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Silent Auction Fundraiser Dinners and Nonprofit Organizations

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Silent Auction Fundraiser Dinners and Nonprofit Organizations

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Abstract

This paper describes and analyzes the Goldendale Pregnancy Resource Center's annual fundraiser dinner and silent auction that was held November 4, 2021. It discusses the importance of nonprofit organizations, the difficulties encountered when planning the event, and an analysis of areas of improvement for future events. The information gathered will be used to determine the profitability of the event for the Goldendale Pregnancy Resource Center. The goal of the project is to increase revenue for the Goldendale Pregnancy Resource Center and be able to provide helpful fundraising information to other similar nonprofit organizations, although external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic may significantly alter the generalizability of this event for other organizations.

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Introduction

My project consists of two parts: planning and holding a silent auction fundraiser dinner for the Goldendale Pregnancy Resource Center (GPRC) and researching ways to raise more money during the auction. The research will focus on the events industry, specifically concentrating on nonprofit organizations (NPOs). My project and the research associated with it contribute to the academic and professional discourse on NPOs by exploring how NPOs can raise more money at their fundraising events, specifically silent auctions. My project covered planning a silent auction fundraiser dinner and comparing the outcome to those of previous iterations of the same event. The research was limited in its scope to one nonprofit organization but is an in-depth study of silent auction fundraising dinners.

About GPRC

The GPRC is a Christian nonprofit organization that supports pregnant women and is located in Goldendale, Washington. They offer services that include free pregnancy tests, counseling, and post-abortion support (*About*, n.d.). They have been operating in the Goldendale community since 1988 and their mission is to share the love of Christ with women and families in any parenting or pregnancy situation. They have a selection of maternity and baby clothes available, as well as a variety of other necessary items, that can be acquired through their “Earn While You Learn” program. They do not provide birth control, perform abortions, or refer those with whom they minister to abortion clinics, as they believe in the sanctity, uniqueness, and value of all human life. They are a member of Care Net, an international nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering men and women considering abortion to choose life instead (Care Net, n.d.). All of the GPRC’s services are free, private, and confidential. Their funding comes from individuals in the local community, local churches, and other community organizations, and they

receive no government funds, in the form of grants or otherwise (*About*, n.d.). The GPRC's annual budget is about \$40,000. The main expenditures of the organization are operational expenses such as salaries, advertising, fundraising, and supplies; dues associated with Care Net; taxes; and client expenses, such as hygiene products, diapers, and baby wipes.

NPOs

Nonprofit organizations are an important part of society. They are created to serve the public in some way and, in the United States, about one-tenth of the workforce is employed by nonprofits (Ben-ner & Van Hoomissen, 1991). However, because NPOs do not exist to make a profit, they can have difficulty supporting themselves. Most gather funds either by donation or fundraising. Current academic discourse on NPO funding sources consists largely of different marketing strategies, success in fundraising, income structure, and donor behavior (Sarikaya & Buhl, 2021, p. 7).

NPO Challenges

A major challenge that nonprofit organizations face is that their existence depends on how popular their cause is and how generous their supporters are (Brayley & McLean, 2019). It is becoming increasingly important for organizations to gather annual donors who will make large donations throughout their lifetime (Waters, 2011). Rather than continually requesting donations for an urgent need as done previously, organizations are focusing on building relationships with annual donors in which the donors can feel involved and cared for, encouraging a more personal relationship with the organization. Communication is an important aspect of keeping loyal donors and cultivating a sense of trust and satisfaction will increase the length of the organization-donor relationship (Water, 2011).

Another challenge that nonprofit organizations face is deciding how much funding to put toward fundraising while still maintaining their operations and meeting their service goals. According to Sarikaya and Buhl (2021), a nonprofit organization's main financial goal is to maximize the services the organization provides over time while lessening service expenses. To aid with this goal, Sarikaya and Buhl created a guide to help organizations set a budget for fundraising (2021). In order to help nonprofit organizations to use their money in the best way possible, they created a mathematical model based on economic principles to find the ideal way for a nonprofit organization to use its resources.

