

Charities – Survival of the Fittest

By Pat Cash

Charity fund raising events are affected badly during economic downturns. Money gets tight; there is less of it to go round. Donors cut back, sponsors cancel and individuals defer participation until better times.

Charities must be very creative to survive a recession that some economists are predicting may become a depression. Charities must also be seen to be more diligent and accountable when raising funds. Very large charities must reduce overheads and all groups have to be better organized and disciplined. This article suggests how charities might still achieve their fundraising objectives and uses golf events for illustration purposes.

First, evaluate your strategies. For example, are fundraising events your only or prime method to raise money and if so, you must adopt a second strategy where you stress, publicize and implement an ownership culture when dealing with donors, sponsors and participants. Be completely open and honest in showing how the money raised in the past was used and where it will be spent in the future. Be specific. List the big ticket items with their costs. Avoid motherhood statements and above all don't be vague.

Impress people with your business acumen. Prepare a five year business plan showing forecasts of all your sources of income and costs – both capital and operating. Establish how much money fundraising events must contribute in total. Evaluate your past fundraising events and list them in terms of priority and chances of success in reaching your targets. Concentrate on the top half and eliminate (for now) the bottom quarter and then assign budgets and target goals to each event.

Examine your organizational structures for fundraising events. Set up at the most a five person committed group for each event with the following positions and responsibility areas: Chair (Sponsors and Donors), Vice-Chair (Volunteers), Finance (Registration), Event Promoter (Publicity), and Event Manager (Operations). Specify in detail each group's terms of references --- its mandate, goals, authority, responsibilities, reporting structure, budgets. Plan to replace each group member every four years.

Develop your negotiation skills. For example on golf tournaments, negotiate a fixed price for use of a club's golf course and a cost-plus contract for the food and drinks. Take advantage of the hard times. Restaurants and clubs have to retain staff to provide essential services. Membership applications at private golf clubs and elite country clubs are decreasing and quotas are harder to maintain. Clubs will welcome all sources of revenue and will use charity events for promotion purposes. This gives you the opportunity to hold events in great locations with marvelous ambience and with reasonable costs.

Focus on other cost cutting methods. For example, freebees are verboten and any donations suitable for handouts such as "goody bags" for golfers should be sold. Sell excess prizes such as Tee shirts and if unsold, donate them to the Salvation Army or a Thrift Shop. Participants in events like golfers don't need a big spread at the end. Most will be satisfied if they know that they are supporting a good cause and are convinced that the money raised will be well spent.

One area you must be careful about stinting is publicity. Word of mouth and use of fliers are good communication tools but some advertising is essential to make people aware of and participate in your events. Invite personalities and publicize their involvement.

Two other areas to concentrate on are the events themselves and income. Make the events as attractive as possible for the participants. For example, limit the number of players in a golf tournament to 120; this means the game will be finished in less than five hours and players won't go home exhausted with bad thoughts about your organization.

Pay personal visits to donors and sponsors. Describe your target expenses and income for the event. Explain how your organization handles overhead. After the event, compare your targets with the actual costs and revenues in your thank-you letter. Respect your donors and sponsors business needs.

Maximize use of tax receipts for donors, sponsors and the event participants. Have your accountant investigate all possible eligible expenses

Be innovative. Always maintain event journals and use them later to identify successful elements of past events in order to find other potential uses. Also note that studies show that the best innovations occur when networks of people with diverse backgrounds collaborate on problem solving. So another suggestion is to get together with other charities and exchange ideas..

Lastly, no successful fundraising event is accomplished without volunteers. Pay them homage.

Got ideas on how YOU can help? Post your suggestions in www.charitylover.com

Spread the word. Get your friends to participate. Charities are invited to do likewise.

The author's book on [How to Organize a Successful Charity Golf Tournament](#) can be read free on www.golfforcharity.com