How to organise a charity ball or dinner

Planning the event

- Choose a date that doesn't clash with any special event which your guests are likely to attend or an important sporting event they might not want to miss. You also need to think about when you will be selling tickets; for example it's best not to try and sell tickets over the summer when people are likely to be away on holiday.
- Holding your ball on a weeknight rather than over the weekend will save you money and you're more likely to negotiate a charity rate (or even get the venue donated for free).
- Get together a team of trusted volunteers to form an event committee. Delegate key tasks, for example sourcing auction or raffle prizes, publicity or organising the event decorations. Ask everyone to ask their friends, family and business contacts to buy tickets.
- Local press are often interested from hearing from local fundraisers about what they are doing. Check out our website for more tips on approaching the press and a template press release.
- Allow yourself plenty of time to organise the event and put together a time plan for the whole event (we've included an example below):

Nine months before:
- Recruit event committee
- Confirm format, budget and how you're going to raise money
- Set up event bank account (if necessary)
- Confirm date and venue
- Develop sponsorship proposal and start making approaches

Six months before:
- Start making prize approaches

Three months before:
- Send out Save the Date (optional)

Two months before:
- Send out invitations
- Create and print programme and other materials for the night
- Book any entertainment for the night

One month before:
- Confirm details with venue (menu etc)
- Prepare schedule for the event
- Recruit volunteers to help at the event

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Two weeks before:

- Send out tickets and final information (including auction list if appropriate)
- Confirm final numbers and table plan with venue

After:

- Write and thank everyone with a final fundraising total

Make more and spend less

- Try to get as much donated as possible. If you can't get it free ask for a charity rate.
- Set your ticket price based on how much the event is going to cost and what you think guests will be prepared to pay. Aim to more than cover your costs through ticket sales and/or sponsorship. That way everything you raise on the night will come directly to the charity.
- When you send out your invitations explaining us and encourage your guests to give generously!
- Keep it simple - there are lots of ways you can raise money on the night but don't overload your guests by trying to do everything!

Here are some tried and tested fundraising ideas:

Heads and Tails

- This is a great game that everyone can play and works well when you have guests seated at dinner. You'll need a Master of Ceremonies (or host of the party) to tell people what to do and when, but it's really simple and a great ice breaker.
- Everyone pays an agreed fee to play (we suggest £5, £10 or £20) and puts this into an envelope. Everyone stands up and they are asked to choose 'heads' (putting their hands on their head) or 'tails' (putting their hands on their bottom).
- A coin is tossed and the result announced. All those who lose sit down and this continues until you are left with a winner.

Raffle

A raffle can be an easy way to get lots of your guests involved and raise money on the evening. You'll need to source a number of exciting prizes which are guaranteed to get people's interest when you ask them to buy tickets. (There are some legal guidelines around this form of fundraising so check out the advice at the bottom of this guide).

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Tree of Life

- Everyone really is a winner with this game. You will need a large number of prizes for this to work but it's a great way to raise money and get all your guests involved.
- Guests buy an envelope for a set price and every envelope wins a prize. There's no draw for prizes at the end of the night and everyone knows immediately what they've won.
- Either set a fixed ticket price for all prizes or, if you've got lots of prizes of very different values, you could tier your ticket price. If you decided to do this then don't set more than three levels or it will start to get really complicated.

Auction

- If you have the right prizes and audience you could consider holding an auction.
- Keep it short – you're better to limit yourself to six really good lots to ensure that you hold your guests' attention.
- Send a list of auction prizes (together with terms and conditions) out with the final information to your guests. That way they'll come knowing what they want to bid on.
- Make sure your auctioneer is fully briefed on each of the prizes including any terms and conditions, value (to make sure it doesn't go for too little) and who they need to thank.
- You'll need volunteer spotters to keep track of who's got the latest bid and to ensure that you get their information and payment once they've outbid everyone else.
- For prizes like signed football shirts display them in a prominent place during the event and get a volunteer to walk them around during the bidding.

On the day and at the event

- Make sure your volunteers know exactly what you need them to do and also the answers to key questions that guests might ask them (like where the nearest toilets are).
- Keep a list of key contacts with you so you know who to contact with any problems.
- Keep track of your fundraising and announce a final total at the end of the event.
- Enjoy it!

After the event

- Thank everyone who's helped with the event (include a final total and how their donation will make a difference).
- Send a press release with a photo and final total to any local papers or newsletters.
- Send in your money – download a donations return form or pay your donation in online.

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The legal stuff

Handling money: Keep a record of any expenses.

These should be costs for the day itself such as printing or venue hire. Claiming costs for volunteer time or effort are not legitimate expenses.

Consider what money you need to have available on the night (e.g. a float for raffle, tree of life etc) and how you will manage this.

Ask the venue if they have a safe you can use and make regular sweeps to ensure that volunteers are not holding on to a lot of money all night. It'll also help you keep track of your fundraising. Always have two people present when counting money.

Gift Aid: If your guests are making donations ask them if they are happy to sign a gift aid declaration. (Please note that we cannot claim gift aid on ticket sales, raffle ticket sales or anything other than a straight donation)

Raffles: It's important that you follow these guidelines when running a raffle:
- Ticket sales and announcement of winners must be held during the event.
- No more than £500 can be spent buying prizes and no cash prizes can be given.
- All tickets must be sold at the same price with no discounts for bulk buys.
- No tickets should be brought or sold by children under the age of 16.

Insurance: Check whether your venue already has this. Unfortunately Southampton Hospital Charity does not provide this for fundraisers' events.

Health and safety: It is good practise to put together a risk assessment to identify anything which could potentially cause any harm on the day, and think about solutions, for example having someone there on the day that has first aid training. Ask your local council for advice or check out the Health and Safety Executive's website.

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