

Tee Up to Raise Funds

BY MARK BREWER

Special events do require considerable planning, time and resources, but what about those that last most of a day and cover anywhere from 70 to 200 acres?

Charity golf tournaments can be successful if they are planned well, deliver a “wow” experience for golfers and attract quality sponsors, thus raising money for your organization year after year. Even if you fall short on sponsorships and revenue in your tournament’s early years, you can build on a good experience to create an annual event that golfers will put on their short list of charity events for the year.

So, where do you start?

Plan, Plan, Plan

How long does it take to prepare for a charity golf tournament? The following timeline may be helpful:

1. One year in advance:

- Create and work a sponsorship plan.
- If you are in a crowded golf tournament market, secure your venue at least a year in advance, and set the date and time for the event.
- Recruit a planning committee.

2. Six months in advance:

- Plan food and catering and activities such as raffles and auctions, as well as on-course activities and contests.
- Promote the event by mailing a save-the-date card to your donors.
- Start reviewing golfer gift ideas.
- Order invitations.

3. Three months in advance:

- Begin your public marketing, and finalize day-of details.
- Mail invitations about six to eight weeks in advance.
- Set up online registration to make it convenient for golfers to register and pay.

- Order arrival packages (balls, tees, towels, shirts and/or hats) for each golfing participant, and order hole sponsorship signs.

4. Day of the tournament:

- Arrange the registration booth, and set out registration packages.
- Set up sponsor recognition signs.
- Host an awards ceremony to announce all the winners and present prizes.

5. After the tournament:

- Write thank-you notes to sponsors, volunteers and other supporters.
- Meet to discuss and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the event.
- Don’t hesitate—begin planning for next year!



A great golfer experience starts with thoughtful planning. Frank MacGrath, president and CEO of Golf Tournaments Incorporated (<http://gtigolf.com>) in Aurora, Ontario, outside Toronto, suggests having a small planning committee of three to five people whose responsibility is to plan and run a well-organized event that will “make sure golfers have fun and learn something about the nonprofit.” A great planning committee must be able to sweat the details, so having the right people is essential. You may want to recruit one or two golfers who have experience playing or planning golf tournaments. They know what golfers want and can help plan the day’s activities. An experienced gift officer can take the lead in securing sponsorships. Someone with marketing experience can handle promotion. If you have an auction, it is good having someone take care of soliciting quality auction items. And if your organization has the budget, you may want to consider hiring an experienced local golf tournament consultant.

Also, make sure your organization’s executives are in the loop. Peter deYoung, an independent golf tournament consultant in the Chicago area, says, “Have your executive director sit in on a planning meeting so he or she knows exactly what’s going to happen the day of the event, what to expect on the bottom line and what’s expected of him or her on the day of the event.”

A Desirable Course

Where you hold your charity golf tournament is a significant factor in its success. “People are inundated with charity golf invitations,” deYoung says. “You want to stand out and be above the crowd. You want golfers to feel good about calling their friends. A good venue pays off, especially for repeatable golf events.”

deYoung, who has managed golf tournaments for more than 40 years, believes that a great experience starts with a popular course that is a good draw for golfers. If you are planning your first event and start at a course with an impeccable reputation, he says that “by the time you get to your second, third or fourth years, you’ll be able to increase the amount you raise” and continue to attract enthusiastic golfers.

Executives, including board members, through their networks, also may be able to connect you with desirable private golf clubs that otherwise would be unavailable for your tournament.

Of course, you need to be practical. “You can’t go to the best golf course in your area if the cost means you don’t actually raise money,” deYoung adds. On the

other hand, if you are offered a golf course for free and it does not affect your bottom line, then it is hard to say no to that.

Volunteers Make the Difference

Your volunteers on the day of the event can make or break your tournament. “It’s very difficult to run a golf event without dedicated volunteers,” deYoung emphasizes. “The best volunteers are those who have a real connection to the nonprofit, whether they’re employees or friends of the charity. The stronger the connection to the charity, the more dedicated those volunteers will be for the day of the event.”

The Importance of Sponsorships

Sponsorships are your primary opportunity for revenue. MacGrath, who has organized golf events for more than 20 years, says that businesses understand this and are approached for sponsorships regularly. They want and appreciate the exposure. Thankfully, golf events offer many exposure opportunities, such as ads in the program booklet, signage and verbal mentions by speakers.

Some nonprofits have built-in networks of suppliers and vendors that sponsor golf events. If you do not have an organic pool of sponsors to dip into, Guy Bonnell, vice president of community development at The Scarborough Hospital Foundation (<http://tshfoundation.ca>) in Scarborough, Ontario, says that having a sponsorship subcommittee with strong leverage within their corporate networks is critical. Look for people with connections to large corporations, large banks, large law firms—any company with big budgets for nonprofit sponsorships.

Bonnell advises getting the sponsorship ask in early in the budget-planning process. In his area, the big banks’ budget year starts in November. “We try to get to the banks in August or September so that they can build it into their plans,” he says.

A Round of Golf, Anyone?

Sponsorships are generally packaged with one or more foursomes, so sponsors are a good source of golfers. However, if sponsored foursomes do not fill the course, you will need to proactively recruit golfers.

Get your event on golfers’ calendars early. “Most golfers will come from people who know about your charity,” deYoung says. “If you start early enough and you’ve got all the people in your organization talking about the golf tournament, you should do very well in attracting golfers.”

