EMPOWER21

2026

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PMCG - COMMUNITY GIVING PROJECT

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04/26/2026

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Initiating

Statement of the Problem

Founded in 2003 by Nancy Gianni, GiGi's Playhouse is a **national nonprofit organization** dedicated to changing society's perception of individuals with Down syndrome through **education** and **vocational training,** empowering these individuals to success. Following Gigi's Playhouse Raleigh's **expansion to a larger location** in 2023, the Playhouse has faced increased operating costs and **financial pressures**, making sustainable fundraising and community support a necessity now more than ever.

Project Scope

Our project, **Empower21**, aims to improve GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's fundraising and community awareness efforts. The project focuses its efforts on **enhancing their annual "I Have a Voice" Gala,** one of the Playhouse's largest fundraisers, crucial to determining the scale of events run for the following year. By partnering directly with GiGi's Playhouse and leveraging its existing community support, Empower21 helps **maximize donations** to fund program growth and sustain services at the organization's new location.

Planning and Organizing

Project Goals

1 Increase Total Revenue

Raise Gala revenue by our symbolic target of 21% by improving donor engagement, auctions, sponsorships, and ticket sales.

2 Improve Guest Acquisition

Attract first-time donors through complimentary tickets, partner outreach, and strong pre-event communication.

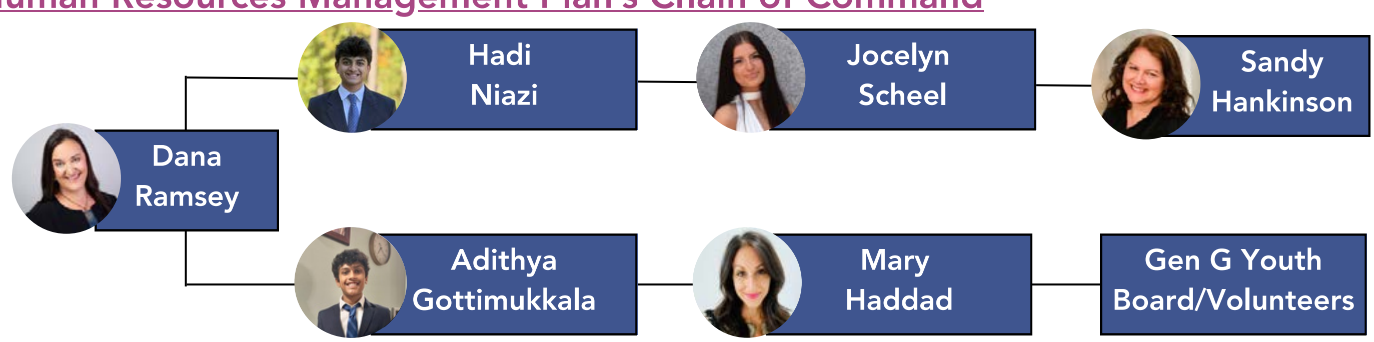
3 Enhance Marketing Strategy

Improve social media marketing, emails, sponsor updates, and phone outreach to boost engagement and visibility.

4 Document Full Process

Establish a standardized planning process to allow consistent and repeatable execution of future Galas.

Human Resources Management Plan's Chain of Command



The Gala used a structured, top-down communication approach for clarity and efficiency. The **Executive Director** (Dana Ramsey), directed **Project Managers** (Hadi Niazi, Adithya Gottimukkala), who delegated tasks to **staff** (Jocelyn Scheel, Sandy Hankinson) and the **GenG Youth Board Advisor** (Mary Haddad). **GenG** coordinated with staff for event logistics, ensuring smooth operations and timely decision-making.

Schedule

1. Initial meeting with Dana Ramsey (June 15th)
2. Complete project approval (July 27th)
3. Early bird ticket sale launch (August 13th)
4. Gen-G youth board meeting (August 14th)
5. 2025 “I Have a Voice” Gala (October 10th)
6. Post-event evaluation meeting (January 17th)

Quality Management Plan

We created **4 key metrics**, each of which numerically corresponds to their according project goal. These metrics hold us accountable and help us track the success of our project.

Key Metric 1: Total Net Revenue Growth (21%)

Key Metric 2: First-Time Donors (40)

Key Metric 3: Marketing Engagement (60%)

Key Metric 4: Standardized Gala Playbook (100%)

Risk Management Plan

Less-than Expected Attendance or Ticket Sales: Low attendance would directly reduce total revenue and weaken the overall success of the Gala.

Sponsorship or Major Donor Shortfalls: Insufficient sponsorships or a lack of gifts could significantly limit revenue growth

Auction Under Performing: Weak bidding activity would negatively impact one of the Gala’s largest revenue streams.

Proposed Project Budget

The project budget covered all key aspects of the Gala, including **venue**, **catering**, **entertainment**, **photography**, **technology**, **décor**, **auction items, and a budget buffer**. Additionally, discounts from venue partnerships and in-kind donations from sponsors helped reduce costs.

Proposed Budget: **$65,387.50**

Actual Budget: **$63,598.28**

Execution

PHASES (DATES)	KEY EVENTS	DESCRIPTION
Phase 1: Goal Setting (May 21st - June 15th)	1. Initial Meeting 2. Goal Development	Established project objectives, reviewed past Gala performance, and defined responsibilities.
Phase 2: Sponsorship Development (June 15th - August 14th)	1. Early Sponsor Outreach 2. Auction Integration	Secured and enhanced sponsor partnerships, restructured sponsorship tiers, and planned the auction to maximize revenue and engagement.

Phase 3: Marketing (August 14th - October 9th)	1. Marketing Strategy Expansion 2. Guest Acquisition	Implemented a multifaceted marketing campaign to increase ticket sales, attract new donors, and boost awareness for the Gala.
Phase 4: Event Execution (September 2nd - October 10th)	1. Pre-Event Operational Planning & Alignment 2. Event Day	Coordinated volunteers, vendors, and program segments on the day of the Gala to deliver a seamless and engaging experience.
Phase 5: Post-Event Review (October 10th - January 17th)	1. Documentation of a Gala Playbook 2. Post-Event Meeting	Analyzed event outcomes, gathered lessons learned, and compiled comprehensive documentation to support future Galas.

