

ESSENTIAL FUNDRAISING TIPS

EXPERT ADVICE FOR YOUR NEXT EVENT!



Provided by Race Nights Australia
www.racenightsaustralia.com.au



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Introduction

So you're helping to organise a fundraiser? Chances are you've got a whole range of questions and concerns racing through your head, especially if this is your first time as an event organiser.

There's good news – you're not alone, and you're certainly not the first person to try to work out the best way to get a crowd of people together and donate money to a worthy cause!

At Race Nights Australia we have well over a decade's experience working in the events industry, and we've seen just about everything. It's given us a very good idea of what works, what doesn't, where you can cut corners, and where you're best off spending a bit of extra time or money.

The goal of this ebook is to pass as much of that knowledge and experience on to you as possible. We hope it'll help streamline the organisation process of your next fundraising event, and contribute to the night being a huge success!

Ronan Leonard
Director
Race Nights Australia



Planning for your fundraiser

If you've worked on a fundraiser, or indeed any other kind of event before, you'll already know that they don't just happen – they take a lot of work to organise!

There's no need to panic though. With a solid plan, the process becomes a lot easier.

Setting a fundraising target

The goal of every fundraiser, of course, is to make money. The important thing to keep in mind is how *much* money you'd like your fundraiser to make, because that number will have a big influence on all the other decisions you make.



Organisations run fundraisers for all sorts of different reasons:

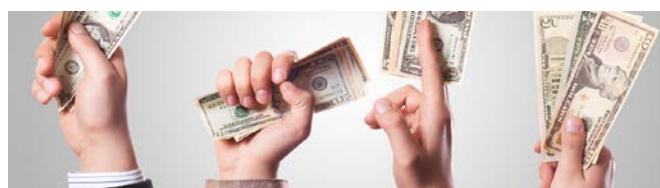
- Some organisations raise funds because they need to receive a certain amount in order to keep operating for the next year
- Others raise funds because they've got a specific item or project they'd like to fund (new equipment for a sporting club, a new building for a school, etc)
- Some fundraisers are held to give money to a good cause, such as a charity
- Or a fundraiser may be primarily a social occasion, with the funds raised being seen as an “added bonus” to the organisation

The important thing is to know which category your fundraiser fits into.

If it's one of the first two categories, then you've likely already got a specific figure in mind. That's your fundraising target, and you need to gear all your activities towards meeting that target. The size of the target will differ for every organisation, and it will dictate a lot of things about your program (the number and type of fundraising activities you run, the size of the market you need to reach, etc).

If it's one of the last two categories, to some extent you're under less pressure. That doesn't mean you shouldn't still set a fundraising target though!

Setting an aspirational target can be a fantastic motivator, both for you and your fellow organisers, as well as the people who are donating. It may seem arbitrary to set a goal of, say, \$5000 to raise for the night, but people can surprise you! Often you'll find they're willing to bid just a little more on an auction item, or purchase a few extra tickets, so that they can feel like they've made a real contribution to the 'success' of the fundraiser.



Just make sure your target is a realistic one – setting it at a million dollars when you're unlikely to get anywhere near that mark is unlikely to be helpful, for example.

How can you tell whether your target is realistic or not? That's something that largely depends on your target market, which is what we'll discuss next.

Knowing your market

When you know how much you're looking to raise, the next thing you need to think about is where that money is going to come from.

Who are the people that are going to donate to your cause? How many of them are there? How much, on average, are they likely to be able to donate to your fundraiser? What kind of fundraising activities are likely to appeal to them, and which ones are likely to get the best results?

For some organisations, the answer to the first couple of questions could be straightforward – sporting clubs have members, and they're likely to be the main target market for the fundraiser. For schools it might be the students' parents and families. If that's the case then you're in luck; most likely you already have a good idea how many people you're targeting, you'll already be in regular communication with most of them, and they're likely to at least share some common interests.

Don't forget though, your fundraiser doesn't have to be limited to *just* the people that are immediately involved with your organisation. With the right event and promotion, for example, you may be able to get your target market to bring friends or relatives along to participate too – you just have to offer something that will appeal to them.

