

HOW-TO GUIDE FOR SPECIAL EVENTS

PUTTING ALL THE PIECES TOGETHER



Making the Decision

Many individuals have implemented special events in their communities for years and already have a clear vision of what their event will be and what it will include. If that is the case for you, that is terrific and you are probably already enjoying the fruits of your labors. However, many people are just beginning the special event/fundraising process and have no idea where to start in planning a special event. It is our hope that this guide will be of some support.

While deciding to plan a special event, you should answer the following questions:

1. What kind of event will it be? The following are events that have proved successful for families in the past:
 - Walk-a-Thons
 - Golf Tournaments
 - Scavenger Hunts
 - Auctions (silent or live)
 - Benefit Concerts
 - Bike-a-Thons
 - Dinner Dances
 - Bowling Tournaments
2. When and where will your event take place?
3. How much time do you and your volunteers have to dedicate to organizing the event?
4. How many volunteers and staff will you need?
5. What level of involvement do you expect from those assisting you?
6. How much money do you want to raise?
7. What is the potential to raise money?
8. What is the potential for publicity?

Think about each question thoroughly and give value to every idea. Brainstorming with your committees and volunteers is quite useful and can yield wonderfully innovative ideas.

How First Candle Can Help

First Candle is committed to ensuring your event is as successful as possible. In this regard, after you have completed and signed the Event Agreement, we are happy to provide each event captain with:

- Encouragement and consultation by national staff experienced with special event fundraising;
- Management of fiscal matters pertaining to your event, including all donor acknowledgments and thank you letters to event donors and participants;
- Attendance of national representative at your event when possible;
- Drafts of letters and supporting materials to help solicit items and funds; and,
- The ability to have First Candle promote your event through a comprehensive list of media outlets and contacts in your local area; and
- Use of First Candle logo and artwork.

Planning Stage

Now that you've decided what your event will be, the planning stage begins. Organization will be key during this process and can dictate, ultimately, how successful your fundraiser will be.

Creating A Timeline

A timeline will be invaluable to you (as well as your volunteers, planning committees, and First Candle) while planning your event. It should be an easily legible piece, that you can take a quick glance at and determine your status and next steps. Your timeline should include the following items:

- **Category:**
What category does the task fall under (venue, food, etc.)?
- **Task:**
What needs to be accomplished (soliciting raffle items, etc.)?
- **Deadline date:**
By when does the task need to be accomplished?
- **Responsibility:**
Who is in charge of this task?
- **Contacts:**
Who else is involved with this step? Names and contact information for vendors, donors and anyone else involved with the event should be included.
- **Other/Notes:**
Any other information you feel is pertinent.

Remember, anyone should be able to pick up your timeline and understand clearly what needs to be accomplished and by when.

Budgeting

Budgeting is often a difficult thing to do, especially with a first-time special event. Keep in mind the type of event you are holding and the resources available to you.

Be realistic when creating your budget. This way, there will be no surprises when you calculate your final expenses and proceeds. First Candle suggests you implement a budget worksheet while estimating:

- **Expenses:**
Overestimate your expenses. Include any expense you can think of and add a miscellaneous expense category for unexpected ones.
- **Income:**
Underestimate your income. While this may seem like you are selling yourself short, when you raise more money you will be that much happier with your efforts.

With a clear concept of the timeline and financial plan your event will follow, you can now begin to develop outside resources and relationships to help make your event a hit.

Note: For your convenience, please refer to a sample budget worksheet on the following page. Feel free to tailor it to best suit your needs.

Sample Budget Worksheet

This Budget Worksheet is for your use and planning.
Feel free to make copies and distribute to your event volunteers.

CONTRIBUTIONS	
Cash	
In-Kind Assets	
In-Kind Services	
TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS	
EXPENSES	
Staff/Volunteer Costs	
Payroll Taxes & Benefits	
Postage	
Supplies/Food/Tickets	
Equipment Rental	
Facility Rental	
Advertising/Printing/Promotions	
Travel	
Insurance/Licenses	
Professional Fees/Contracted Labor	
Gifts/Prizes/Awards	
Miscellaneous (<\$100)	
TOTAL EXPENSES	
NET INCOME	

Resource Development

In this stage of the event planning process, people in your community will start to learn about and look forward to your fundraiser. You can now start to make relationships with people in your community who will be an asset to you as well as to your event.

