



Project Strengthening Organizations Assisting Refugees Tip Sheet on Special Events

Objective

To provide a guide on how events can be a part of the overall development plan for your MAA.

After reading this tip sheet, you will be able to:

- Determine if an event would be cost-effective and beneficial, given your organization's development plan
- Choose what *type* of event best suits your existing resources, community, and target audience
- Create an event budget
- Set and evaluate feasible goals, pertaining to financial outcomes and/or increasing the size of your mailing list or volunteer roster
- Recruit and coordinate a volunteer committee to plan the event
- Implement a successful follow-up strategy for attendees
- Evaluate the success of your event

I. Introduction

Events are great ways to raise money and awareness your organization. However, if not planned well, they can also be very time-consuming and expensive. This sheet can be used as a tool and resource to ensure that organizing an event is a fun and successful experience. Here are a few basics to get you started. (Tip: Use the **Event Planning Timeline** in this guide to help direct your event planning):

- **Step 1: Establish the basics.**
 - Why do you want to hold an event? What's the event's purpose? To educate your community about an issue? To raise money? To push decision-makers to take some action? To get media coverage for an issue? To build a base support from a specific audience? To facilitate good community relations?
 - Who do you want to attend?
 - After defining your goal and mission, choose what type of event will help you accomplish your goal. (Tip: Use the **What Are Some Different Models** section of this guide.)
 - Develop ways to evaluate the event's success. Measurable event objectives may include attendance, the amount of money raised, or the number of new names of potential clients or volunteers collected).

In considering this question, ask yourself: what kinds of events do I enjoy attending? What would I enjoy organizing? Consider the cost, time investment, and difficulty of different kinds of events.

- **Step 2: Recruit your committees.** No matter what kind of event you host, you should have a volunteer leadership committee that is tasked with getting people to attend the event and with strategizing and organizing all of the logistics.
 - Involve enthusiastic, dedicated people (family members, volunteers, students, other organizational leaders, etc.) with diverse skills and contacts in the planning.
 - To give people ownership of their work, consider setting up various sub-committees (i.e. location, budget, publicity, speakers, refreshments, setup and cleanup, volunteers, invitations, etc.).
 - Appoint a chair for each sub-committee, responsible for getting the sub-committee to adhere to its deadlines.
 - One member of your leadership committee should be responsible for coordinating, motivating, and following-up with committee members.

- **Step 3: Work out logistics.**
 - Set a budget. How much do you want to spend (and, if it's a fundraising event, raise)? The budget should be specific, and include revenue opportunities (sponsorship, ticket sales, donations, concession sales) and expenses (printing, permits, insurance, speakers, food, supplies, security). *If you elect a finance committee or budget committee, these volunteers can oversee this work.*
 - Confirm any speakers and give them guidelines (topics, speech length, program schedule). *If you elect a speakers' committee, these volunteers can oversee this.*
 - Secure in-kind donations of supplies, refreshments, photographers, decorations, and equipment (or request bids from various contacts and vendors if necessary).
 - Confirm speakers/films/etc.
 - Draft and confirm an hour-by-hour schedule.
 - Hold a final meeting or conference the day before the event. Distribute a schedule of events to each committee member. Discuss assignments. Distribute nametags. Answer questions.

- **Step 4: Promote Your Event.** Here are some ways to publicize your event:
 - ✓ Post Your Event Online: post your event on www.EthnicCommunitites.org, the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Affairs, and other community forums and listservs.
 - ✓ Create an announcement on your webpage about the event.
 - ✓ Send save-the-date email. Write emails to friends and neighbors telling them about your event and directing them to your event's page on your website.
 - ✓ Design flyers and invitations for the event, and distribute these to your mailing list.
 - ✓ Ask your school, church, synagogue, or mosque to publicize your event. Ask them to:
 - ✓ Place an event announcement in their bulletins and newsletters, both online and print. The announcement should ask people to visit your event's webpage and should provide contact information for someone on your leadership team who can answer questions.
 - ✓ Include an event flyer in any mailings they send out.

