

Petfinder

Petfinder.com's Guide to Planning a Successful Event

Events are a great way to raise funds, increase awareness of your organization in your community and promote your adoptable animals. Regardless of the size of the event, taking measures to plan out the details will save many headaches on the day of the event. Thorough pre-planning will also make future events easier and require less work up front.

Types of events

The first step to planning an event is to decide your end goal. Will it be a fundraising event meant to bring in cash? Will it be an adoption event meant to find as many new homes as possible? Below are various types of events that have been successful for Petfinder members.

Dog Walk: A great way to combine fundraising and adoptions! Participants pay a nominal entrance fee, and your adoptable dogs will look great sporting a Petfinder bandana!

Fur Ball: A formal event, often with a large price tag for attendees, with a goal of reaching out to new donors as well as offering something fun and different for current supporters.

Pet Photos: Pet photos (with Santa, the Easter Bunny or just the pet) are a great way to raise money, and you can often find a pet-friendly photographer willing to donate his or her time.

Seminar: You likely have experts on your staff or among your volunteers, who can give workshops on pet care, selecting the right pet for your family and more. (If you can host the seminar at your shelter, your adoptable cats will love having extra laps to curl up on!)

Open House: Invite your supporters inside! Offering a tour of your shelter, and introduction to all your animals and mentioning your future plans can be a fairly easy way to get donations and increase community awareness.

Kitten Shower: Taking a decorating cue from human baby showers, kitten showers are special adoption events just for kittens.

Black Tie: Black cats (and dogs) can be the hardest pets to find homes for, so why not dedicate an event just for them? Animal handlers can dress in black as well and make it a fun and fairly easy themed-event.

Art Show: Local artists are often looking for ways to get their name and art into the community, which makes for a great pairing with an organization wanting to raise money. Contact artists to see if they'd be willing to donate art work to your group and host an art show at your shelter or a local business, such as a coffee house.

Phantom Ball (no ball at all!): Supporters pay for the privilege of staying home. A creative invitation and follow up thank-you notes are the keys to the success of this donation-only “event.” This is a good “event” for organizations that already have a strong donor base.

For more adoption event ideas, visit the Petfinder Library at <http://www.petfinder.com/library>

Start Planning

Who is available to help? If you are a small organization, you should start off with a small event until you are comfortable hosting events. You’ll want your event to be a lot of fun so that people come to your next one, so be sure you don’t plan bigger than you are able to handle. Just like with any project, events can bring unexpected twists and turns, so starting small will make life easier for all involved.

As you start planning and making lists of all the tasks to complete before, during and after your event, be sure everyone who offered to help is on the same page. Assign duties by name and give deadlines. Do as much pre-planning as you possibly can so that there is limited stress the day of the event and everyone knows who is doing what, what to do, when to do it and how to do it. For helpful information on how to form an event committee, visit <http://www.petfinder.com/for-shelters/12-tips-successful-dog-walk.html>

Who is your intended audience? Are you planning to include families with children, such as with a dog walk? Are you looking to include the wealthier set, such as with a formal seated-dinner event? Knowing the basics about your audience will help in all aspects of planning.

What do you want to come out of your event? Is it a small event designed to get a small return? Is it a big event from which you're hoping to get a big return? Are you more interested in increasing adoptions during the event or increasing dollars? Figuring out what you want your end result to be will set the stage for all of your planning.

Where do you want your event? Finding a suitable location can often be the most difficult part of planning an event – especially when animals are involved. Choose a location (for whatever type of event) that allows you to do everything you want (such as have animals indoors, etc.), is easy for people to find and has plenty of parking.

When do you want your event? Check with all your staff and/or volunteers prior to setting a date in stone. Be sure the date does not conflict with any holidays or other large events scheduled your area. (Your local Chamber of Commerce or arts council might be able to help you pinpoint other scheduled events.)

How do you get people to come? Using some common sense social marketing techniques will help you draw in your target audience. Where does your intended audience go? For family events think schools, grocery stores, kid-focused stores, movie theaters and other family-friendly venues. If you’re hosting an art show, leaving flyers in coffee houses, art supply stores and college campuses might to do the trick, in addition to your usual haunts (vet’s offices, groomers,

pet supply stores, etc.). To ensure you get on people's calendars, start handing out flyers about two months before your event.

Your flyers/brochures should mirror the type of event you are hosting. If it is a family-friendly outdoor event, a photocopied flyer that is handed out everywhere will work. If you're hoping to attract people to a \$200 a plate dinner, photocopies won't cut it.