By splitting our execution into 5 phases, we were able to efficiently distribute work amongst sub-teams while also having collectively shared deadlines in mind. Additionally, the phased approach provided us the leeway to overlap deadlines when needed, and account for any potential setbacks without disrupting the project schedule heavily.

Monitoring and Controlling

Monitoring

Schedule Monitoring
Biweekly milestone reviews ensured tasks stayed on track and delays were addressed early.

Budget Monitoring
Expenses and in-kind donations were monitored to control costs and maximize revenue.

Project Quality Monitoring
Quality was evaluated through mission checks and post-event feedback.

Controlling

Issue	Response
Issue: Delayed sponsor confirmations	**Response:** Set deadlines and conduct follow-ups
Issue: Check-in bottlenecks	**Response:** Added stations and reassigned volunteers
Issue: Low early auction bidding	**Response:** Promoted items and encouraged bidding through MC
Issue: Attention loss during transitions	**Response:** Shortened transitions and refocused guests

Closing the Project

Evaluation of Key Metrics

32%	total revenue growth from 2024
52	attendees were first-time donors
72%	of tickets sold early
100%	of Gala documented and approved

Lessons Learned

- Established roles created efficient and centralized communication systems
- Positive interaction decreased potential communication barriers

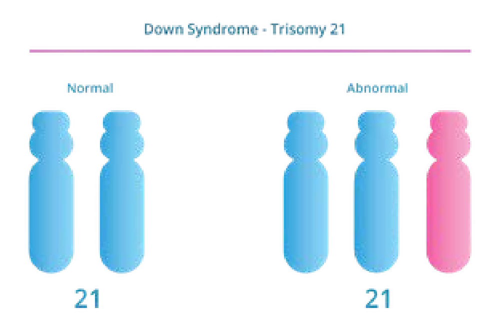
Future Recommendations

- Earlier sponsor outreach, especially for any new sponsors
- Implement a digital donation pipeline to reduce barriers of access

II. INITIATING

A. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Trisomy 21, often referred to as Down syndrome, is a common **genetic disorder** caused by an extra copy of **chromosome 21**. The additional genetic material from the added chromosome that the individual is born with results in various **physical** and **cognitive health effects**. For example, Down syndrome restricts physical development, hence why individuals with the condition often have distinct facial features. However, the effects are not solely medical, as they branch out to social environments, where challenges based on **lack of access and inclusion** are often prominent. This exclusion affects all stages of life, from education to employment opportunities; **individuals with Down syndrome are statistically limited** in their ability to develop essential life skills. That's why GiGi's Playhouse, founded in 2003 by Nancy Gianni, has dedicated it's efforts to change society's view on Down syndrome by empowering individuals through achievement centers focused on providing **free therapeutic and career development programs** for their participants.



Visual Representation of an Extra Copy of Chromosome 21 in Individuals with Down Syndrome

1 IN 700 babies in the United States is born with Down syndrome	**~20%** of adults with Down Syndrome are employed in integrated jobs	**~60%** of babies with Down Syndrome have congenital heart defects	**3 IN 4** adults with Down syndrome require ongoing support for daily living

In fact, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh, opened in 2016, became the **first Down Syndrome Achievement Center in North Carolina,** and has been serving members of the Triangle area ever since. Recently, the organization grew and thus expanded its space in February of 2023 to a larger location in Downtown Cary, but with it has come a fair share of **financial burdens.** Firstly, higher fixed operating costs have resulted in decreasing fundraising capacity, and when blended with stagnant community support levels, it means GiGi's Playhouse NC is facing **limited long-term program expansion** if it does not overcome these challenges.

Problem: Rising Costs & Limited Funding or Community Support

Impact: Restricted Program Growth & Reduced Impact Levels

Need: Increased Fundraising Capital & Sponsor Acquisition

Solution: EMPOWER21

B. PROJECT SCOPE

Purpose

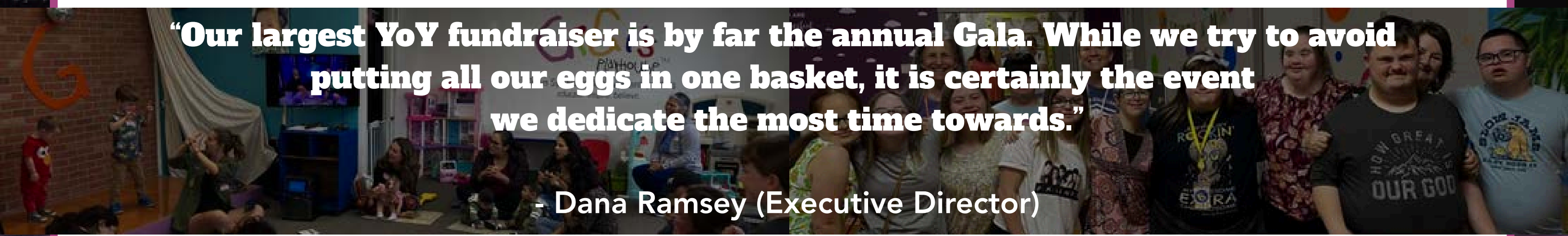
Empower21 aims to directly support individuals with Down syndrome by providing GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh with the **funds** and **community awareness** necessary to continue their development. Specifically, our project is focused on enhancing GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's annual **"I Have a Voice" Gala,** one of their biggest fundraisers, crucial to ensuring program success for the upcoming year. By partnering with the Playhouse, we plan to utilize their existing community backing to create a larger event to **increase net donations**, funding the expansion and **improvement** of their services.

Why Target the Gala?

- Proven Success
- High Growth Potential
- Largest Annual Fundraiser

Rationale

As GiGi's **primarily receives its funding through donations,** it is crucial for their largest fundraiser for the year to be a success, hence why it is **Empower21's main target.** Additionally, the reasoning behind specifically focusing on the Gala lies in the **historical success** that the organization has had with the event, as well as the potential for growth by solving the issues that they have faced YoY, including donor engagement and event planning.



"Our largest YoY fundraiser is by far the annual Gala. While we try to avoid putting all our eggs in one basket, it is certainly the event we dedicate the most time towards."