On the flipside, remember too that you probably won't be able to get *everyone* in your target market to come along. There will always be some people who have other commitments or won't be in a position to participate for whatever reason. Work on a percentage of attendees that you think is reasonable.

When you've got a rough estimate of the number of people you think would participate, multiply it by the average amount you think they'd be willing to donate per head, and compare the amount to your fundraising target. If they're in the same ballpark, then you're off to a good start!

If they're not, then you might have to consider some other options: you can look to broaden your market, consider other options such as sponsorship (which we'll discuss later in this ebook) to make up the shortfall, or revise your target.

It can be helpful to publicise your target, as well as the cause you're raising money for.

“We're trying to raise \$2000 to fix the leak in the clubhouse roof”, for example, is a cause that can engage people, as it has a specific outcome. They know exactly where their money is going, and they can get a warm fuzzy feeling for years to come when they go into the clubhouse and see the roof doesn't leak any more.

At risk of sounding cynical, it can also provide a different kind of motivation: *not* donating to the fundraiser can seem like support for the alternative: wet carpets in the clubrooms, in this case! Just don't lay that on too thick, nobody likes to feel like they're being bullied into giving money.



Timeline

Planning is vital to the success of any fundraiser. The best ones are planned months in advance.



That doesn't mean you have to be working on the event every day and night for six months – it just means you should start thinking about your fundraiser well in advance, and allow plenty of time for promotion and ticket sales.

If your organisation is a school or sporting club, you'll probably want to get your fundraising team together early in the year / season to plan out the calendar. Will there be just the one event, or multiple events? How will you space them out? Don't try to do everything all in the last few weeks!

Events that you need to do promotion for and sell tickets too are the ones that need the most attention paid to the timelines. Tell people too early and they'll forget, or won't be motivated to act because "it's still ages away". Tell them too late, however, and you might not be able to contact everyone, or people may already have alternative plans.

What kind of activity fits best?

The best fundraising activities are the ones that allow as much of your target market as possible to participate.

A fun run, for example, might work with some markets but with others it may be a hard sell because some people will see fitness as a barrier to participation. By the same token a disco-themed only works if the majority of your target market likes dancing.

Something with a bit of excitement or novelty is good too! Remember that you're likely not the only organisation asking the people in your market to participate in fundraisers, so you need yours to stand out. People will find it harder to get excited about a football club trivia night, for example, if they went to the school trivia night last month.

Striking the right balance is key: if you can design your fundraiser so that it gives your participants a fun, memorable experience, regardless of their age, gender or background, you'll be onto a winner!



Ways a fundraiser can make money

There are all sorts of ways you can structure your fundraising program. Indeed, you might have multiple types of fundraisers scheduled on your organisation's calendar.

The type of fundraiser you have will dictate how it makes money – it's pretty obvious how a sausage sizzle makes money, for example! Same goes for raffles or chocolate drives.

As a result, this section will focus on events: fundraisers where you bring a group of people together in one place for a day or night. With events, there are a range of options for making money.

Ticket sales

One of the best feelings you can have as a fundraising organiser is to have your desired profit locked up before the event even happens – then everything you make on the night is just a bonus!

Selling tickets to your event in advance is one of the best ways to achieve this. Add up all the costs your event is likely to incur (more about them in the next section), add your profit target to that number, then divide by the number of people you think you can get to come along, and you've got your ideal ticket price.



For example:

- Our fundraising goal is \$5000
- Our expenses for the event will be \$2000
- We think we can get 200 people to attend
- Profit target + expenses = \$5000 + \$2000 = \$7000
- $\$7000 / 200 \text{ people} = \$35 \text{ per ticket ideal price}$

Is the price right for your market?

Every audience is different – they'll have a different idea of what's affordable, of how much they're willing to spend, and of what they expect in return for their money. So it's important to apply a bit of common sense to your ticket pricing.

If you're really lucky, you'll do the calculation above and find the ticket price is well under what you think your audience will be willing to spend. If that's the case (and you've double checked to make sure your numbers are right!) then congratulations, it might be time to think about charging a little more and revising your fundraising goal upwards!

