

# Development for Conservation

## Getting the Most Value from (Fundraising) Events

Prepared for

**WeConservePA**

January 2023

**David Allen, Development for Conservation**



**DEVELOPMENT  
FOR  
CONSERVATION**



## Agenda

- Fundraising Events
- Appreciation Events
- Engagement Events

- Revenue Sources
- Best Practices
- Reasons NOT to do
- Discussion



David Allen | Development for Conservation LLC

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



### Fundraising Events Examples

- Galas
- Runs, walks, hikes, bikes, triathlons
- Golf tournaments
- Rummage Sales

---

---

---

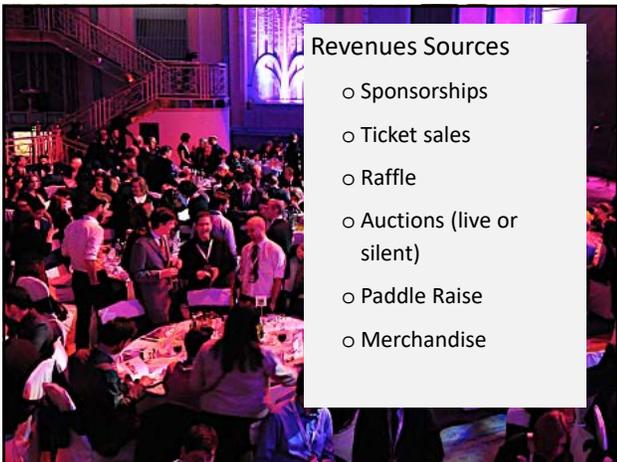
---

---

---

---

---



### Revenues Sources

- Sponsorships
- Ticket sales
- Raffle
- Auctions (live or silent)
- Paddle Raise
- Merchandise

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Helpful Best Practices**

- Host
- Set dates and venues in advance
- Save the date postcards
- Mailed invitations
- Personal invitations
- Sponsorships solicited following the event

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Helpful Best Practices**

- Two-seat and four-seat sponsors
- Name tags
- Centerpieces that can be taken home
- Keepsakes (etched champagne flutes)
- ALL Board members attend

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Helpful Best Practices**

- Calculate revenue excluding the Board
- Could be managed by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Reasons NOT to do

- FR Events do not raise enough money
- Difficult to scale
- Competition
- Some events “run their course”
- Inherently transactional

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Reasons NOT to do

- Distracts Board and staff from activities that might raise more money (opportunity cost)
- Leaves donors feeling like they have “contributed”

---

---

---

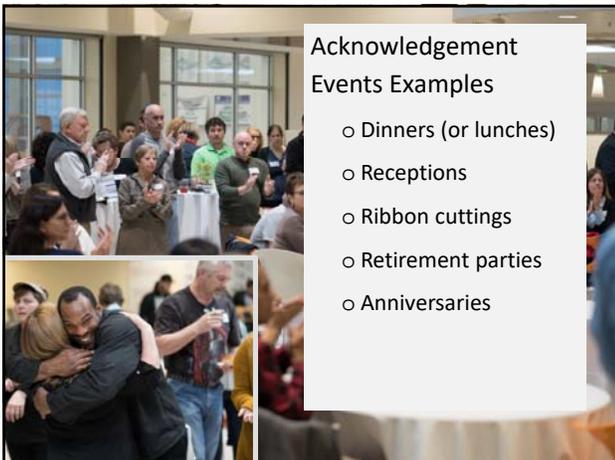
---

---

---

---

---



Acknowledgement Events Examples

- Dinners (or lunches)
- Receptions
- Ribbon cuttings
- Retirement parties
- Anniversaries

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

A collage of two photographs from an event. The top photo shows a group of people gathered around a table, some holding drinks. The bottom photo shows a man and a woman embracing warmly.

**Revenue Sources**

- Sponsorships
- Suggested Donations
- Fish bowl
- Merchandise

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

A collage of two photographs from an event. The top photo shows a group of people gathered around a table, some holding drinks. The bottom photo shows a man and a woman embracing warmly.

**Helpful Best Practices**

- Host
- Set dates and venues in advance
- Save the date postcards
- Mailed invitations
- Personal invitations
- Sponsorships solicited following the event

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

A collage of two photographs from an event. The top photo shows a group of people gathered around a table, some holding drinks. The bottom photo shows a man and a woman embracing warmly.