- Dana Ramsey (Executive Director)

Expected Benefits

Empower21 is focused on **building financial stability** for GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh as well as attracting new support via the community around them. Firstly, the project aims to expand the **revenue generated from the past Gala by at least 21%**, and with it, we plan on fostering stronger donor relationships to ensure sustainability for the future. Additionally, we aim to **improve the event planning process** for GiGi's employees by targeting previous planning hurdles, such as the registration process for the online bidding, a key part of the Gala. In order to create a framework of overarching goals for this project, we decided to create the acronym **EMPOWER.**

E M P O W E R

- **E** → Enhance Fundraising Capacity
- **M** → Mobilize Community Support
- **P** → Promote Long-Term Financial Stability
- **O** → Optimize Event Operations
- **W** → Widen Organizational Impact
- **E** → Elevate Donor Engagement
- **R** → Reinforce Inclusion & Awareness

III. PLANNING AND ORGANIZING

INTRODUCTION

Before we determined our main project goals, we conducted a **research study** to identify specific problems within the current 'I Have a Voice" Gala process that led to the Gala being ineffective. We then used the feedback as a basis for our project goals. Below we have a few sample responses:

"With the lack of recurring volunteers, information gets lost and Galas become harder to execute."
- Denise Hards, Treasurer

"I have noticed that since I've started volunteering, in 2019, our marketing every year has remained the same, and we have had very little success with it."
- Aashrith Tatineni, GenG President

A. PROJECT GOALS

After compiling frequently mentioned issues and areas for improvement from the project goals research study, we were able to narrow them down to **4 key goals**. Each of these targets a unique issue within the Gala and will, in turn, benefit both the success of Empower21 and the GiGi's Playhouse North Carolina location.

1 Increase Total Revenue

GiGi's Playhouse currently relies solely on donations from individuals, business partnerships (such as current partnerships with Microsoft, Invesco, SouthWire, etc.), or through corporate matching of employees' donations. To honor the GiGi's community and the affected 21st chromosome in individuals with Down syndrome, our team set a symbolic target to increase the total profit of the Gala by at least 21% compared to the previous year.

2 Improve Guest Acquisition

GiGi's Playhouse also requested that our team expand its donor pipeline to support long-term sustainability. After careful research, our team determined that offering 20 complimentary tickets to new prospects, expanding outreach through community partners, and strengthening pre-event communication would be the most effective strategies to attract first-time donors and grow GiGi's Playhouse's long-term donor pipeline.

3 Enhance Marketing Strategy

In previous years, GiGi's Playhouse relied mostly on basic social media posts, word-of-mouth, and a single round of emails, limiting the event's reach. Our project sought to enhance the marketing strategy by improving communication to increase visibility, engagement, and support guest acquisition and donor growth. Improving communication ensured potential guests, sponsors, and donors received consistent and exciting information.

4 Document Full Process

Beyond creating a successful Gala, the project aimed to improve the consistency of future events by addressing staff and volunteer turnover, often leading to inconsistent planning and lost knowledge. To solve this, the team completely documented the Gala planning process, including timelines, workflows, templates, and lessons learned, creating a repeatable system that improves efficiency and ensures continued success in future years.

B. HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN

Hadi Niazi
Project Manager of Communications

Responsibilities
- Oversee project coordination and tracking
- Manage communication between board members, staff, youth board, and volunteers to ensure successful Gala execution

Strengths
- Project organization
- Leadership
- Cross-team communication

Adithya Gottimukkala
Project Manager of Operations

Responsibilities
- Co-manage planning and execution by supporting logistics and improving revenue strategies
- Ensures Gala stays within budget, meets deadlines, and delivers goals

Strengths
- Analytical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Operational coordination

Dana Ramsey
Executive Director

Responsibilities
- Provide executive oversight, approve strategic decisions, and budget considerations
- Verify all project activities are aligned with GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's mission and long-term goals.

Strengths
- Strategic decision-making
- Nonprofit management
- Organizational vision

Jocelyn Scheel

Program Coordinator

Responsibilities
- Coordinate volunteers
- Support event-day operations
- Ensure a smooth and positive attendee experience.

Strengths
- Volunteer management
- Event coordination
- Adaptability

Sandy Hankinson

Operations Coordinator

Responsibilities
- Manage event logistics
- Manage registration systems
- Gather and prepare materials
- Operational execution of the Gala

Strengths
- Organization
- Logistics coordination
- Operational efficiency

Mary Haddad

GenG Youth Board Advisor

Responsibilities
- Oversees GenG Youth Board, a group of dedicated high school volunteers within GiGi's Playhouse
- Coordinates youth involvement

Strengths
- Mentorship
- Skill development
- Volunteer outreach

C. SCHEDULE

I. Milestones

01	02	03	04
PROJECT ESTABLISHMENT	FUNDRAISING DESIGN	PRE-EVENT ENGAGEMENT	EVENT EXECUTION

1 Project Establishment

Our first milestone began with **researching a viable nonprofit that aligns with our idea**, which in this case was GiGi's Playhouse. We initially contacted the organization via email, which led to our first meeting with the organization's Executive Director, **Dana Ramsey**, giving us a deeper understanding of GiGi's mission and potential fundraising needs. Within this stage, we were able to understand the area of improvement based on previous Gala performance, allowing us to lay out our **project goals**, budget, and **baseline schedule** before moving forward. Upon receiving approval from all levels of GiGi's organizational hierarchy, **we officially began planning**.

Nonprofit Research → Stakeholder Meeting → Project Planning → Organizational Approval

2 Fundraising Design

The second milestone used a **project management plan** to transform the information that was established within the first milestone into executable actions. For example, we knew that improving the revenue generated from the Gala by **21%** was a **primary goal**, and to achieve this, we planned to **implement new fundraising methods within the Gala itself, such as the "last give" segment**, in which gift items provided by sponsors would be auctioned off to members. It was at this stage that strategies to attract first-time attendees were finalized, and improvements to pre-event donor communication pipelines were arranged.