Most of us won't be that lucky, but that doesn't have to be a problem. If your ticket price is in the right ballpark then you're pretty much on track. If you think it's a bit over what your audience will be willing to pay, then you just need to look at your options: is there a way to attract more people (and thus more ticket sales) to the event? Are there places where you can cut expenses? Is there the potential to make up the shortfall with sponsorships or other activities on the night? Or does your target need to be revised down, or spread across multiple events?

Here's a few other things to think about when setting your ticket prices:

- Factor what you are and aren't providing people and including in the ticket price. Will your audience be happy to pay a bit more and have drinks included, for example, or would they prefer a lower ticket price in return for bringing their own drinks, or buying them at the bar on the night?
- Set your prices at a level that the *majority* of your target market will be able to afford.
- Keep in mind that the price of the ticket probably isn't the only money you'll be asking people to spend at your event. For example, say you think the average amount people will be willing to spend on the event is \$50. If you set your ticket price at \$50, they may not have much left to spend on raffles or auctions on the night. Set the price accordingly, and leave some money in your guests pockets to spend on the night if that's how your event will be structured.

Getting the tickets sold

Here's a few handy tips for getting as many tickets sold as possible:

- Promote early and often, using all the various means you have available to you: in person, advertise in newsletters, use email lists, posters, whatever will reach your audience. Focus in particular on the six weeks before the event, when people are most likely to know their timetable and be ready to put down money for a ticket.
- Make sure you promote what people will be getting for their money on the night, as well as what their money will be going towards. A great night out that *also* supports a cause they care about should be an easy sell!
- Spread the load – it's a lot easier for 20 people to sell 10 tickets each than it is for two people to sell 100 tickets each

Should we sell tickets on the night too?



Absolutely – unless you've sold so many tickets in advance that you physically can't fit any more people into the venue, then it's a good idea to sell tickets at the door as well, for the few people who won't make a decision until the night or might bring some friends with them on a whim.

Just remember to promote this as a secondary option: it's always better to have the money and the certainty up front! You can promote this as a benefit for your audience too – if they buy in advance there's no chance they'll miss out on the night, they don't have to come up with the money on the night, etc.

Remember, money spent is money forgotten. For those who have paid for their ticket prior to the night, they are more likely to spend a little bit more on the “extras” you have planned.

Sponsorships

Another way you can lock up significant revenue in advance is to get companies or individuals to sponsor your events.

How much they'll be willing to contribute and what they'll want to be offered in return will vary greatly from event to event, but there are typically a range of things you can offer sponsors in return for their support. They include:

- Having their name or logo included on promotional materials for the event, possibly even co-branding of the event
- Opportunity to place banners or promotional materials in the venue, or even make a presentation during the night
- Have the company logo or promotional slide displayed throughout the night on a PowerPoint presentation
- Acknowledgement throughout the night from the MC
- Opportunity to participate in key parts of the night (for example, having a real estate agent sponsor the event and help conduct an auction on the night)
- Free tickets to the event to give to their clients
- Additional acknowledgement and promotion in post-event communications

You can also structure sponsorships so there are opportunities for companies to participate at a range of price points. You can have platinum, gold and silver level sponsorships, for instance, with better promotional opportunities at the higher levels. You can have companies sponsor the whole event, or just a small part of it.

If you're having a race night, for example, you can sell sponsorships for the whole night, or you can get six companies to sponsor one race each.

Tips for selling sponsorships

Even when a sponsor thinks you're raising money for a good cause, it's important to remember that they'll have to consider your proposal as business decision. So you need to be able to provide them with information up-front about the benefits for their business. Helpful information can include:

- The number of people you'll be able to expose to their business
- Demographic information on the audience (a babywear company wouldn't get much value out of an event that's targeted largely at retirees, for example)
- Other relevant figures on promotion of the event (will be acknowledged in 500 newsletters, 1500 emails, etc)
- Exact details on how they'll be promoted through the event

Live auctions

Done well, a live auction can be a focal point of your event, and a source of significant profits. Done poorly, however, an auction can sap momentum or distract people from other activities.

