



Community
auction services
Building community through fundraising.



Maximizing Auction Donations

It's not an auction if you don't have things to sell—that much is obvious. But how can you improve the number and quality of the donations you solicit?

First, think outside the box. If your organization generally has a “service auction” with items donated primarily by members, explore the idea of increasing outside solicitations. If you generally solicit only external donations, consider asking your members for donations, especially event items. The most successful auctions consist of donations from both sources.



Internal Donations

Those from within your organization usually donate because they see your cause as worthwhile and want to help. But many organizations fall into the trap of saying “we're ready to receive donations” and leave it at that. Motivated donors won't need more, but many people simply can't think of anything to donate, or think that what they have to offer will not be valued. You can overcome this:

- Give potential donors some ideas:
 - Publish an “Auction FAQ” in your newsletter with lists of items you'd like to see donated. Do entertainment events sell well? Ask for more donations of that type.
 - Arrange for entertaining skits to advertise the need for donations during or after church services or meetings. Take a lesson from the Super Bowl advertisers: people get your message better when they laugh!
 - Ask potential bidders what they would be most likely to bid on. One of our auction chairs had the idea of having a “donation tree” at the lobby auction table, where potential bidders would write a desired item on a “leaf” and tape it to the tree. Those who could not think of anything to donate could pick a leaf and turn it into a donation.
- Ask for specific types of donations from specific groups. For example:
 - If you want to encourage more families to participate, visit a parents' meeting and ask for low-cost, family-oriented donations, such as pool parties and ice cream socials.
 - Ask committees and your governing board to donate items for theme baskets, such as movie nights, pet care, etc. Such groups might also sponsor a joint event.

- Approach members with specific skills to donate rather than waiting for them to offer. Everyone does something well; find out what it is and help members turn that skill into an auction item.
- Encourage donor groups. It's a lot easier—and more fun—to offer a social event if you co-donate. Giving a party with a full complement of food and drink can be expensive and a lot of work to organize; suggest that the potential donor might want to spread the load by asking a friend to help.

External Donations

The motivation to donate is often quite different with external businesses, especially if they have no ties with your organization. Although there may be an element of altruism, the business probably is hoping to get some exposure and will see their donation as a marketing tool. How can you encourage them to donate?

- Accept business cards, brochures and coupons to display next to the bid sheet. You might even create small posters that thank businesses for their donations and display them prominently on auction night.
- List all business donations on a special page in your catalog and invite community members to patronize these businesses. If you want to go a step further, provide ads in your catalog, either by selling them or in return for donations of a certain level. Hint: ask your members to personally thank these businesses for donating as they interact with them.
- Be sure to let the business know how many people will be seeing this advertising. Also encourage your members to mention that they appreciate the donation next time they patronize the business.
- Don't be hesitant to ask for a specific donation. For example:
 - If a restaurant offers meals for around \$30 each, ask for "dinner for two" or a \$60 gift card.
 - For stores where the merchandise varies in price, ask for a round amount, like \$25, \$50, etc.
 - If you're offered a gift card-type donation of, say, \$100, you might want to ask that it be broken out into two certificates of \$50 each; the store will get two new customers rather than one, and the lower-priced donation might sell better.
 - Keep an eye on future donations: if a business gives a very small donation the first year, ask for a larger one the next.

If the donation experience was rewarding, you will find these same donors willing to donate the same amount or more next year.

In our next issue we'll talk more about maximizing donations, including how to package and price donations to earn the highest bids. Meanwhile, check out our Facebook page and post your ideas, questions and suggestions.