

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.
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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.
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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

5. Miscellaneous:

- Add **10–20% contingency** for printing, decorations, and unexpected expenses
- Optional bonus for the auctioneer if fundraising goals exceed projections..Just kidding

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.**
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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 End

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.

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/>



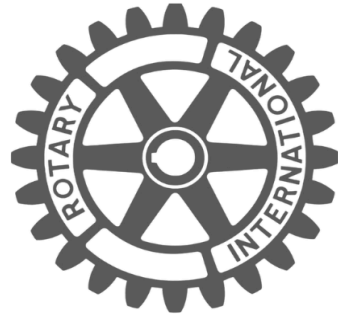
Other Resources

SAMPLE BID CARD

Dimensions of the Perfect Bid Card - 5.5" X 8.5"

(Print Numbers in 300 point font, black on white background)

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CASH APPEAL RECORDING FORM

Upon completion of Cash Appeal, take this form to the Cashier Station

[illegible]

Note: Only One Bidder Number Per Box

SILENT AUCTION BID SHEET

[illegible]

LIVE & SILENT AUCTION ACQUISITION FORM

(Insert event logo, name, date, location, mailing address for donations, email, website, contact info, Tax ID or GST Registration #, CATALOG DEADLINE)

Live & Silent Auction Acquisition Form

Donation: _____

Item Tag #: _____ ☐ Merchandise ☐ Services ☐ Cash

Fair Market Value: \$_____ ☐ LIVE ☐ SILENT ☐ SS AUCTION

Donated by: ☐ Individual ☐ Company ☐ Business card attached?

Name: _____

Address: _____

PC/Zip: _____ email: _____ website: _____

Contact numbers: T: _____ C: _____ F: _____

Authorized by: _____ Title: _____

Signature: _____

Donation Description (Please list any restrictions): ☐ Actual item ☐ Certificate

If applicable, is the donor expecting a tax receipt? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Donation acquired by: _____ T: _____

Is item to be: ☐ DELIVERED ☐ PICKED UP ☐ ACCOMPANYING PROMO MATERIAL

Details: _____

WILDCARD RECORDING FORM

WILDCARD AUCTION™

EVENT: _____ DATE: _____

DONOR'S NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ CITY: _____

POSTAL CODE: _____ EMAIL: _____

PHONE NUMBERS: _____

COMPLAINT CONTACT: _____ TITLE: _____

Description of Item/ Special Conditions: _____

AIRFARE INCLUDED: ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ N/A

BUYER: _____ BIDDER NUMBER: _____

ADDRESS: _____ CITY: _____

POSTAL CODE: _____ EMAIL: _____

PRICE: _____ METHOD OF PAYMENT: ☐ VISA ☐ MC ☐ CHEQUE ☐ CASH

BUYER SIGNATURE: _____

PROCUREMENT LETTER

(On letterhead if possible)

Procurement Letter (SAMPLE)

(Date)

Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss (name) (or Supporter),

On (date), (organization) will be hosting a fundraising auction event to benefit (explain the cause) in our community. (Provide details of the event). Your support of this important initiative would be greatly appreciated. The purpose of this letter is to request a donation of an auction item that will help us achieve our goal of raising (amount).

Attached is an Auction Acquisition form that you can complete and return by regular mail, fax, or email. Your generosity will be acknowledged in several ways (details). You can be assured that the additional visibility of your company will provide a worthwhile benefit to you.

In addition to your donation of an auction item. We are grateful for cash contributions that will go towards underwriting the costs of our event. As well, several levels of sponsorships are available, as are numerous advertising opportunities. An event representative will be happy to explain these options.

On behalf of (organization) and all the other volunteers, I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration of this opportunity to step up and help our community at whatever level and in whatever capacity you wish. Of course, we would like to invite you to our event, and we will gladly add your name to our invitation list so you may be included when our invitations are sent.

Should you require additional information or have any questions, please contact me at any time. My email and telephone numbers are listed below. Again, thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

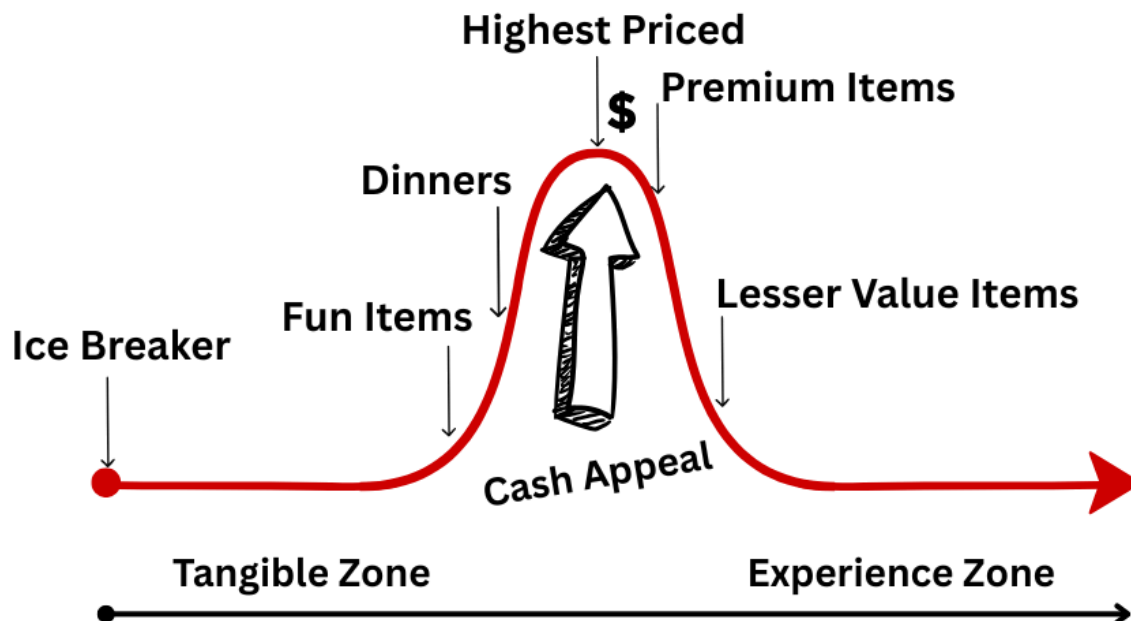
(Name)

(Title)

(email address)

(telephone number)

Live Auction Sequence



This diagram illustrates the Cash Appeal Curve, a strategic sequence for items in a live auction designed to maximize fundraising revenue. The approach follows a bell-curve structure to build and peak bidder excitement.

Building Momentum (Ascending Curve)

The auction starts in the Tangible Zone with lower-value items, aiming to warm up the audience:

- Ice Breaker: A low-cost item sold quickly to get the crowd engaged and comfortable with bidding.
- Fun Items & Dinners: Mid-range items that build excitement, participation, and increase the average bidding amount as the audience gains momentum.

Maximizing Revenue (The Peak)

The peak of the curve represents the highest fundraising potential:

- Highest Priced / Premium Items: These are the most sought-after and exclusive lots. They are strategically placed at the point of maximum Cash Appeal, when the audience's enthusiasm and financial readiness are highest, to ensure they command the best possible price.

Tapering Off (Descending Curve)

The auction concludes by managing the natural decline in energy:

- Lesser Value Items: These items transition into the Experience Zone (which may feature tangible or non-tangible goods). They are sold after the peak, allowing final bidders to secure lots as the main energy dissipates. This prevents the highest-value items from being sold when the room is tired or less engaged.

The sequence ensures the highest revenue is generated by hitting the peak of bidder enthusiasm with the most valuable items.