Below are a few tips to help ensure that your auction is a success:

- Tell people in advance about the items that will be auctioned. If possible, have them on display in the room, and include details on each item in the program or on posters. If people see ahead of time that there are items they're interested in, they'll be more likely to pay attention to and participate in the auctions.
- Make sure you have a captive audience. Turn off the music, stop your other entertainment, and if you're having a sit-down meal, have the auction take place between courses. By doing this, you make sure you have everybody's full attention and maximise the chances that people will participate.
- Shorter is better. Your live auction should ideally last for no more than 30 minutes to keep your guests engaged.
- Less is more. Generally it's best to have fewer items that you can charge a higher price for rather than multiple lower-cost items. There's a few reasons for this: the shorter your auctions are as a whole, the more likely you are to keep your audience's attention. And the fewer items there are on offer, the more likely your guests are to bid, as they won't be thinking "there's plenty of other items to bid on" in the back of their mind.
- Items that can be bid on / used by a group of people often attract a higher price than those that can only be used by an individual. A signed football, for example, can be a very valuable item but it's difficult to share. A weekend away for eight people, on the other hand, is something that a number of people can get together and pool their money on, potentially resulting in a higher final sale price.
- Use an experienced, dynamic auctioneer. The person on the microphone can make or break your auction. A good auctioneer will keep the crowd entertained, engaged and bidding.



Silent auctions

Flexibility and scalability are two of the biggest advantages of silent auctions.

For those not familiar with the process, in a silent auction guests are given the opportunity to bid on items throughout the night, at their own pace. Each item has a piece of paper (usually next to the item, if the item is on display) on which guests can write down their bids. At the end of the night, the highest bids on each item are announced.

Thanks to their format, silent auctions mean you don't have to stop everything that's going on for people to participate – instead they can peruse the items throughout the night, place bids at their leisure, and keep checking back throughout the night. You don't even need to turn the music down!



Silent auctions also very easy to scale: you can have just a few items, or you can have a lot. You can also have some variety in the type and value of items you have on offer: a small item that might not attract a price of more than \$40 or \$50 probably wouldn't be worth including as a live auction item, but it would work perfectly fine as a silent auction item.

The main thing to be aware of with silent auctions is that they require substantial organisation before and after the event to make them work. Typically additional sponsors need to be found to donate the items being auctioned and procedures need to be set in place to collect money off the winning bidders at the end of the auctions. Silent auctions may also distract your guests from the other activities on the night or result in them feeling “hit up” multiple times in the same evening.

Carefully assess the number of silent auction items you can realistically expect to be donated for your event, the amount of revenue you could expect to raise from them and how the silent auctions will be incorporated with the other activities being run on the night.

When setting your silent auction up on the night make sure there is room for all the items to be viewed and that the flow of people looking at auction items doesn't interfere with the operation of other parts of your entertainment – for example, it doesn't interrupt your bar queue or access to your other entertainment.

Also make sure that every auction item has a working pen to go with the sign up sheet and that you have appropriate facilities to take money from the winning bidders at the end of the night. Signage that clearly states whether you accept credit cards, EFTPOS, cheques, cash only or how long after the event the winning bidders have to pay should be displayed clearly.

If possible, try to delegate management of the silent auctions to one person whose sole responsibility is to make sure they run smoothly.

Also, ensure that your MC keeps the crowd updated with the status of the silent auctions. In particular, make sure that your guests know when the silent auctions will be closing so that they can get their final bids in, and try not to schedule anything else to be happening in the 10-15 minutes leading up to auction close, to allow for maximum participation.

Fun money rebuys

If you're reading this ebook, then you're probably considering a race night as one of the options for your fundraiser.



One of the many advantages of a race night is that they give your guests an activity that can raise additional funds on the night.

At a race night, typically you'll be providing your guests with some fun money as they come in the door to "bet" on the races throughout the night. Some of your guests will get lucky and have a big win early on, setting them up comfortably for the rest of the night.

Other people won't be that lucky though – they might lose their fun money early on, or they might just want to get some more to give themselves a better chance of catching up to the leaders. You can offer those people the chance to make a real money donation in return for some additional fun money.

The general advice if you're planning to do this is to keep the donation amount relatively low and affordable: those with a lot to spend can buy lots of fun money, while those with less to spend can still participate.

Fashions on the Field

Another fundraising option that a racing night provides you with is a "fashions on the field" contest.