3 Pre-Event Engagement

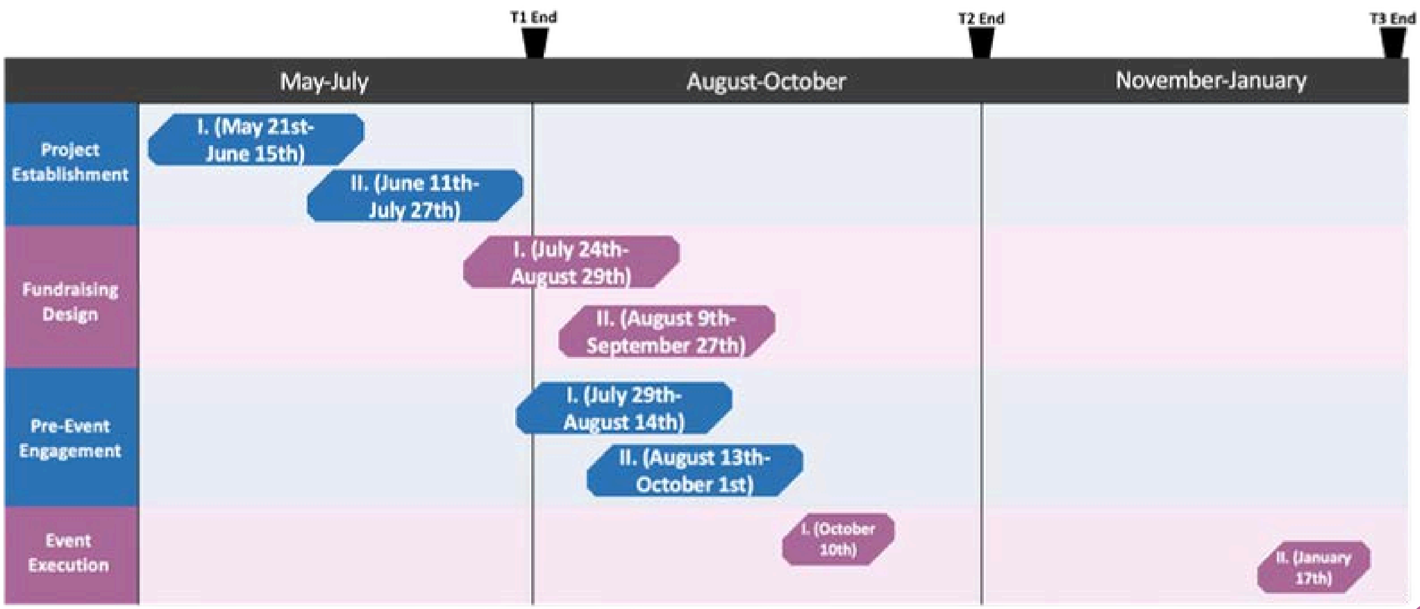
While researching areas of improvement within the GiGi's Playhouse fundraising process, Dana informed us about the struggles they've had in the past regarding involvement from their youth board, **GenG**. We took this as an opportunity to join the team and hold meetings to inform the members about the Gala, and alongside Mary Haddad, the GenG coordinator, **we created a fundraising challenge** that split the team into **5 groups of 4 to create mini events** that would generate funds for GiGi's mission. Within this stage, we also implemented the initial steps of our **new marketing plan**, including consistent communication with potential guests, sponsor acquisitions, and launched our early bird ticket sale program, all with the objective of **building excitement** surrounding the Gala and aligning with fundraising growth goals.

4 Event Execution

Our final milestone consisted of the execution of the "I Have a Voice" Gala, followed by post-event evaluation meetings with GenG and the GiGi's office. The post-event evaluation **documented the full planning process to create a repeatable planning framework** for teams in the future to build upon. Expanding past the Gala, the fundraising challenge started on October 24th and finished up on January 8th, followed by a meeting on January 17th to celebrate GenG's success with the competition. Both events **concluded with a comparison of results to the goals** that were previously established, accompanied by recommendations for improvement in the future.

II. Timeline to reach each milestone

The Gantt chart below was utilized to split up our project timeline based on the **key milestones** selected. Each milestone has a designated row, and each trimester has a designated column. The Roman numeral labels correspond to the **graphic below the Gantt chart**, providing more information on each event. This chart was used to hold our entire team accountable and also served as a reminder for important events, such as the Gala on the 10th of October. **Any delays in time were adequately handled with mitigation strategies** to prevent a major project setback.



Project Establishment:	Fundraising Design:	Pre-event Engagement:	Event Execution:
I: Nonprofit research and initial meeting with Dana Ramsey	I: Full project management plan development	I: Gen-G youth board intervention meeting	I: 2025 "I Have a Voice" Gala
II: Early project planning and full organizational approval	II: Key resource acquisition time period	II: Early bird and online ticket sale launch	II: Post-Event Evaluation Meeting

D. QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Our team established 4 key metrics, where each key metric directly corresponds to one of our 4 important project goals created earlier.

KEY METRIC 1	KEY METRIC 2	KEY METRIC 3	KEY METRIC 4
Total Revenue Growth **21%** Increase From 2024	First-Time Donors **40** Attendees	Ticket Sales Timeline **60%** of Tickets Sold Early	Documentation of Gala **100%** of Gala Processes

#1: Total Revenue Growth

This metric measured financial success by comparing net revenue to the previous Gala. Because GiGi's Playhouse relies entirely on donations, revenue growth supports ongoing programs. A strong increase reflects an effective fundraising strategy and execution. **If the 21% growth target is reached, Goal 1 is fulfilled.**

#2: First-Time Donors

This metric tracked first-time donors to evaluate guest acquisition effectiveness. Previous Galas relied heavily on returning attendees, limiting long-term growth. Data identified that new donors came from comped tickets, outreach, and communication efforts. **If 40 attendees are first-time donors, Goal 2 is fulfilled.**

#3: Ticket Sales Timeline

This metric evaluated how early and consistently tickets were sold as a result of improved marketing and communication efforts. Earlier ticket purchases and higher engagement indicated that marketing was reaching a wider audience well before the event date. **If at least 60% of tickets are sold by two weeks before the event, goal 3 is fulfilled**

#4: Documentation

This metric ensured full documentation of the Gala planning process for consistency. Due to annual staff and volunteer turnover, capturing knowledge was essential to reduce future planning time and errors. A centralized system improves future planning, execution, and overall efficiency. **If a fully completed playbook is approved by the Board, Goal 4 is fulfilled.**

E. RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

We first created a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) chart to analyze key factors proactively, followed by an effective Risk Management Plan to mitigate potential risks (as seen below the SWOT chart).

