



Engagement Amplified

A Modern Guide to Fundraising Events



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Why rethink your event strategy

**Events do more than raise money.
At least, they can.**

They can ignite energy, forge emotional connections, and draw people closer to your mission. They can spark lasting relationships—but only when they’re designed to create momentum, not just to fill a room.

Our research with more than 250 fundraisers and 1,000 donors revealed a disconnect: fundraisers are planning events using the same playbook, while donors are showing up for connection, energy, and clarity. Fundraisers are focused on raising dollars. Supporters are looking to feel something—and do something meaningful.

That disconnect isn’t a failure—it’s an opportunity. When you design events with your supporters in mind, events become more than moments. They become momentum.

This guide offers a fresh approach, grounded in what supporters actually want and built around a strategic framework we call the Engagement Arc.

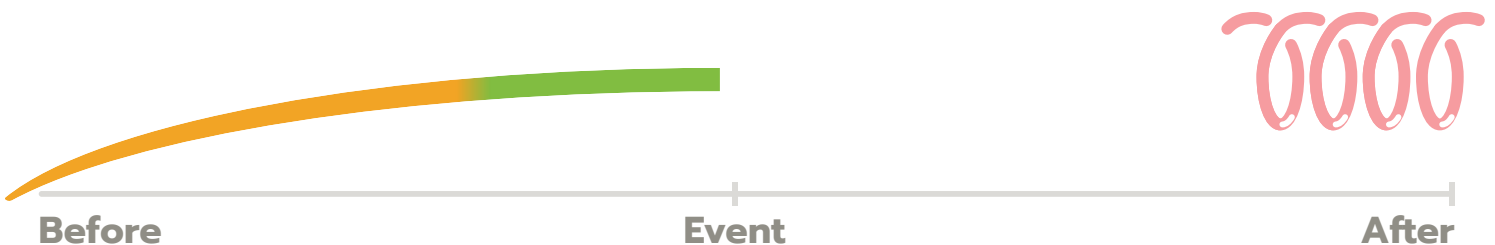
Introducing the Engagement Arc

The Arc follows three phases:

① **Design the right moment**

② **Invite meaningful participation**

③ **Extend the relationship**



Each phase shapes the supporter’s experience—and gives you a more intentional way to design, evaluate, and improve your events.

What is it?

The Engagement Arc maps how supporters connect with your mission through the event experience—from the first invitation to the follow-up.

It's not about logistics or planning steps. It's about the supporter's perspective: what they see, feel, and do at each point—and how each moment can move them closer to your mission.

Think of it as a layer that sits on top of your event timeline. While it aligns roughly with “before, during, and after,” it's not a planning checklist. It's a framework for designing intentional experiences that build lasting connections.

It's not the full donor journey, but it's a crucial piece—the bridge between showing up once and staying involved.

And it doesn't end at the event. The Engagement Arc coils forward—fueling cultivation, continued involvement, and deeper connection.

Why it matters

Event strategy often stops at logistics: What's the theme? Who's attending? How much will it raise?

But that view misses the bigger picture. Events are more than standalone moments. They're turning points in a supporter's relationship with your mission.

The real question isn't how many people show up. It's what happens next.

That's why we developed the Engagement Arc. It gives you a way to think about designing and measuring your events with the full supporter experience in mind.



Design the right moment



Your event is the moment a future supporter's engagement journey begins. That moment tends to get overlooked—eclipsed by logistics, timelines, or tradition. It's easy to go with formats based on what's worked before or what's easy to pull off—not what supporters are most likely to get excited about.

That's a missed opportunity. Because when someone shows up, they're not just filling a seat—they're showing curiosity, interest, and a desire to connect. You've got one shot to make that feel like the start of something.

What the data shows

Our research revealed a disconnect between what supporters want and what fundraisers are planning:

70%

of donors said a fun experience would make them more likely to stay involved.

68%

said entertainment makes an event feel more engaging.

46%

pointed to interactive elements as a deciding factor—things like raffles, games, competitions, or auctions.

