



Definitive Guide to Nonprofit Event Planning ►

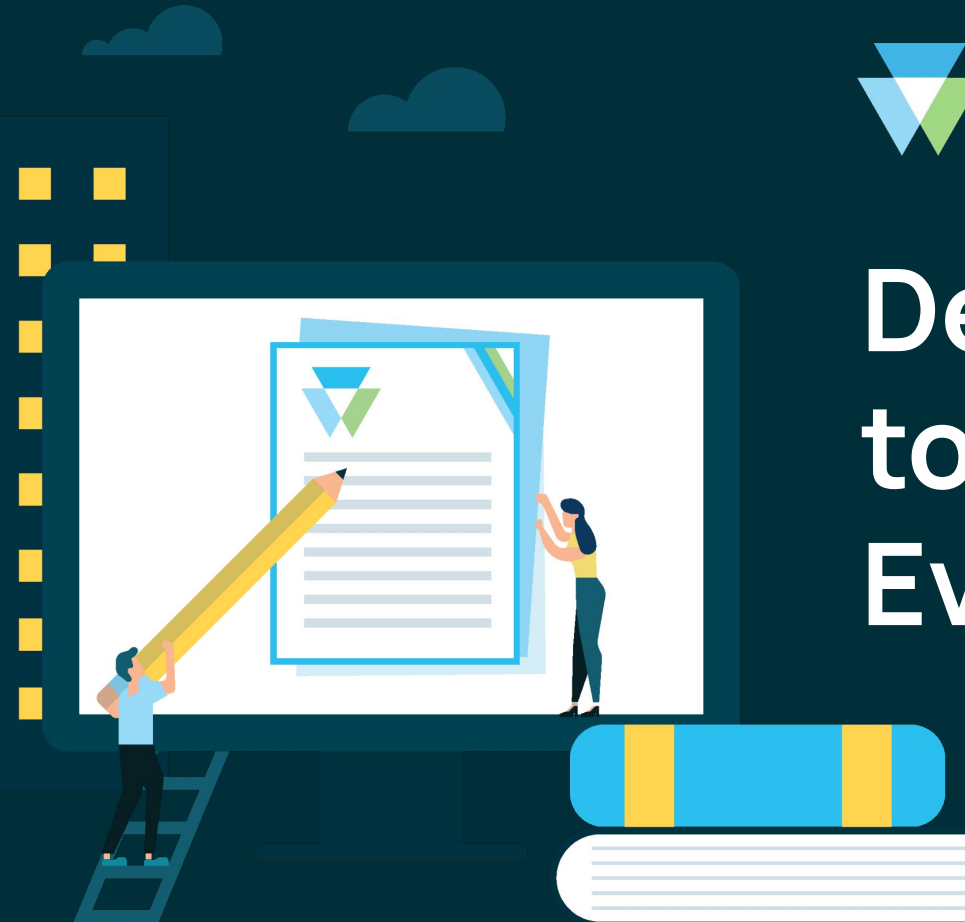


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For organizations that rely on donations to fund their mission and operations, fundraising events are of the utmost importance.

To ensure your event goes off without a hitch and secures an appropriate volume of donations, you can utilize **Spave's Definitive Guide to Nonprofit Event Planning**. In this resource, we'll guide you through event purposes, agendas, sponsors, marketing, timelines, and more. Read on for a comprehensive overview of the basics of nonprofit event planning.

Top Reasons to Have an Ask Event as a Nonprofit ►

Before undertaking the endeavor of planning a nonprofit fundraising event, you need to clearly define your primary goal for the event. This goal should guide your decisions throughout the event planning process. These are some of the most common guiding objectives in nonprofit event planning, but your driving purpose may look different.





EXPOSURE

Fundraising events are a fantastic way for nonprofit organizations to broaden their reach and expose new people to their work. Many nonprofits aim to gain exposure through their events by refreshing their guest lists to invite new people. Local news coverage of a fundraising event is another way to get the word about an organization out to a community. **Exposure is a great strategy to appeal to potential donors, advocates, and volunteers.**



PASSION

As a nonprofit, you rely on the passion your staff, volunteers, donors, and supporters have for your organization's mission. This means that **keeping energy and motivation levels high is critical to the sustainability of the work you do.** Regular fundraising events simultaneously provide your loyal supporters a periodic opportunity to reconnect with what they love about your organization and give your board, staff, and volunteers a chance to reconnect with their passion for the work you all do.