Racing and fashion are closely linked, and chances are if you're having a race night you'll be encouraging your guests to dress up. A fashions on the field contest is a great opportunity for people to show off the effort they've gone to!

There are a couple of options for fundraising through a fashion contest. One is to sell sponsorship of the contest before the night, and provide special acknowledgement for the sponsor during the contest.



Another is to have prizes up for grabs, and charge an entry fee for people who want to enter.

And while the fashions at the field contests you see on TV during the spring racing carnival are taken very seriously, remember that yours doesn't have to be – everyone is at your event to have a good time and raise some funds, so it's OK to just have a bit of fun with the fashion contest. And don't forget to include the guys as well as the girls!

Raffles and door prizes

Running a raffle on the night can be another way to raise funds on the night – like silent auctions, typically you'll be looking to have the prizes donated. Find a way to either display the prizes on the night, or ensure that your guests know what they will be (put information in the event program, for example).

Have some volunteers responsible for selling the raffle tickets, and have the volunteers get out in the crowd and talk to people – they'll have a lot more success that way than if they're sitting at a table somewhere waiting for guests to come to them.

Based on the number of items you have to raffle, and the other activities you have planned, you may want to just have one draw later in the night, or multiple draws throughout the night.

Keep in mind though that drawing a raffle isn't always a quick process: particularly if you have a large crowd, it can take up to a few minutes each time you draw a number for everyone to check their tickets and for the winner to come up and claim their prize – at some events, raffle draws alone have taken up an hour or more of the night!

As a general rule, raffles should be thought of like live auctions: try to have a few high-quality / desirable prizes that should attract a lot of ticket sales, but not take too long to draw.

If you find yourself with dozens of raffle prizes to give away, you may want to either bundle them together into a larger prize, or consider offering some of them as silent auction items instead of raffle prizes.

Door prizes can work in much the same way – with the obvious exception that people are entered automatically for buying a ticket to the event. This can be a good way to cheaply add value to the event's ticket price: remember though that just like raffles, it will still take time on the night to draw the winners and award the prizes.



Food and beverage sales

When people go to an event, they expect to be eating and/or drinking for at least some portion of the night. Your job as the organiser is to choose the food and beverage option that will be the best fit for your audience, and allow you to maximise the funds raised on the night.



Generally speaking, the more expensive the event ticket, the more guests expect in terms of food and drinks. You want to meet those expectations without blowing your budget.

If you're working with a venue on a package where all food and drinks are included, just make sure that you get a per-head set price in advance – some venues may want to charge on consumption on the night instead, and that can result in a nasty shock at the end of the night.

If you're running a cash bar on the night, a middle-ground option is to provide a couple of free “drink tickets” to each guest on entry. You can set them so that one ticket gets a soft drink and two gets an alcoholic drink. Some guests will be happy just having one or two drinks, and others can purchase additional drink tickets or buy drinks over the bar if they choose to have a few more.



At other events it might be appropriate to have guests bring their own drinks. If this is something your market is happy to do then it can be a great way to save costs – just make sure they're told in advance what the arrangements will be.

If you're providing the drinks, remember to make sure your package includes options to suit all your guests, especially if you are buying the drinks yourself or using your club's existing bar.

Food packages can be arranged in much the same way. Again, the more expensive the ticket price the more your guests will be to expect to be included. More so than with drinks, people are more likely to expect at least some amount of food to be included in the ticket price. The easiest solution, therefore, is usually to ensure the cost of the food you wish to provide is built into the ticket price. And again, remember to cater to all guests, including vegetarians.

Whether your guests expect a sit-down meal or finger food will depend largely on the type of event you're having, the structure of the entertainment, and the price they're paying for tickets. In many cases, finger-food will be sufficient to cover your guests' expectations, and will also allow you to have a more free-flowing event structure (as opposed to having everyone go back to their tables each time a course is served).

You want to strike the right balance with your catering too: poor quality or insufficient food will probably leave your guests feeling short changed but at the same time, if food isn't the focus of the event then they're probably not expecting a five-star meal either. Find the happy medium, and be careful not to overspend.

In some cases, as with drinks, it can be OK to have your guests bring their own food or snacks. If this works with your audience it can be a great way to reduce costs for the night but again, just make sure everybody is informed in advance of the arrangements.