**Helpful Best Practices**

- Name tags
- Centerpieces that can be taken home
- Keepsakes (etched champagne flutes)
- ALL Board members attend
- Program is relevant to land conservation

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Reasons NOT to do

- Cost (Time and money)
- Lack of critical mass (more Board member and staff than donors being acknowledged)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Reasons NOT to do

- Cost (Time and money)
- Lack of critical mass (more Board member and staff than donors being acknowledged)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Engagement Events Examples

- Field Trips
- Library Lectures
- Project tours
- Volunteer projects
- Living room get-togethers
- Backyard BBQs
- Networking events

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



### Revenue Sources

- Sponsorships
- People joining at the event or paying small amounts to get in
- Merchandise sales

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



### Helpful Best Practices

- Diversify event offerings to attract diverse audiences
- Registration
- Identify and celebrate current members/ donors at the event
- Name tags
- Event Photos

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



### Reasons NOT to do

- Available time
- Multiple events that all look the same
- Preaching to the choir
- No clear vision; no clear commitment to evaluation

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Helpful Best Practices for All Events

- Have a singular event GOAL or purpose
- Write down what you expect to happen
- Measure your results (evaluate) against what you expected
- Board members attend as Ambassadors and Hosts - and report back
- Photograph the event
- Follow-up



DEVELOPMENT  
FOR CONSERVATION

David Allen | Development for Conservation LLC

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Helpful Best Practices for All Events

- People who registered and attended
- People who registered and did not attend
- People who did not register and attended anyway
- People who received an invitation and did not respond



DEVELOPMENT  
FOR CONSERVATION

David Allen | Development for Conservation LLC

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# 14 Ideas to Improve Your Fundraising Events (and 7 Reasons Not to Do Them)

17 January 2023

*By David Allen, Development for Conservation*

I'm not a huge fan of fundraising events. So I'm going to give you a bunch of ideas about how to get the most from them, but I'm going to preface the tips by enumerating my list of reasons NOT to do them. And NOW is a good time reconsider the role events play in your fundraising calendar, because many events have been canceled in recent years.

So first, let's define fundraising events.

Fundraising events are events that are designed to raise money directly at the event. Examples of fundraising events include gala dinners, physical activities (like runs, walks, hikes, bikes, and triathlons), music festivals, golf tournaments, and so on. The money comes from sponsorships, ticket sales, raffles and auctions, paddle raises, and merchandise.

So what's your problem, David?

(Thank you for asking.)

**First and perhaps most importantly, fundraising events don't NET enough money.** If your fundraising event nets less than \$50,000, try dividing the actual net by the number of human hours involved. What's your Return on Investment (ROI)? Fifty cents an hour? Now make the same calculation taking all Board giving OUT. Presumably, they would have given anyway. Imagine redeploying all those human hours into major gift fundraising instead. You'll get the picture.

Here are some other reasons NOT to do events:

**Fundraising events are difficult to scale.** Need to raise twice as much money? It's hard to Net twice as much, even given several years to crank it up, and nearly impossible to add another event that nets as much as the first.

**Competition.** Donors who attend fundraising events are often choosing between events they want to attend, instead of choosing between organizations they want to support. The more galas or runs they have to choose from, the less likely they are to consistently choose yours. The more successful fundraising events are those that have developed a reputation over time for being the most fun – not an easy task.

**Inherently transactional.** Fundraising events are attended by people who are buying something. Not by people who are necessarily giving to a cause. Many golf tournament participants don't remember a month later the organization they supported. Same with music festivals. People come for the music and the beer, and not necessarily because they love the organization.

**Tend to stagnate over time.** For all of the reasons above, most fundraising events will tend to “run their course.” Tracking annual net returns over a number of years will help you see the point where growth begins to flatline. Without constant injections of new energy, that flatlined experience will tend to curve in the other direction.

**Organizational distraction.** Fundraising events tend to command an enormous amount of organizational attention and energy. There is a very real and very urgent deadline. And failure to pull it off is very public – not a good thing. As a result, activities that are perhaps less urgent yet more important tend to get ignored or at best delayed. Activities such as building relationships with major gift donors, getting thank you letters out on a timely basis, crafting proposals, or even fundraising training.

**Donors feel like they have “contributed.”** Even loyal donors tend to leave fundraising events feeling good about having contributed to the organization.

Coming back several weeks or even several months later with a renewal notice or an appeal will often see diminished results even when added to the event results. Same donors. But the giving is stimulated by a different part of the brain. Instead of encouraging larger and larger giving, events tend to establish a “price point” for the experience.

Not convinced? Or possibly your organization has too much energy and momentum invested to stop now?

The following list of ideas are honed from years of being critical of events. Here’s how you can get more value from yours.

