

what?

Using Distinguished Speakers as a Vehicle for Fundraising

who?

Advocates for Children and Youth

Contact: Christine Brubaker, Deputy Development Director, cbrubaker@acy.org

Summary:

In 2003, Advocates for Children and Youth in Maryland hosted a Distinguished Speaker fundraising event, inviting a well-known speaker to address its fall luncheon of current and potential donors. With a 350% return on investment, the Distinguished Speaker Series proved to be an effective fundraising project, which the organization is preparing to repeat this fall.

Background:

Borrowing from the success of another Maryland child advocacy organization, ACY started its own series, inviting national or international figures to speak on children's issues or matters generally related to the organization's advocacy mission. The higher-profile speakers turned an educational session on policy into a prime fundraising opportunity. As another organization holds its speaker series in the spring, ACY decided to stage its in the fall.

Key Elements:

- Choosing a Speaker:
 - Staff developed an initial list of speakers for review by the Board's Development Committee.
 - The Development Committee narrowed the options down to three choices.
 - Staff determined the speakers' availability and any related expenses or fees.
 - With input from the Development Committee, the Board President made the final decision.
 - Nearly 59% of the allocated budget was spent on the speaker's fee.

- Sponsorship:
 - ACY volunteers committed to selling individual tickets and soliciting corporate sponsorships on behalf of the organization. The event offered corporations the opportunity to support ACY's agenda and mission, and to have their names associated with the organization.
 - Corporations could sponsor tables at \$2,500, \$5,000 or \$10,000 levels, with certain benefits associated with each level. Individuals were charged \$100 per ticket.
 - ACY's top corporate sponsor was the *Baltimore Sun*, the city's only daily newspaper. As part of its sponsorship, *The Sun* printed a 1/6-page ad promoting the event and its corporate sponsors.

- ACY received sponsorship dollars from WYPR, Baltimore's local NPR news station. WYPR also promoted the event and aired a segment with one of the distinguished speakers the week before the luncheon.
- Audience:
 - The event allowed potential donors to become familiar with ACY and kept existing donors involved with the organization.

Things to Think About:

- ACY decided that each event should be chaired or co-chaired by a Board member to more directly engage the Board in raising corporate funds for the event.
- Through the Board, ACY has an active cadre of volunteers who are interested in supporting special events in addition to working in advocacy.
- ACY tries to find speakers who appeal to the organization's highest sponsorship level, which can mean paying a high speaker fee.
- It is important to find a venue that is moderately priced and conveniently located. In 2003, ACY found that a mid-town location would help increase attendance from business community. It was also able to purchase parking at one third of the normal price.
- To make the event as affordable as possible, ACY offers a moderately priced menu of fruits, salads, and simple beverages. It assumes that guests attend the luncheon because friends invite them, not for a fine dining experience.
- Centerpieces are donated by a florist or borrowed.

Staff Time:

- The Executive Director solicited one corporate sponsorship from a personal friend and briefed the speaker on the organization's mission and goals for the event. She also prepared her own introductory remarks.
- Over a three-month period, the Board, the Executive Director, the event committee, volunteers, and ACY's development staff met with corporations to secure sponsorships.
- The development staff contacted the speaker, made arrangements with the florist, and reserved the venue. Communications staff promoted the event to its network through its normal electronic channels.
- During the week before the event, a number of staff members helped with ticket sales, printing name tags, and finalizing the registration process.
- The development staff contacted the speaker, made arrangements with the florist, and reserved the venue.
- ACY's entire staff attended the event. Administrative staff helped with the on-site registration process, KidPin sales, and the "traffic flow" of the guests.
- Policy staff blended in, filling empty spots at tables in order to focus conversations around the organization's legislative priorities.

Outcomes:

- Potential donors get to know the organization, which allows ACY to expand its list of solicitations for its end-of-the-year campaign.
- The luncheon has become an opportunity for Board involvement in raising corporate funding for the event and working with staff to identify potential speakers.
- The event produced a 350% return on investment.