Costs you need to take into account

In the previous section we discussed some of the many opportunities you have to bring money in with a fundraiser. As the saying goes, however, you have to spend money to make money.

This section will examine some of the expenses your fundraiser is likely to incur, and give you some helpful tips for minimising them. Again, we'll mostly be focusing on the expenses associated with events, as opposed to other kinds of fundraisers.

Venue hire

Obviously one of the big differences between an event and other types of fundraisers is that you need a venue to hold the event in!

The good news is that this doesn't have to be a huge drain on your event's finances. If you're a sporting club or school, for example, chances are you have access to a hall or clubrooms that you can use either free of charge or for a relatively small fee.

Even if you don't have that option, chances are there are some other organisations in your area that would be willing to make a hall or other space available to you at little or no charge. Contacting your local council is usually a good place to start.

When you're going with one of these venues, just make sure that they have all the facilities you'll need (kitchen, bar, car parking, chairs and tables, etc) to make your event a success.

Dedicated event venues in your area (such as pubs and clubs) are another option that may cost you a little more, but they may also be able to save you time and hassle by, say, taking care of the catering for you.

A nice venue can also be a draw card for some guests: if they want to support your cause *and* they know your venue serves great food, for example, it'll be easier to sell them their tickets!

Keep in mind that some venues will require a security deposit or bond – if this is the case for your venue, remember to include the cost in your preparations.



Entertainment

Once you've got your venue secured, you need to move on to what people will actually *do* after they arrive – what are you going to offer to entertain them, and how much will it cost you?

There are a myriad of options to choose from but, as we discussed earlier, you're likely to get the best bang for your buck from entertainment that appeals to the broadest possible cross-section of your audience.

If you have a small, particularly close-knit group then just putting on some background music and leaving people to eat, drink, chat and entertain themselves might be a viable option. But most of us won't be that lucky, and a more structured entertainment program will be needed.

Having a DJ or a live band is one option if you know you have a crowd that wants to dance the night away (more about them in the next section). You could have other performers, or a notable guest speaker. Games or contests are another option.

While we're probably a little biased, we think a race night is a great option for entertainment because it gives people a structured activity that they can participate in across the whole night. It also creates a talking point that can help get everyone socialising, even complete strangers.

A race night provides a fun theme for the whole event that your guests can get involved with. It offers plenty of scope for additional fundraising on the night and, most importantly, it's also very cost effective – DIY kits start from as little as a few hundred dollars.

Think carefully about your entertainment and what's going to work best for your audience.

If you paid for a band last year, but the dance floor stayed empty for most of the night, then maybe you'll get better bang for your buck from a different option.



Music

Even if you're not planning a fundraiser where everybody is expected to get up and dance, music will still likely be an important aspect of the night.

How important? Next time you're at a party, or even just in a shop, stop for a moment and imagine the background music wasn't there. Chances are it'll feel pretty weird!

You've got a range of options for music at your fundraiser and the good news is that they don't all have to blow your budget.

MP3/CD players



In a lot of cases, all you'll need music to do is fill in the background while people socialise during the night. Some venues have their own background music already in place, or give you the option to just bring an MP3 player or CDs of your own.

This can be a great option because it costs next to nothing. It also puts you in full control of the playlist, and you can start and stop the music whenever you need to fit with other activities.

DJs

DJs are a great option for events where you don't want to worry about doing your own music. They're a particularly good option for venues that don't have an in-built sound system, as DJs will typically provide their own PA system – some can even provide a dance floor as well if you need one.

DJs typically bring a huge library of music with them and can adapt their playlist throughout the night to keep your guests entertained.

Live bands

If you want to make an even bigger statement, you might want to look into getting a live band.

Live bands have a number of benefits: they make a visual statement and can interact with your guests in a way that background music on a CD simply can't. They also come in many shapes and sizes, from solo acts and duos through to full bands.

If you're having a dinner dance or a similar type of event, then a live band is often the way to go.



There's a few things to keep in mind with live bands though. The first is that of all the options here, they'll likely need the most time to set up. They're also a more expensive option (in addition to their fee, many bands also require a meal, drinks and change rooms to be provided) so it's worth weighing their fee up against the value you think your guests will get from the band.

