

# The Party's Over— How to Measure Event Success



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# The party's over—how to measure event success



**It's after midnight when you finally get home from doing tear-down and clean-up at your gala. Your shoes have been hurting you all night and you stumble into bed exhausted.**

You optimistically arrive at work the next day with every intention of personally calling your new donors. After that? You're going to set up coffee dates with the wealthy prospects you met.

But your day blows up with auction buyers asking a million questions:

- "Can I take the trip to Cancun next year instead of this year?"
- "I won the backyard goat yoga package, but I live in a condo, and I just found out my HOA has strong feelings about livestock. Can I get a refund?"
- "Will the house in the ski package to Aspen allow emotional support animals?"
- "Can I split the private chef dinner with a couple who didn't attend the gala? And will the chef cook vegan and gluten-free? Oh, and no nightshades, ok? I'm allergic."
- "The vacation package says it's valid for 12 months. Is that 12 calendar months or 12 lunar months? It's just that Mercury retrograde might affect our travel dates."
- "I won the weekend in Napa, but I decided this morning to stop drinking. Is there a sober sommelier experience? If not, can I do a juice cleanse retreat instead?"

- "I bought the 'Dance Like Nobody's Watching' hip-hop class for two, but that was definitely the wine talking. Can I gift it to someone else?"
- "I thought the signed Hamilton playbill came with tickets to Hamilton. It doesn't???"

Before you know it, a week's gone by. No one got thanked in 24 hours. Or even 7 days. You're embarrassed calling those new donors now. You try calling the prospects you met but the leads feel cold.

You tell yourself, well at least we met our fundraising goal. But in your heart, you know if all the time staff spent on the event was included in the event budget you'd be in the red.

If you're like most nonprofits, this scenario sounds familiar.





# Why we need to redefine event success

How do you measure if your fundraising event was successful?

- It was very well attended
- We met our financial goal
- A lot of 'awareness' was built
- Our event brought in new donors
- We deepened donor relationships
- Lapsed donors engaged with us again
- It generated new major gift and legacy giving prospects
- For every dollar we spent (including staff time) we raised at least 50 cents

The right answer? **As many as possible!**

If the only boxes you're able to check are the first three—high attendance, meeting your financial goal, and building "awareness"—you failed.

Why? Attendance and dollars raised don't tell the full story. Just because an event draws a crowd doesn't mean donors feel connected. Raising a lot of money on one night doesn't guarantee lasting support. You could have donors sponsoring a table for \$2,000 at your gala who are making major gifts of \$50,000 - \$100,000 to other nonprofits.

## Real event success is about what happens after the event.

It's the actions attendees take after the event – donating, advocating, volunteering, bringing their connections to your cause and/or coming back that matter.

Are you sitting down in 12 months' time having a living room conversation about a major gift or legacy gift with a new donor who came to your event?

The only way to make your event lead to lasting, long term supporters is to start with the end in mind—a well-executed pre-made follow-up plan to convert first-time attendees into donors and to deepen donor relationships.

Properly segment your pre-and-post event communication and write it all before the event. If you don't, you'll get sidetracked and waylaid by post-event headaches you have to solve.



# Understanding donor behavior



According to T. Clay Buck, Co-Creator of The [Fundraiser's Planner](#) and cohost of the podcast [Fundraising is Funny](#), there are 4 types of event attendees:

1. True believers
2. Guests (invitees)
3. Table fillers
4. Undecided

## The signals that matter: Small actions that predict future giving

What behaviors at an event could indicate a high propensity for future giving?

- Making any gift
- Taking educational materials
- Emotional responses to program content like tearing up in a video
- Asking questions, engaging in meaningful conversations, or lingering to talk
- Bringing a friend to the event, sharing photos online, tagging the org on social media

## How to identify which attendees are most likely to become long-term supporters

If you have a tool like Bloomerang, which allows you to wealth-screen your RSVPs, you've got a keen sense of which attendees are your best major gift prospects—and who you can hopefully turn into long-term supporters who name you in their will or estate.



# So how do you keep the spark alive after it's over and deepen the donor relationship?



## Personalized post-event journeys

Automation makes creating personalized, segmented follow-ups to deepen the relationship. A quick survey, a behind-the-scenes invitation, a coffee with leadership, or a personal video email can make event attendees feel connected and valued.

## Use event interactions to inform your personalized follow-ups and donor journeys

In a recent [Fundraiser Focus Week on events](#), Clay Buck dropped this pearl of wisdom: **segment based on action at the event – not just attendance.**

Lots of nonprofits thank attendees for coming. Some also reach out to no-shows. But don't stop there. Auction buyers, silent auction bidders, and paddle raisers for your fund-a-need are all very different segments.

Auction buyers and bidders are often more transactional and will need more reader-centric storytelling and identity-based communication to convert them. Remember—buying an auction item is not the same as making a donation. Paddle raisers for a fund-a-need, on the other hand, are more emotionally engaged.

## Showing value to your event sponsors and stakeholders

Want to impress your stakeholders and sponsors? Show them how event participation leads to lasting engagement and larger gifts.

