

Organizing a Black-Tie Dinner/Gala

In the ideal fundraising scenario, there would be no costs-everything you need would be donated or sponsored. While this can occur in some cases (usually smaller activities or events), it is likely that you will need to spend money to make money. Such is the case in organizing a black tie dinner. In order to tackle such an event, it will be imperative that you have some seed funding in place, as well as a good staff of volunteers.

Benefits of a Black Tie Dinner/Gala

- If your organization is new, it needs exposure. A great dinner and evening will spark interest in patrons, your potential donors, and sponsors.
- Dinners require more time and investment, but bring in HIGH fundraising dollars.
- Inaugural events spark interest in the community and will lead to annual fundraising events.

Things to Consider when Getting Started

- The financial goal to be reached, and the budget for getting there
 - A goal for the number of attendees
 - Establishment of a ticket price:
 - determined by location and menu
 - generally 2x the cost to your organization
 - have a limited amount of VIP tickets available at a higher cost
- Setting the date, which should be 2-3 months after planning begins

Assessing Costs and Budgeting Expenses

Before you begin planning, a crucial first step will be to determine the amount of money your organization can put up as seed money or what percentage of the ticket sales can go to planning and running the fundraiser. You need to know exactly how much money you are starting with and how much you will need to turn a profit. List both the money you'll spend and the money you'll make.

Some of your expenses may include:

- Site rental, including not only the facility, but maintenance and security personnel as well
 - Food and refreshments, including servers and bartenders
- Promotion and advertising, which may include printing, mailing, and possibly website costs
 - Travel and lodging for special guests
- Equipment such as microphones, speaker, and A/V equipment
 - Items to be sold (including shipping)
 - Telephone expenses, including internal calls between committees as well as calls to prospective donors
- Miscellaneous items, anything from paper clips to raffle prizes

Depending on the event, you will have a variety of ways in which you can raise funds, which may include:

- Selling tickets or admission individually or to groups
 - Selling refreshments
 - Holding a raffle or silent auction
- Selling ads in the program that accompanies the event
- Teaming up with a known goods or service provider or vendor to get a piece of its sales

Look for as many money-making ideas as possible. However, make sure you are providing value and not just hitting people up for more and more donations. People will buy more if they feel that they are receiving quality goods and services.

****It is important to keep in mind that your budget may change as you plan and conduct your fundraiser. Flexibility is important as you work with a budget.**

Items Needed

Hall/Ballroom-To save costs use your resources to obtain a donated room in a hotel, office building, or community building. Check with board members to see if they have any connections.

Menu-Many restaurants are more inclined to donate food and time than cash. Buffet stations are a popular way to incorporate many restaurants.

Beverages-Contact your local beer/wine/liquor distributors for donations and/or deeply discounted beverages (alcoholic and non-alcoholic). Local liquor stores may also be willing to contribute.

Prizes/ Sale Items- Businesses may be willing to contribute to your cause by donating items to be auctioned or raffled off during your event.

Entertainment

Speakers- Local celebrities are a great way to save money. Some options may include comedians, athletes, politicians, executives, and reporters. Keep in mind that big name speakers may charge \$10,000 or more.

Music/Theatre- Local bands, singers, dancers, drama troops, animal experts, etc. If you're hiring a band, remember to leave room for a dance floor!

Volunteers

Your staff of volunteers will be a vital part of planning and executing your black tie dinner/gala.

- Volunteers open doors to donors and corporate sponsors
 - Volunteers lower overhead costs for your organization
 - Volunteers increase the level of awareness for your organization within the community.
- (See 'Fundraising Team' for more information)

Sponsorships

Sponsors are a fundamental part of any dinner or gala. Set a goal for fundraising from sponsorships according to your overall budget. \$10,000 can be a reasonable goal to raise from sponsorships.

It is important to establish various sponsorship levels, so as to include all types of businesses, for example:

Gold-(\$1,000 level) - Includes 2 VIP tickets, name/logo in program, recognition at dinner, in the newsletter, and a hanging banner.

Silver-(\$500 level) - Includes 2 tickets, name/logo in the program, in the newsletter, and on the entrance sign.

Bronze-(\$250 level) - Includes name/logo in the program

Presentation

At some point during your event, you'll want to make a presentation about your organization and its cause. This will help those who are attending or donating to realize the mission that their money is being used to accomplish.

(A sample presentation is available in the additional online resources.)

Silent Auction

A silent auction is a free and simple way to increase fundraising monies.

Have board members, staff, and volunteers solicit local and statewide (to sports teams, businesses, etc.) for in-kind donations of auction items.

Immediately after receiving an item, remember to send a thank you letter (Example provided in additional resources)

Additional Information

It is important to send a Thank You letter to all sponsors, donors, volunteers, and any other individual that has contributed in any way to the event, no matter how small the donation.

Sample letters are available online

Events can be adjusted to fit your needs and goals

Good Luck!!!