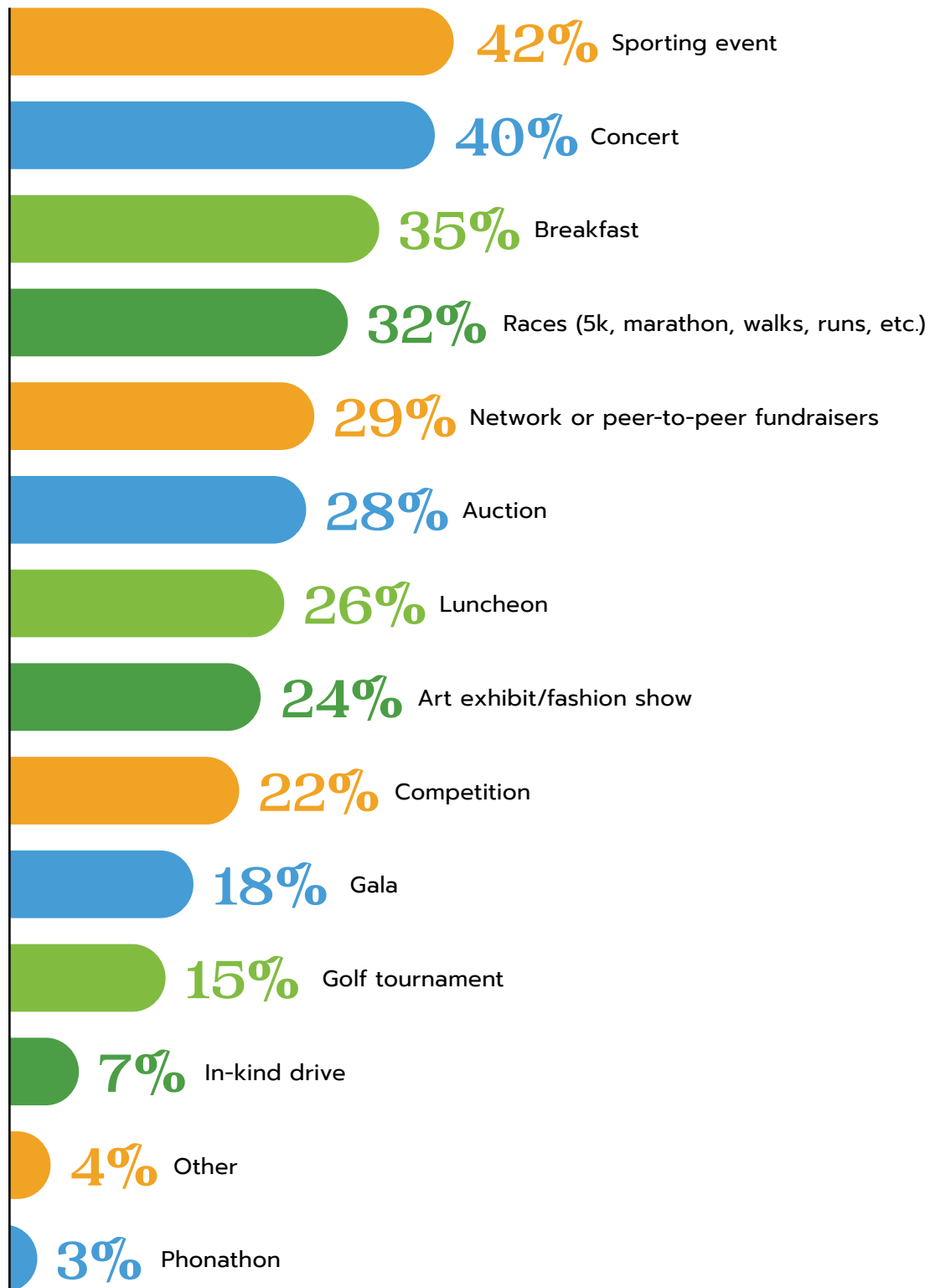
And yet, fundraisers told us their most frequently planned event types—galas, auctions, and peer-to-peer events—don't always deliver on those expectations.

Fundraisers may believe galas are fun and interactive—and maybe yours are all of those things! But when asked which events they actually want to attend, donors ranked galas 8th out of 13. Only 37% expressed interest, and just 17% had attended one in the past year.

Turn to the next page to see what events donors are most likely to attend!

