



Putting the “Community” in Community Auctions: Volunteer Management

Auctions can help your nonprofit make money—that’s a given. But you have options when it comes to raising money—send out letters or emails asking for donations, hold a raffle, sell candy bars (or gift wrap or cookies). Why fundraise with an auction, which requires a fair amount of work to bring off? One of the biggest reasons is that an auction can help build your community—not only financially, but in terms of making your members more involved and dedicated.

A “community building” goal for your auction can affect how you run your auction in many ways. This month’s issue will discuss how you manage volunteers in a community-building manner. Future issues will discuss Event Planning, Donation Procurement, Data Systems and Money Matters.

The first commandment of community auctions:

Do not burn out thy volunteers, that their service may be long and satisfying.

A load carried by many is a load not only carried more easily, but not dropped! Let’s look at how you can organize your volunteers in a community-friendly manner.

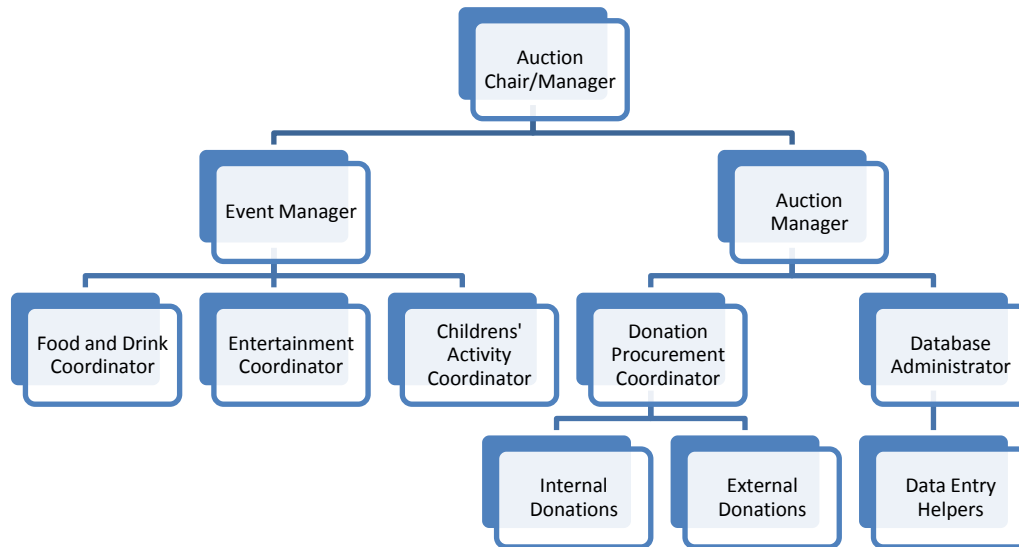
Auction Chair/Manager

The auction chair or manager is often whoever volunteers for the job! But if you know your organization’s members well, it doesn’t hurt to ask the person you believe will do the job best. Once you’ve identified a couple of potential candidates, don’t wait for them to offer—ask if they’re willing to help. So...what should you look for?

- Of course it’s a plus if the person has experience working for or running auctions, but this is not necessary. Experience running *anything* will serve you well.
- The most important skill is the ability to get others to do things, and the willingness to delegate rather than trying to do everything.
- You need a communicator—a good listener, willing to consider the ideas of others, but also able to make decisions when the time is right. A thick skin is an advisable attribute!
- Obviously, the person has to have the time to do the job. Someone with a full-time job and a few little kids might not be your best candidate, but ask anyway if she or he meets all other criteria. There might be a willing spouse or parent in the background!

Auction Committee

Before creating your committee you need to determine what tasks need to be accomplished; then you can set about creating a committee hierarchy to accomplish them. Here's a possible organizational chart for a medium- to large-sized auction committee. The hierarchy is the same for a small auction—the task divisions are the same. However, individual volunteers may take on more than role.



Meetings...and more meetings...

Start early and end late! Your first organizational meeting should take place a couple of months before you think it should. A medium sized auction should start planning at least six months in advance, longer if you are soliciting donations from national companies.

Your first meetings can be a month apart, but start brainstorming right away. Plan the date, theme, size, goals, venue, etc. in general terms. Assign committee heads and empower them to find more volunteers. If you're using a data system (like <http://communityauctionservices.com/products>) this is the time to arrange for it and learn how to use it.

Things will go wrong, so meeting every couple of weeks will give you the space to discuss solutions and ways that the various committees can help each other. As the auction approaches, the auction chair should be checking in frequently between meetings to make sure that all tasks have been accomplished.

Finally, after the auction, it's important to have a wrap-up meeting (which can be a fun social event!) where everyone who worked on the auction can meet to celebrate the success of the auction. Just as important, have a discussion about what worked and what can be improved while it's still fresh in everyone's mind.

Then, start talking about next year's auction and how fun it will be to work on it together!