S • Strong community reputation • Established annual Gala tradition • Existing partnerships with local sponsors	**W** • Reliance on in-person attendance • Potential for volunteer burnout • Budget constraints for large promotions
O • Expand social media promotion • Corporate matching donations in Gala • Hybrid Attendance for further reach	**T** • Rising operational costs • Last-minute cancellations • Weather or logistical disruptions

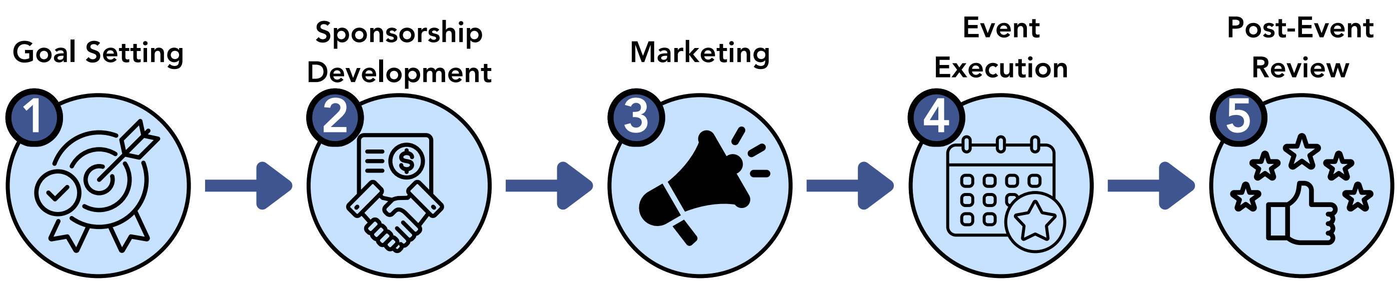
	POTENTIAL RISK	POTENTIAL IMPACT	MITIGATION STATEGY
MOST SEVERE	**Less-than Expected Attendance or Ticket Sales**	Low attendance would directly reduce total revenue, limit donor engagement, and weaken the overall success of the Gala.	- Strengthen marketing and communication efforts - Provide 20 complimentary tickets to promote new donors - Expand outreach through email, social media marketing, partner organizations, and direct calls to past attendees.
	Sponsorship or Major Donor Shortfalls	Insufficient sponsorships or major gifts could significantly limit revenue growth and prevent achieving the 21% increase goal.	- Prioritize early sponsor outreach, enhance sponsorship packages, and provide regular sponsor updates - Leverage board members and donor development leadership to secure commitments earlier.
	Auction Under Performing	Weak bidding activity would negatively impact one of the Gala's largest revenue streams.	- Curate higher-value auction items by improving item descriptions - Promote auction highlights before the event
	Volunteer Shortages or Insufficient Training	A lack of trained volunteers could disrupt registration, auctions, guest experience, and event logistics.	- Recruit volunteers early and define all roles - Assign staff leads - Provide pre-event instructions to ensure readiness.
LEAST SEVERE	**Loss of Knowledge Due to Turnover**	Staff and volunteer turnover could reduce efficiency and lead to repeated mistakes in future Galas.	- Create a comprehensive Gala playbook documenting the entire Gala procedure to prevent loss of information - This risk led to the creation of the project goal #4

F. PROPOSED PROJECT BUDGET

Item	Description	Proposed ($)	Actual ($)
Venue	The Pavilion at Angus Barn	$11,797.50	$11,797.50
Catering	Food, beverages, and service staff from Angus Barn	$25,740.00	$25,740.00
Entertainment	Professional DJ services, MC/Auctioneer	$4,300	$4,290.22
Photography	Event media and photography services	$4,000	$4,112.75
Technology	Online auction platform, and registration systems	$5,000	$4,826.25
Decor	Event decor, banners, printed items, bidding materials	$3,550.00	$3,686.18
Purchased Trips	Non-donated travel packages used as auction items	$9,000	$9,145.38
Services	Volunteer hours from GenG board and other volunteers	$0.00	$0.00
Auction Items	In-Kind donations of experiences, items, and services	$0.00	$0.00
Budget Buffer	A buffer created in case our budget exceeded proposed	$2,000	N/A
Total		**$65,387.50**	**$63,598.28**

Thanks to GiGi's Playhouse's relationship with Angus Barn due to their previous Galas, we were able to **receive a discounted price ahead of time on the venue and catering**, two of the biggest expenses for the project, so we incorporated the actual cost of these items into our proposed budget beforehand. **Other items' proposed budgets were developed using past Galas for reference**. Additionally, a few of the Playhouse's sponsors were able to provide free experiences to auction off during the "last give" segment, such as season tickets to Carolina Hurricanes games and a variety of all-expenses-paid vacations. We also created a **budget buffer fund of $2,000 as a contingency** in the event our budget exceeds what was proposed. Because this Gala already had a high budget, $2,000 was all we could afford to embed into the budget, emphasizing the need to carefully monitor our budget without costly overflow. With everything included, **we projected a total budget of $65,387.50 for the 2025 Gala, while our actual cost was 63,598.28. All unused funds were returned to Gigi's Playhouse for future events.**

IV. EXECUTION



Phase 1: Goal Setting

Initial Meeting: May 21st, 2025

The execution portion of our project was **split into five phases,** with a few key events in each phase. The first phase **begins with early communication** between our project management team and GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's leadership team. **The initial kickoff meeting took place in person at Gigi's Playhouse with Executive Director Dana Ramsey.** At this meeting, we agreed to take over the 'I Have a Voice Gala', leading us to discuss expectations, priorities, and other overall Gala objectives. This successful meeting **established a shared understanding of GiGi's Playhouse's reliance on private donations** and the critical role the annual Gala plays in funding year-round programming, and also gave us the green light to begin brainstorming potential ways to improve the Gala. We also reviewed outcomes and lessons learned from previous Galas to **identify areas for improvement** related to revenue generation, guest acquisition, and operational efficiency. Utilizing post-event data from previous Galas (which were obtained from both staff and guests), we recognized that limited marketing reach and year-over-year (YoY) redundancy were key factors restricting growth.