The mathematical model is based on three assumptions. The first is that the more money an organization spends on fundraising, the higher the revenue from those expenses and the lower the marginal revenue of the fundraising expenses. The second assumption claims that fixed administration costs for a nonprofit organization are not associated with a specific purpose of the organization, while the variable administrative costs relate directly to various services or fundraising costs. Finally, the model is based on the assumption that NPOs want to maximize the current value of their service expenses. This model can be quite useful for organizations looking to optimize their use of funds, particularly if they have enough current funds to properly execute the model. However, while the model based on these assumptions may be extremely useful to some organizations, the authors acknowledge that resource use changes based on the environment of the organization. For example, the success of a particular event might depend on additional factors such as how large and affluent the community in which it is located is.

Factors Affecting Fundraisers

The success of various fundraisers that an organization holds depends in a large part on the volunteers at the organization (Dove, 1988). Volunteers provide free labor and reduce what

would otherwise be a costly budget expense. They are very useful and can perform many different tasks for a nonprofit organization. In the case of the Goldendale Pregnancy Resource Center's annual fundraising dinner and silent auction, they help set up and decorate the venue, prepare the food, set up the silent auction, wait on tables during the presentations, help auction winners retrieve their items, and help clean up after the event. Without the volunteers to aid with this event, it is very likely that the GPRC would be unable to afford such a fundraising event.

A necessary component of a nonprofit organization's fundraising success has to do with advertising and marketing to annual donors and prospective donors. Advertising must be done early and often. It is unwise for an organization to rely on one individual for a large portion of their income, so drawing new supporters is important for the long-term survival of a nonprofit organization. Advertising and marketing can be performed in a multitude of different ways, and change according to the area which the organization is trying to reach.

Nonprofit organizations play a big role in society, providing many services for individuals. While some may receive government funding, all NPOs must fundraise in some way, preferably with low fundraising costs and high return on investment. Such organizations must allocate money wisely and heavily rely on donors, volunteers, and the popularity of their cause to continue operations. There are many ways to raise funds for NPOs, and this project will delve into one method—silent auction fundraiser dinners—to determine if it is a truly good way to raise funds or if organizations should look into other methods to collect revenue in order to continue their operations.

Event Description

On November 4, 2021 at 5 pm, the Goldendale Pregnancy Resource Center held its annual silent auction fundraiser dinner at the Community Grace Brethren Church. There is a

local man in the Goldendale community who provides everything needed for the turkey dinner except for dessert which he cooks himself with a crew of volunteers. At 9 am the day of the event, he and a crew of volunteers began cooking the food for the dinner. Throughout the day, community members and local businesses brought donations for the silent auction. There was an emphasis on baked goods, as historically they tend to bring in more money, but there was still a good selection of other auction items. At noon, a group of volunteers came in to help decorate the tables for the evening. The volunteer servers arrived at 5 pm to prepare to help serve the dinner at six. Overall, there were about 100 attendees of the event and it was able to raise around \$12,000 between the donations and the auction.

Post-event Analysis

Overall, the banquet went well, especially considering that it is the year after COVID first became widespread and some people are still reluctant to go out. There was an excellent turnout of volunteers. Set up and tear down went smoothly and quickly, and there was a good selection of auction items. Because we planned for fewer people, we set up fewer tables than usual, which meant that there was more space between them and larger aisles, which was a great improvement over past events. There was space for servers to walk and room for guests to move their chairs.

Program

It is always a good idea to have some sort of keynote speaker. This year it did not work out to have a speaker. There were several potential speakers, but they did not work out for various reasons. While the program this year went relatively smoothly, it would have been better if it had been slightly longer. A keynote speaker adds time and can help with the personal connection between the audience and the auction. One of the main reasons for a longer program is it gives servers enough time to eat without feeling rushed. Unless they are fed before the guests, they should be fed right after everyone is served or they will lose energy and motivation.



