

A man and a woman are shown from the chest up, looking upwards and cheering with open mouths. The woman on the left is holding a black smartphone. The man on the right has a beard and is wearing a plaid shirt. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

10 SECRETS FOR A SUCCESSFUL AUCTION

Whether you're stepping up to run a charity auction for the first time or you're a veteran of the auction world, this guide should help you construct a plan for getting the job done right! Even experienced auction chairs can often use a refresher, as there's always new things to try and different tactics to experiment with in order to achieve greater success. The key is to make a plan and stick to it.

Having helped thousands of organizations run nearly 40,000 auctions, we've seen it all – the good, the bad, and the just plain ugly. This list of 10 Secrets is the collected wisdom of all those auctions. The real secret isn't in any one of these steps - it's in making sure you do them all. The entire process will run more smoothly, feel less stressful, and yield a better, high-value catalog for your charity's auction.

Let's dive in!

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1. Have an Item Brainstorming Session

Not sure where to start with your auction? Just start at the beginning: coming up with ideas for items to auction off. And the best way to start is with a brainstorming session - it's fun, it builds team spirit, and it generates a lot of great ideas! If your organization has run an auction in the past, review what worked and what didn't. What sold best? What raised the most money? What got the most bids or generated the most buzz, even if it wasn't the highest dollar value item?

Don't forget to brainstorm some unique items-like exclusive or once in a lifetime event tickets. One of the things the thousands of bidders on BiddingForGood by FrontStream™ tell us is that they love the one-of-a-kind items they find in our auctions.

Most nonprofits are great at coming up with a standard list of items each year, but new perspectives can help you think outside your normal box. Invite your volunteer committee, program staff and administrative staff to your brainstorming sessions. They may have ideas and connections that surprise you! Be sure to bring in people from different areas of your nonprofit to provide feedback and item ideas - you could get a perspective from demographics you wouldn't expect!



2. Make an Item Plan

Now that you've got your ideal wish list of items, it's time to delegate. You shouldn't be making all the asks yourself. If a member of your volunteer committee has a great idea for a new item at your brainstorming session, invite him or her to do some research and make some calls. Make sure that each item or package has a point person assigned to it. If a committee member complains that they don't have any connections or any ideas for new items, task them with confirming items you've had donated in the past. Recommitting previously donated items is a pretty easy job and a great way for a new committee member to get their feet wet in the procurement process.

Next up, establish deadlines for contacting and following up with donors. Having deadlines to report on gives the whole committee clarity about expectations. It also gives you the opportunity to periodically review your lists or tactics and take corrective action where necessary.

Finally, assign tasks like writing item descriptions or uploading items into your online auction site for review. It may feel like you need to wait until you have every single piece of information before entering an item, but even entering incomplete information is helpful. That way you can keep track of what you have, what you know, and what information you still need to gather. It's never too early to get started on the production side of things- even if you still have months to go until your event.

It's best to do these things as you receive items and commitments. Remember to make sure that someone on your team is writing item descriptions and entering all the information into an online auction management tool like Panorama by FrontStream™ as items are secured.

3. Train Your Volunteers to Secure Items

Before you send out your army of volunteers, make sure they're trained. If you have a veteran committee member, ask them to do a 30-minute training session for new team members. This can be done at the office or on a conference call. People tend to be more receptive to training coming from a peer and a veteran committee member can go over all their tips and tricks for making the procurement process simple.

The most important things to do in your volunteer training are:

- Acknowledge that asking for donations can be awkward but emphasize that most people want to help if they can.
 - Explain why donors give – connect the work they're doing to the mission of your organization
 - Distribute talking points that your committee can use when making their asks. Make sure to include:
 - Recap your mission, event goal and the impact money raised at this event will make
 - Benefits donor will receive when they donate- including visibility at the event, listing on your website, posts on social media and more.
- *The profile of your supporters - influential, large, local, passionate, etc.*
- *How much you are marketing the auction - online, offline and at the event*
- *Never forget to say "thank you" for your time regardless of the outcome*

Remember that many people join volunteer committees to network and meet new people. Make sure there's time for your team to get to know each other and learn more about your organization.



4. Set Specific Goals

Most fundraising events have more than one goal. In addition to your revenue goals, you may be focused on engaging new supporters, fostering deeper relationships with current donors, or raising awareness for your cause in your community.

Be sure to connect all your goals back to your mission. If your goal is \$100,000 and that will send forty kids to summer camp, be sure to mention that. Connecting seemingly arbitrary revenue goals to a programmatic activities helps to make the number feel more real.