Recruit your employees who golf. Ask them to promote the event and get a foursome together. And don't hesitate to contact your organization's major supporters, volunteers and donors who golf.

However, avoid the trap of overbooking the course to increase revenue. "The No. 1 criticism golfers have about tournaments is that they take too long," MacGrath says. "Sometimes, that's because they're poorly organized. Sometimes, it's because you try to jam too many golfers on the course. The ideal number of golfers is around 120 in terms of pace of play," and that number will fill an 18-hole course for at least half a day.

If you are nervous about attracting a full course, MacGrath suggests finding a venue that can work with a smaller number of golfers. For example, you could negotiate a deal where you guarantee 80 golfers and pay extra per golfer beyond that.

Celebrate!

Opportunities for prizes and awards create more excitement and make memories, which create a better experience that will motivate golfers to return. "You'll have a lot of people who don't play golf very often or who aren't serious players," deYoung says. "I like to give as many small trophies and prizes as, budget-wise, I'm capable of giving out, instead of having one overall major champion."

He says that on-course games and contests "keep the interest going for the noncompetitive golfers by maximizing the amount of things a golfer takes home." Contests may include longest putt, shortest drive and straightest drive. Bonnell's tournament has four contests, which he says provides enough of a fun factor while keeping the pace of play moving.

Equally important, every golfer should go home with a quality gift with your organization's name on it. "Give them something they're going to use," deYoung emphasizes. "Make sure the charity's name is on it, but not so big that they

won't use it. If it looks like obvious advertising, then they might leave it in the closet."

Revenue Builders

You can raise money with on-course activities by charging to participate, either individually for each game or contest or as an all-inclusive package, such as two mulligans, a hole-in-one contest and beat-the-pro for a \$20 ticket. Or you can include contests and games as part of the registration fee.

Resources

The Complete Handbook for A Successful Fundraising Golf Tournament: Everything You Need to Know to Plan, Implement and Sustain a Successful Tournament by Frank MacGrath (Civil Sector Press, 2013), paperback, 184 pages

Going for the Green!: An Insider's Guide to Raising Money With Charity Golf by Tom King (Emerson & Church Publishers, 2008), paperback, 156 pages

Golf Tournaments for Professional Fundraisers (Fundraising Event Mastery Series) by Monique Littlejohn, CFRE (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), paperback, 68 pages

18 Steps To Produce A Successful Charity Golf Tournament

<http://teetimespress.com/main.asp?SectionID=5&SubSectionID=60&ArticleID=25>

Golf Tournament Resource Center

http://www.golfregistrations.com/resource_center/index.cfm

How to Produce a Successful Golf Tournament
www.gtaaweb.org

How to Run a Successful Golf Tournament
www.holeinoneinternational.com

How to Run an Efficient, Organized Golf Tournament
www.pga.com/pga-america/pga-information/tips-organize-golf-tournament

Raising Money with Golf Events
<http://blog.greatergiving.com/raising-money-golf-events>

Score With a Golf Fundraiser
www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/312-score-with-a-golf-fundraiser

The Ultimate Golf Outing & Event Planning Guide
http://sevenoaksgcc.com/files/6013/9205/7102/Seven_Oaks_Outings_Planner_2014.pdf



Raffles also can be used to raise funds. Sell tickets at registration and as the golfers come off the course. (However, avoid asking for money while they are playing.) Silent and live auctions are other popular and effective fundraisers.


In addition, MacGrath suggests using the entry fee to break even on the event cost. The entry fee should be similar to what golfers in your area expect to pay for a round of golf. Golfers may not have a strong connection to your organization, so they may not see the value of a high entry fee.

Promotion

Think about your messaging on the day of the event. Be specific about what you are raising money for so that golfers understand the impact of the revenue raised at the tournament, MacGrath advises. Bonnell's

Scarborough Hospital Foundation has television monitors running a two- to three-minute video describing how the hospital will use the money raised through the tournament. The television monitors also display sponsor recognition and provide updates on the day's events.

MacGrath also says that it is particularly powerful if beneficiaries of the charity are at the event to interact with golfers and thank them for participating.

Sponsors, golfers and volunteers are key ingredients in planning and running a successful golf tournament that raises money and is repeatable, year after year. If you plan a day that is fun for everyone involved, your golf event will hit a hole-in-one every year. 

Mark Brewer is a freelance writer in Elizabeth, Ill. (<http://markbrewerwriter.com>).



SEE HOW YOUR GIFT EMPOWERS FUNDRAISERS



"I am grateful for the opportunity to attend the 2016 AFP International Conference in Boston, MA. It is an honor to be part of the investment my chapter and AFP Foundation make in the professional growth of fundraisers. Furthermore, it was a privilege to be surrounded by others representing diverse communities from across the country to learn of their unique struggles and challenges. The first thing I did to express my appreciation for this scholarship was donate to the BE the CAUSE Campaign so that others might be awarded the same opportunity I have."

- Jasmine T. Okafor, AFP GA, Greater Atlanta Chapter, 2016 Diversity Scholar



"I would not have been able to attend the conference if I did not receive the scholarship. I met a wide range of development professionals and they motivated me in pursuing a CFRE. Because I am so grateful for the scholarship, I am making sure that others understand how worthwhile the conference is."

- Charmaine Torma, AFP IN, Michiana Chapter, 2016 Chamberlain Scholar

DONATE NOW
www.afpfoundation.org/bethecause

Text "BETHECAUSE" to 61416