

Virtual Events

March 31, 2020

If you are replacing an in-person event for a virtual event, be sure to consider the purpose:

- Cultivation event
- Fundraising event

Cultivation Events

If it was a cultivation event, think about the event goals:

- What understanding/connections did you want to take place?
- After the event, what were the desired outcomes?
- After the event, what was the planned next step with the guests and hosts?

Other considerations

What was the culture of the event – formal or informal?

How engaged were the hosts or co-hosts to be during the event?

Was the event themed

Is the event time-sensitive?

What was the program, and can it be replicated (or closely) by video or live virtual presentations?

What can you do to capture (if appropriate) some fun and excitement?

What kind of participation did you want from participants (i.e. If questions and answers, you may want to have a host or a guest prepared to ask a question to get things started)?

Fundraising Events

First and foremost, now is the time to re-evaluate fundraising events. Typically, they are high cost, staff-intensive and are not effective at donor retention. A signature fundraising event for your event can be effective; however, focus first on gifts from individuals, foundations and corporations through personalized relationship building.

One of the positives in a fundraising event is that it can provide exposure for some businesses who may prefer to give (and therefore need to justify) with their marketing budget.

After this careful evaluation, confirm which events you must have this year to meet your budget. Again, many participants would be happy to – and even prefer – to simply make a gift to your organization if they understand how they can make a difference. Make this about them!

If you are continuing with a fundraising event then:
Confirm the net goal

Refine your expense budget. You may not have food, but do you want to send a beverage, food item or other treat to your participants? This can be seen as a great goodwill setup in helping the employees in the restaurant or other food industry.

Next, develop your income budget. Just as with an in-person event, sponsorship is key. Outline the exposure that your sponsors will receive and be creative.

Other considerations

Are you able to integrate similar activities in an online format?

Do you want to incorporate a text-to-give or online auction?

Do you want your event to be a paid ticketed event?

Determining Which Platform to Use

Online meeting

Online meetings are great for small group event replacements. These are much more intimate than any of the other digital platforms, making online meetings a useful tool in cultivation. Invite participants to share their video to make the meeting more personal and more interactive.

Uses for online meetings include:

- Happy hours or coffee sessions
- Gaining feedback on programs or services
- Stream a movie night
- Celebrate birthdays or anniversaries
- How to sessions (i.e., a paint and sip)
- Ask me anything's

Features to include in your online meeting:

- If the meeting is a little larger, create breakout sessions and have the host pop into each one to briefly check in and answer any questions
- Include ice-breakers
 - Ask a question and have attendees use the “raise your hand” feature as a way to indicate “yes” (i.e. Did you take a walk today?)
 - Play a trivia game
 - Have attendees dress in a theme (i.e. decades, crazy hat day)

We recommend Zoom.

Webinars

A webinar is a seminar or presentation conducted online. A webinar allows for one or multiple presenters in different locations to simultaneously livestream. Webinars allow for the viewers to be involved in the discussion through chats, Q&A's, polls, and even allowing viewers to virtually raise their hand. The host of the webinar has the capability to invite a viewer "on stage" to share their insight or ask a question.

Webinars are broadcasted live and have the ability to be integrated with social media platforms and websites. Webinars may also be recorded and downloaded so you may upload the webinar to your website or YouTube channel.

Webinars are a great option for fundraising events or cultivation events, depending on the structure of your webinar and who you involve.

Uses for webinars include:

- Informational and educational seminars about what your organization does and its needs
- Training for staff or board members on asking for gifts
- Storytelling
- "Fire-side" chats
- Online fundraising, including peer-to-peer
- Award or honor banquets

Features to include in your webinar:

- Powerpoints
- Videos
- Live performances or testimonials
- Images or graphics
- Q&A sessions

We recommend Zoom, Vimeo or Livestorm.

Virtual Conferences

Virtual conferences are similar to in-person conferences. These events are great if you are looking to replicate a multi-day event online. The digital platform allows for a digital space that begins in the virtual lobby. From the lobby, attendees can enter different rooms or "spaces" with different sessions. From the lobby, your organization has the ability to customize rooms and upload or stream videos for "sessions." Other spaces include a help desk, networking room, theater, sponsor space and more.

Virtual conferences also allow for data to be extracted after the conference is complete. You'll be able to gain contact information, as well as data on how involved attendees were at each session.

Uses for virtual conferences include:

- Educational sessions
- Training
- Partner summits
- Association gatherings

Features to include in your virtual conference:

- Incorporate your branding into the spaces
- Display sponsors or donors
- PowerPoints
- Interactive videos
- Social media integration

We recommend Inxpo or

Online Auctions

Online auctions allow donors to browse auction items from their computer or mobile device. Online auctions come with a great tool that enables notifications for reminders and outbidding.

When setting up your online auction, determine what goods or services should be auctioned and include high quality photos of each. Include a brief description of the item. Promote the online auction through social media prior to the virtual event.

Uses for online auctions:

- Use in conjunction with a webinar or virtual conference
- In conjunction with a social media campaign

Features to include in your online auction:

- Notifications and reminders
- Most online auction platforms come with a thermometer of how much has been raised. If you're hosting a livestream, give updates and show how much has been raised by sharing your screen.
- Highlight those who have given the most by featuring the scoreboard.

We recommend OneCause and Greater Giving.

Best Practices for Virtual Events

Plan for your virtual event in the same way you would for an in-person event. While the online platforms do not take much time to set up, plan your content and have a test run before launching live. Test your internet connection, speakers, video and presentations.

Promote your virtual event through social media and email campaigns. If your virtual event platform allows you to create a customized registration page, add your branding the registration page.

Consider your setting. Your background of your videos should not be distracting. It does not have to be a blank wall, but keep the background appropriate and within the culture of your organization. Minimize any distractions and potential background noises. Turn off fans, do not stand under a noisy air conditioner, etc.

Take your appearance into consideration. If you are presenting at a virtual conference, dress as you would if you were speaking to a group at an in-person conference. If you are hosting a virtual happy hour, casual attire might be more accepted.

Create ways for engagement. Ask viewers to submit questions, take polls or share the stream with friends.

Integrate your livestream with your social media accounts. This allows for increased reach. While those who view your livestream through a social media platform won't be able to directly interact as a webinar registrant would, encourage them to comment and engage with each other.

Capture data of those who attended your virtual event and enter that into your donor software.

Lighthouse Counsel
4/7/2020