GalaBid

FREE PLANNING WORKBOOK

Fundraising Gala Planning Timeline

Plan your entire gala from six months out to event night with one practical workbook. Get every key milestone and deadline, clear ownership of tasks, a revenue model, your event-night running order, and checklists to keep everything on track.

GET STARTED

How to Use This Workbook

A gala dinner has more moving parts than any other fundraising event, and almost all of them touch the same guest list. Six months is enough time to run one properly. Less than that and you are compressing decisions that should be made calmly.

Work through it in order. The worksheets are there to be filled in rather than read, and anything in [square brackets] is for you to complete.

You'll Find

1. **The full timeline at a glance**
2. **A revenue model worksheet**
3. **A team roles table with owners**
4. **Sponsorship tiers you can price**
5. **The running order for the night**
6. **AV, volunteer and rehearsal checklists**
7. **A morning-after wrap-up list**

Everything Flows From Three Decisions

✓ **The date.** Avoid clashes on your community calendar, leave time to sell tickets, and aim at a generous giving period such as end of financial year.

✓ **The venue.** Capacity, parking, AV, catering flexibility. One that has hosted a fundraising gala before is worth a premium.

✓ **The goal.** Ambitious but real. Work backwards from your five revenue lines, based on guest numbers and prize quality.

OVERVIEW

The Timeline at a Glance

Eight stages from first decision to final report. Pin this up.

When	Focus	Done by the end of it
6 months out	Foundations	Date, venue and goal locked. Team roles assigned. Fundraising platform chosen.
4 to 5 months out	Tickets, sponsors, items	Ticket sales open. Sponsors secured. Auction item procurement under way.
3 months out	Programme, raffle, promotion	Running order designed. Raffle live for pre-event sales. Promotion started.
6 to 8 weeks out	Technology, volunteers, catalogue	AV confirmed. Volunteers recruited and briefed. Silent auction catalogue loaded.
2 to 3 weeks out	Communications and rehearsal	Pre-event email sent. Full rehearsal run. MC briefed on the running order.
Event week	Final preparations	Reminder sent. Check-in devices set up. Final team brief held.
On the night	Delivery	Run the sheet. Keep the leaderboard live and the volunteers roving.
The morning after	Wrap-up	Reconcile, thank, debrief and report.

If you have less than six months, keep the order and compress the gaps. The one stage never to compress is the rehearsal.

The Mistakes That Cost the Most

- ☐ Choosing the platform late, so the technology dictates the event rather than serving it
- ☐ Opening ticket sales too close to the night
- ☐ Leaving guests to register at the door instead of before they arrive
- ☐ Putting the paddle raise anywhere other than straight after the emotional moment
- ☐ Skipping the full rehearsal, particularly the technology touchpoints
- ☐ Letting checkout queues form, so the last memory of the night is a wait

6 MONTHS OUT

Foundations

Lock the three decisions, give every area an owner, and choose your platform now. Choosing it at six months rather than six weeks is what prevents late-stage disruption, and it should handle ticketing, silent auction, raffle, live auction, paddle raise and checkout in one system, with funds flowing directly to your own connected payment account.

- ☐ Date locked, checked against the community calendar
- ☐ Venue booked, with capacity, parking, AV and catering all confirmed
- ☐ Fundraising goal set, and modelled rather than guessed
- ☐ Planning team assembled and every role assigned an owner
- ☐ Fundraising platform chosen and campaign created

Model Your Goal

Work backwards. The total is the sum of five revenue lines, not a number you hope for:

Your revenue model

Expected guests: [ ] Tables: [ ]

Ticket and table revenue: [ ]

Silent auction: [ ]

Live auction: [ ]

Raffle: [ ]

Paddle raise: [ ]

Total projected: [ ] Our goal: [ ]

YOUR TEAM

Assign Every Role an Owner

Clear ownership is the difference between a task being done and a task being assumed. Write a name against every row before you leave the first planning meeting.

Role	What it covers	Owner
Venue and catering	Contract, capacity, menu, dietary requirements, timings on the night	[ ]
Item procurement	Silent auction, live auction and raffle prizes, plus consignment if needed	[ ]
Tickets and guests	Ticket sales, table sales, seating, guest lists, dietary collection	[ ]
Sponsorship	Prospectus, approaches, tier fulfilment, logo collection	[ ]
AV and technology	Screens, internet, leaderboard device, backups, platform setup	[ ]
Volunteer coordination	Recruitment, role allocation, device setup, briefing	[ ]
Communications	Event page, emails, social, pre-event and post-event messaging	[ ]

Choosing Your Platform

One system should carry all of it. Check that it handles:

- ☐ Ticketing and table sales, with table hosts able to manage their own guest lists
- ☐ Guest check-in on the night
- ☐ Silent auction, live auction, raffle and paddle raise in the same campaign
- ☐ A leaderboard display for the room
- ☐ Volunteer access, so staff can act on behalf of guests
- ☐ Checkout, with funds flowing directly to your own connected payment account

4-5 MONTHS OUT

Tickets, Sponsorship and Items

Open ticket sales with as much lead time as you can. Support both individual tickets and table packages, and let table buyers manage their own guest lists, assign seats, invite their guests and collect dietary preferences. That work is otherwise yours.