NETWORKING

Often, wealthier donors appreciate opportunities to establish themselves as philanthropists in a public setting. Nonprofit fundraising events are an opportunity for your loyal donors to declare their ongoing support for your work by becoming a member of your multi-year giving society. It's also a great chance for your organization to cultivate these loyal donors in special ways so they can become more involved, introduce others, and continue to give at increasing levels. Over time, as you continue to host these events, you can build a network of supportive and well-connected philanthropists who are invested in your organization and its mission.



FUNDS

Perhaps the most straightforward reason to host a nonprofit fundraising event is the fundraising itself. Although you likely have a consistent trickle of smaller donations coming in every month, you often won't receive large contributions unless you prompt your supporters.



DID YOU KNOW...

An ask event is likely to raise more money in one hour than any other event.

Nonprofit Event Planning Considerations ►

Once you've determined your primary purpose for hosting a fundraiser, you can begin planning with that goal serving as a point of guidance. However, even with your purpose in mind, the planning process can feel overwhelming because of how many details you have to account for. To make things more digestible, let's break it up into The People, The Place, and The Plan.



THE PEOPLE

► GUESTS



Not everyone you invite will be able to attend, so we **recommend inviting 25% more guests than you're realistically planning for**. This will offset the attrition rate and give you a well-attended event. At the same time, remember that if your event is free or low-cost to attend, you may have walk-ins. Plan accordingly so that you can accommodate any unexpected arrivals.

Remember, the more guests you have in attendance at your event, the more pledges and gifts you'll be able to secure. Considering that approximately half of the attendees are likely to give during or shortly following the event, you want to plan for as many attendees as possible. You can enlist volunteers and planning committee members to help build out your guest list. Consider naming volunteers with wide networks as table captains and making them responsible for inviting eight to ten guests each. This will help build a large event by encouraging people to talk about it in the community and consequently building confidence and credibility in the cause.

THE PEOPLE

► SPEAKERS



You have options for what types of speakers you engage for your fundraising event.

If your guest list is primarily comprised of a specific audience, it can be wise to choose a speaker who will appeal to their demographics and interests. You may also choose to have a board member or a loyal volunteer speak about their involvement with the organization and their relationship with its mission.

Regardless of the specifics of your lineup, **it's best to include at least one testimonial speaker, someone who has directly benefited from the work your nonprofit performs.** A testimonial speaker can capture excitement for your mission and evoke an emotional response from your attendees that encourages them to donate more generously.

THE PEOPLE

▶ EMCEES



Your emcees will speak before, between, and after your speakers.

They'll be responsible for moving the event forward and providing updates throughout the event on the amount of money raised. It's best to select emcees who are comfortable speaking in front of crowds and have high energy to keep your attendees engaged.

It's also great if your emcees have **creative ideas to contribute regarding clever and unexpected ways to provide updates on donations** in order to bolster excitement levels.

THE PEOPLE

► VOLUNTEERS



When it comes to volunteers, it's better to have too many rather than too few.

Consider all of the different roles you'll need people to fill, not only during the event itself, but throughout the planning process as well. Try to engage a variety of people with a range of skills and relationships. Some may be regular supporters of your nonprofit and its mission; others may be new to working with your organization.

It's best to have a mix of experienced and new volunteers to **balance reliability and knowledge with networking and exposure.**

THE PEOPLE

▶ PARTNERS AND SPONSORS



When you're planning an ask event, you can invite businesses within your community to sponsor the event.

Having event partners and sponsors is a great way to help offset event costs for things like food, drinks, and entertainment. It's also a great opportunity for cross-promotion and increased exposure. **When approaching potential sponsors, be sure to let them know how it could benefit their business;** you'll likely need to appropriately incentivize them for them to be willing to provide goods and services for free. Let them know how positively it will reflect on them to participate in the event.

Tell them how many guests and influential community members will be in attendance; this could be a great branding and exposure opportunity for their business.

THE PLACE

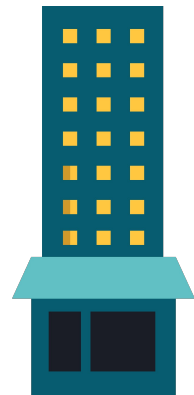
TIME AND DAY

One of the first steps in the fundraiser event planning process is choosing the time and date of your event. Be thoughtful when making your scheduling selections. Think about the time of year, day of the week, time of day, and how all of those will factor into your event attendance.

Don't pick a time of year when it's popular for your donors to travel or when other community events might divert some of your invitees. Do your best to check for conflicts and schedule the event for a day and time when you expect most invitees to be available.