This image was taken after our first meeting with Executive Director Dana Ramsey

Goal Development and Subcommittee Development: May 22nd - June 15th

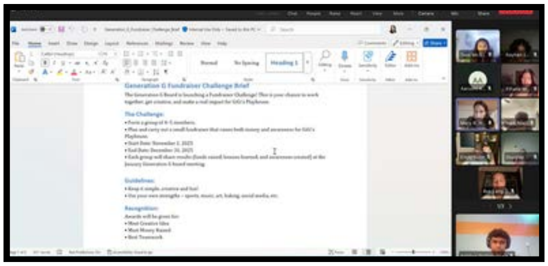


Image from a Q&A meeting in which the project scope was defined alongside the GenG Youth Board

Following the initial meeting, **we conducted a research study** with the GiGi's staff and their GenG Youth board to identify the biggest areas of improvement, and **project goals were thus collaboratively developed**. These goals can be found earlier in the paper, in the Project Goals section. To achieve these goals, our team created 3 different subcommittees focused on sponsorships, marketing, and guest experience to easily divide responsibilities without bearing too much workload on each subcommittee. Finally, we also established **A biweekly check-in structure** to track progress and maintain accountability across all teams.

Phase 2: Sponsorship Development

Early Sponsor Outreach: June 15th - July 19th

With revenue growth as a primary objective, our team worked with **the sponsorship team to begin outreach earlier** than in previous years to allow more time to boost and strengthen sponsorship packages. Existing corporate partners were contacted through personalized communication, while **new prospects were identified through board connections and targeted research**. Furthermore, alongside locating sponsors for the Gala, our team also worked to **revise sponsorship tiers** to clearly communicate value at each level, including enhanced brand visibility, recognition during the event program, and premium placement opportunities. This restructuring of the sponsorship tiers led to a substantial increase in higher-level commitments, allowing for a much larger amount of revenue to be generated from sponsors alone, compared to previous Galas.

Some of GiGi's "I Have a Voice" Gala's sponsors

Auction Integration Strategy: July 19th - August 14th

During this portion of phase 2, our team worked to **formally integrate live and silent auctions** into the Gala strategy as a new revenue-driving and engagement-focused component. Our team worked directly with all 3 subcommittes to ensure this new element of the Gala truly connected with our guests. **High-value auction items**, including premium trips and bundled experiences, were secured through sponsor and community donations, **creating a bonus incentive for sponsor participation & guest involvement.**

Phase 3: Marketing

Marketing Strategy Expansion: August 14th - October 9th

Another major focus of our improvements to this year's Gala was marketing and communication with our guests before the event. To address this, we decided to **shift our reliance** from basic social media posts and limited email outreach to a multifaceted marketing campaign. **Our team, in collaboration with the marketing team, executed the following:**

Sponsor updates highlighting corporate involvement	**Website banners promoting ticket sales**	**Direct phone outreach to past attendees**
Email blasts to over 1,300 registered families and 647 volunteers	**Consistent social media campaigns**	**Partner organizations promoting the event**

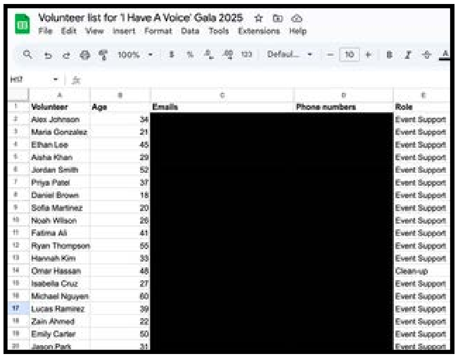
Guest Acquisition: August 24th - October 9th

To encourage new attendees, our team decided to remove financial barriers by strategically allocating **20 complimentary tickets to new prospects**. By allowing 20 new attendees to attend the Gala for no cost, we increased accessibility and introduced new individuals to GiGi's mission. This allowed for GiGi's Playhouse to introduce new individuals to the donor pipeline while supporting long-term sustainability across the community. **Improved communication and messaging consistency** increased early ticket sales & attendance reliability, allowing the team to effectively plan logistics, seating, and auction participation prior to event day.

Instagram Post Promoting the Gala

Phase 4: Event Execution

Pre-Event Operational Planning & Alignment: September 2nd - October 9th


Volunteer list for 'I Have A Voice' Gala 2025

Volunteer	Age	Emails	Phone numbers	Role
Alex Johnson	34	[redacted]		Event Support
Maria Gonzalez	21			Event Support
Ethan Lee	45			Event Support
Aisha Khan	29			Event Support
Jordan Smith	52			Event Support
Priya Patel	37			Event Support
Daniel Brown	18			Event Support
Sofia Martinez	20			Event Support
Noah Wilson	26			Event Support
Fatima Ali	41			Event Support
Ryan Thompson	55			Event Support
Hannah Kim	33			Event Support
Omar Hassan	48			Clean-up
Isabella Cruz	27			Event Support
Michael Nguyen	60			Event Support
Lucas Ramirez	39			Event Support
Zain Ahmed	22			Event Support
Emily Carter	50			Event Support
Jason Park	31			Event Support

Volunteer List for Gala (sensitive information is censored)

In the weeks leading up to the Gala, our team **finalized all operational details** to ensure the event could be executed without disruption. This included **confirming volunteer assignments, coordinating vendors, finalizing the schedule** (and creating a flyer which will be given to guests on the day of the Gala to track the timing of events), and conducting numerous pre-event briefings to align expectations across all members to minimize risk that could potentially arise as a result of poor communication. These preparations ensured **participants understood their responsibilities before arrival.**

Event Day: October 10th

When the day of the Gala arrived, all the time spent ensuring that each piece put into motion worked in synergy finally paid off. **Execution on the day focused on delivering a seamless and engaging experience to guests and participants**. With the help of the Gen-G youth board, volunteers were assigned designated roles. Vendor teams, including the venue staff, DJ, auctioneer, and photographer, were briefed through a finalized run-of-show document, followed up with a quick meeting prior to the event to ensure smooth transitions between programs during the event. Special attention went into the **timing of each segment** as we knew that an important aspect of execution during the Gala would be the ability to allocate appropriate amounts of time and maintain guest engagement for new segments, such as the auction. To reinforce GiGi's Playhouse's impact and vision, **visual storytelling in the form of prerecorded videos was displayed via the screens in the venue throughout the evening.** These moments were intentionally spaced throughout the program to help sustain emotional engagement and reinforce the organization's mission. Lastly, we noticed that enhanced décor and curated entertainment contributed to a more elevated event atmosphere in the pavilion compared to prior years, transforming the Gala from a traditional fundraiser into a more immersive and memorable experience for guests.

