



FAQs for Nonprofit Fundraising Events

Updated November 2020

When clients first started canceling in-person events because of COVID-19, none of us expected that the impact of the pandemic on large in-person gatherings would be so long-lasting. The Ann Plans team continues to adapt and innovate to ensure the success of nonprofit virtual events in the midst of these uncertain and ever-changing times. We hope this FAQs resource will be helpful as you put plans in place for upcoming events.

Are many nonprofits scheduling in-person events for 2021?

Ann Plans clients with events scheduled through May 2021 have all decided to go with a virtual format. Organizations with events scheduled for later in 2021 are planning for the likelihood of a virtual or hybrid event. Some clients are exploring the possibility of reimagining a traditionally indoor event as an outdoor experience.

In marketing an upcoming gathering that is being planned as an in-person event, we recommend including language in all marketing materials indicating the date and format are subject to change, and that guidelines from the Center for Disease Control and local health department experts are being closely monitored.

How are virtual fundraising events performing compared to in-person events?

Among the positive outcomes of virtual events, many organizations are raising more as a fundraising net total than when their event was last hosted in person. One factor is that virtual events are typically less expensive to produce than in-person events. Organizations experiencing success with their virtual events are focusing on pre-event marketing strategies and producing an engaging and inspiring program.

What elements are key to the success of a virtual event?

Having a strong audiovisual and/or video production partner is key to the success of a well-produced virtual program and minimizes risks of technical issues. Finding an online giving platform that meets the needs of your event is also important. A well-messaged program that is short, compelling and entertaining is key to ensuring your event is well received and inspires generous giving.

How does fundraising differ with a virtual event?

Going virtual provides the opportunity to turn your event into a multi-day giving campaign; making it easy for people to donate online in the days leading up to the event, during the event, and in the days following. As with in-person events, pre-committed momentum gifts are critical to have in place before your virtual event takes place, and a large matching gift is another powerful tool to inspire giving.

How far out should we start planning our virtual event?

While the overall logistics of virtual events are typically less time-intensive to plan and implement than for in-person events, some key elements still need and deserve as much time when planning virtually. For example, we recommend investing the same amount of time in securing sponsors and planning the program whether you are planning for a virtual or in-person experience.

Is it better to completely pre-record or go live?

As organizations and planners have become more comfortable with the technology needed to produce a virtual event, there has been an increase in the number of live virtual events. Benefits of having live elements include being able to leverage fundraising progress in real time, the ability to refine messaging up until the event date, and the energy and spontaneity viewers experience with a live format. That said, there are instances where a 100% pre-recorded program makes sense. We would be happy to discuss your event goals and recommend the format that will work best.

Are nonprofits still having success securing sponsorships?

We continue to see organizations having success with securing sponsorships, often at a level comparable to the last in-person event. Keep in mind that some companies are doing well despite the pandemic. Expect that some of your corporate partners may not be in a position right now to sponsor, but many will, and some could be in a position to increase their level of giving.

Are online auctions doing well?

Organizations that have staff and volunteers with time and energy to creatively and strategically secure auction items are having good results with their online auctions. An auction component provides a fun way for people to participate in your event and helps drive traffic to the event website.

What will in-person events look like when they resume?

Large in-person events will look different when they resume with health and safety needing to be top of mind, and not everyone will be comfortable attending in person. To accommodate both audiences, many events will be done in a hybrid format with the option available to participate virtually.

How does Ann Plans support virtual events?

The Ann Plans team has been proudly serving the nonprofit community for over 13 years. Our expertise in all areas of fundraising event planning including video production, audiovisual planning, and crafting impactful programs has translated well to planning in the virtual space. Whether you are looking for guidance on a virtual, in-person, or hybrid event, we would love to help!

Please [contact us](#) with questions or for additional information.

Download our complete [Virtual Event Resource Guide](#).

(The updated version of this guide will be available in early December 2020.)

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Ann Plans has been celebrating and serving with the nonprofit community since 2007. An expert in fundraising events, we partner with organizations in creating amazing events that inspire generosity. Our team specializes in supporting each client's mission through purposeful storytelling and strategies that grow attendance, increase revenue and cultivate supporters.