VENUE

Most ask events include a social hour during which attendees can mingle, followed by a sit-down presentation. It's important to select a venue that can accommodate both of these functions. This means accommodation both in terms of flexibility on the part of venue management as well as the allowances of the actual space. Be thoughtful about the size of your venue. You want a large space that can fit a high number of guests, but if you know your guest list will cap out at 150 people, a space that accommodates 400 will be excessive and may give your event the appearance of being poorly attended. To the extent possible, you want to choose a venue that's appealing to invitees in an effort to increase attendance.



THE PLACE



DECOR

Your area or budget may limit the number of event spaces available to you. That's okay! You can get creative with your décor and floor plan to cultivate a unique, engaging, and comfortable event experience. When considering venues and décor, think about if you want to have attendees listen to the presentation at tables or in theater-style seating. This question will help you choose the right venue for your needs and decorate it appropriately.

THE PLAN

But what about the event itself?

What will happen during your fundraiser? How can you orchestrate an event that encourages attendees to donate generously? Let's take a look at the optimal fundraising event structure, schedule, and agenda.

THE AGENDA

Typically, a nonprofit fundraising event is divided into two main parts. The first is the social hour, which generally lasts for around 45 minutes. This is a time for your guests to mingle and get comfortable. It also helps prevent late arrivals from walking in during the presentation. Your social hour doesn't have to last 45 minutes, but this is considered the standard, as less time may be insufficient for guests to arrive, settle in, and chat with their fellow attendees. Conversely, too long of a social hour can engender feelings of frustration within attendees regarding the amount of time they have to wait before the presentation starts. Be thoughtful about how long you schedule for your social hour and set expectations with guests in advance by publicizing the event schedule prior to the day of the fundraiser.

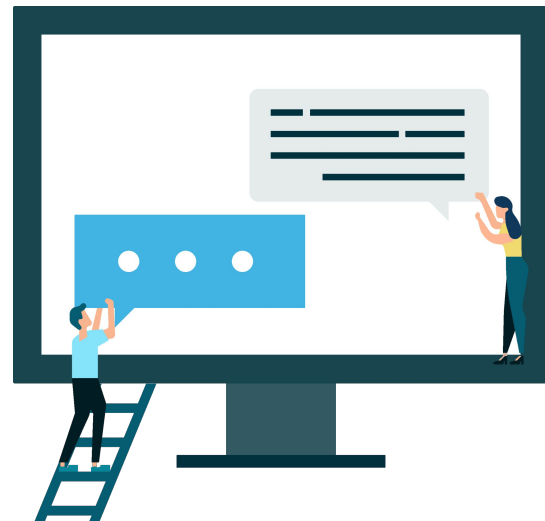
After the social hour, it will be time to transition into the presentation portion of the event. Again, 45 minutes is typically an optimal length of time for this portion of the event to last. If your social hour is shorter or longer than 45 minutes, you may want to adjust the presentation length accordingly. However, 45 minutes is typically enough time to include sufficient substance in the presentation, but not so long that guest interest or attention has the chance to wane. If your presentation will be longer than 45 minutes, consider offering multiple courses to guests during that time.

Once the presentation has concluded, you can transition into another social hour as an after-party or you can end the event. This is up to the discretion of your organization and should be decided based on what makes sense for your nonprofit, the contents of your event, and the sensibilities of your guests.

THE PRESENTATION

As for the contents of the presentation, the specifics will depend on your nonprofit and what's appropriate for your mission. However, we recommend that you start with an introduction from the emcee before transitioning into speeches from your speakers. The introduction should be brief, just to welcome your guests, remind them of the cause they've shown up to support, and let them know how they can give at this event. How long each of your speakers is on stage will depend on how many you have, but if you have two to three speakers, plan on them speaking for about five minutes each.

After the speakers have gotten the guests invested, transition to screening a captivating and emotional video that goes further into your organization's mission, work, and impact. This video should also be approximately five minutes in length and should transition you directly into the main thrust of the presentation, which will be a concise slide deck presentation, lasting up to thirty minutes, given by someone notable in your organization.



Miscellaneous Considerations and Tips

Not all of our nonprofit event planning advice fits neatly into categories. Don't forget to implement these miscellaneous bonus tips from Spave!