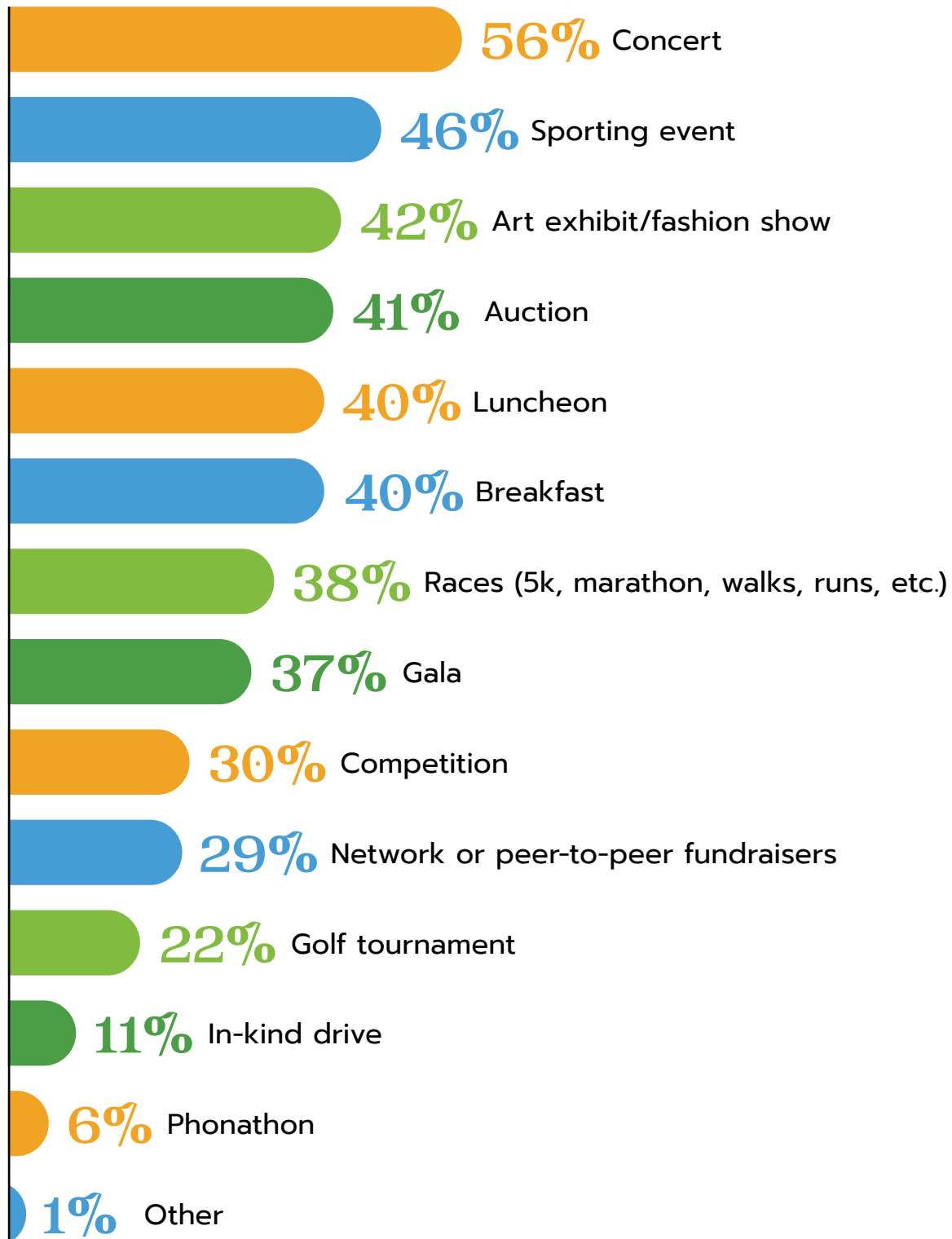
DONOR FINDINGS

Which type(s) of fundraising event(s) have you attended in the last 12 months?



DONOR FINDINGS

Which types of fundraising events would you be most interested in attending in the future?



Donors were **twice as likely** to have attended a sporting event, concert, or race than a gala. These formats aren't just more appealing—they're also more accessible and memorable in practice. They also draw more participation. That's a strong signal. Donors are showing up for events that feel social, inclusive, and purpose-driven—not just traditional.

If your format feels more familiar than energizing, that's a signal. It's worth pausing to ask: Is this what your supporters want—or what's easiest to pull off?

Strategy

Take a fresh look at the types of events you're planning this year. If the highlight of your event is the program—not the people—that's your opportunity to re-center the experience on connection to your cause. Choose formats that build connection: [peer-to-peer challenges](#), community-based celebrations, interactive campaigns. You're not just hosting an event—you're inviting supporters into something meaningful.