Photos of the Gala, taken by a professional photgrapher

Phase 5: Post-Event Review

Documentation of a Centralized Gala Playbook: October 10th - October 17th

Cover Slide of the Gala Playbook

A major differentiator of this year's execution was the **major emphasis on documentation**. Our team compiled all timelines, budgets, auction systems, checklists, workflows, and communication templates into a centralized planning guide. The finalized Gala playbook, with recommendations & lessons learned, now **serves as a repeatable framework for future Galas**, **reducing reliance on individual knowledge and ensuring consistency** despite staff or volunteer turnover. This framework improves efficiency, lowers planning risk, and supports the long-term success of GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's largest annual fundraiser, because our team **wanted our impact to last beyond just one Gala**.

Post-Event Evaluation Meeting: January 17th

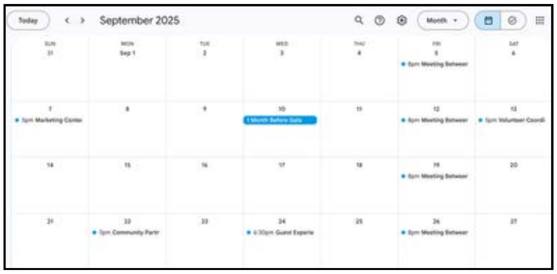
Following the Gala, the **GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh Staff and our team met to evaluate the event's success**. Key metrics, including financial performance, attendance, and guest feedback, were also analyzed. The meeting addressed donation reconciliation and coordinated post-event appreciation efforts for donors, sponsors, and volunteers. At this meeting, **we received confirmation that our documented playbook will be in use for future Galas, and GiGi's Playhouse thanked us for our efforts, deeming this project a massive success.**

V. MONITORING AND CONTROLLING

A. MONITORING

To maintain consistency with the schedule, budget, and quality standards that were planned at the beginning of the project, the team implemented a monitoring system throughout the planning, promotion, and execution of the "I Have a Voice" Gala. As mentioned before, monitoring focused on three core areas: **schedule, budget, and project quality.**

Schedule Monitoring



Our Shared Google Calender for the Month of September

Corresponding the milestones established during the initiating and planning phases of the project to a major phase of the Gala improvement strategy allowed us to **distribute the work into teams that held each other accountable.** Examples of improvement strategy sections include: sponsor research and alignment, planning and design, project promotion, and execution. **Planning meetings were held once every two weeks** to assess whether important tasks, such as auction item procurement was being completed on time. In these meetings, **we were able to identify any potential bottlenecks early,** like delayed auction item confirmations, which allowed us to address the issue through schedule adjustments or extra assistance for that specific team. By pairing a collaborative environment that lifted each other with monitoring techniques such as tracking milestone completion dates, the team ensured that **all critical activities were completed prior to the Gala in a timely manner.**

A	B	C	D
Category	Item	Description	Cost ($)
Angus Barn	Venue	The Pavilion at Angus Barn	$11,797.50
Angus Barn	Catering	Food, Beverages, and Service staff	$25,740.00
Total			$37,537.50
Category	Item	Description	Cost ($)
Operations	Entertainment	DJ services and MC/Auctioneer	$4,290.22
Operations	Photography	Event media	$4,112.75
Total			$8,402.97

Example of Financials Tracking on Sheets

Budget Monitoring

To maintain expenses while maximizing net revenue, **we used a tracking system designed to monitor major expense categories,** including venue, food, entertainment, and décor. Additionally, **budget check-ins** were conducted during the planning meetings to compare the projected cost to the spending rate. An important decision made by the team early on was to track in-kind donations, such as donated auction items and volunteer hours, separately to reflect their true value and to identify cost savings more effectively. This approach allowed the team to **prevent any cost overruns while creating a strong YoY increase** in fundraising results

Project Quality Monitoring

Project quality was monitored by evaluating operational effectiveness and alignment of feedback to the mission statement. Reviews before the event focused on centering the event towards inclusion and awareness for individuals with Down syndrome. Furthermore, **volunteer roles were reviewed** to support efficiency in the event execution process and a positive guest experience. During the event, we asked all **volunteers to also watch for any potential issues** that arise, which could affect the Gala's quality. Following the event, the team conducted a **lessons-learned review meeting** with key members of GiGi's Playhouse staff to assess performance across all key aspects, including revenue generation and guest engagement. To support long-term sustainability, this feedback was documented in our playbook

Image of one of our trained volunteers engaging with guests whilst they were checking in

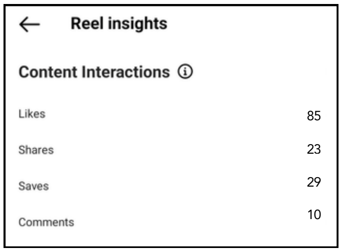


Image detailing Interactions of an Instagram reel promoting the Gala

B. CONTROLLING

#1: Delayed Sponsor Commitment Confirmations	
Issues Ecountered	**Response Strategy**
Several sponsors delayed finalizing their sponsorship levels close to the event date, creating uncertainty in projected revenue and affecting planning for signage, recognition materials, and budget allocation.	Our team implemented a sponsor confirmation deadline and conducted direct follow-up calls to clarify benefits and urgency, while preparing flexible recognition materials that could be quickly updated, ensuring sponsor relationships were maintained without disrupting event logistics.

#2: Registration and Check-In Bottlenecks	
Issues Ecountered	**Response Strategy**
During peak arrival time, guest check-in lines became longer than anticipated, risking a negative first impression and delaying guest access to networking and auction activities.	Our team immediately redirected many volunteers to registration, opened additional check-in stations, and streamlined the process by separating pre-registered guests from walk-ins, restoring efficient flow within minutes and improving guest experience.

