



Small Auctions: Are They Worth It?

YES! With some planning and a view toward the future, you can have a very successful small auction. First, if one of your goals is to build community, a small auction makes sense (see the other article in this issue, Putting the “Community” in Community Auctions”). Add some good advice and a couple of dedicated volunteers, you might be surprised how much you make. But most importantly, look at a small auction as a starting point, and build on even moderate success in the future.

Let’s start with a case study...

A preschool was planning a small auction, with the goal of raising \$1,000 for new playground equipment. I met with the auction committee, gave them some pointers on soliciting and packaging donations and turned them loose. At the end of the auction they were thrilled to find that they had made \$3,500! But they gained more than financial success: their community feels more cohesive and friendly as a result of working together on the auction, and they’ve gotten some valuable recognition in town through soliciting donations and advertising the event. They’re planning a larger auction this year, since last year’s success has energized both donors and volunteers.

The point is that they started small, did better than expected, and are now building on this success for the future. Can your organization do this?

How do you decide if your organization is ready for an auction? Ask yourself:

- What do you want to raise money for? Is it for your general operating budget or a specific project?

A first auction might do better if funding a specific project is the goal. Once community members see the success in a tangible way, you can move toward an auction that has a more general focus.

- How much money do you want to raise?

Be realistic! You want your goal to be high enough to generate the funds needed but low enough to ensure success. This is pretty easy if you’re raising funds for a project: your goal is whatever the item costs. It’s a little harder to set a goal for a general purpose.

- Do you have some willing and able volunteers to help organize and run the auction?
You'll need at least a few volunteers to work on the auction. You'll need people to organize the event, plan the auction itself and deal with auction data and paperwork.
- Do you have a free or inexpensive venue for the auction?
If your organization is a church or school, perhaps you can have the auction there. If you have to go to an external location, try to get the leasing company to donate the use of the space in return for advertising in your auction catalog.
- Where will you get donations?
Will organization members donate, or will you go outside your community to solicit donations? You should do both (see last month's newsletter). Will everyone in your organization solicit donations, or do you have to rely on a couple of people? The more people you have involved in soliciting, the more donations you're going to have.
- Who will attend the auction and bid on items?
Who will come to the auction? If your organization has few members, you might consider outside advertising. Leave fliers and put up posters at local businesses; try to get coverage through local media outlets; use social media to stir up some excitement!
- Do you have funds to cover up-front expenses for the auction?
You'll need at least a small budget to pay for things that need to be purchased before the auction, such as advertising, comestibles and software to run your auction.

If you can cover these bases, you are probably in good shape to have an auction. There are many sources of information about how to plan and run your auction—and you'll find a lot of advice in future editions of this newsletter.