- ✓ Let you announce your event to their congregation or student body.
- ✓ Have the leader of the group announce your event to the entire organization.
- ✓ Put flyers up at their office or building.
- ✓ Post event flyers and signs around your neighborhood, community, or school.
- ✓ The key to a successful event is getting others involved. Ask other organizations to:
 - ✓ Announce your event in their print and online newsletters and verbally at their gatherings.
 - ✓ Post flyers in their buildings and offices.
 - ✓ Designate one person from their organization/campus to serve as their point-of-contact for the event. Then invite that representative to be a part of the event committee and involve him or her in the planning process.
- ✓ Research local media contacts and send out a press release.
- ✓ Advertise in your local newspaper and on local radio stations to help spread the word!
- ✓ Send out reminder emails a few days before the event.
- ✓ Take photos at the event. Post them on your website and send them to supporters.

TIP: Make a detailed list of who you contact, how, and when, and save it so you can use the same list next year.

- **Step 5: Hold Your Event**

- ✓ Confirm all details (donations, volunteers, speakers, etc.) one last time.
- ✓ Organize volunteers to help out on the day.
- ✓ Set up a table with brochures, photos, newsletters, donations box and other general information.
- ✓ Create a sign-in sheet, and encourage all guests to sign it. Let your guests know how you will use their names. Will you send them your quarterly newsletter, invite them to next year's event, or send them more information about an upcoming open house?
- ✓ Post a volunteer at the check-in table and at the door to greet guests, answer their questions, collect their contact information, and provide more information.
- ✓ Put a donation box in a prominent location. Be prepared to issue receipts for any cash you accept.

- **Step 6: Evaluate Your Event**

- ✓ Do your evaluation **immediately** after the event. You may want to consider having a questionnaire for participants to fill out. Ask: Did the event fulfill its goals and objectives? Why or why not? What items were missing on the checklist? Was the event well attended? Was informal and formal feedback about the event positive? Given the time you put in, was it worth doing?

Summary: Event Planning Timeline

The timeline below provides a step-by-step guide to organizing and executing an open house. Fill in your own deadlines and point people.

Task	Date Started	Date Finished	Due Date	Point Person
Step 1: Establish the basics				
Determine your event's purpose and target audience. Write it down. _____ _____				
Develop an evaluation plan. Write it here: _____ _____				
Set the event date. Write it here: _____				
Set the location. Write it here: _____				
Brainstorm all logistical needs and establish timeline for getting them done, including location setup, staging (if any) and audio/visual				
Step 2: Recruit your committees				
Determine your committees. Write them here: Committee: _____ Chair: _____ Committee: _____ Chair: _____ Committee: _____ Chair: _____ Committee: _____ Chair: _____ Committee: _____ Chair: _____				
Invite committee members				
Elect a chair for each committee				
Step 3: Work out the logistics				
Determine your revenue sources				

Determine your expenses				
Confirm any speakers and give them guidelines (topics, speech length, program schedule)				
Hold a final meeting or conference the day before the event				
Buy/rent/secure in-kind donations of supplies and equipment				
Confirm speakers/films/etc.				
Draft and confirm an hour-by-hour schedule.				
Step 4: Promote your event				
Make a list of your publicity outlets (listservs, websites, newspapers, churches/synagogues, JCC's, local stores, etc.)				
Prepare copy for program and printed materials (flyers, handbills and event announcements for print and online newsletters and bulletins)				
Post your event on the Project LOREO website				
Send save-the-date email				
Send Listserv Announcement				
Design flyers and invitations for the event, and distribute flyers/invitations to your mailing list				
Reach out to your school/house of worship				
Reach out to other organizations				
Make a media list				
Send your press release				
Send out reminder emails. Write the dates you'll send these emails here: First: _____ Second: _____ Third: _____ Fourth: _____				
Make a list of potential donors.				
Draft donor solicitation materials.				
Mail donor solicitation materials.				

