



Holding a Gala/Cocktail Event

Fundamentals

- Pick a date and venue that fit your theme and guest list.
- Make sure there aren't other large fundraising events being held on the same night that might compete with yours.
- Set a goal for how much you would like to raise.
- Set SMART goals. Your goals need to be specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and timely to help guide your efforts. Examples of good SMART goals for your gala are:
 - Certain number of attendees
 - Certain amount of money raised
 - Certain number of sponsors
- Assemble a planning committee to help with PR & marketing, recruiting, hospitality, volunteers, etc..
 - Rotate members of the committee through the years so that people don't burn out and others can bring fresh ideas to the event.
 - MP support is the lynchpin, they need to be onboard to get others onboard.
- Build a budget. Set a budget and keep careful track of it so you know what the gala is costing you as planning progresses. The last thing you want to do is get to post-event stage and learn that the gala has cost your nonprofit money.
- Obtain sponsors for food, beverages, decorations, entertainment, and gift bag.
 - This is the event's biggest money maker.
 - Because of the level of clientele, many businesses find value in sponsoring the event. Have advisors reach out to their clients that own businesses.
 - Many years the sponsors commit to the next year shortly after the event concludes.

HOLDING A GALA/COCKTAIL EVENT

- Survey your sponsors after the event to see if they liked being involved. Get them to sign up for next year right away.
- Update the Northwestern Mutual Sponsorship Package template to fit your event.
- Map out and practice welcoming guests to ensure the check-in process, check-out process, food, and service are not confusing or disappointing.

Promote your event

- Put gala details on your ALSF fundraising page.
- Promote your gala via social media using Hearsay.

Tickets

- Sell tickets and manage guest list using Northwestern Mutual's EventBrite account. Contact Jodi Nolte at jodinolte@northwesternmutual.com to request access.
- Use Northwestern Mutual email template to invite clients, prospects, and other community members to the gala.

Strengthen Donors' Commitment with Auctions

Auctions are a staple of the nonprofit gala experience and it's tempting to auction off anything you have at hand. But, like speakers and other content, your auction items are a chance to tell a story and deepen donors' connections. For example, auction art-work that was created by kids with cancer.

- Use Northwestern Mutual's Bidding for Good account to create an auction. We recommend using the online auction feature. Contact Jodi Nolte at jodinolte@northwesternmutual.com to request access.
- Open the online silent auction a few days before your event and encourage early bidding.
- You can choose the option to have Bidding for Good supply personnel for the day for setup and technical support.
- Find special items that are exclusive or hard to purchase.

HOLDING A GALA/COCKTAIL EVENT

- Be selective in the items you are offering, less is more.
- Select three to four high-end items, such as trips for a live auction.
- At the end of the live auction, hold a “raise the paddle” to solicit direct donations. Have a few donors planted in the audience to start the paddle raising.
 - Create a situation where your FR’s can look generous in front of their clients.
 - If matching gifts are utilized, a \$500 gift can be a \$1000 gift and the FR can say they are pledging \$1000 at the event. This primes the pump for others to be generous and look good.
 - See if the MP is willing to offer a match as well to help increase the amounts given.
 - Teach FR’s how to utilize matching gifts before the event.

Celebration Above Solicitation

- Showcase the important progress we are making for the cause.
- Use programming, décor, and ambience to create a celebratory experience.
- Invite Liz or Jay Scott, and/or hero family to speak.
Contact Erica Stein at e.stein@alexslimonadestand.org to check Liz and Jay’s availability.

Surprise and Delight Guests

Major donors and other funders likely attend fundraising events similar to your gala all of the time. If you don’t show them something new or remind them why they support you, you risk missing out on much-needed funds.

Remember, people are coming from work and have other things on their mind, but you have been gearing up for this for six months. When guests walk through that door, what they need is a few things that catch their eye and remind them why they care about this organization or why they should care. For example, decorate the room with giant portraits of children dressed up as what they want to be when they grow up. This serves as a delightful visual reminder of how funding better treatments and cures of childhood cancer leads to better outcomes for these children.

Show Guests What You're Fundraising For

Even though you want to highlight your successes and celebrate the progress you've made, your fundraising event will require...some fundraising. And when you are appealing to guests, you should show them what exactly they are contributing to. Having a hero family speak is a great way to make the cause real to your guests. Storytelling is a chance to get people more involved, remind them why they care, and make them lifelong supporters.

You can request a hero ambassador for your event using this form: <https://www.alexslimonade.org/hero-ambassador/request-an-ambassador>

Utilize ALSF Partners

Partners that are aligned with ALSF can help you create the event you want by helping to weave your story and message into every part of the experience.

ALSF has several partners that may be willing to participate in your event. Here are some examples and contact information:

- Idea: Have an Auntie Anne's pretzel truck.
Contact: Nathan Route, NRoute@auntieannes.com
- Idea: Serve Rita's Ice.
Contact: Liz Dougherty, e.dougherty@ritacorp.com
- Idea: Hold event at a Firebirds venue
Contact: Stephen Loftis, sloftis@fbgrill.com
- Idea: Serve Tito's Vodka in signature drink.
Contact: Erica Stein, e.stein@alexslimonade.org

Post-event

- Thank participants and send out surveys. During the week after the tournament, email all of your participants thanking them for taking part in your event, inviting them back next year, and letting them know when registration will be open. You should also include a link to a post-run survey to get feedback about what they liked, disliked, and what they'd like to see done differently. This feedback is crucial, especially for a new tournament!