Why people show up:

58%

said a unique event experience motivates them to attend

54%

cited a sense of community

51%

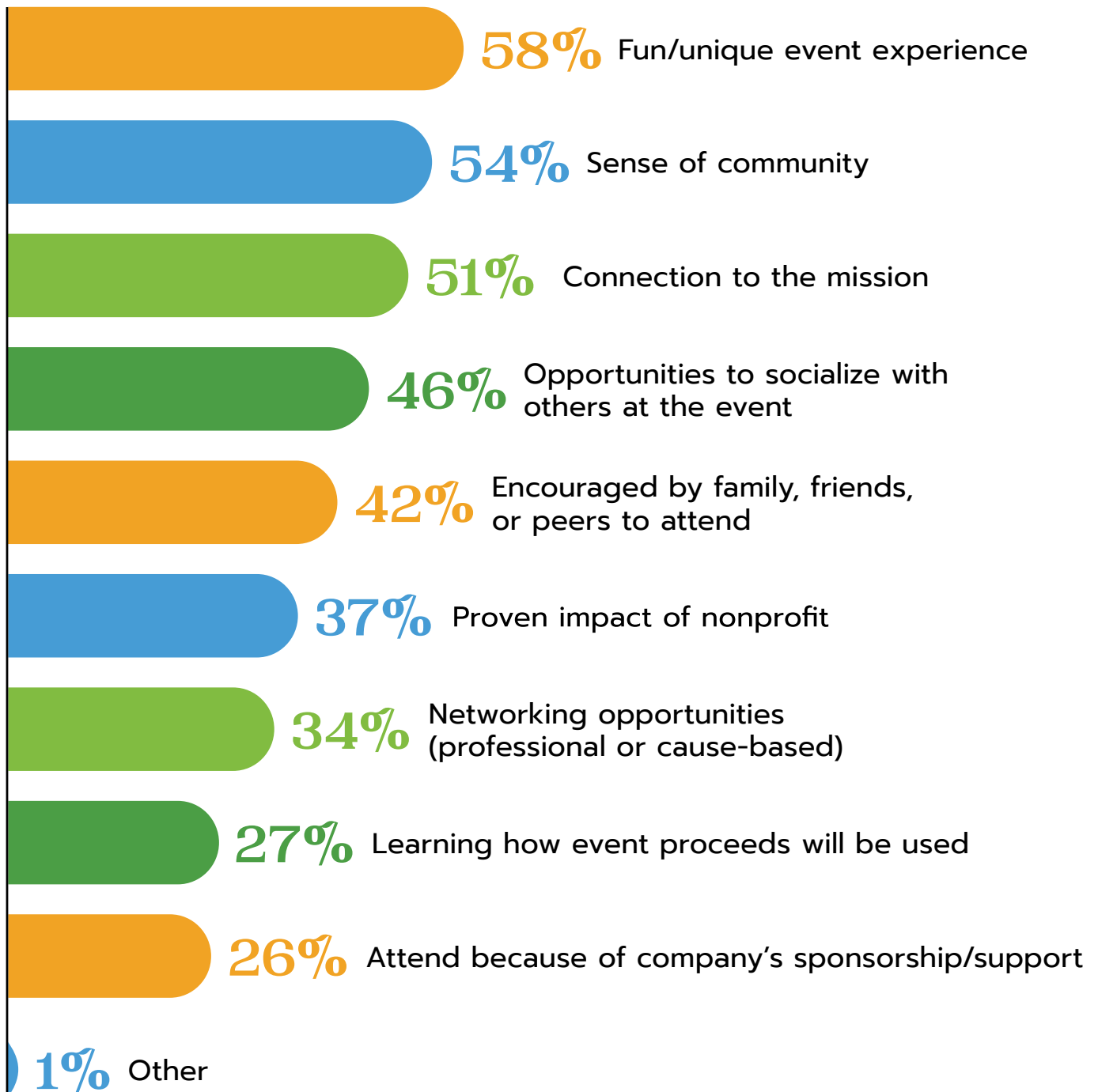
said connection to the mission

46%

pointed to opportunities to socialize

DONOR FINDINGS

What motivates you to attend a nonprofit fundraising event?



USING THE ARC

Design the right moment



This is where a supporter's journey begins.

Where your event first becomes visible to a supporter—where curiosity gets sparked, or it doesn't. The moment someone hears about your event, they begin forming impressions. What they see, feel, and sense from that first encounter shapes whether they see your event as relevant to them—or just another invitation. You're not just announcing an event. Your goal is to make that first signal feel like something worth leaning into.

What this phase is for:

To capture attention with purpose—and signal that this event is for them. Not through volume or urgency—but through relevance, clarity, and emotional pull. You're extending a personal invitation to act on values.