Regardless of your type of event, be sure your printed materials are easy to read and include the date, time, location and – the most important part – that it is a benefit for animals. Contact your local printing stores as they will often donate the printing (and sometimes the design work too!) in exchange for being listed as a sponsor on your brochure. Print a lot – way more than you think you'll need – once you start handing them out, they'll go quickly!

Reach out to all your local media outlets, both to ask them to promote the event as well as to attend! If you need help finding how to contact your local newspapers, television stations, etc., please email outreach@petfinder.com.

How do you get donations? Events offer several options for raising money. You can sell (or trade for a service, such as refreshments) ad space in a program or on a t-shirt. You can charge a set admission fee or minimum donation. You can sell your own branded materials or donated goods (including food). You can put donation cans at all the key places at your event (like the bathroom!). You can ask local merchants to donate big-ticket items that can be auctioned off through a tricky tray or grab bag.

Thank you, thank you, thank you! Don't forget to thank everyone who helped your group – no matter how small or how well you know them. Thank your attendees, your volunteers and staff, your donors, any media outlets that supported you, your event location (especially anyone cleaning up) and anyone else who comes to mind. A simple hand-written thank you note goes a long way to ensuring continued support for your group and your future events.

Creating a Planning Timeline

6 Months – 1 Year Prior to Event Date

Meeting: Your initial planning meeting should cover all the basic questions – what type of event, what are the goals, who's doing what. Create a starter outline of tasks to get you to your event date and assign them to specific people with deadlines.

Big details: Select your date and location. Be sure to read over the first part of this article to help you select a non-conflicting date and easy-to-find location. If your location requires permits, file for them now.

Create: Work with your event planning crew to develop lists of potential sponsors, including both financial sponsors and in-kind sponsors who may wish to trade a service, such as food or entertainment. Create a packet of materials for potential sponsors to show them both what you need and what they'll get in return. Use this time to also create a starter distribution list for flyers. This is the time when friends-of-friends come in handy!

4 – 6 Months Prior to Event Date

Review: See where you are with sponsorship and if you need to reach out to more companies. Check back with any potential sponsors who have been supportive in the past, but from whom you have not yet received a reply.

Press: Create your publicity campaign! Submit an initial news release to all local media to announce your event.

Design: Create a logo for your event – or customize your current logo and design your event flyers. Check with local universities with graphic design programs to see if you can get a volunteer graphic designer to help. After proofreading several times, send your flyer off to the printer.

2 – 3 Months Prior to Event Date

Review: Create a finite logistical plan for the days leading up to the event. Ensure all volunteers and staff are in agreement and ready to move forward.

Press: Submit an initial news release to local media. You'll want to send another release closer to the event date, but this will give them a heads up and allow them to make plans to attend.

Flyers: Now is the time to start distributing flyers. Vet's offices, pet supply stores, grooming shops and any other animal-friendly stores/people are the best places to start. Then move on to any targeted options, such as schools, coffee shops and more. If your group has a membership, mail a brochure to your list of supporters.

Promote: Use Facebook, Twitter and the Petfinder Event Calendar to let everyone in the online world know about your upcoming event.

Order: If you are ordering anything custom-made for this event (or replenishing a dwindling supply), place your orders now so you won't have to run during the final days before your event.

Confirm: Speak with each of your event sponsors to confirm they are participating as planned and to thank them again. If you have any services, such as food, entertainment, etc., now is also the time to confirm with the suppliers.

1 Week – 1 Month Prior to Event Date

Meeting: Invite all staff and volunteers who have a role in the event to a pre-event training session for a final review of the event-day plans.

Review: Re-review EVERYTHING. While things can always change at the last minute, doing a final review of your scheduled staff/volunteers, your schedule for the day, your lists of materials people are bringing or you need to get, etc., will save you many headaches on the big day.

Press: Depending on how you arranged it with your local media outlets, now is likely the time to submit a written press release to newspapers, radio stations and television stations.

Flyers: Be sure any store/person you sent flyers to is still well-stocked. If not, now's the time to give them a fresh supply and hang signs in their storefronts

After your Event

Meeting: Have a post-event meeting to give updates to all staff and volunteers involved. Discuss the highs and lows of the event and what was successful and what needs to be changed next time around.

Release: Once you've calculated your total donations, adoptions and any other key numbers you want to share, create a post-event press release to send along with your thank-you notes.

Thank you: Thank everybody! Be sure all your sponsors, major donors, volunteers and anyone who played a role in making your event a success receive a personal thank-you no more than one month after your event.