#3: Low Early Auction Bidding Activity	
Issues Ecountered	**Response Strategy**
In the first phase of the silent auction, bidding activity was slower than expected, raising concern that items would close below projected values.	Our team responded by making live announcements highlighting featured auction items, encouraging mobile bidding, and assigning volunteers to personally explain item value and impact, which successfully increased engagement and competitive bidding.

#4: Donor Attention Drop During Program Transitions	
Issues Ecountered	**Response Strategy**
Transitions between speeches, dinner service, and fundraising segments caused temporary drops in guest attention, reducing momentum leading into the "Last Give" appeal.	Our team shortened transitions, coordinated timing cues with the MC and AV team, and repositioned volunteers to refocus guests' attention, ensuring strong engagement during the most critical fundraising moment of the evening.

VI. CLOSING THE PROJECT

A. EVALUATION OF KEY METRICS

KEY METRIC 1	KEY METRIC 2	KEY METRIC 3	KEY METRIC 4
Total Revenue Growth	First-Time Donors	Ticket Sales Timeline	Documentation of Gala
32%	**52**	**72%**	**100%**
Increase From 2024	Attendees	of Tickets Sold Early	of Gala Processes

Key Metric 1 — Total Net Revenue Growth (%)

The Gala generated approximately **$237,000 in net revenue**, which exceeded last year by **57,000 representing a 32% increase compared to the previous year**. This exceeded the targeted 21% growth, and the significant increase confirmed that our new strategies focused on donor engagement, auction optimization, and sponsorship quality were highly effective. Because this metric exceeded its target, **Goal 1: Increase Total Revenue was successfully achieved.**

Key Metric #1 Fulfillled

Key Metric 2 — Percentage of First-Time Donors

The project surpassed our target of 40 first-time donors by **attracting approximately 52 new donors to the Gala**. Increasing first-time donor participation expanded GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's donor pipeline and supported long-term fundraising sustainability. Because this metric exceeded its target, **Goal 2: Improve Guest Acquisition was successfully achieved.**

Key Metric #2 Fulfillled

Key Metric 3 — Ticket Sales Timeline and Marketing Engagement

Approximately **72% of tickets were sold at least two weeks before the event**, exceeding the target of 60%. Earlier ticket sales indicated increased audience engagement and stronger marketing reach resulting from new and improved email campaigns, social media promotion, and partner outreach. This improvement helped to reduce uncertainty/risk of a lack of tickets sold leading into the event. Because this metric exceeded its target, **Goal 3: Enhance Marketing Strategy and Communication was successfully achieved.**

Key Metric #3 Fulfillled

Key Metric 4 — Completion of a Standardized Gala Playbook

Finally, our project **achieved 100% completion of a centralized Gala playbook** documenting the Gala process. We thoroughly documented every single step to preserve knowledge and create a repeatable system for future Galas, as volunteer turnover is a significant issue. Our Gala playbook was also reviewed and approved by GiGi's Playhouse's board of directors, ensuring our team that the playbook will be used for future Galas. Because this metric was exceeded its target,
Goal 4: Document the Full Process was successfully achieved.

Key Metric #4 Fulfillled

B. LESSONS LEARNED

Initiating

Areas of Success

While defining the project scope and objectives, our team established clear goals and strong initial alignment with stakeholders, creating a solid foundation for the project.

Areas for Improvement

However, early assumptions about attendance levels and donor behavior needed refinement and later adjustments once detailed planning began, revealing gaps in initial projections.

Planning and Organizing

Areas of Success

As we organized marketing, auction logistics, and volunteer responsibilities, our team developed a structured and collaborative plan that supported overall coordination. This plan helped manage multiple aspects of the entire Gala and reduce further event day issues.

Areas for Improvement

We identified that systems for tracking auction items and clearly defining roles needed to be established earlier, as increasing complexity caused details to become unclear. The lack of early centralized organization led to inefficiencies, reinforcing the need for stronger systems.

Execution

Areas of Success

During event execution, overall coordination and engagement were strong, contributing to a positive guest experience. This reinforced that preparation and teamwork created a solid foundation for a successful live event.

Areas for Improvement

Minor delays in registration and auction bidding impacted the flow of the event, emphasizing the need for more thoroughly tested systems and stronger real-time communication.

Monitoring and Controlling

Areas of Success

Frequent check-ins and rapid response strategies allowed the team to quickly address issues and maintain smooth operations.

Areas for Improvement

Unanticipated issues still required immediate attention, showcasing the need for an even stronger contingency plan and continuous oversight to keep the project fully on track.

C. RECCOMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

1. **Launch Sponsor Outreach Earlier**

Future Gala planning should begin sponsor outreach earlier in the project timeline to allow more time for relationship-building and higher-level sponsorship commitments. Earlier engagement increases sponsor confidence, improves package customization, and reduces last-minute fundraising pressure.

2. **Build a Digital Donation Pipeline for New Donors**

Implementing a year-round digital donation pipeline would help convert first-time Gala attendees into recurring donors. Follow-up emails, impact updates, and targeted giving opportunities can sustain engagement beyond the event and support long-term financial stability.

3. **Create a Volunteer Training Binder**

Producing a detailed binder filled with every key bit of information that new and existing volunteers would need to get up to speed with the rest of the team would be an efficient way to save resources while assuring everybody is on the same page. This binder could have various versions designed for specific events, such as the Gala.

OVERALL IMPACT AND FINAL NOTE

We presented our evaluation of key metrics, lessons learned, recommendations, and finalized project deliverables to GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's Board of Directors following a successful Gala, which exceeded the project's symbolic 21% growth goal.
In response to our final results, the Board **confirmed that our recommendations and standardized Gala playbook will be implemented for future Galas**, creating a repeatable, data-driven framework that strengthens long-term sustainability, donor growth, and operational efficiency. **The Board, along with our team deducted this project a major success.**

$237,000

in Net Revenue from the Gala

52 **first-time donors**

72% **of tickets sold early**

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VIII. Appendix

Pre-event Mingling

Adithya with Dana Ramsey and Mary Haddad

Photo Booth