How to apply it:

- **Choose a format people actually want to attend.** Your supporters have already told you—sporting events, concerts, races, breakfasts, and art exhibits rank higher than galas or golf tournaments. Picking the right format is one of the clearest ways to design for connection.
- **Reframe your invite.** Why this event, for this audience, right now? If the answer isn't crystal clear to you, it won't be clear to your invitees. Spell out the "why now" in a way that connects the event to a current moment or supporter motivation. It's more than time, date, or dress code—it's the moment that makes someone care. For example: Instead of "Join us for our spring gala," try "Celebrate milestones with us as we build the next chapter in mental health access."
- **Create a sense of anticipation.** What do you want people to feel when they read the invite—or walk through the door? Aim for more than information. Aim for excitement, belonging, purpose.
- **Track who shows up—and why.** RSVPs aren't just numbers. They tell you something about interest and alignment. Use attendance to understand what's working—and who's ready for a deeper connection.

Engagement checkpoints:

✓ **You attracted first-timers or reengaged supporters who'd gone quiet.**

✓ **Your format reflected supporter preferences—not just organizational history.**

✓ **Registrations came in early or were driven by peer sharing.**

Invite meaningful participation

2

Showing up isn't the same as being engaged.

Supporters want to do more than observe—they want to take part, feel something, and walk away remembering the moment. You create that kind of memory when you build opportunities for people to act, contribute, or choose their own path through the experience.

What the data shows

Donors didn't name the program, the speech, or the fundraising pitch as the most engaging parts of an event. They pointed to what they got to do:

63%

said raffles and games of chance drew them in.

53%

identified gamified experiences were a highlight of the events they attended.

45%

participated in silent and live auctions

28%

found the live appeals portion of events engaging.

70%

said entertainment would make events more engaging.

46%

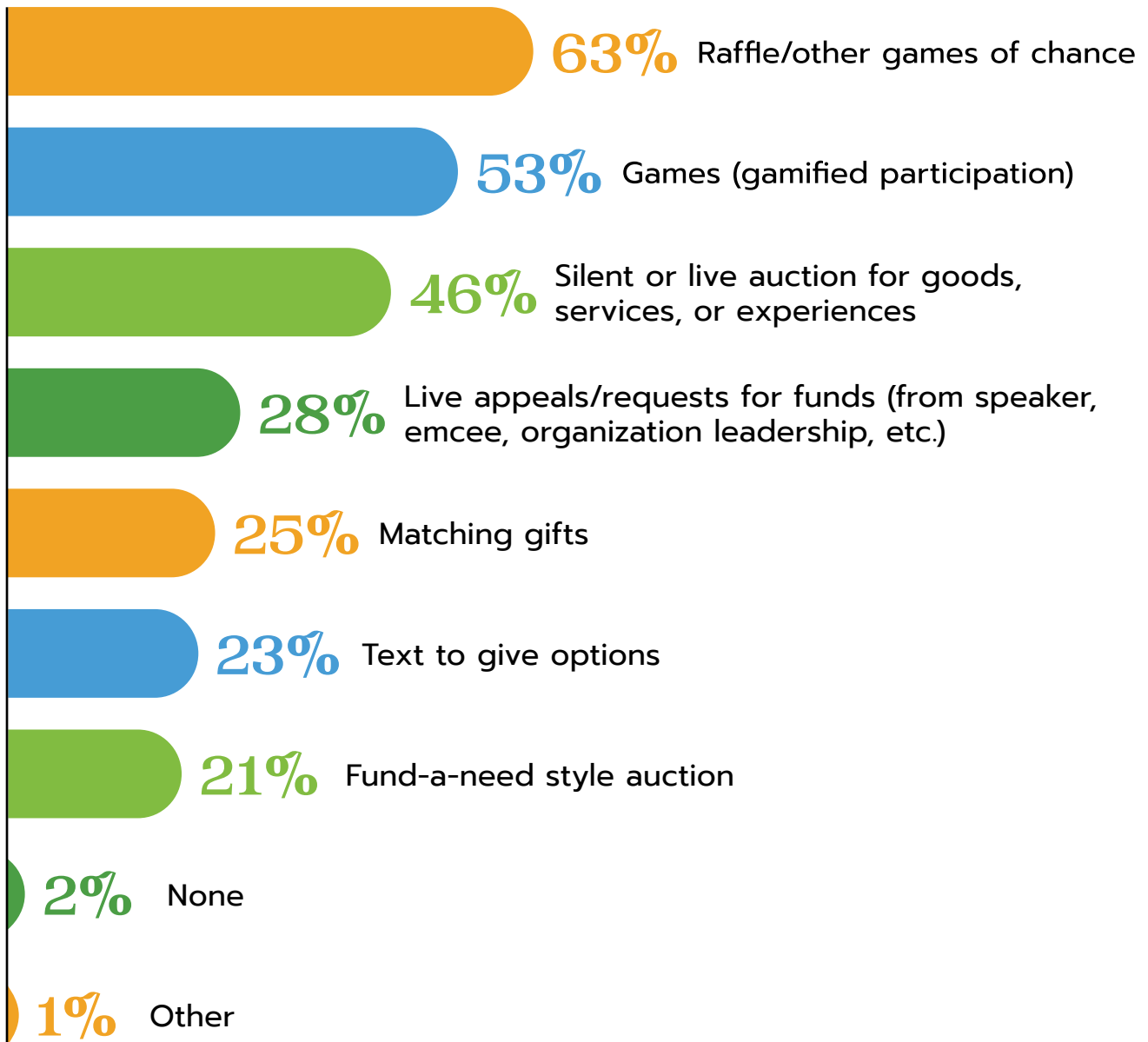
of supporters said interactive activities made events more engaging—things like raffles, games, team competitions, and auctions.