If you can show who attended, who gave again, and who upgraded their support - congratulations! You just demonstrated how your events contributed to lifetime donor value. Now your funders can see their investment not as a one-night affair, but as a smart investment with great ROI.



Here's some email templates to make your follow up a breeze!

## Sample email follow up for event no-shows

Subject line: We missed you last night

Well, hello there {Recipient's Name}!

I was just thinking about you. I missed your beautiful smile and giving you a hug last night at our "Ice Ice Baby" fundraiser [name of event] for Sweaters for Penguins [org name]. What did you miss? Picture this {Recipient's Name}: a ballroom sparkling like a glacier, laughter ringing out like the calls of happy penguins, and dance moves that would make Vanilla Ice proud.

We're thrilled to share that the event was a phenomenal success, raising a cool \${amount}!

These funds are earmarked to support your beloved penguins, ensuring they have cozy life-saving sweaters and care they need to thrive.

I captured some special moments just for you [insert link to event photos/videos]. It's almost like being there (minus the need to wear your fancy snow boots)!

Feeling inspired by what you've seen?

Last night a generous donor agreed to match every gift made this Friday [insert fast-approaching deadline].

Will you give today to give TWICE as many penguins life-saving sweaters?

**\$25 will become \$50** to knit sweaters for five penguins

**\$50 will become \$100** to ensure there's plenty of krill for penguins to eat

**\$100 will become \$200** to support breeding efforts to ensure penguin species survival

Your gift today makes a wave of difference for your feathered friends!

[donate now button]

We're already fluffing up the snow for our next event, and we'd love to have you there. Here's a sneak peek at what's coming up [Insert link to register for the next event].

Thanks for being part of our waddle!

Warmest wishes and the coolest of thanks,

{Your Name}

{Your Position}

[Your Org Name]

{Phone} and {email}

P.S. Will you help us make our next event even cooler by taking this quick survey [Insert link to survey]. Your feedback is as valuable as a penguin's feathers in winter!

## New event donors who made first gift during paddle raise at event

Subject line options: You made magic happen last night

Hi {Donor First Name},

It was such a joy to meet you and share a truly unforgettable evening at [event name] last night. Everyone at [org name] is thrilled to welcome you as a first-time donor.

I'm still thinking about [insert a memory from the event, such as a moment in a speech, or video, or "the moment the campers took the stage"].

[If available, include a photo or a link to the emotional video with a light touch: Here's that video again of our summer campers in action—grab those tissues!] It was such a special moment made even more magical to have shared it with you.

But what really made last night truly meaningful? You.

When you raised your paddle, you didn't just make a donation—you made a decision. You chose to believe in a girl's potential. You chose to open a door that might have otherwise stayed closed.

Because you believe in girls. In their dreams. In girls changing the world.

And together? We raised [insert amount]! [include link to landing page for the event in case they want to give again, update them on how close you go to your goal or how much you soared past it, or if you have a match that is still active and when it ends].

Your gift will [impact statement, e.g., help fund scholarships for girls from low-income backgrounds to attend STEM summer camp—an experience that sparks curiosity, confidence, and lifelong ambition].

Thanks to your first time gift they'll be more girls building robots, launching rockets, coding their first apps—and seeing themselves as scientists, engineers, and leaders.

Welcome to the family {Donor First Name}.

We have a very special invite for you! Here's [a rsvp link](#) to join me for an informal behind-the-scenes tour of our Girls Technology Center and coffee with our Executive Director.

We hope you'll join us.

Thanks for being part of the [org name] family. You are truly STEM-tastic!

Our girls' lives are richer because they have you—someone who believes in them.

Your fan,

Scanned signature

{Your Name}

{Your Title}

{Phone} and {email}

P.S. We'll report back to you [say when, like "next month"], as soon as [program name, for example, summer camp] starts with all the ways your support is making a difference



# Secrets to long-term event success

## Let me tell you a little secret.

The magic of your event? It doesn't end when the music stops, or the last glass is cleared. That's just the beginning.

If you want to turn that amazing one-night-only experience into a long-term love affair—one where your guests stick around, make bigger gifts, come again and maybe even bring their friends—you've got to think **beyond the party**.

So, what happens after that (first date)? You follow up. Thoughtfully. Strategically. You send a heartfelt "thank you." You report back with a small but powerful story about the impact they made. You invite them back—not just to the next gala, but into your mission—to your programs, your leaders.

The real power move is knowing your audience and writing segmented personalized follow-up before the event even happens.

Build a little communication arc: a few touchpoints spaced out over the months ahead. Make them personal. Relevant. Segment if you can—because not all guests are the same. (Some are first-timers. Some are paddle raisers. Some are auction buyers. Some are long-time friends. Talk to each accordingly.)

Do this well, and your event becomes a milestone—a marker on a much longer journey. One that connects their heart to your cause, not just for a night... but for a lifetime.



# The purpose-built giving platform

**Donor Management**

**Volunteer Management**

**Online Fundraising**

**Event Management**

**Peer-to-Peer Fundraising**

**Auction Fundraising**

**Payment Processing**

**Email Marketing**

**Reporting & Analytics**

**Integration Hub**