- ☐ Ticket sales open, with individual tickets and table packages
- ☐ Event page published, with strong images and a clear description of the cause
- ☐ Launch announced by email, social media and supporter communications
- ☐ Sponsorship prospectus written, with tiers and benefits at each level
- ☐ Sponsor approaches under way
- ☐ Silent auction item procurement started, beginning with premium items

Price Your Sponsorship Tiers

Tier	Your price	What they get
Naming rights	[$]	Event naming rights, logo on all materials and screens, a table, inclusion in pre-event emails, recognition from the stage
Gold	[$]	Logo on materials and screens, a table, recognition from the stage
Silver	[$]	Logo on materials and screens, inclusion in pre-event emails
Table sponsor	[$]	A table, logo on screens
Prize sponsor	[$]	Named against the item, logo on the campaign page

Digital logo placement, on your campaign banner and pages, reaches your whole supporter base from the moment the campaign launches, not just the people in the room on the night. Sell that.

3 MONTHS OUT

Programme, Raffle and Promotion

The running order is a fundraising decision, not a catering one. Where you place each moment changes how much it raises.

The running order	Your time	Why it sits here
Guest arrival, drinks, silent auction bidding opens	[ ]	Bidding should be live before anyone sits down
Welcome and introduction to the cause	[ ]	
First course	[ ]	
Silent auction stays open through dinner	[ ]	Extended bidding windows lift the total
Main course	[ ]	
Guest speaker or impact video	[ ]	The emotional peak the paddle raise depends on
Live auction	[ ]	Energy peaks after people have eaten, before momentum drops
Paddle raise	[ ]	Strongest immediately after the emotional moment
Dessert	[ ]	
Raffle draw	[ ]	The room is relaxed and paying attention
Silent auction closes, checkout opens	[ ]	
Dancing and post-event	[ ]	

Brief your MC to explain, at each break, why the activity matters, how to take part, and what the money funds.

Also This Month

- ☐ Raffle set up and open for pre-event ticket sales, so supporters who cannot attend can still buy
- ☐ Prizes, pricing and bundle deals configured, with multi-ticket discounts
- ☐ Raffle compliance checked against local licensing requirements
- ☐ Campaign page customised with prize images and descriptions
- ☐ Pre-event promotion started, teasing auction items and raffle prizes
- ☐ Table buyers asked to share the campaign with their own networks

6-8 WEEKS OUT

Technology, Volunteers and Catalogue

Confirm Your AV Setup

Your platform is only as good as the screen showing it. Confirm all four with the venue or your AV supplier:

- ☐ A large screen or projection that shows the leaderboard and the raffle draw to the whole room
- ☐ A reliable internet connection for the platform, the leaderboard and every volunteer device
- ☐ A device dedicated to the leaderboard display, not shared with any other event use
- ☐ A backup device and a backup connection, usually a mobile hotspot

Recruit and Brief Your Volunteers

Volunteer role	What they do	How many	Briefed
Guest check-in	Search the guest list, confirm arrivals, register anyone new	[ ]	[ ]
Roving table support	Help guests bid, answer questions, sell raffle tickets table by table	[ ]	[ ]
Live auction spotting	Identify bidders in the room for the auctioneer	[ ]	[ ]
Paddle raise recording	Record pledges against guest accounts as the MC works the room	[ ]	[ ]
Checkout assistance	Help guests complete payment before they leave	[ ]	[ ]

Set up volunteer accounts on your platform so they can work from a tablet or phone, and brief them on the platform, their own responsibilities, and who to escalate to.

Finalise the Silent Auction Catalogue

- ☐ Item list closed and everything loaded into the platform
- ☐ Descriptions written: what is included, what makes it special, and the estimated market value
- ☐ High-quality images added to every item
- ☐ Starting bids set at 30 to 50% of market value, with sensible bid increments
- ☐ Items ordered deliberately: broad-appeal items near the top, aspirational items given room

2-3 WEEKS OUT

Communications and Rehearsal

Guests who register and browse before the night bid more on it. They arrive knowing what they want, and nobody spends the first half hour working out how the platform works.