- Prepare a large challenge grant in advance to encourage donors to give as part of the effort to match the challenge. You can restrict the matching challenge to the night of the event or extend the challenge period beyond the event, such as for an additional month.
- Give donors options for how they want to give. Explore give by text and online giving station options. It's also good to provide pledge cards at the event and distribute collection boxes throughout the venue to accept check and cash donations.
- To make handling literature at the event simple, consider using lanyards with the pledge cards and event program attached so that donors can follow along with the agenda and make pledges with ease.
- Be sure to livestream and record the presentation portion of the event! Livestreaming the event gives non-local supporters the opportunity to get involved and recording the event provides more opportunities for people to watch it at a later time. This can encourage more donations from virtual attendees and those watching the event recording. It's best to hire a professional to handle live streaming and recording, as this can be tricky to get right.
- Don't be shy about promoting your event, but be smart about which promotional strategies you invest in. Flyers, print ads, radio advertisements, sponsor cross-promotion, and local influencer marketing are just some of the options available to you. Whatever strategies you engage, be sure to post about the event on your website and on social media to notify your community and your core audience.

Your Nonprofit Event Planning Timeline ►

Nonprofit event planning isn't easy and ask events shouldn't be treated as quick donation cash grabs. Orchestrating a fundraiser takes considerable time and effort; in fact, planning for your fundraising event should begin as much as one year in advance.



Nonprofit Event Planning Timeline



PHASE



In the first stage of planning your fundraiser, you need to lay the groundwork for all of the more extensive event planning that's to come. First, select a date for your event. Next, recruit your event planning committee and appoint a committee chairperson. Then, with the help of your committee, research and evaluate your venue choices. Don't forget to consider parking when choosing your event space! Once you've decided on a venue, don't wait to book it. Sign contracts and save copies of them for your organization's records.



Nonprofit Event Planning Timeline



Now that you have a date, a venue, and a planning committee, it's time to create a budget. This should happen at *least* six months in advance of your event. Make sure to account for all possible considerations and expenses, such as food, equipment, travel, speaker fees, and so on. Don't forget to include the venue, even if it's already paid for. Once you know approximately how much it will cost to put on the event, you can set sponsorship and ticket prices.

Once you have a rough budget, you and your planning committee can start making real decisions. Generate an invite list, send out save the dates, select your speakers, contact potential sponsors or partners, create a décor plan, develop a rain plan if your event is outdoors, and form planning subcommittees as needed. Once the basic event details are nailed down, such as location, date, time, and dress code, you can begin posting about the fundraiser on your organization's website and social media profiles.

PHASE



2



Nonprofit Event Planning Timeline



Once you're three to four months out from the date of your event, it's time to begin the next phase of planning. In this stage, you'll begin to get deeper into the details of your event. Speakers should submit their presentation topics for final approval and provide their bio information and speaker photos. Once you have those topics, you can begin generating a draft program for the event. After you've created the program, you can draft an event script that outlines instructions and talking points for your emcees to cover in their openings, speaker introductions, thanks, and closing remarks.

This planning phase is also the time to decide, coordinate, organize, and record details regarding the food and drink menus, audio visual equipment, registration set-up, parking, signage, and so on. This includes confirming the event date and time with all vendors, requesting logos from corporate sponsors for use in event materials, and determining if any specific permits, licenses, or insurance policies will be required for the event.

PHASE



3



Nonprofit Event Planning Timeline



It's critical to conduct an on-site walkthrough of the event space during this stage of the fundraiser planning process. Once you've conducted the walkthrough, you can work with the venue manager to establish security needs for the event and plan accordingly. This is also the natural time to finalize your event decoration plan.

Once you've drafted a program and script, coordinated with vendors and sponsors, planned for security, and finalized layout and décor, you can begin developing your materials. This means designing invitations, programs, posters, tickets, signage, and other related materials. You should also determine who your VIP guests will be and create some kind of system, such as a spreadsheet, for tracking invitations and RSVPs. Once the designs and the guest lists are finalized, you can produce and distribute your invitations and RSVP cards.

PHASE



3

continued



Nonprofit Event Planning Timeline



PHASE



4

Phase four of the nonprofit event planning timeline typically occurs approximately two weeks before the event date. During this stage, you're finalizing details and making sure everyone is on the same page about their roles and responsibilities. This includes coordinating a meeting between any event planning subcommittee chairs to review each of their checklists and develop backup plans as needed.

Once everyone has synced and confirmed the details, all event personnel (such as hosts, greeters, and volunteers) should be briefed on their specific event duties and the schedule for those duties. You should also coordinate with presenters and VIPs regarding photo ops, interviews, and any other media attention.

