plan changes, such as switching the meals for Table 12 because you forgot one of your guests has a food allergy.

EXECUTE YOUR PLAN - Start setting all the details in order.

This step is self-explanatory. It's now time to put the plan you created in step three and the timeline in step five into motion.

Planning an event is not complicated, as long as you have a plan, a crew, and some money. Next up, we'll go into more detail on what needs to happen during the week leading up to your event.

PART 2: THE WEEK OF

In this section, we will focus on the “week of” tasks leading up to your event. This is usually the week when, to quote Shakespeare, the “shi-dith duth hit the fan.” So, it’s important to be on your A game. Remember that plan you worked on? This is a good time to reference it to ensure things happen the way you expect it to, and that your crew is ready to go. Here are six additional steps to take the week prior to the event.

1 FINALIZE SCHEDULE Make sure your timeline is set.

Your original timeline helped you stick to a schedule, but during this week, things can change. You’re human; you may get sick, meetings may come up, and all sorts of things can happen that you didn’t plan for. About a week prior is a good time to make sure you’re still on schedule for deliveries, pick-ups, and last minute event meetings with your crew.

2 CONFIRM DETAILS Follow up with vendors.

When you book your vendors, they typically like to wait until the event gets closer to confirm a delivery time. So be sure to check in with all your vendors that will be completing a service for you and coordinate any deliveries or time of service.

3 COMMUNICATE TASKS Time to blast your crewmembers.

Communicate. Communicate. And communicate some more. Your crew needs to know your plans as thoroughly as you do. Problems will arise when your help doesn’t know what they are doing or what YOU are doing. Check in and make sure they know everything they need to take care of, and what their responsibilities are—this way there is no confusion day-of as to what they were supposed to get done for you. The idea behind this is that you can complete your list of tasks without having to babysit them for theirs.

4 CREATE PLAN B, C, D SCENARIOS Life happens, so be prepared.

People get sick and things will break. A good thing to do is figure out which tasks are likely to have issues and create back up plans in case it doesn’t happen the way you want it to. Let’s say ALL of your flower vases break or better yet, ALL the flowers you ordered look 4 weeks old the morning of your event. Have other arrangements for your centerpieces that can be a quick fix.

5 FLEXIBLE SITUATIONS/MAKING QUICK, DECISIVE DECISIONS

This goes hand-in-hand with step four, and it’s an important step to remember. If your plans aren’t working, it’s time to take a deep breath and make simple decisions that will be easy to accomplish. I once worked an event where my sole job was tying bows on wine bottles. We inevitably ran out of ribbon and had to run to the store to buy more. And of course nothing in the store matched what was already on the bottles.

So what did we do? We made a quick decision to just alternate colors on each table and bought ribbon that was completely different. It wasn’t the plan, and yes, it wasn’t perfect, but when you’re down to the wire, you do what is necessary in order to finish. And guess what! Nobody noticed the difference.

6 PLAN YOUR MEALS FOR DAY OF EVENT It’s a long day and a long process, so you need to keep your body/mind in check.

I laugh at this step because you’d think it was common sense. But it’s not. O the day of your event, you’ll be so busy, your body is in go-mode and might not have time to stop and think, hmm, you should probably feed me. The best option would be to have food delivered to your venue where you are setting up. You will be so thankful you did this; the last thing you’re going to want to do is stop working to pick up food for everyone.

There you have it—a complete list of the most important tasks to take care of the week of the event. Once these are taken care of, it’ll be smooth sailing. Now it’s time to have the event! You’ve done the hard work up to this point, so on that blessed event day, you’ll just be marking checkboxes.

PART 3: AFTER THE EVENT

The bad news is that your job isn't over yet. Once the event is over, there often comes a dark period. The 'I Need A Few Days To Recover' period. We all know those few days can sometimes extend to a few weeks, or for some, a couple months. To keep yourself from falling into this trap, here is a list of things to complete before you can stop and take a breather. You won't regret it.

CLEANINGUP – Remember that clean-up crew you recruited?

If you followed the previous steps, this crew was established well before the event. Sometimes those same people who helped you set up are also the ones to help you tear it down. Often, it's best practice to ask folks to clean who didn't already spend their entire day helping you set up. Be sure to communicate with your clean-up crew a couple days before the event, and even the day of, as a reminder.

SAY THANK YOU – Never forget this step.

Never miss an opportunity to say thank you. It's like throwing money out of a window. Regardless of whether they gave money at your event or not, it's always best practice to thank them for coming. Do it quickly while they are still engaged with your organization, and consider something hand-written. Yes, it's more work, but it's also more personal. Your donors will feel more connected to you if you take the time to hand write their note.



EVALUATE YOUR EVENT – How'd everything go?

Never forget to evaluate your results. Did you raise the money you set out to receive? Was your attendance what you'd hoped? How many people gave at your event verses before or after? Did you spend more than you wanted to? Create a spreadsheet and record all of this. If you plan to do this event annually, it's good to have tangible data to work off of. When you start setting goals for the next event, you'll know what you did the year before and try to outdo it.

CONCLUSION

So, there you have it — a how-to on event planning for your nonprofit. We covered the steps necessary to plan the event, what tasks are essential to accomplish the week prior to an event, and how to properly wrap up your event.

Event planning is usually a task folks think needs to be outsourced to a professional, but it's a task that is easier achievable by you. All you need are some organizational skills and a plan, then you're ready to go!



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