



Chapter 2 The Idea: what makes a good charity event?

Chapter 2 - The Idea: what makes a good charity event?

Before you start

A successful event is all about planning and getting the process right from the get go. This starts with the “idea”. As we demonstrated in the first chapter, there is a whole range of charity event options, but depending on your organisation’s resources and goals, some types of events will work better than others. For example, if you’re looking to raise awareness for a relatively unknown disease, a cake stall or fun fair may be less successful in getting your message across, even though it could be very popular. Meanwhile, if you’re looking primarily to raise funds quickly, a charity event like a benefit gala or a fun run may require more organisation and planning time than putting together a sausage sizzle or just collecting donations with volunteers.

Brainstorming Ideas

If this is a new charity event, brainstorming is a great way to come up with a successful event plan. Many organisers will tell you that establishing a framework is one of the most essential steps before any kind of planning begins. With clear boundaries to work within, relevant and irrelevant charity event ideas are easier to differentiate during brainstorming sessions.

To help with your brainstorming session, consider these helpful suggestions:

- ✓ Talk and bounce ideas off a range of people who work in various industries.
- ✓ Attend both charity and non-charity events to see what others are doing. Use these experiences to get ideas on what works and what wouldn’t work for your organisation.
- ✓ Write down all ideas, regardless of how far-fetched the idea may seem at the time as it could turn out to be highly original and most successful.
- ✓ Organise two different brainstorming sessions, one that purely focuses on coming up with the ideas, and another that addresses why certain ideas will or won’t work. Even if ideas seem completely outrageous, by blocking out scepticism and negativity in the first session, you are encouraging creativity.
- ✓ Consider your resources. You can incorporate your existing networks and contacts (i.e. corporate connections, celebrity names, brand associations) to put together an event that really stands out.

Once you’ve come up with a great idea, you’ll want to do a larger scope of the feasibility and logistics. The clearer you are about what you want, the easier it will be to set up a committee and get down to the nitty gritty.

Helpful Hint: Don't get too bogged down with logistics at this stage! On your own, the amount of work that needs to be done can seem overly daunting and scare you away from putting together a charity event altogether. Remember, you'll be working with a team of committed and dedicated people who will add valuable resources and skills to your pool so you'll have plenty of help with everything you'll need. We'll discuss how to find the right people to help you organise your charity event in the next chapter.

Planning a knock out charity event, eight crucial questions to ask

✓ **Is my event relevant to the cause?**

The more relevant a charity event is to an organisation's values and causes, the better. It is important for the event to reflect the charity's purpose and to communicate a message that the community, corporate partners and supporters can connect with.

For example, The Smith Family recently hosted a discussion panel at the Melbourne Writers Festival that allowed 300 disadvantaged children to hear from prominent Australian authors. Not only did this hopefully inspire the children, The Smith Family also highlighted the importance of developing fundamental literacy skills to the wider community.

✓ **How will I market the event and is the timing right?**

Timing is everything and certain events gain greater community and media attention at particular times of the year. Putting on a charity event at the right time will also naturally help with marketing. For example, The Smith Family's annual Winter Appeal raises awareness and funds to help disadvantaged children weather the harsh season.

✓ **Will my event raise awareness for the cause?**

A good charity event should bring attention to the cause as well as the charity organisation – before, during and after the event has occurred. Not all charity events will get featured in the media, and while you may not have finances for advertising, don't underestimate the power of word-of-mouth or social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to help spread the word.

✓ **How will I plan for and organise the event?**

One of the most obvious traits of a successful charity event is how well it is organised. This includes logistics, marketing, adhering to budget constraints and how smoothly the charity event runs on the day. Leaving things to the last minute is simply unprofessional and diminishes the effectiveness of the charity event itself. You want people talking about the event and the charity organisation for the right reasons. Consider the amount of time you'll need to plan for the event and give yourself some extra leeway for unforeseen hiccups.

✓ **What are my goals and are they clearly defined?**

Whether you want to raise \$500 or \$500,000, a good charity event should have clear objectives. If you set definitive and measurable goals, even if you don't meet them, you'll be able to reassess your expectations and improve on them for your next event.

✓ **What budget will I set and how do I plan to stick to it?**

Set a realistic budget based on your resources and expectations. If your primary objective is to raise funds, you don't want to blow out your costs in such a way that you have nothing left over for the cause. Keep costs down and be strategic about spending.

✓ **Does my event stand out?**

A fun, quirky or unique charity event is a memorable one and you can do this without blowing your budget. A bit of creativity can grab the attention of the community, sponsors and the media as well as help raise the profile of your organisation.

✓ **How am I engaging the community?**

From a fun-filled charity bike ride to a gallery exhibition or a gala night, a successful charity event should engage the wider community, existing partners and supporters – and offer something unique that leaves a long-lasting impact after the event.

Charity event ideas: 5 simple mistakes to avoid

1. Not distinguishing your event from other charity events
2. Not considering the return on investment of running a charity event
3. Being too unrealistic
4. Jumping the gun and not planning strategically
5. Doing a charity event for the sake of it, instead of establishing relevant, long term goals

Case Study: 'Stand Up for The Smith Family' Comedy Charity Event

In a sell-out show in Melbourne's Athenaeum, well-known comedians including Jimeon, Wil Anderson, Judith Lucy and Peter Helliar, were invited to donate their talent to 'Stand Up for The Smith Family'.

The comedy charity event raised more than \$21,000 for disadvantaged children in the *Learning for Life* sponsorship program, and in return, the performers received a framed picture of themselves drawn by the students they helped.

There are several reasons why The Smith Family's comedy charity event was a successful event idea:

- ✓ Increased **awareness** of the charity by associating it with high profile personalities.
- ✓ Engaged and informed the community of The Smith Family's valuable work.
- ✓ **Profitable** enough, after costs, to contribute funds to The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program.
- ✓ Memorable for the audience and participants who received a personal token of appreciation.

Resources:

http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/funding/funding_article.jsp?articleid=1726

<http://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/site/page.cfm?u=146>