Meeting With Key People

You will need to decide who will be the key players in the overall success of your event. Are they volunteers? Friends or members of the local business community? Colleagues?

After you've decided who is going to play a role in planning your event, sit down with them and review what has been decided and implemented thus far. Review the budget and the timeline. This meeting is also the time to designate initial tasks as well as an opportunity to find new contacts in the community for additional support.

Obtaining Sponsors for Your Fundraiser

One misconception in planning a special event is that securing a company in your community to sponsor your fundraiser is impossible. Many people are often intimidated by the corporate world, and they ultimately sell themselves and their event short. In this section, we have described ways to approach your community businesses in a manner that will benefit both of you.

Why Companies Become Sponsors:

Special events provide an opportunity for companies to portray themselves as civic-minded within their respective communities. Your event could be the perfect way for them to do this. Companies sponsor fundraisers for:

Publicity:

The publicity that your event could generate for companies in your area is probably the most valued benefit of sponsorship.

A Positive Image:

Participating in your event will create a positive image for employees, colleagues and customers.

Positive Client Relations:

Sponsors are usually given free tickets or admission to the event they are sponsoring. This gives them the opportunity to entertain potential clients or key constituencies at your fundraiser.

What Companies Look for in Event Sponsorship:

- Does the event's goal match the company's philanthropic goals?
- Can they trust the event will be executed responsibly, professionally and successfully?
- Who are the participants in the event? How many people will be there?
- Could these participants be future clients or customers?
- Is there another event occurring in the community at the same time?
- How many other sponsors are there?

The Ask

The next step is actually visiting and asking local companies to sponsor or donate to your event. Try to keep these things in mind when soliciting their help:

- Whenever possible, use your connections. Even contacting a friend of a friend is better than making a cold call.
- Talk to the most senior level person at the business (Area Manager, Regional Manager, etc.)
- Offer them different ways to sponsor your event:
 - Develop different sponsorship levels and name them (Silver, Gold and Platinum, etc.)
 - Determine different dollar amounts and benefits for each level.
 - Offer them the opportunity to sponsor specific parts of the event. For example, if you're having a golf tournament, they could sponsor a tent or the 18th hole.
- Don't forget to make your request a personal one. If you are a bereaved parent, talk about your baby and why you are having this event. The company will want to know that their money will make a difference.
- If someone at a company has been extremely helpful to you, capitalize on it. Do not feel that you are asking too much if they can provide great networking opportunities. This person could turn into a great champion of your efforts year after year.

Supporting Materials

You will need to develop a few communications tools to introduce your event to potential sponsors or attendees.

1. Consider developing a simple letterhead for your event. You do not need to go to great expense but creating a professional looking letterhead will convey a professional image for your event.
2. While letterhead is optional, a one-page fact sheet about your event is not. It should contain the basics:
 - Who?
 - What?
 - When?
 - Where?
 - How?
 - Why? Emphasize the Why!

Having your fact sheet on hand when you are soliciting businesses in your area will be extremely helpful. Many times, business managers are very busy and can only spare a few minutes to consider sponsoring an event. Your fact sheet should be a quick, easily readable page that will give them the basics of your event and fast facts about your organization. Note: please refer to the next page for a sample Event Fact Sheet for an event that will benefit First Candle. Feel free to copy the layout and replace the details of the event with your own.

3. Be creative with your fact sheet; put First Candle's logo on it or a picture of your baby. We have provided you with sample letters and fact sheets, on the following pages, so feel free to utilize those. The more personal your request is, the more that business will feel that it is contributing to a worthwhile cause.
4. If you are offering different sponsorship levels, you will also need a fact sheet that outlines the options, benefits and corresponding financial responsibilities.

