



Ask Sara....

...about encouraging auction participation

Question: How can an auction committee change the culture so that a higher percentage of folks get involved?

Sara: *The easy answer is "Give them what they want!" But what "they" want varies depending on who the "they" are...*

Bidders/Attendees:

Encourage attendance at the event by providing a party that will be irresistible to everyone.

- *Have good food, whether catered or homemade. Consider small plates rather than full meals to increase time at the auction tables.*
- *Make sure you don't have long lines; arrange several smaller serving tables rather than one long buffet.*
- *If your organization is OK with it, serve beer and wine. If not, have a festive punch or sparkling cider to increase the party atmosphere.*
- *Charge just the right amount. A charge encourages attendance—once a ticket is bought, last minute conflicts will be less likely to interfere. But make the price low enough so that everyone can afford it; a good rule of thumb is to charge enough to cover the food and beverage cost—no more.*
- *Solicit donations in every price range so that everyone who attends can afford to purchase at least one thing. Make sure you have a few "buy it now" sign-up items for \$5 to \$15 each.*
- *If you're including children, design activities that will not only keep them busy but happy. Be sure that the food they're offered is kid-centered, even if you have to order pizzas!*

Donors:

Potential donors will participate for different reasons, depending on whether they're members of your organization or outside business donors:

- *Internal donors want to know that the items they donate are appreciated. Don't make major changes in the way the donation is described and priced without talking to the donor first. For example, if you know a donation will not sell for the price listed by the donor, let them know that you'll start the bidding low but give it plenty of room to grow. Always send thank-you letters within a week or two after the auction.*
- *Potential business donors will be looking for a marketing return for donated items. Be sure to list donating businesses in your catalog, and display business cards, brochures, etc. next to the bid sheet. As with all donors, be sure to send a thank-you letter after the auction is over.*

Volunteers:

There's nothing worse than working for someone who doesn't know what they want you to do! Encourage volunteers by being organized (see the article in this newsletter about Volunteer Management).

- *Ask people to perform tasks that are within their skillset and interests.*
- *Be sure that the job you're offering is well-defined and limited in scope. Example: Don't say "Get some business donations;" assign a person to help with business donations in a specific area of the city.*
- *Give your volunteers the tools they need to do their job well, whether it's more help, computer access, phone lists, etc.*
- *Thank them—over and over!*

Everybody:

Communicate, communicate, communicate! Use every possible method of letting potential donors and attendees know what's going on.

- *List some of the best items in your newsletter (not just the most expensive—the best!).*
- *Make announcements fun and amusing. If possible, put on skits to let people know how much fun the event is going to be.*
- *Have an auction table available at church services or in the lobby of your building staffed by enthusiastic volunteers ready to explain all facets of the auction.*

You may not get everyone involved the first year, but work hard to build a reputation as a "not to be missed" event with communication after the event. Brag a little about how much fun it was, how much money you made, how much fun it was to work on the auction.

Thanks to Tom from Colorado Springs for the question. Have a question you'd like answered? Email Sara at sara@communityauctionservices.com