1. Set dates and venues 12-18 months in advance. This will allow you to announce the next year’s event as you thank people for coming to this one.
2. Use a Host Committee – again chosen and announced 12-18 months in advance. You will want the host committee to have already started working by the time this year’s event is complete.
3. Use mailed invitations and save-the-date postcards. Don’t put all your eggs in any one marketing basket. People get information all the time and from multiple directions.
4. Make some of your invitations personal. Have a list of people you want to involve personally and reach out to them in very personal ways. For example, invite them to sit at your table.
5. Solicit all your next-year sponsors immediately following this year’s event. *“Thank you so much for sponsoring. It was a fantastic event. I hope we can count on your sponsorship again next year.” “We were sorry you couldn’t sponsor this year. It was a fantastic event. I hope we can count on your sponsorship next year.”*
6. Ask individuals to sponsor as well as companies. Bayou Land Conservancy asks individuals to be “two-seat” or “four-seat”

sponsors by paying twice or four-times the two-person ticket price. Individual sponsors are recognized along with companies in all event publicity.

7. Print name tags for all participants. Make sure the print is large enough to be easily read from a short distance away. Color code the name tags (or use ribbons) for specific designations (eg. Host Committee members, Board members, Giving Circle members, and so on).
8. Hire, or at least designate, an event photographer. Ask the photographer to help make sure the name tags can be read in the photos.
9. Don't skimp on food and wine quality. If event patrons have choices between events, food and wine are often decision helpers. And beware of using donated food/wine. It sounds good but bad wine is still bad if it's donated.
10. Think through keepsakes that event patrons can take home. Table centerpieces, small books, etched wine glasses or champagne flutes – something perishable or something collectible.
11. ALL Board members should expect to attend all fundraising events. In my opinion, Board members should not be required to pay for their attendance, though some may prefer to do so. But rather they should attend with the expectation that they are there to work. And that implies that their work for the event is organized.
12. Calculate the gross and net receipts from the event having first removed all Board members. Presumably your Board members would have given that same money anyway (and not because of the event). You will see the event growth, flatline, and declines sooner if your Board giving is not masking the results.

13. Follow-up with everyone. Send thank-you notes and make some of them personal to the extent you can. Include a photo of them if you can. Use the opportunity to remind them of next year's date and venue, express the hope that you will see them again, and provide one more shout-out to the sponsors.
14. Consider that the entire process could be managed by a third party. If you are netting \$50,000 now, could your organization live with paying someone else \$20,000 to manage it for you and redeploy that same organizational energy into activities with a larger ROI?

Cheers, and Have a great week.

-da

# DAVID ALLEN

I am a non-profit fundraising consultant. I work with nonprofit boards and staff to help them learn how to be better leaders and advocates. I work almost exclusively with conservation organizations because that is where my heart is.

My background includes 30 years working in membership fundraising, major gift development, communications, and marketing. I worked for about half that time for Nature Conservancy (TNC) chapters in Oregon, Texas, and Wisconsin. In addition to my duties for the individual chapters, I served TNC as an internal fundraising consultant and major gift development trainer.

In 2000, I served as the vice-president of operations for the Wisconsin-based, international conservation organization Sand County Foundation, a position I held through mid-2009.



Gathering Waters Conservancy, a land trust service agency based in Wisconsin, called me in 2004 to ask whether I would be interested in teaching a seminar for Wisconsin land trusts on major donor development. From 2004, then, through 2009, I consulted on a nights and weekends basis with just a few clients each year.

In March of 2009, I launched my consulting business full-time using the name **Development for Conservation.**

Also in 2009, I partnered with Nancy Moore to form **Conservation Consulting Group.** Together we help land trusts by providing needs assessment, strategic planning, and leadership coaching services.

I consider myself a strategic thinker, problem solver, facilitator, educator, and program developer who brings a particular passion for conservation and the environment.

## **Practice Competencies**

### *Fundraising*

- Development Audit
- Strategic Fund Development Planning
- Staff/Board Training and Development
- Major Gift Coaching
- Capital Campaigns: Feasibility, Planning, Management

### *Organizational Development*

- Strategy Development
- Practice & Process Assessment
- Problem Solving Facilitation
- Marketing

**David Allen**

**Development for Conservation**

[David@DevelopmentForConservation.com](mailto:David@DevelopmentForConservation.com)

608-239-5006

608 West Dean Avenue  
Madison, WI 53716

[www.DevelopmentForConservation.com](http://www.DevelopmentForConservation.com)