



## Seven Test Questions To Ask *Before* You Plan An Event

Events can make the best of us panic. Should you send embossed print invitations or a PDF? Invest in champagne or go with the cheaper sparkling wine? Should the keynote speaker speak before dinner or during coffee? And critically, should you ask for money on the night?

There are no 'right or wrong' answers. Successful events – like all great relationships – are founded upon a strong, long-term purpose, not on short-term tricks to impress people, or get their attention or money.

If you're clear about that purpose, your guests (and sponsors) will get the message: you are a charity with a burning mission, and proud of it. While you want to make people welcome, you are experts in that mission – not champagne.

To help you test your event readiness, try answering the questions below. Ask your colleagues, your boss, and a couple of key close supporters the same questions. Getting different answers? Go back to the drawing board.

1. What is the core purpose of the event? Is it just to say thank you? To raise much-needed cash for short term needs? To lay the groundwork for further gifts? Whatever it is, be sure that you, your manager, and your colleagues all agree on one core purpose.
2. What three key messages about your charity would you like guests to remember? Can you write them down? Have you tested them on outsiders? Are they memorable and fascinating?
3. How will your guests *know* what the event's core purpose is? Be clear. If you want people to bid on raffle prizes, then sell hard. If it's a thank-you event, then thank hard. If it's a cultivation event, then tell people that somebody will be following up, and when.

Be sure to ask any speakers or auctioneer to reinforce your core purpose loud and clear. People need to hear things more than once!

4. Do you know who your guests really want to meet? Help your supporters develop good relationships with other people, not just you, and they'll thank you for ever. Do they want to meet people like themselves? Famous people? Programme staff? Beneficiaries?

Not sure? Why not call some top supporters and ask them?



5. Can you answer the Three Key Questions:

1. Who would suffer if we didn't exist?
2. Why are we best at what we do?
3. How will donors know we've succeeded?

These are donors' favourite questions. Rehearse the answers so that everybody has their own mini 'elevator pitch' at the ready.

6. Are you ready to listen? The best events are ones where staff are asking thoughtful questions of their guests – not huddling in a corner waiting for the hors d'oeuvres tray. Everybody should learn something new about at least three guests.
7. Do you know what happens next? All events are doorways to future relationships. What happens tomorrow, next week, next year?

Make thank-you calls the following day, not only to your committee and important guests, but also to staff who were there. Whom did they meet? What did they hear? Hold a de-brief meeting in the most attractive place possible – outside in the park, in the local pub at 5 pm - - whatever will get people there! Make it the 'post-event' event!

**Three Easy Ways to Help *Any* Staff Succeed At *Any* Event:**

1. Ask everyone to wear something with pockets, so they can carry their own business cards as well as collecting other people's.
2. Get people to prepare three great questions to ask on the night. Questions should be open-ended, such as: how did the guest first learn about the charity? What made them decide to come to the event?
3. Ask everyone to write down the toughest questions they have ever been asked about the charity. Then brainstorm positive, honest answers and rehearse them. Now everybody's ready!

Want more help? Prospero Partners offers a half-day in-house workshop, *“Events and Networking – How to Work a Room”*. Participants receive tailored training tips and techniques, and feedback on preparation and planning for an event; how best to meet, greet and circulate; and how and when to follow up with guests.