It's also worth remembering that live bands, particularly ones with live drummers, can get pretty loud. If quiet background music is what you're looking for at your fundraiser, you might want to consider just a soloist or duo, or look at one of the previous options.

Food and beverage costs

As discussed in the previous section, the most important thing with food and beverage packages is striking the right balance.

If you're including drinks in the ticket price but looking for a way to minimise costs, a good option is to offer a limited bar (beer, wine and soft drinks) is recommended to reduce costs. If you are having a third party or the venue provide your drinks, where you have the option it is usually cheaper to book a beverage package that charges based on time rather than consumption (ie: unlimited drinks for all guests for three hours at a fixed price per hour, rather than paying by the drink).

If you're running your own bar just for the night, wherever possible, arrange with your supplier to be able to return all unopened bottles so that you only pay for the drinks that you have sold. Also, leave the actual drinks purchase until close to the event, so you've got a good idea of how many people you're expecting and how much you'll need to buy to cater for them.

Venues that provide food, and third-party caterers, will often give you a range of food packages to choose from. Pick the one that strikes the best balance between your guests' expectations and the

cost to your organisation.

AV provision / hire

Depending on the entertainment options you've chosen and the activities you have planned for the night, you may need to provide or acquire some audio visual equipment for the night.

Always check with your venue first to see what they can provide – if they have in-house screens, microphones and sound systems it'll save you money as well as time and hassle.

Your next step is to check with your entertainment providers: DJs are used to working in all sorts of venues so they'll often provide their own speakers, for example.

If you do have to hire in equipment, make sure you shop around as prices and quality can vary greatly from provider to provider. Also remember to take any security bonds or deposits into account.

Decorations

Venue decoration is a tricky thing to get right. You want to set the right mood for your event – when people have paid good money for a ticket, they usually expect more than to walk into an empty hall. But at the same time the decorations aren't really what they're paying for, and you don't want to blow all your profits just on making the room look pretty.

In a lot of cases you don't need to do much. Some balloons and streamers, some flowers or table centrepieces might be enough – just simple things that set the mood.



Remember that lighting can play a huge role too. There's a reason that pubs turn all the lights on when they want everyone to leave: people associate dimmed lighting with parties and good times! So before you spend a fortune on decorations, try simply turning the lights down a little in your venue and seeing what a difference it makes.

One of the benefits of using an external venue can be that they can look spectacular without much

need for additional decorations, whether it's the view from their windows, the décor, their lighting or something else. If a venue will cost you a little more to hire but it will cost you a lot less to decorate, it could save you money overall.

Security, insurance and clean up

We're getting into the nitty-gritty and hidden costs now – that doesn't make these items any less important to your bottom line though!

Some venues might require you to purchase a one-night insurance policy to cover your event. This is most common in venues that have been provided free of charge.

The same also goes for security – depending on the location and venue you may or may not be required to pay for security, or hire your own security for the night.

Clean up is another potential cost, again mostly associated with venues that have been provided free of charge. Often in those venues, you'll have to either do your own clean up at the end of the night, or pay an additional cleaning fee.

You need to be aware of these possible costs when choosing your venue. The best way to minimise costs in these areas is to get quotes and information from multiple venues and compare them. Is the free venue still the most cost effective one if you have to pay for insurance and security, or does it make one of the hire venues a cheaper option overall?

Things to consider for a smooth night

Once you've got your plan in place, your budget done, your venue booked and your ticket sales underway, you're well on your way to having a successful fundraiser!

In this section we'll have a look at some of the small-detail things that will help to make everything run smoothly on the night.

Put together a running sheet for the night



Time slips by *very* quickly during a fundraising event – you've got a drink in your hand, everybody's having a great time, and before you know it the clock's struck 11pm!

Putting together a running sheet will help you keep everything on track during the night, especially if you've got a lot of activities you're looking to fit in.