Despite all that, only **6%** of fundraisers currently offer gamification in their events. That's a huge gap between what supporters say they want and what they actually get.

That gap matters. When supporters get to choose, play, or act, they don't just remember the moment—they remember the feeling they created.

DONOR FINDINGS

What fundraising experience(s) during an event do you participate in?



Gamification adds interactive elements—like team challenges, point systems, or prizes—that make people want to take part.

Strategy: Start small. Add one interactive or choice-based element to your next event. That could be a [mission-based challenge](#), a raffle, a silent auction that sparks a friendly bidding war, a team competition, a choose-your-impact giving station, or even a low-lift QR code game that tracks participation.

Participation doesn't have to be individual—team-based activities or friendly competition can multiply energy and [deepen connections](#) between supporters.

You can even [add a raffle](#) to give attendees another way to participate. Give people something to do together—[something they'll remember and talk about](#).

A signal that's easy for teams to overlook:

Bidding in an auction—even if you don't win—is a signal. It means someone cared enough to try. But most fundraisers miss that signal. Just **17%** follow up with non-winning bidders.

That matters—because nearly **two-thirds** of bidders said they'd still consider giving—if *they understood how their gift would make an impact*. Only **7%** said they were out for good.

Strategy: Treat auction non-winners like the warm leads they are. While the experience is fresh, send a fast, personal follow-up that names their action and offers a meaningful next step. Done right, this can turn a moment of disappointment into deeper involvement.

USING THE ARC

Invite meaningful participation

This is the heart of the event.

When someone RSVPs, they're showing curiosity. But what happens next determines whether that spark grows—or fades.

Participation is how you hold attention. It's how a person decides whether they felt included, moved, energized—or just ... there. If your event gives people something to do that connects them to your mission or to each other, it doesn't just become memorable. It becomes meaningful.

You're creating space for action—and that's what builds connection.

What this phase is for:

To turn interest into involvement. You're creating opportunities for people to connect, contribute, and choose their level of engagement. The goal isn't just to entertain. It's to create moments that stick.

How to apply it:

- **Design a moment of agency.** What can people choose, personalize, or influence? Even a small act—voting for a project, making a team donation, answering a question—can create ownership.
- **Use supporter participation to drive forward motion.** Ask: How will this experience fuel post-event engagement? How might it prompt a next step?
- **Make room for emotion.** Games and challenges work not just because they're fun, but because they create emotional momentum—surprise, excitement, pride, connection. Build for that.

Engagement checkpoints:

- ✓ **Supporters interacted with more than one element—not just watched the program.**
- ✓ **Conversations, sharing, or social posts pointed to emotion: “That was fun,” “I loved doing this,” “This made me think.”**
- ✓ **You saw creative or unexpected engagement—teams forming, supporters taking initiative, or people following up on their own.**

Extend the relationship

3

This is what happens after the applause.

This phase determines whether supporters stay involved or drift away. And the biggest risk isn't that people didn't enjoy themselves—it's that they leave without knowing what their presence meant or where they fit next. That's what keeps good events from turning into lasting relationships.

What the data shows

Fundraisers know follow-up matters. **97% say they send something after the event.** But ...

58%

say they don't have a strategy behind it.

34%

stop after one message.

30%

stop after two messages.

No strategy, no connection. And the people who showed up? They notice.

Here's what they say they want:

- 66% want to know how much you raised.
- 56% want to see photos from the event.
- 52% want stories of impact.
- 51% want to know how you'll use the funds.

