

“Let’s Have an Event!”

For nearly 25 years, Cause Effective has assisted in the planning of special events for thousands of nonprofits. Some of the organizations were very small, others were very large and some were in between. Some of the events focused on fundraising, while others celebrated the organization’s programs. We have worked with organizations that focused on everything from human rights to the environment to cultural issues. Over the years we have learned hundreds of things about throwing events, but if there was one thing we would ask you to realize *before* exclaiming “Let’s have an event!” it would be this: sometimes events are good things, but sometimes they are incredibly risky.

Nonprofit organizations are always looking for ways to raise money. A common fundraising misconception is that events are a good and easy way to do it. This myth often encourages organizations to embark upon an event hastily, before thinking through all of the steps necessary to make it a success. The truth is, events can be very unpredictable and should not be taken lightly. A great deal of thinking should be done before, during, and even after any event. It is important to identify available resources—human, financial, and otherwise—and apply what you have to your ultimate goal. Making sure that your resources and your goals align is one of the most important first steps.

What exactly are we talking about?

A *special event* is any activity outside of an organization’s normal programs designed for and/or with a group of people within a specific time frame.

“Normal programs” refer to what your organization usually does. If your organization has built a community garden and you decide to have a Friday night gathering to thank the volunteers for their work, that is a special event.

In this book, we ask you to think about special events in the same way you think about everything else in your organization—as part of a campaign. In other words, think first about all of the events you want to do over a whole year rather than focusing on each event individually. Approaching special events in this manner will help to make them more successful than they ever would have been separately. **We call this concept a *special events campaign*: a series of special events, each with its own primary objective, designed to fulfill a set of objectives over a period of time.**

How can this book help you?

Please do not misunderstand—events can contribute greatly to your organization’s success. If done well, they can make money, raise morale, expand programs, promote your organization, recruit new members, and more. We encourage you to throw events if you have the appropriate resources. It is important, however, that you do them right.

This book is intended to take much of the guesswork out of events. The *idea* of having an event for your organization is easy. You rent a hall, get a caterer, order flowers, hire some entertainment, and sell tickets, right? No way! There are many, many other things to think about. For organizations that have never organized an event before, this book will identify all of the things you might not have considered. For organizations with some event experience, this book will help bring the efficiency and effectiveness of your event to a whole new level. Regardless of your experience, *The Toolbox* is a comprehensive tutorial that will help you organize your tasks and make sure that all of the necessary steps are taken. It is intended to make your life—and your event—as smooth and simple as possible.

Using this book

The Toolbox is a complete how-to guide to special events campaigns for nonprofit organizations. Whether you are an event novice or a seasoned veteran, this book will help you think through and maximize the opportunities that special events can provide, while helping you avoid common pitfalls. If you follow the book from beginning to end—read the text, complete the worksheets, and use the tools—you will have a clear vision of how to create and implement a special events campaign.

The first two chapters of *The Toolbox* focus on examining your organization critically and determining where it currently stands, where you want it to go, and what goals you will need to set to help you get there. Chapter Three walks you through the process of designing an event that fits your goals and your organization most appropriately.

Once you have laid this groundwork, you can begin to think about the shape and scope of your campaign. In Chapters Four through Six you will learn how to develop a realistic budget and a plan to fundraise and “friendraise” by pulling together committees and friends to help. These chapters will also help you to identify resources, both monetary and human, available for your campaign. Armed with this information, you can begin logistical planning, as well as create a strategy for how to market your events. Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine will highlight all the logistical and marketing issues and decisions for all sorts of events. Chapters Ten and Eleven will walk you through how to actually *manage* all of these pieces—from administrative necessities that will lead to smooth sailing, to recruiting and training volunteers to help with all of the essential jobs that will make your events successful.

If you decide to incorporate any ancillary activities into your events such as a journal, auction, or raffle, Chapters Twelve and Thirteen will help you plan and implement them effectively. Chapter Fourteen addresses celebrating an anniversary, which can be a special opportunity to expand your efforts but also requires special consideration.

Chapter Fifteen walks you through evaluating your campaign’s success. By looking critically at the events you have just carried out, you will have concrete details to inform next year’s campaign and make it even more successful than this year’s.

Step-by-Step

Almost every chapter in *The Toolbox* has been divided into four parts. The first section of each chapter provides essential information for every step of the event planning process. It is filled with very practical *theory* to help you on your way. We have highlighted some important information with additional tips in sidebars throughout the book. Following this theory is a “Case in Point”, an illustration of an organization that is applying that chapter’s subject to their campaign.

The “Worksheet Set” found in each chapter allows you to tailor the techniques to your organization. These worksheets ask you the necessary questions that will help you apply each topic to your own events. Sample completed worksheets provide examples of answers an organization *might* have.

In addition, we have included a number of “Tools” in each chapter. Consider the tools to be the instruments that will help you build the most successful event possible. Use them as examples to further illustrate the chapter’s text, as templates that can be modified to fit your own organization’s special events, or as a spark that can start your creative juices flowing. Remember—like the worksheet samples, these are *examples* and must be adapted to the needs of each individual organization.

Have confidence

We are certain that you have already had relevant event planning experience, probably without even realizing it. Why are we so confident? The definition is so broad that it encompasses your personal as well as professional life. Perhaps you’ve helped to plan a birthday party, a wedding, a church picnic, a Bat Mitzvah, a Little League Awards ceremony, or even a funeral. All of these activities require many of the skills and techniques that this book talks about. Remember, you *do* know what you’re doing.

Let’s go!

Don’t be afraid of this process. If you think carefully and act cautiously, your events are sure to be a success. This book will help you plan and manage your events and anticipate every bump and turn, leading to restful nights and organized days. Now, onto your special events campaign!