

Elements of A Successful Special Event

**by
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1. Understand the Purpose, the Mission, or the Point of the Event

The mistake most often made in special events, especially fundraising events, is that the organization does not understand the reason for having the event beyond some simple concept of raising money or having some sort of ceremony.

Every successful event has a primary purpose or mission, accompanied by goals and objectives, which are the measurements of success. Understanding the purpose/mission of the event leads to good planning and appropriate allocation of resources (time and money).

Even a press conference or policy speech or public ceremony has to have a specific purpose or mission in order to succeed.

2. Select An Appropriate Venue

The venue or type of event and its location is vital to success. There must be a connection between the cause that the organization espouses, the venue selected and the community being served.

This includes everything from the type of event, the space and the layout of the event, as well as the convenience and appropriateness of the location in relation to the community served by the organization.

3. Draft A Written Plan

There must be a written plan, an actual guiding document that is prepared far in advance, when there is no pressure on anyone involved. 90% of all mistakes in special events occur during the planning stage of the event.

Writing out a plan forces logical and open thinking. It allows for ideas and goals and objectives to be tested before they are put into place. A good plan must include: (a) the mission, goals and objectives; (b) a very detailed “script” or matrix of the actual event and each action in it; (c) a detailed map of the event site; a clear organization structure for the event and (d) a budget of revenue and expenses based on the planned activities.

4. Manage the Flow of the Event

A special event, whether it is a speech or a festival or a banquet, is a planned or “scripted” presentation, not unlike a play. It should have a beginning, middle, and end – and these should be thought through with care and consciousness. The sequence of events also affects flow. Attention must be paid to the order in which actions occur. Often simple choices such as when to do what can derail the focus and engagement of the audience.

In addition to the written “script” or event matrix detailing the activities, there should be a sense of engaging and leading the audience or participants through the event. Failure to lead or guide leads to disengagement by the audience and will change the entire tone of an event, and will affect the outcome, including revenue and future attendance.

Elements of A Successful Special Event (Continued)

5. Create An Emotional Moment

There must be a moment at which the event grabs the audience and makes each person attending aware of the cause being supported, the organization's importance in the community and, above all, the importance of the contribution by those attending.

This may be a bit more difficult in the case of a festival than at a banquet, but to the degree that there is a unifying "emotional" moment to connect everyone, the event will have meaning beyond the time and location in which it is presented.

6. Design Your Messages to be Taken from the Event

People attending a special event should enjoy themselves and should enjoy the various aspects of the event such as food, décor and entertainment. But none of these should overshadow the purpose or the mission of the event.

Every attending person should know where his or her contribution has gone and should understand its importance. To this end, it is vital to provide information that helps the audience understand the organization. These may be simple facts or statistics about the work and the impact of the organization and should not be complicated or complex, but should build a confidence in the organization by patrons.

In addition to an emotional moment, as mention above, there should be specific messages delivered through the printed program, table centerpieces, general event décor, or from the dais or podium throughout the event.

7. Plan for Repeatability & Expandability

Unless the event is a one-time grand opening or truly special event that won't be repeated, it should be designed with repeatability and expandability in mind.

This does not mean that an intimate party for a hundred people needs to be thought of as a gala for hundreds of people. It does mean, though, that thinking long term, understanding how it will and may grow over time, is important from the outset.

Revenue should be increased each year until a comfort level is reached. This includes thinking about price increases for attendance or per person spending through an auction or other participation at the event, as well as seeking ways to reduce expenses, often by finding in-kind contributors.