Make sure all of your stakeholders know exactly what the goals are, including your volunteers. Just as your organization has a mission and a vision, so should your events.

Start every committee meeting or check in call with a summary of your goals and an update on your progress. Get as specific as you possibly can in setting your goal for your event. Next, break down your revenue by categories and assign goals for each of these sources:

- Ticket sales
- Sponsorship
- Silent and live auctions
- Raffles and revenue enhancers (like a wine pull)
- And most importantly, your mission ask

Ideally every single person that attends your event will make some sort of revenue contribution, so make sure you have plenty of opportunities for attendees to give at higher and lower levels. When you're looking at your auction goals, remember that you should have a range of values for your packages- a good range is \$100-\$1,000 for silent items and anything that is above that value or you know will generate a lot of excitement should go into the live auction.



5. Make a Contingency Plan

With a walk, run, or ride, most revenue is raised before the event. So even if the event gets canceled, you're likely to meet your goals. Special events with auctions raise a huge portion of the funds at the event- so you need to have a back-up plan for everything.

6. Have a Clear Registration Process

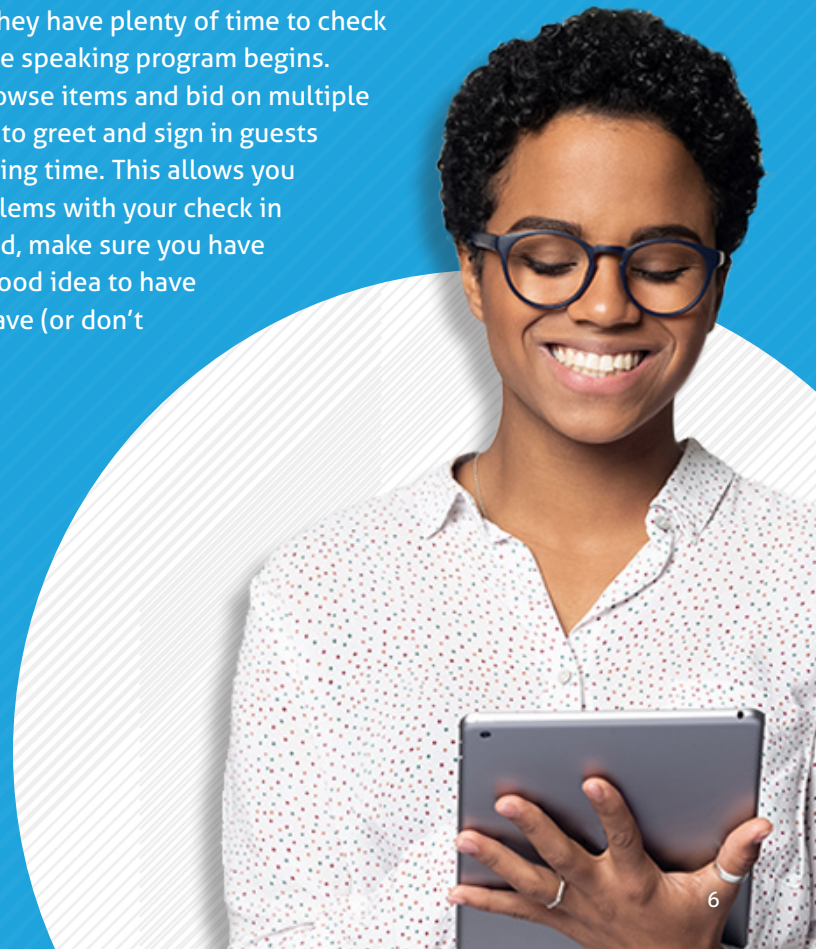
For live auctions, registration is your first chance to ensure your guests have a seamless and fun night. Designate specific volunteers and staff to work at registration and do a training and run-through ahead of time. If you're using laptops, tablets, credit card scanners, or any other technology other than paper and pen, be sure that someone checks that everything is charged and in working order before your event starts. Designate someone you trust to run registration. This person should understand every aspect of the process and be able to run things without you there to help. They should serve as a "problem-solver" and be available to help volunteers if they get stuck during the check in process.

Set up registration in a place that every attendee must pass and have signage that helps people navigate from the parking lot or venue entrance to registration.

Make sure you have an attendee list for every volunteer to reference that lists important details like the guest's table number and bidder number. Collect as much information from your guests ahead of the event as possible so that you don't end up with a backup at registration.