Follow-up with donors. Write the dates and ways you'll follow-up here: Date: _____ Method (email, phone, etc.): _____ Date: _____ Method (email, phone, etc.): _____ Date: _____ Method (email, phone, etc.): _____				
Step 5: Hold Your Event				
Confirm all details (i.e. donations, volunteers, program elements, speakers, etc.) one last time				
Create volunteer descriptions for the day of the event, and match them with volunteers				
Set up registration tables				
Distribute a program as guests arrive, so they know what to expect.				
Step 6: Evaluate and follow-up				
Distribute a questionnaire to attendees, committee members or others				
Complete a self-evaluation				
Hold a debriefing meeting with all planners				
Thank everyone who participated. Send photos if possible.				
After the event, mail the printed program with a letter to "important" people who were unable to attend. Send photos.				

What are some different models of special events? What are the pros and cons of each model?

Informational Briefings

Informational briefings are small, intimate events that involve between 15 and 75 guests. These can be offered as a cultivation or thank-you tool to your current donors and volunteers (For example, some MAAs have offered briefings for all of their current donors who donate more than \$250 a year, or to volunteers who have volunteered for more than 6 months.)

Staff, volunteers, and donors can all be involved in deciding the program, but the final program should:

- ✓ Focus on a single topic
- ✓ Provide an introduction to your MAA's work
- ✓ Give you an opportunity to collect contact information for your guests
- ✓ Give you guests tangible ideas about how they can help you, whether through volunteering, advocacy, donations, or something else.

Ideas to engage your audience include showing a short video or photo slide show on your MAA's work, having a former or current refugee client presenting on how the organization has made a difference in their lives, or asking a key staff member to present on his or her particular role in your MAA. A cultural or historical theme could frame the program for the evening.

Fundraising Capacity: Limited – these are a way to engage local community and begin cultivation of prospective donors, not to raise money right away.

Lead Time: 3 – 4 months

Pros: No cost to attendees, easy to coordinate, informative, and low-cost to organization. Organization gains a list of prospective donors and volunteers and a way to thank existing supporters.

Cons: Do not raise funds on the night. It's hard to collect names and addresses (which you need to cultivate donors and identify community leadership in the future).

Role of Volunteers: inviting guests, hosting the event at their work place or at their home, underwriting refreshments, ideas for briefing topics/themes.

House Party

Like informational briefings, house parties – which are hosted at a supporter's home – are fun, intimate, and relatively easy to coordinate. Ask your host to cover the costs of the refreshments, in order to keep your costs low. (If they tell you what they purchased, and you provide them with an acknowledgement of their donation, the purchases can be taken as tax-deductions.) On the invitation, it must be evident that it is a "fundraising house party" that will support your MAA – it is important that guests know that they will be expected to contribute at the event. A peer should always solicit the guests for donations at the event – not a staff member. As a volunteer of your organization and a friend of the attendees, the host will have credibility with the guests and this will make the "ask" more persuasive.

Fundraising Capacity: \$500 and up after expenses, depending on the host and their network of friends. Ask should be made towards the end of the event. It is a good idea to have someone

TIP: Planning a community-wide event? Then involve the whole community. Reach out to other groups in the community and ask them to be part of your event committee. Their members are much more likely to show up if their group participates in the planning process.

planted in the crowd that makes a donation publicly, right after the “ask” is made.

Lead Time: 3-4 months

Pros: Fun, relaxed, intimate, engaging.

Cons: Can be difficult to secure a peer who will be comfortable asking for a donation at the event. (If this is the case, you can refrain from making an “ask” at the event and instead follow-up with a letter to all of the event attendees, asking for donations.)

Role of Volunteers: Guest attendance, theme, venue at their home, coordinate and pay for refreshments.

Educational Events/Film Screening

Hold a teach-in, speaker event or multimedia presentation (including film showings) to educate those in your community about refugees.

We’ve found that film screenings are good ways to engage new members of your community in your MAA’s work, because filmgoers will attend, in addition to your own donor networks. If you are selling tickets for the event, you must secure the rights to screen the movie. (The movie’s official website is a good starting place, to find the person responsible for the film’s marketing and promotions.) Review the film first and ensure that it conveys a message in tune with your MAA’s mission. Invite the filmmaker, actors, and your clients to attend the screening, and, after the event, host a panel discussion for your guests. The venue is important also. The better the audio/visual equipment, the more of an impact the event will have. Sell tickets in advance, if possible, and at the door. Collect names and contact information for all of your attendees.