They're not looking for generic thank-yous. They want to see the story they were part of—and feel like insiders, not afterthoughts. And many are also looking for ways to keep contributing.

Add to that: **35%** of fundraisers say they don't have time to focus on retention at all. That's not just a bandwidth issue—it's a strategic gap.



Strategy: Make follow-up part of the experience

It's natural to think of follow-up as something that happens after the event. But here's the thing: you need to build it into your planning from the start.

It's how supporters [understand their impact](#) and decide whether to stay involved.

Here's what helps:

- **Use technology to make it possible.**
68% of fundraisers say limited staffing is their biggest challenge. A unified giving platform can help automate key steps—like segmenting by behavior, scheduling impact emails, or triggering thank-yous in real time—so follow-up doesn't get lost in the shuffle.
- **Design for retention from the start.**
Write your thank-you email when you finalize your program. Schedule the impact summary before you send the invites. Follow up based on what someone did—whether they gave, bid, volunteered, or just showed up—so your message feels personal, not generic. When it feels personal, it sticks.
- **Track what actually drives momentum.**
Most teams still measure success by dollars raised (94%). But just 37% measure engagement after the event. That's a problem—because if you're not measuring what moves people forward, you're missing what matters most.



Strategy: Turn interest into involvement through volunteering

Volunteering is one of the most underused—but most effective—ways to extend engagement after an event. It's not just a nice add-on. It's a signal of connection—and a way to keep supporters active beyond the moment.

Our research backs it up:

- **52% of donors** say volunteer opportunities help them stay connected after an event—making them a powerful tool for long-term engagement.
- **48%** say hands-on ways to engage with the cause—like volunteer signups or activities—make events more meaningful.
- **66% of fundraisers** ask attendees to contribute in ways beyond giving—and volunteering is the most common path.

This is about more than filling roles—it's about [deepening relationships](#). Whether it's joining a committee, helping at a future event, or pitching in on a campaign, volunteering gives supporters something tangible to do—and a reason to stick around.

USING THE ARC

Extend the relationship

3

This is where strategy sets you apart.

Anyone can send a thank you. But meaningful follow-up signals that your organization is intentional—and ready to build something lasting. You're helping supporters understand they made a difference—and showing them what comes next, whether that's making another gift, attending a future event, or stepping up to volunteer. When people feel seen, valued, and invited in, they're more likely to stick around. That's what turns attendance into advocacy.

What this phase is for:

To turn a single event into something bigger. You reinforce belonging and spark continued action by reflecting back the story they were part of and offering a meaningful next step.



How to apply it:

- **Plan your follow-up before the event.** Draft your [thank-you email](#) and impact message [while you're finalizing the run of show](#)—not after. The earlier you plan, the more thoughtful and timely your follow-up will be. Use your [giving platform](#) or [CRM](#) to automate what you can.
- **Personalize based on what people actually did—not just what you want to say.** Did they give? Volunteer? Show up for the first time? Your message should reflect that.
- **Use storytelling to help supporters feel like co-creators of the outcome.** Show supporters the story they helped create. A photo, a quote, a milestone—it doesn't have to be elaborate. A small touch that says: "This happened because of you."
- **Look beyond the numbers.** Most fundraisers are already tracking dollars raised—**94%** say that's how they measure success. But only **37%** measure post-event engagement, and just **35%** say they value engagement as a metric at all. That's a gap worth closing. Don't stop at open rates. Use qualitative signals to measure whether your message sparked a reaction. Comments, social shares, or personal replies are often stronger indicators of connection than clicks.
- **Close the awareness gap.** Many fundraisers aren't tracking what happens next. **Nearly half** don't know what percentage of attendees will give again—or who might go on to volunteer. You can't act on what you can't see. Use your data to spot patterns, surface potential, and build relationships that go beyond the event.
- **Invite action that goes beyond giving.** For many supporters, the next step isn't another donation—it's showing up in other ways. Hands-on involvement—like volunteering or helping behind the scenes—can build loyalty and keep the connection going long after the event ends.

Engagement checkpoints:

- ✓ **Your open, click, or reply rates beat your usual campaign benchmarks—because the message felt tailored and timely**
- ✓ **Attendees register for another opportunity—monthly giving, volunteering, your next event—without needing a second ask.**
- ✓ **You hear personal reactions like: "I felt seen." "This made me want to do more." "I didn't expect a follow-up like that."**



The last word: Events as your most underused engagement engine

You've already done the hard part. You brought people in. They showed up. They cared.

That moment shouldn't end when the chairs get stacked. It should spark something new.

