



Benefit Auction Success Guide

1. PLANNING & TIMELINE

- Begin planning at least **12 months** for major benefit auctions.
- Use a **professional run of show** to structure the evening and keep everything organized.
- Ensure **donors who cannot attend** can still participate via mobile bidding or online donations.
- Extract funds early in the evening **before speeches or long presentations** to maintain momentum and maximize giving.
- Develop a **timeline of key milestones**: procurement deadlines, marketing campaigns, volunteer assignments, sponsorship confirmations, and rehearsals for emcees/auctioneers.
- Assign **responsibilities** to staff, volunteers, and board members for accountability.
- Conduct **pre-event meetings** to finalize logistics and troubleshoot potential issues.

2. PROCUREMENT (ITEM ACQUISITION)

- **Live Auction Items:** Aim for **4–12 high-value items**.
- Focus on **experiences and consumables**, as these consistently generate high bids.
- The **best items are exclusive** to your auction (e.g., fishing trip on the executive director's boat).
- Use **historical event data** to identify high-performing items.
- Conduct **short surveys** (2–3 questions) to past attendees and donors to gather procurement ideas.
- Encourage **long expiration dates** on trips and experience packages to maximize flexibility for winners.
- Limit **consignment items** to no more than 20% of total auction items.
- When possible, **secure high-value items multiple times** to sell more than once.
- **Everyone should participate** in procurement, leveraging their personal networks.
- Optimal moment to ask for items: **while paying for a service** (e.g., request a dinner experience while paying your restaurant bill).
- Ensure items retain:
 - **Live auction:** at least 75% of retail value
 - **Silent auction:** 25–50% of retail value

Tax Details in Alberta (CPA Confirmed):

- **Live & Silent Auction Purchases:** If an item sells for **over 125% of FMV**, the amount above FMV is eligible for a charitable tax receipt. Clearly communicate FMV to bidders.
 - **Raffle Tickets & Fundraising Games:** Not eligible for tax receipts under CRA guidelines.
 - **Donated Items:** Donors can receive a receipt equal to FMV if documented (invoice, appraisal, etc.). Example: \$1,000 item donation = \$1,000 tax receipt.
 - **Pledge Auction / Raise the Paddle:** Fully tax-deductible as outright charitable contributions.
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3. MARKETING YOUR EVENT

- Use a **multi-channel approach**: website, online registration, email campaigns, save-the-date cards, invitations, auction catalog.
- **Save-the-Date Cards:** Send 4–6 months in advance, including:
 - Event name and date
 - Website address
 - Clear indication it's a fundraiser
- Staff, volunteers, and board members should **carry extra cards** for distribution.
- Invitations expand on save-the-date, providing more details about the event, featured items, and fundraising goals.
- Online content and emails should **mirror the invitation** and showcase sample items.
- **Limit schedule details** on invitations; only list start times to avoid

confusion.

- Leverage **social media campaigns** to generate excitement and engage potential attendees.

4. BUDGET & EXPENSE MANAGEMENT

- Identify all sources of **income and expense** before setting a budget.
- Avoid cutting costs that negatively affect fundraising performance — investing upfront **maximizes returns**.
- **Ticket Pricing Formula:** Total event budget ÷ number of tickets = ticket price.
- **No table discounts:** Encourage donors to buy tables for seating preference, not discounts.
- Ensure **expenses are covered before the event** through ticket sales, underwriters, and sponsorships.
- Guests who complain about ticket prices may **not be your target audience**.

Key Budget Components:

1. Auctioneer / Consultant:

- Hiring professionals costs more but **can generate 3x returns** over volunteers.
- Example: Volunteer raises \$10,000; professional raises \$30,000.

2. Event Software:

- Pre-registration with credit cards and bidder numbers
- Cashless transactions (casino-style bidding)
- Donor behavior analysis for future procurement
- Real-time donor recognition during paddle raise or live auction
- Smooth check-in, bidding, and checkout
- On-site tech support

3. **A/V System:**

- High-quality sound in all corners of the room
- Avoid ceiling-mounted “house speakers”
- Always have an **on-site technician** to prevent costly errors

4. **Dinner & Catering:**

- Family-style service recommended for efficiency
- Facilitates live auction during main course
- Costs can often be negotiated based on group size
- NEVER D HAVE A BUFFET

5. **Miscellaneous:**

- Add **10–20% contingency** for printing, decorations, and unexpected expenses

- Optional bonus for the auctioneer if fundraising goals exceed projections..Just kidding
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5. LIVE AUCTION

- Schedule earlier in the evening, ideally during dinner.
 - Time per item: 2.5–5 minutes.
 - Guests must be **pre-registered with credit cards** and have a bidder number.
 - Only allow **in-room bidding**; no pre-bidding for live auction items.
 - **Professional bid spotters**: Minimum 1 per 140 guests.
 - **Clerks**: 1 paid or 3 trained volunteers.
 - **Item order**: Follow a bell curve — start with moderate-value items, peak with highest-value items, finish with lighter items.
 - Avoid selling low-value items for extremely high bids (can undermine paddle raise).
 - High-ticket items should be **placed at excitement peaks**.
 - Launch **mobile bidding** 5–7 days before the event, ideally at high noon.
 - **Emcee / Master of Ceremonies**: Charismatic, reliable, keeps energy high and program on track.
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6. PADDLE RAISE (FUND-A-NEED)