Consider selling tickets on a sliding scale. Some MAAs have sold general admission tickets for \$10-\$15, but also sold tickets for \$25 or more that included a VIP reception, priority seating, or a panel discussion.

Fundraising Capacity: \$1,000 and up after expenses.

Lead Time: 5-6 months – it takes time to secure the rights to screen a film.

Pros: A good film can convey information about your MAA’s mission, engage new donors and volunteers, and, if you do effective PR, educate new audiences through press and advertisements.

Cons: Securing film screening rights is a lengthy process, and may require you to pay some fee. Travel for speakers, finding a donated venue, and securing audio/visual equipment can be expensive. Must be sure you are able to sell the number of tickets that the venue can hold.

Role of Volunteers: Publicizing the event and selling tickets, securing in-kind donations for refreshments and space.

Dinner

Organizing a fundraising dinner is extremely labor intensive. It is a good option if you have a full time member of staff and dedicated event committee focus their work on this event.

Fundraising Capacity: Sell tickets at a sliding scale; for example, selling tickets from \$100-\$500 can reflect seating or perks such as VIP reception or meet & greet with guest speakers. \$5,000 and up, after expenses (which can be high).

Lead Time: 6-7 months

Pros: Very engaging, fun, high fundraising potential, inspiring

Cons: Labor intensive, high cost, labor intensive to secure in kind donations of food and wine, securing informative program & speakers, audio/visual equipment, usually high end prospective donors are invited to a LOT of these, so your dinner must stand out, PR costs can be high.

Role of Volunteers: Publicizing the event and selling tickets, securing donated decorations, food, graphic design (i.e. for invitations), entertainment, etc., and reviewing the program. (Their friends will be attending, so they should be involved in developing the program.)

Art/Photo Exhibit & Auction

Again, this can be a labor intensive choice for an event. If, however, you have connections to a local photographer or a portfolio of artwork, it can also be rewarding. MAAs and other refugee-serving organizations have displayed the following:

- ✓ Photos of refugees taken by professional photographers
- ✓ Photos of refugees taken by refugee youth
- ✓ Artwork expressing the experiences that refugees endure, artwork by refugees, and
- ✓ Artwork by local artists.

We have found that silent auctions, where guests bid on items during the event (or online before or after the event), are easier to coordinate than live auctions.

Fundraising Capacity: \$1000 and up after expenses, depending on the value of the auction items and the bidders' financial capacity.

Lead Time: 5-6 months

Pros: Good exposure in local community, exhibit can 'travel' to other locations

Cons: Labor intensive, costly, difficult to secure partners and 'exhibit' items, no guarantee of how much will be sold, difficult to secure 100% donations from artists, PR costs can be high.

Role of Volunteers: Securing auction items, producing exhibit, creating artwork or photography, doing the marketing and public relations, designing and producing invitations, selling tickets, serving as docents at the event.

III. Follow-up plan for special events: Cultivating the new donors

While it may seem counterintuitive, the real work with donors starts as soon as your event ends. It is important to keep the donors engaged while your attendees' enthusiasm is still high. Consider implementing these six steps within the three months immediately following your event:

1. Send personalized acknowledgments to all attendees within one week of the event.
2. Offer ways to get involved at the event - hand out volunteer cards/sign up sheets/How to help brochures etc.
3. Enter the names of all attendees and their contact information into a donor database. Throughout the year you can then send them your newsletter or e-newsletter, your appeal letters, newspaper clippings that mention your organization, or any other correspondence that you design for donors and volunteers in order to keep them engaged with the work of the organization.
4. In addition, call some of the guests to thank them for attending and to get their feedback.
5. Invite your top donor prospects to visit your organization, tour your facilities, sit in on a class, and/or meet your staff and clients.
6. Invite your top prospects/past attendees to future events in a personalized way (i.e. by phone).
7. For those attendees who have attended two or more of your events, or expressed interest in event planning, marketing, public outreach, or fundraising, invite them to join an event committee to plan a future event.