Sample Event Fact Sheet

On January 6, 2004, our family suffered the tragedy of losing the youngest member of our family, Clayton Paul Haley, a much beloved little boy and the world's next Motocross Champion, to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Clayton was a perfectly healthy baby, as are all 2,300 infants lost to SIDS each year. In an effort to do something proactive and positive in Clayton's memory, my family is proud to announce the **18th Annual Clayton Paul Haley Memorial Motocross Race**. All proceeds from the event will benefit the programs and services of **First Candle**, the nation's leader in the field of infant health and survival.

When: Saturday, September 18 & Sunday, September 19, 2004

Where: Hidden Valley MX Track
Burlison, Tennessee

Cost: \$10 and \$30 per class to race

Details of the Motocross Event:

- Fast 1.8 mile Texas style national outdoor track;
- Very fast and safe track ;
- Great 40 rider backward falling starting gate;
- Track was completely new in 2000, New sections and improvements have been made every year;
- Designed and built by Trey Clingfrost, owner/operator of Swan Cycle Park;
- Gates will open at 6 a.m.;
- Sign-up starts at 7 a.m.; and
- Practice will begin at 9 a.m. and racing will immediately follow.

First Candle is a national voluntary health organization uniting parents, caregivers and researchers nationwide with government, business and community service groups to advance infant health and survival.

Our mission is to promote infant health and survival during the prenatal period through two years of age through advocacy, education and research; while at the same time providing compassionate grief support to those affected by an infant death.



Clayton Paul Haley
9/15/03 – 01/06/04

For more information about Clayton's Event or about First Candle, please contact Kristin Hassey Brooks at 800.221.7437 or via email at Kristin@firstcandle.org

Sample Donation/Sponsorship Request Letter

Dear Prefix Last Name:

On behalf of [Organization Name], I am writing today to request your support for an important local event.

Enter a detailed description of the event. Include the date, time, how many participants you anticipate, etc.

I need your help and am respectfully asking that you join us in our effort to promote infant health and survival. For a (AMOUNT TBD) donation, (NAME OF SPONSOR) would be listed as a premiere sponsor of the event and receive recognition on all promotional materials. Your sponsorship would be a critical component of our success, and an investment that (NAME OF SPONSOR) and its employees could be proud of.

As you may be aware, SIDS is the sudden, unexpected death of an infant that remains unexplained after all known and possible causes have been ruled out. **It is the number one cause of death for infants one month to one year of age, claiming 2,300 babies in the United States each year.** Historically SIDS has been a mystery, leaving behind devastated families and bewildered physicians. Today, we are beginning to find some answers—such as factors that increase the risks for SIDS and actions that parents can take to reduce those risks.

OR

Stillbirth, the death of an infant in-utero and past 20 completed gestational weeks, claims more than 26,000 babies in the United States each year. The majority of these deaths occur at or near full term. They are otherwise healthy babies that die shortly before or during birth. Stillbirth deaths are unpredictable and there are no identifiable risk factors. They cut across socio-economic classes, races, religions, body types and maternal age groups. No woman is immune. We have just begun delving into the causes for stillbirth, and with your support, we can do even more.

Your contribution and all of the proceeds from [Event Name](#) will support [Enter Programs/Projects](#) at [Organization Name](#).

I look forward to coming and speaking with you at your store on **(DATE TBD)** to further explore your sponsorship of the [Event Name](#). Until then, I thank you for your kind consideration and for your belief that every baby should live.

Sincerely,

[\(Insert Name\)](#)

Event Chairman

Promoting Your Event

By this point, the large pieces of your fundraiser should be in place and coming together. You should have the date, time and location of your event secured, as well as some sponsors and in-kind donations from businesses in your community. Now, promoting your event becomes important. **Make sure that any sponsors that are contributing to your event are recognized early and often.**

Media Relations

Ideally, every radio and television station in your area would be promoting your event every hour on the hour. Building this type of exposure is difficult but not impossible. The key is to be persistent and begin by building relationships with local media representatives. If you and your planning committee agree, as the date of your event draws closer, First Candle can provide you with a comprehensive list of all local media outlets in your area. In addition, First Candle can also assist you with the dissemination of the sample press release, which can be found on the next page.

Begin by calling the television stations in your area. Usually, these stations have a Public/Community Relations department. Ask for a Public Service Announcement (PSA) to promote your event. Again, the best bet is to start at the top. Follow this procedure for local radio stations as well.