- ☐ Pre-event email sent to all ticket holders
- ☐ Email confirms date, venue, start time, dress code and parking
- ☐ Email prompts guests to register and browse the auction and raffle, with direct links
- ☐ Full rehearsal run with the core team, covering every technology touchpoint
- ☐ Leaderboard display tested on the actual screen
- ☐ Raffle draw practised, and volunteer device logins verified
- ☐ Checkout process tested end to end
- ☐ Failure plans agreed: device failure, internet outage, a long checkout queue
- ☐ MC briefed on the running order and the talking points for every fundraising moment

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EVENT WEEK

Final Preparations

- ☐ Short reminder sent two to three days out, with highlights of the top prizes
- ☐ Guest list downloaded from the platform for reference
- ☐ Check-in devices set up and logged in, in teams of two to four
- ☐ Multiple check-in points arranged if the guest count warrants it
- ☐ Every device charged, every login tested, every screen checked
- ☐ Final team brief held: roles, running order and escalation contacts

Aim for a thirty-second check-in. A queue at the registration desk is the first impression of the night, and it is a hard one to undo.

ON THE NIGHT

Who Does What, and When

The running order is on your programme page. This is what your team is doing behind it.

Moment	What your team does
Doors open	Check guests in by name search or by scanning ticket QR codes. Volunteers at the door prompt anyone unregistered to register on the spot, so everyone is ready before they reach their table.
Pre-dinner drinks	Auction and raffle are already live. Roving volunteers with tablets help less confident guests and sell raffle tickets, including for cash.
Through dinner	The MC gives regular, enthusiastic updates on bidding. The leaderboard shows live totals and activity. Outbid alerts keep pressure on while phones are in pockets.
Live auction	Spotters identify bidders for the auctioneer. Winning bids are recorded against the bidder and added straight to their invoice. Four to eight high-excitement items is the right number.
Paddle raise	Following the most emotionally resonant moment of the evening, the MC starts high and works down. Volunteers record pledges against guest accounts as the room responds.
Raffle draw	Draw on the big screen with a pause between each one. Winners are notified automatically by email or SMS, so nobody is left confused.
Auction close and checkout	The MC announces the close. Winning bidders are prompted to pay from their phones. Checkout staff help anyone who needs it, so payment is resolved before people leave.

THE MORNING AFTER

Wrap-Up and Follow-Through

The night is done but the result is not banked. This is the part that decides how much you actually collect, and whether people come back next year.

Reconcile and Review

- ☐ Full reports pulled: total raised, and the breakdown across auction, raffle, donations and paddle raise
- ☐ Payment status checked, and reminders sent to anyone who has not completed checkout
- ☐ Winner and ticket data downloaded

Thank Everyone

- ☐ Email to all attendees within 24 to 48 hours, leading with the total raised
- ☐ Personal notes to significant donors, auction winners and table sponsors
- ☐ Volunteers thanked separately
- ☐ Prize and item donors thanked by name

Debrief While It Is Fresh

Get the team in a room and write the answers down. Next year's planning starts from this document:

- ✓ **What worked brilliantly?** Name the specific moments, not general impressions.
- ✓ **What would we change?** Be honest while the detail is still sharp.
- ✓ **Which auction items performed best?** And which attracted no bids at all?
- ✓ **When was the energy highest?** And did the programme make the most of it?
- ✓ **How smooth was checkout?** How many people left without paying?
- ✓ **Was the raffle in the right place?** Would it have done better earlier or later?

Once funds are received and reconciled, report the outcome to supporters, beneficiaries and your wider community. Say what was raised and exactly what it will fund. Transparency is what makes the next ask easier.

PRO TIPS

Tips That Lift a Gala Total

- ✓ **Choose the platform at six months.** Not six weeks. Late changes cascade into everything else.
- ✓ **Open ticket sales early.** Lead time is the cheapest lever you have.
- ✓ **Get guests registered before they arrive.** Pre-registered guests who have browsed bid more.
- ✓ **Put the paddle raise after the story.** It is the placement that raises the most.
- ✓ **Start bids at 30 to 50% of value.** Low entry points bring more bidders into the room.
- ✓ **Never skip the rehearsal.** Especially every technology touchpoint.
- ✓ **Aim for a thirty-second check-in.** It sets the tone for the whole evening.

One Platform for the Whole Night

Almost every part of a gala touches the same attendee list.

- ✓ Ticketing and attendee check-in, with QR code scanning at the door
- ✓ Silent auction, live auction, raffle and paddle raise in one campaign
- ✓ Leaderboard display with live totals and activity pop-ups
- ✓ Volunteer accounts, so staff can bid, buy and donate on behalf of attendees
- ✓ A Checkout Console that searches by guest name, item name or item number

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