Summary: What are some different models of special events?

	Lead time	Pros	Cons	Roles of volunteers
Informational Briefing	3 – 4 months	Easy to coordinate, informative, and low-cost. Gives you a list of prospective donors. Way to thank current supporters.	Do not raise funds on the night. Collecting the names and addresses from attendees can be challenging.	Guest attendance, event hosts, topic ideas and themes for briefing.
House Party	3 – 4 months	Fun, relaxed, engaging	Can be difficult to secure a peer who will is comfortable asking for a donation at the event. (If this is the case, you can refrain from making an “ask” at the event and instead follow-up with a letter to all of the event attendees, asking for donations.)	Guest attendance, theme, venue at their home, coordinate and pay for refreshments
Film Screening	5-6 months	A film can convey information about your MAA’s mission and engage new donors and volunteers	Securing film screening and finding a venue take time. It’s hard to estimate predict if you’ll be able to fill the theater.	Publicizing the event and selling tickets, securing donations of refreshments and space
Dinner	6-7 months	Engaging, high fundraising potential, inspiring	Labor intensive, high cost, labor intensive to secure donations, secure speakers, etc. In some communities, donors are invited to a LOT of these – competition is high.	Publicizing the event and selling tickets, securing donated decorations, food, graphic design (i.e. for invitations), entertainment, etc., and reviewing the program
Art/Photo Exhibit & Auction	5-6 months	Good exposure in local community, exhibit can ‘travel’ to other locations	Labor intensive, costly, difficult to secure items. Difficult to secure 100% donations from artists. Production costs can be high.	Securing auction items, producing exhibit, creating artwork or photography, marketing/PR, designing and producing invitations, selling tickets, serving as docents at the event.

Sample Event Timeline: World Refugee Day Fundraiser

January – April: Planning & Sponsorship Solicitation/Pre-Sales

- ✓ Confirm volunteer leadership and publicize committee members
- ✓ Set event date
- ✓ Secure venue
- ✓ Confirm program/format
- ✓ Set budget and pricing
- ✓ Recruit event Co-chairs and committees
- ✓ Develop and approve sponsorship packages & materials
- ✓ Finalize sponsorship prospect lists and solicitation strategies
- ✓ Confirm event vendors (pro-bono and paid): print design, PR, A/V, photographer
- ✓ Solicit in-kind donations: wine, food, airfare, floral, and other décor
- ✓ Secure major sponsors
- ✓ Finalize Co-chairs & Chairman's Committee membership
- ✓ Develop personal prospect lists for working committee
- ✓ Solicit prospective attendees by email
- ✓ Finalize event program and format
- ✓ Identify A/V and other event production needs

April

- ✓ Complete all solicitation/follow-up calls for invitation acknowledgment (4/6/07)
- ✓ Invitation copy to designer (4/9/07)
- ✓ Electronic invitation available for distribution (4/16/07)
- ✓ Invitation packets to Committee for personalization (4/23/07)

May

- ✓ Cultivation opportunity: Briefing on Micro-enterprise Program (4/26/07)
- ✓ Printed invitations drop (5/1/07)
- ✓ Begin follow-up calls to all invitees with reminder of program print deadline (5/21/07)
- ✓ Contact local newspapers and sports teams for pro-bono PR (5/21/07)
- ✓ Final program copy due to designer (5/28/07)
- ✓ Complete all follow-up calls (5/28/07)
- ✓ Confirm volunteer photographer from local university (5/28/07)

June

- ✓ Contact sponsors re: seating and guest lists (06/11/07)
- ✓ Final guarantee due to venue/caterer (6/13/07)
- ✓ Committee approval of seating (6/13/07)

Day of Event

- 6:00 Committee/volunteers arrive
- 6:30 Introductory remarks
- 6:38 IRC "short" (3 minutes)
- 6:41 Movie Screening
- 8:10 Moderated discussion
- 8:45 Post-screening reception
- 9:45 Adjourn

June

- ✓ Follow up with attendees (See section III)

Acknowledgments

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Opinions expressed on this resource do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of the United States, the Office of Refugee Resettlement or the International Rescue Committee.