



# To Event or Not to Event

Making Strategic Go / No-Go Decisions for Nonprofit Events

**Lizi Lewis**

Community Development & Tourism Director | Town of Front Royal

# The Default Setting: Why Nonprofits Default to Events



## Tradition and Established Practices

The "we've always done it" mentality often dictates current strategies.



## Board Enthusiasm

Events are generally more engaging and easier for board members to champion.



## Visibility for the Mission

Events offer a clear, tangible way to showcase impact and connect with the community.



## Feels Like Fundraising

Events provide a direct and often celebratory method for revenue generation and engagement.

# The Real Cost: Events Are Resource Intensive



## Staff Time

Hours dedicated to planning, execution, and follow-up.



## Financial Investment

Direct costs including venue, catering, marketing, and staffing.



## Volunteer Time

The invaluable commitment of individuals supporting event operations.



## Planning Energy

The cumulative mental and emotional effort required for successful execution.



## Donor Attention

Competing for limited donor bandwidth and engagement.

Understanding these intensive demands is key to evaluating the true return on investment and considering the opportunity cost of pursuing an event versus other mission-advancing activities.



**Think of your  
energy as if it's  
expensive. As if  
it's a luxury item.  
Not everyone  
can afford it.**

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TAYLOR SWIFT

# The Framework: Friends. Famous. Funds.

Evaluating Events by Impact

## Key Pillars for Event Evaluation



### Friends

Building and strengthening relationships with customers, partners, and stakeholders.



### Famous

Increasing visibility and brand awareness through media, social reach, and public perception.



### Funds

Generating net revenue or a positive financial return on investment.

EVALUATE EVENTS BASED ON THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THESE THREE CORE AREAS.

# Cultivating 'Friends': How Events Build Stronger Relationships

Events serve as vital touchpoints for nurturing connections across our key stakeholder groups, transforming interactions into lasting relationships.



- **Donor Relationships**

Offer exclusive opportunities for donors to witness impact firsthand, engage with leadership, and feel a deeper personal connection to our mission.

- **Volunteer Recruitment & Retention**

Foster a sense of community and shared purpose, allowing volunteers to connect with each other and the organization, increasing engagement and encouraging continued support.

- **Partnerships**

Provide a dynamic environment for collaborative networking, celebrating mutual achievements, and exploring new avenues for joint initiatives.

- **Community Connection**

Serve as inclusive gatherings that strengthen our ties with the wider community, demonstrating our local presence and fostering goodwill through shared experiences.

# Famous = Visibility



## **New Audiences**

Attract individuals previously unaware of or not engaged with your organization or cause.



## **Media Coverage**

Generate press, interviews, and features to amplify reach and credibility.



## **Community Awareness**

Increase recognition and understanding of your mission and impact within the broader community.



## **Pipeline for Future Donors**

Cultivate initial interest and relationships for long-term support and contributions.

# Focus on Net Revenue

The Critical Metric for Financial Success



- **Prioritize Net Revenue**  
Concentrate on Net Revenue – the actual profit after all expenses – rather than just Gross Revenue.
- **Key Drivers of Net Revenue**  
Understand the core factors that contribute to net revenue growth.
- **Sponsor Support**  
Essential for offsetting costs and increasing direct contributions.
- **Return on Effort (ROE)**  
Maximize funds raised in relation to the resources invested.
- **Long-Term Donor Value**  
Cultivate relationships for sustained support and increased lifetime value.

# The Two-of-Three Rule

Evaluate event potential by assessing its contribution to at least two of three key criteria.



## Friends

Strengthening relationships and community.



## Famous

Increasing visibility and public recognition.



## Funds

Generating financial contributions.

**An event is likely worth doing if it accomplishes at least two of the three criteria. If an event only accomplishes one criterion, reconsider its value.**

# Signs an Event May Be a No-Go



- **Stale Audience**  
The event consistently attracts the same attendees year after year, indicating a lack of new engagement.
- **Low Sponsor Interest**  
There's a noticeable lack of enthusiasm or participation from potential sponsors.
- **Minimal Net Revenue**  
The event generates very little profit after expenses are accounted for.
- **High Staff Burnout**  
Event organization leads to significant exhaustion and stress among the staff.
- **Reliance on Tradition**  
The primary justification for continuing the event is simply 'it's always been done this way'.

# When Events Are Worth It



## Building and Strengthening Relationships

Fostering deeper connections with donors, volunteers, and stakeholders.



## Expanding the Donor Pipeline

Identifying, engaging, and cultivating new and existing supporters.



## Generating Meaningful Net Revenue

Ensuring a positive return on investment that directly supports operations.



## Advancing the Mission

Directly contributing to the organization's core purpose and impact.

# Protect the Energy

- **Strategic Alignment:** Every event must demonstrably support the nonprofit's core mission.
- **Resource Conservation:** Nonprofit resources (time, money, staff capacity) are finite and precious.
- **Purposeful Engagement:** Select events that strategically build relationships, enhance visibility, and generate revenue.
- **Mission Over Momentum:** Prioritize events that contribute meaningfully to the mission, avoiding those that deplete organizational capacity without a clear return.