Background music should be playing softly at all times. The only exception to this should be when someone is talking or a video is playing. It does not have to be fancy or live, but music will help wait times between speakers or sections of the program run more smoothly and adds to the general atmosphere of the event. It should begin playing when the doors open and continue throughout the night until the doors close. Special music by someone is a great added bonus, but it does not happen every year.

Putting together a run sheet for the evening would also help everything run more smoothly. This is an all-inclusive document that has everything timed out so servers know when they need to be places, speakers know when they need to speak, and the auction closes and is announced in a timely manner. Future events should have a run sheet available; a simplified run

sheet is provided in the Appendix. More details can be added to it as relates to the specific future event.

Logistics

Placement and flow are incredibly important at events. The placement of items such as tables affects how people move throughout a room and can either positively or adversely affect a person's experience at an event. Items should be placed to optimize flow and positive experiences at events. One major bottleneck area of the Grace Brethren Church is by the doors into the fellowship hall. This year we had the salad table and auction tables by the door but people were unable to move freely going into the auction and leaving with food. This is an ongoing problem from previous years and is something that we should look into for future years. Possibly adjusting the angle of the tables would help.

Communication

This was a big area that needed work this year. We need to go through our contact lists at least once a year and make sure that we have updated contacts at all the churches. This means calling phone numbers, making sure emails are correct, and ensuring that if there is a new pastor in town, we have their contact information. A particular area that should be looked into specifically is with the two Orthodox churches and the Seventh Day Adventist church, as they did not hear about the banquet. Churches should also be notified of the event several months in advance so that they can begin to mention it to generate attendance.

Volunteers

Volunteers should be contacted well in advance. Although we were successful in bringing in volunteers this year on relatively short notice, it is not a wise way to operate. There needs to be a detailed list of everything the volunteers need to do: keep waters refilled, serve dinner, serve dessert, decorate, childcare, bussing, food prep,



tear down, dishes, clean, act as runners, greet, operate the moneybox, etc. This way volunteers can be given specific jobs and some won't be overlooked while others are overworked.



Our volunteers this year were gathered from the local homeschool community. I sent out a group email to the general homeschool and co-op lists and received responses from there. Volunteers need to be fed prior to the dinner or right after everyone is served while the main body of the program is happening. They should also all be sent thank you notes. The most important volunteer, the community member who provides the dinner, should be contacted several months in advance of the event and should be alerted to any changes. He should also be

thanked profusely and acknowledged during the program for everything that he does for this event.

Decorations

For future events, there should be a list of everything that is needed at the tables. This includes centerpieces, donation



envelopes and papers, cups, napkins, silverware, and pens. Pens were not included on tables this year and that should not happen again. They are necessary

to fill out the donation envelopes. The podium and greeter table, as well as the drinks table, should also be decorated. Decorations should be allergen-free as much as possible, and should fit well with the theme of the dinner.



Discussion

I was able to access data from 2019 and 2020 on previous iterations of this event. Funds received from the event include money raised from the silent auction and donations made at the dinner. Attendance at the events was not precisely tracked, but I have access to a rough head count. In 2019, the banquet and silent auction raised \$8679 and was attended by about 250 people. In 2020, due to COVID-19, the banquet was not held; however, the GPRC held a cookie fundraiser in its place and was able to raise \$1570 through donations. In 2021, \$7745 was raised

at the dinner, about \$4000 of which was from the auction. There were 125 attendees in 2021, roughly half of previous years' attendance.