Print Advertising

Your publicity campaign should also include print vehicles such as community calendars, banners and flyers.

Your local newspaper will most likely contain a Community Calendar with a list of upcoming special events that could highlight your fundraiser. This is a terrific way for the event to receive a lot of local exposure. Also, create flyers to distribute throughout your community. Be creative and use color. (This would be a great in-kind donation from a printer or graphic design company.) Remember, the more people in your community that are involved with and reminded of your event, the more people will come.

Sample Press Release

Contact

Event Captain Name

Phone

Email Address

For Immediate Release

Local Event Helps Babies Survive and Thrive

[Name of Event] to be Held [enter date]

[City, State – Month Year] In an effort to create awareness and raise funds to support the fight against **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) OR Stillbirth** and other causes of infant death, (organization name) will be sponsoring a fundraising event for (city or town name) residents and their families. (name of event) will take place at (name of facility or venue), (address), on (date of event). All proceeds will be donated to (organization name) in support of (enter programs/project).

Enter an emotional quote from your organization's president or executive director here.

Dedicated to the memory of all babies in (enter state or city), who have died of **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and/or Stillbirth**, (name of event) will (description of event). Lifesaving messages for parents and caregivers on reducing the risk of infant death will also be available. Tickets for the event are \$(cost) and can be purchased (when, where). (Event Captain's Quote if desired)

For more information, contact [enter contact person information].

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Wrapping Up

This final section is to be used after you have held your event. Follow-up is often disregarded because the organizers, volunteers and planning committee are so glad the event is finally over, and they do not want to be reminded there is still critical work to be done. Final steps include:

- Meet with your planning committee and volunteers, if possible. Talk about all the things that went well and the things that could be improved for next year.
- Decide if this event will be an annual event. Don't forget, the first year is always the most difficult.
- For those that were extremely helpful in organizing your event, you may want to buy an inexpensive but thoughtful thank-you gift. This shows you did not take their help for granted.
- Complete a Final Event Report. A sample is provided for you on the following page.

Thank-You Letters

A terrific and heart-felt thank-you letter may make the difference for sponsors and donors to continue their support for next year. It is vital that your letter not sound phony or “canned.” Another good idea is to **buy a pack of thank you cards and hand-write thank-you's to your benefactors.**

Sample Final Event Report

General Event Information

Description of Event:	
Event Caption:	
Location of Event:	
Date of Event:	
In Memory Of:	
Contributions:	Cash: In-Kind Assets: In-Kind Services:
TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS:	

continued to next page

Sample Final Event Report *(continued)*

Event Expenses

Expenses:	Supplies:
	Postage:
	Rental Fees (equipment):
	Advertising/Printing:
	Travel:
	Licenses:
	Professional Fees:
	Gifts/Prizes:
	Facility Rental:
	Miscellaneous Expenses:
TOTAL EXPENSES:	

NET PROCEEDS FROM EVENT:	
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Feedback

Provide feedback to those who supported your event. Companies will want to know that your event was successful and that their sponsorship was critical to its success. The following are some ways to provide feedback to your sponsors:

- If you have received positive letters or comments, share them with your sponsors, staff, planning committee, and volunteers.
- Provide pictures of the event to the sponsors (even if they attended the event), especially the photos that feature their company logo or employees.
- Send copies of any newspaper articles about the event to your sponsors.
- Offer to take the sponsors to lunch to thank them again for being a champion of your fundraiser. Give them the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the possibility of their sponsorship next year.

The last impression that you give to all those who contributed to or were involved with your event is crucial to your organization's credibility and to obtaining their help in the future.

Questions & Comments for First Candle Staff

We hope that you have found this guide to planning a fundraising event beneficial to you and your volunteers. However, we know that questions may arise that this guide has not covered.

If you have any concerns, questions or general comments, feel free to contact Kristin Hassey Brooks at First Candle at 800.221.7437, ext. 233, or email at Kristin@firstcandle.org.

The Development Staff will be there with guidance and suggestions as well as encouragement for all the wonderful things you are doing for the benefit of infant health and survival.

Best of luck in your fundraising efforts!