

# *Missionizing Your Special Events*

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Events, special or otherwise, have become a staple of the fundraising diet of every nonprofit organization. From bake sales to black tie galas, we all know what to expect when we show up: get out your checkbook and—in most cases—have fun! There's nothing wrong with that.

Somewhere along the line, good people who love the work being done by their favorite organizations got sidetracked into the entertainment business. They figured that, rather than having to talk to people about the amazing and meaningful work of their organization, if they could just entertain people—give them some good, honest fun or a product in exchange for their money—they'd have a winning fundraising event. The prevailing thinking was that people won't go for the serious stuff—they just want to have a nice night out, play some golf, and go home happy. So why get serious when we can just entertain people and get them to give money?

At Benevon, we say those days are over. While those events may raise short-term money—in many cases a lot of money—they generally are not designed to grow and develop the base of people who truly support the work of the organization. The value proposition is: we will give you an enjoyable evening, and in exchange, you will give us your money.

Think of the last fundraising event you attended. How did you get invited? Why did you say yes? How much did it cost you—when you add in the babysitter, the parking, and the new outfit you bought to look great there? What did you get in return? Did you have fun there? Would you have preferred to write the group a check and stay home?

Did you learn anything memorable about the group putting on the event? The day after the event, could you have told someone the name of the group that benefited from your money and one inspiring thing about their work?

If you are a volunteer or on the board or staff of the nonprofit group that put on the event, was it really worth it? What did it build in the way of long-term support? Did you resent the amount of effort it took? At any point in the process, did you find yourself thinking, "There must be a better way than this to raise money"?

We have found, having worked with teams of board members, staff, and volunteers from more than 3,000 nonprofit organizations over the past twelve years, that it is time for that value proposition to change. People are hungry for more than a nice chicken dinner. If they are coming to an event anyway, why not educate and inspire them, so that in exchange for their ticket price, they can walk away with an idea of what their money might have helped your group accomplish—and a way for them to become more involved should they choose to do so?

The Benevon Model provides a template by which every nonprofit can convert its seemingly haphazard stream of labor-intensive events into a tightly crafted "System of Events." Over time, this system educates and inspires event guests and builds long-term relationships with major donors. As the organizations become more and more self-sustaining in their funding, they find that they are able to phase out many of their events.

And for groups that have very few special events, the model provides a blueprint for how to start from scratch and do it right—with as few events as possible!

In the chapters that follow, you will discover a new systematic approach for creating long-term sustainable funding for your organization from individual donors: the source of over 80% of the charitable funds contributed to nonprofits in America today.

Then you will learn to customize the ideal System of Events for your group. Be forewarned: this may be uncomfortable, as it will include how to strategically modify the program and format of each event, how to rotate the time of year of the event, how to substitute the event with a more program-related event, or how to eliminate an event altogether. Furthermore, in between each event, you will need to do a great deal of follow-up with guests.

This book is designed to restore the most important element in every event you ever put on from here on out— your organization's mission! And, in the process, you will learn to systematically connect with those special event guests to convert them into long-term supporters.

Ultimately, this book has one simple message: if your event is not, first and foremost, educating people about the real work of your organization in such a powerful way that they feel compelled to either become more involved with your organization or tell others about your work (or both), then you should not be having that event.

Conversely, **if you take the time to carefully craft each event with a particular objective in mind, you can design a System of Events**, and, over time, all of your events will integrate with one another to build long-term supporters who love your work and will engage others, not merely to sell a ticket or bring in short-term cash, but because they truly believe in the mission of your organization.