Communicate a time for registration to your guests so that they have plenty of time to check in, find their tables and bid on silent auction items before the speaking program begins. Even if you're using mobile bidding, people need time to browse items and bid on multiple items. Most importantly- have registration volunteers ready to greet and sign in guests at least 15-20 minutes before your official registration opening time. This allows you to check in the early birds and iron out any last-minute problems with your check in process. Finally, if people are using their mobile device to bid, make sure you have a volunteer available to help people get started. It's also a good idea to have a few stations set up for people to place bids if they don't have (or don't want to use) a mobile device.

Don't let your beautiful evening get off to a rough start by failing to plan for a smooth registration process!



7. Solicit Quality Sponsors

Remember that event sponsorship is a huge revenue opportunity. Even if your event is small, see if you have supporters that are willing to purchase a table (10 tickets) or make a flat donation to the event. Remind potential sponsors of both the soft and hard value of their sponsorship: affiliation with a great cause and quantifiable online marketing opportunities, supported by post-auction data.

Be sure that you set standard sponsorship levels where the benefits increase based on the amount donated. Calculate the value of the goods and services the sponsor will receive so they know how much of their donation is tax deductible. Create a list of sponsorship levels that outline the benefits and value of the sponsorships. Also think about what you are going to call these levels:

- Keep it simple: Platinum, Gold, Silver
- Link your sponsorship levels to your mission, for example, an animal welfare charity might use: Premiere Pups and First-Class Felines, Top Dogs and Cool Cats, Classy Cats and Canines
- Identify specific areas of the event that can be sponsored - have a coat check sponsor, registration sponsor, and photo booth sponsor.

Ensure that you have a range of sponsorship levels including an entry-level sponsorship. If appropriate, designate a title or event sponsorship level- where one sponsor can co-brand the event with you. Don't forget about your in-kind sponsors- if someone donates a very valuable auction item or food or beverage for the event, be sure to recognize them with your other sponsors.

8. Pick the Right Length

If you're going the online auction route, the optimal auction length is 7 to 10 days. Running for less than seven days means that there's not enough time to benefit from word-of-mouth, and running for longer than ten days can result in loss of bidder interest. Bidders will not bid if they have to wait long to find out if they won an item!

When it comes to the optimal open time for your auction, we've found that Mondays between 8 and 9 AM local time is the most successful. As for the optimal close time, it's typically Thursdays or Sundays between 8 and 10 PM local time. We don't recommend closing your auction on a Friday or Saturday (live events with mobile bidding are an exception). Here's how the typical auction cycle works:

- There's a spike in bidding on the first day or two after the auction opens
- There is minimal bidding in the middle. This can be mitigated by adding new items periodically and emailing your community
- Bidding significantly increases during the last 2 days of the auction
- We've found that 40% of total bidding happens during the final 48 hours of the auction!

If you're hosting an in-person event with mobile bidding, expect a large spike in bidding in the last ten minutes. Be sure to give your donors a warning of when the auction is about to close (either online or in person) so they have time to get one last bid in!



9. Promote with Email and Social Media

Speaking of promotion and word-of-mouth, whether your auction is in person or online, you're going to want to spread the word far and wide using social media and email. Set up a quick email campaign to your supporters that gives them key event details and remind them again as the auction gets closer. Use these emails to highlight some of the cool items you're going to have available for bidding, or to keep your audience updated on event details.

If you're active on social media, post about your auction on all your accounts. Post links to interesting auction items, post behind the scenes photos of the event and share how much money you've raised.

10. Keep an Eye on the Little Things

When you ignore the little things, they can become big things. It's great that you've got your master plan in place for the bidding process, hyping up your auction, gathering your sponsors and other parts of your event, but there's so many other small details that need to be taken care of as well.

For instance, what's the parking plan? Valet? Is there a parking lot at the venue? Did you arrange for a free coat check? Also, not to be indelicate, but whatever you do, make sure the restrooms stay spotlessly clean throughout the evening. Make your venue take a pledge to do that for you! As for online auctions, be sure to make sure all your item descriptions are up to date, and that you've got nice images to go with the listings. Small touches like this can make your items look even more appealing to prospective bidders!

Bonus!

To wrap up, our final secret should be obvious, but it's one of the most important parts of fundraising. Thank every single person that supports your event. From your bidders to your donors to your volunteers and staff, everyone works together to make the auction a success. Don't forget to acknowledge everyone's efforts and contributions, and know that you've put on the best charity auction you possibly could!