Here's a few helpful suggestions for putting together a running sheet:

- Remember that, for you and your fellow organisers, work unfortunately starts some time before the doors open. Include the setup times on your running sheet.
- Liaise closely with your suppliers and entertainment providers on the night: check how much time they need before the function to set up, how long their activities will run for on the night, and how long they'll need to pack up afterwards.
- Don't schedule everything to start as soon as the doors open! People rarely arrive all at the same time – instead, you'll likely find people arrive in dribs and drabs over the first hour of the event. If you schedule your entertainment to start right after doors open, chances are only a few of your guests will be there at the time and you won't be getting your money's worth.
- Keep an eye on the schedule throughout the night, and try to stick to it as closely as possible. Ensure that all your volunteers have a copy of the schedule and know which tasks are allocated to them.
- Have a few spots on the schedule in mind where you can make up time. If your auction runs over time, for example, it can be helpful to have in the back of your mind that you can shorten the next music break to get back on track.
- As with the setup, work on the event doesn't necessarily finish when the guests leave. Remember to include pack up and post-event tasks in your running sheet too.

Recruit volunteers to help run the night

During the event there will be a whole range of jobs to do – likely too many for just one person. To lighten the load, it's a good idea to recruit some volunteers to help run things. Here's a list of some of the things you might get volunteers to do:

- Help with preparation and decoration of the venue
- Collect / sell tickets at the door
- Be the master of ceremonies for the evening
- Oversee the silent auctions
- Sell raffle tickets
- Look after music
- Work the bar (if they're qualified and the venue doesn't provide bar staff)
- Assist with the running of the live auctions
- Help clean up at the end of the night

Think carefully about the things that will need to happen on the night for your event, and think about how much of that work each person could reasonably do. It might be OK to ask the same person to, say, sell raffle tickets and help with the auctions, but it might be a bit much to ask the person working the bar to also be the MC.

Make checklists for use on event day

The day of your fundraiser is likely to be hectic. Creating checklists for the things you and each of your volunteers needs to do or bring on the day can help streamline the process.

Every event is different so it pays to come up with your own checklist in the weeks leading up to your event. But here's just a few of the things you might want to include:

- Guest list
- Running sheets
- Copies of sponsor announcements for the MC to read
- Contact details for all your equipment and entertainment providers
- Cash float for ticket / raffle / silent auction sales and change
- Any AV equipment you'll be providing (laptops, projectors, microphone, PA, etc)
- Any music items you'll be providing (MP3 player, CDs, etc)
- Fun money, DVD, betting slips and form guides (if you're running a race night!)
- All items to be auctioned on the night
- Any prizes you'll be giving away
- If you're providing them yourself, the drinks (as well as the ice, tubs, cups and everything



else you'll need for the bar service)

- The food and other associated items, if you're providing it yourself
- Phone charger (if you're the main point of contact you'll probably get more calls than usual – last thing you need is your phone dying!)

If it helps, print the checklist out and physically tick off each item as you pack it for the night. Don't forget to customise the list too, there's bound to be something specific to your event that we haven't included above!

Case study – DIY racing night fundraiser

For three years in a row, Daniel has run fundraisers at his soccer club in suburban Melbourne using a do-it-yourself race night kit.

“It just gets bigger and better every year,” says Daniel. “We run our night ourselves and the information, instructions and kit supplied carries everything you need to run your own night.

According to Daniel, one of the reasons the event keeps getting bigger and better each year is the atmosphere the races generate – he says that every time the guests really get into the spirit of the event, shouting and cheering their horses home.

The DIY kit Daniel used at his latest event cost just \$440 – a key factor in being able to maintain a very modest ticket price of \$15 per person, or \$25 per couple.

The club runs the events to be equal parts fundraiser and social gathering: “We want people to have fun without thinking that we have our hands in their pockets every five minutes,” as Daniel describes it.

To that end, the flexible format of the racing night has proven ideal for the club. Between races at the latest event there was a raffle and three door prizes drawn, and a fake-money auction was held at the end of the night for people to “spend” their racing winnings.

Even with this fairly relaxed approach on the night, and a low ticket price, the event still manages to be a substantial financial success. According to Daniel, the latest event had over 125 people attend, and raised over \$7000 for the club. Again, this was done largely on the back of a \$440 DIY racing kit!

Will the club keep using this as an option in future years? “As the punters commented at the end of the night, ‘Roll on next year!!!’” says Daniel.