Nonprofit Event Planning Timeline

PHASE



continued

You should have final registration numbers and a reliable list of attendees at this time. Use them to finalize your seating plan, create place cards, provide a headcount to the caterer, and notify your florist and decorations committee of the number of tables that will need to be decorated. From there, you can conduct a final registration check, generate a final registration list, and create name badges.

Then, all that's left for this phase is collecting speeches from each of your speakers for review and approval, finalizing your event script, and then making copies (both print and online as applicable) of presentation materials such as speeches, videos, visual aids, etc.

Nonprofit Event Planning Timeline

This is the final stage of the nonprofit event planning process. Phase five, when you perform final checks, occurs the day before your event. In this stage, you'll confirm media attendance, get all signage into place, stock registration and media tables, and ensure all promotional items (such as gifts or trophies) are on-site.

It's also highly advisable to conduct a full run-through of the event with your emcees and speakers. This provides you an opportunity to test your AV equipment, make sure your event is poised to operate on schedule, and give everyone the practice they may need to feel confident during the actual event.

Once you've finished your run-through and conducted all your checks, congratulations!

All that's left is the event itself—enjoy it!

PHASE



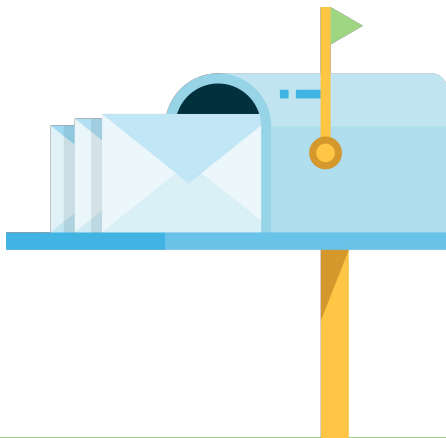
Your Nonprofit Event Planning Timeline Checklist ►

If that's a lot to wrap your head around, don't worry. We've distilled our event planning process and timeline tips into an easy-to-manage worksheet and checklist. Take a look!



▶ PHASE 1: One Year Until Event

- ☐ Determine your event purpose
- ☐ Select your desired event date and time
- ☐ Recruit an event planning committee
 - Appoint a committee chairperson
- ☐ Choose and book your venue



▶ PHASE 2: Six Months Until Event

- ☐ Outline your budget
- ☐ Set sponsorship and ticket prices (if applicable)
- ☐ Generate an invite list
- ☐ Send out Save The Dates
- ☐ Select your speakers
- ☐ Contact potential sponsors and partners
- ☐ Create a decor plan
- ☐ Develop a rain plan (if applicable)
- ☐ Form subcommittees as needed



PHASE 3: Four Months Until Event

- ☐ Collect and approve/deny presentation topic proposals from speakers
- ☐ Solicit speaker photos and bios
- ☐ Generate a draft of the event program
- ☐ Generate a draft of the event script
- ☐ Plan the food and drink menus
- ☐ Coordinate AV equipment and book live streaming services
- ☐ Plan registration, parking, and signage details
- ☐ Confirm event details with all vendors
- ☐ Request company logos from partners and sponsors
- ☐ Assess the need for permits, licenses, or insurance and apply if needed
- ☐ Conduct an on-site walkthrough
- ☐ Develop a security plan
- ☐ Finalize event decoration and layout plans
- ☐ Design event materials
 - Invitation
 - Programs
 - Posters
 - Tickets
 - Signage
 - Presentation materials
- ☐ Designate VIP guests
- ☐ Create an invitation and RSVP tracking spreadsheet
- ☐ Distribute invitations and RSVP cards



PHASE 4: Two Weeks Until Event

- ☐ Host a meeting of planning committee members and/or subcommittee chairs
- ☐ Develop backup plans as needed
- ☐ Brief event personnel on their duties and schedules
 - Hosts
 - Greeters
 - Volunteers
 - Emcees
 - Speakers
 - VIPs
- ☐ Finalize seating plan
- ☐ Create place cards
- ☐ Submit a headcount to your caterer
- ☐ Submit registration numbers to florist/decorators
- ☐ Conduct a final registration check and generate a final registration list
- ☐ Create name badges
- ☐ Perform a final speech review and approval
- ☐ Finalize event script
- ☐ Make copies of all presentation materials (print and online)

► PHASE 5: One Day Until Event

- ☐ Confirm media attendance
- ☐ Put signage in place
- ☐ Stock registration and media tables with supplies
- ☐ Ensure promotional items are on-site
- ☐ Conduct event practice run
- ☐ Test live streaming, AV equipment, and lighting