Several factors contributed to the lower attendance rate over previous years: poor communication with prospective attendees, fears of COVID-19, and displeasure over COVID-19 protocols followed by the GPRC. Typically, prior to the event, the GPRC sends update emails to the churches in Goldendale, requesting that they advertise the event to their congregations. This year, several of the churches were not included in the communication, including the Greek Orthodox, Antiochian Orthodox, and Seventh-Day Adventist Churches, all of which attend the event regularly and contribute to the GPRC.

The Goldendale community is split in their views of COVID-19. Half of the community is afraid of attending public events for fear of contracting the virus, while the other half does not care about the virus at all. One difficulty the GPRC had when planning the event was to determine what protocols would be followed and/or enforced. They chose to follow state guidelines, though the Sheriff has given all businesses in Klickitat County the freedom to choose their own methods of protection against COVID-19. Some attendees were afraid to come over COVID-19 concerns, and others did not want to come because they did not want to wear a mask. However, despite these difficulties, the dinner was able to bring in about half the usual attendance.

Conclusion

There are several key points that I took away from planning and analyzing the GPRC's annual silent auction and fundraiser dinner. The first is the importance of communication in all areas of the event. Communication between the planners is important to ensure that no areas are overlooked, communication with volunteers is important so that there will be enough to

successfully run the event and they will be used optimally, and it is incredibly important during this type of event to communicate with prospective donors. Clear communication will lead to a successful event.

Something else important to this particular event was the program. A keynote speaker that was a previous client of the GPRC or can share a gripping testimony will keep the attendees coming back year after year and continuing to donate. It also helps the evening run more smoothly and distracts from any gaps in service from the volunteers. A good speaker as the focal point of the program reminds the attendees why they are at the event and what cause their money is going to.

Attendance at the event was not the only way that the GPRC experienced the impact of COVID-19. The center has had more difficulty raising funds, as can be seen from the poor donation intake from 2020's banquet substitute. However, the center had fewer clients in 2020, which helped reduce client expenses and they were able to remain open and help the community after the first couple months of initial lockdown. Their use of funds has not changed over the course of the pandemic, even though their donations have fluctuated.

While some areas of this project can be applied to other events by other businesses and NPOs, such as clear communication and relevant programs, this event was a specific situation with a specific group of people. This document will be helpful in planning future years of this event, but it may not apply equally to different events. Other communities may not be as wealthy or supportive and different areas have different restrictions due to the pandemic. Despite the specific nature of this event, however, general knowledge can be gleaned from it to help others who may be planning a silent auction or a fundraiser dinner or both.

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Appendix

Sample Run Sheet for GPRC Dinner (Simplified)

Time	Duration	Activity	Who	Notes
9:00 AM	3 hours	Cooking	Dr. Ogden, 5 volunteers	May take longer, may be shorter, ends when cooking is done Main decorator set up
12:00 PM	1.5 hours	Decorating/Set up	Volunteers	sample table volunteers can work off of
12:00 PM	4 hours	Auction items arriving	Community members, volunteers	Check in items as they arrive Double check décor, auction items, food is all in order
4:00 PM	15 minutes	Final preparations	Planner	
4:15 PM	30 minutes	Volunteers arrive	Volunteers, planner	Assign tasks
5:00 PM	1.5 hours	Doors open		
6:00 PM	1.25 hours	Program	Director, board members, speaker	Background music playing when no one is speaking
6:00 PM	45 minutes	Dinner	Attendees, volunteers	Dismiss by table Announce, 15 minutes before and at close
6:30 PM		Auction closes		
6:45 PM	30 minutes	Dessert	Attendees, volunteers	Serve to tables
7:00 PM	1.5 hours	Clean up	Volunteers	Dishes
7:15 PM	15 minutes	Winners announced	Board members, volunteers	Need runners
7:30 PM	30 minutes	Items picked up and paid for	Attendees, volunteers	Minimum 2 volunteers collecting funds
8:00 PM	30 minutes	Final cleaning	Volunteers	Vacuum, adjust tables, remove decorations
8:30 PM		Event over	Planner	Final check of cleanliness, lock up