When you treat your event as a single point in a longer journey—not the whole story—you unlock a different kind of value.

It's not just about raising money. It's about creating momentum that lasts.

Because supporters don't stay involved because they're asked—they stay because they're seen, involved, and invited to keep going.

That's what the Engagement Arc helps you do: Design the right moment. Invite meaningful participation. Extend the relationship.

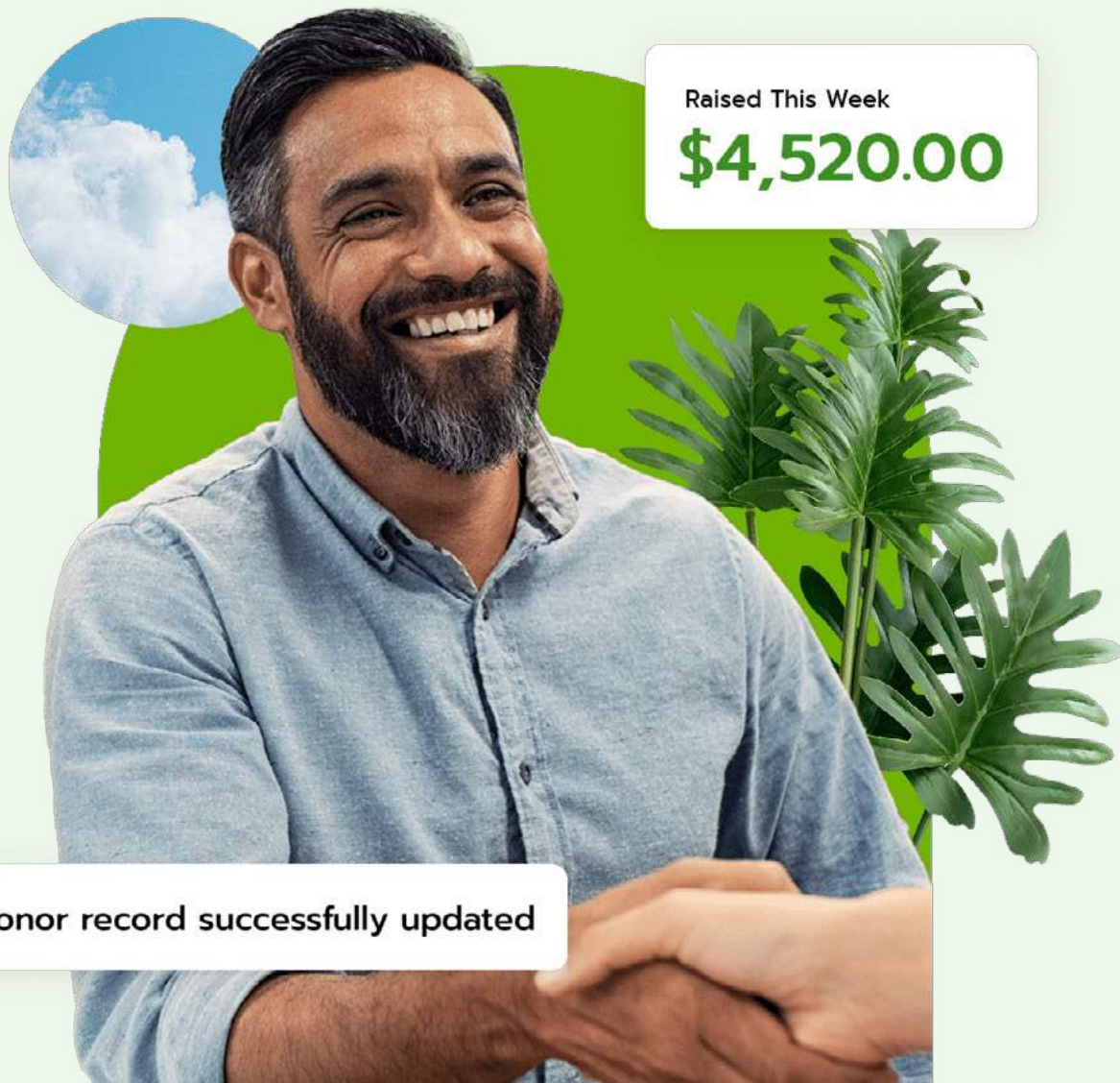
Your event isn't just a story well told. It's the moment that makes the next chapter possible.

Fundraising and donor management software built for purpose

Ready for less struggle and more wins? Connect more meaningfully, and unleash the generosity that is all around, with Bloomerang's built-for-purpose giving platform.

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