- Every guest must have a paddle because at the lower levels, everyone can participate.
- **Follow-up:** Call donors within 24 hours; send thank-you letters within 72 hours.
- Assign **three recorders** to track paddle numbers.
- Effective format:
 - 2–3 minute emotional video
 - 2-minute speech (max 1.5 pages, double-spaced)
 - Structure: for each giving level
 1. Identify the problem
 2. Show how your organization addresses it
 3. Describe the impact per giving level
- **Ask format:** Auctioneer alone or “Fireside Chat” with representative.
- **Pre-secure 40% of gifts** to maintain energy.
- Keep paddle raise open **one week post-event** for additional donations.
- Display donor names and levels **in real-time** via software.
- Paddle specifications: **8.5” x 5.5”, white background, black 300-point font.**

7. FUNDRAISING GAMES

- Run 1–3 games to engage attendees, especially non-live auction participants.
 - Popular options:
 - Balloon Pop
 - Wine Tree
 - Dessert Dash
 - Wildcard Auction (spontaneous donations during event)
 - Heads or Tails
 - True or False
 - Purse Snatch
 - Centerpiece Auction
 - Games are **run jointly by the auctioneer and emcee.**
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8. SPONSORSHIP & UNDERWRITER OPPORTUNITIES

- Sponsors may cover costs for:
 - Auctioneer, A/V, Dinner, Catering, Refreshments, Back of Bid Card, Decor, Venue, Software, Centrepiece, Auction Items, Paddle, Photo Booth, Drinks, Golden Ticket, Safe Ride Home, etc.

- Recognition includes: Free tables, email and social media acknowledgment, website presence, program mentions, on-stage shoutouts, etc.
 - Tiered sponsorship levels: Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze
 - Platinum: choose 4 perks
 - Gold: choose 3 perks
 - Silver: choose 2 perks
 - Bronze: choose 1 perk
 - Option for **custom “build your own” sponsorship**.
 - Ensure **promises are deliverable** before committing.
 - Script all announcements and prize mentions to avoid surprises.
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9. RUN OF SHOW (SAMPLE TIMELINE)

- **6:00 PM:** Doors Open / Social Hour
- **7:30 PM:** Guests Seated for Dinner
- **8:15 PM:** Paddle Raise (Fund-a-Need)
- **8:30 PM:** Live Auction
- **9:00 PM:** Awards & Speeches
- **10:00 PM:** Program Ends

Notes:

- 6:00–7:30 allows **mingling and networking** before fundraising.
 - Schedule revenue-generating segments **before awards/speeches**.
 - Never place Fund-a-Need at the end — energy drops.
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10. SILENT AUCTION

- **Close earlier in the evening** to allow checkout team to be organized before live auction.
- Suggested layout: **three sections**, high-traffic areas.
- Avoid tables on room perimeter; maintain **10-foot aisles**.
- Optional: **online silent auction** to expand bidder reach.
- Bid sheets: **bidder numbers only, no names**. This assures bidders won't stop because they are bidding up a friend.
- Include **mini posters/placards** describing items, using catchy names.
- Item placement: high-traffic zones like paths to bar.
- Max 1 item per 10 guests and limit to 30 items per section.
- Expected return: up to **50% of item value**.
- **Table spacing**: minimum 1.5 feet per item: 8-foot table = 5 items per side, 10 items total on an 8-foot table

Consignment Packages:

- Usually, trips or consumables are purchased from consignment companies.
- Example: \$2,000 purchase package is purchased by the organization and is sold at \$4,000 = \$2,000 profit.
- Pros: no risk if it does not sell, the organization does not pay. These packages are easily marketed and can be sold multiple times
- Cons: small profits can take up event capacity

11. RAFFLES

- Options: 50/50, Bucket, Balloon Pop, Big Toy, Centrepiece raffle, Treasure Chest, Champagne & Diamond, Lotto Tree, Diamond Mine, Tequila, Golden Ticket.
- **Recommendation:** Only one raffle per event: Golden Ticket preferred.
- **Golden Ticket:** Premium tickets \$100–\$200; winner selects any live auction item.
- **Ticket Sellers:** 1 per 100 guests, ask no more than every 25 minutes.
- **Stickers** to track purchases prevent duplicate asks.

Revenue Stream ROI Ranking:

1. Paddle Raise
 2. Live Auction
 3. Raffle
 4. Fundraising Games
 5. Silent Auction
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12. DONOR CULTIVATION

- Each donor should receive **21 touchpoints annually** (calls, emails, updates).
 - Builds trust and familiarity for future asks.
 - Call donors within 24 hours post-event; send thank-you cards within 72 hours.
 - Only **10% of touchpoints should be asks** to maintain relationship quality.
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13. GENERAL BEST PRACTICES

- Ensure all attendees can **participate in fundraising**, in-person or remotely.
- Leverage **data and software tools** to improve engagement and event performance.

14. RESOURCES

Consignment Companies:

- Lux Give: <https://luxgive.com/>
- Charity Getaways: <https://charitygetaways.com/>
- Mitch Stuart: <https://mitchstuart.com/>

Auction Software Companies:

- Givergy: <https://www.givergy.com/us/>
- Auctria: <https://www.auctria.com/>

A/V Companies:

- Onstage Audio and Visual: <https://onstageaudiovisual.ca/>
- Starlite Sales and Rentals: <https://starliterentals.com/>
- Big Guy Productions: <https://www.bigguyproductions.com/>

Venues (Calgary):

- Telus Spark Science Centre:
https://www.sparkscience.ca/host-an-event?srsId=AfmBOop-TRbKs_W-D_YLAn1OsE5RGT4JQKV_chjSDjSCeaDj3vce3PNXi
- Fairmont Palliser:
<https://www.fairmont.com/en/hotels/calgary/fairmont-palliser/meetings.html>

- Radisson Hotel & Event Centre:
<https://www.radissonhotels.com/en-us/meeting-conference-hotels>

Caterers:

- Roma Catering: <https://www.romacatering.ca/>
- Cookie Queen Inc: <https://cookiequeen.ca/>
- Gather Catering and Events: <https://www.gathercatering.ca/>