



# **HOW TO HOST A HIGH-IMPACT, LOW-COST SUPPORTER ENGAGEMENT EVENT**

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## HOW TO HOST A HIGH-IMPACT, LOW-COST SUPPORTER ENGAGEMENT EVENT.

As fundraisers you regularly send emails and direct mail. You may be a social media whizz and have fantastic videos that breathe life into your marketing. However, you cannot always ensure that your message is received by your target audience and furthermore, you cannot be sure that you will resonate with and inspire potential supporters.

Wouldn't it be fantastic if you could get your current and potential supporters into a room to really engage and inspire them? You may be surprised to hear this but you definitely can!

Welcome to the Supporter Engagement Event!

**Supporter Engagement Events are not just for huge charities with equally huge budgets. They can be a low-cost, high-impact way of getting your current and potential supporters in front of the most inspirational people in your organisation; your beneficiaries.**



### WHAT IS THE POINT?

The purpose of the event is to grow your networks and voluntary income, by building relationships and trust. By inviting a broad range of current and prospective supporters, you can provide your audience with unique insights to your work.

It is also your way of giving back to supporters. An invitation will stand out against the backdrop of increasing requests for support. Fundamentally, a supporter engagement event doesn't have to break the budget.

**You can be resourceful with venue and refreshments, so don't let budget be a barrier to engaging with supporters in this way.**



### WHO:

The best events rely on a mix of current and potential supporters. The current supporters can inject passion and enthusiasm to the audience, which can help to inspire the potential supporters. Remember, not everyone that you invite will attend. Generally, for current supporters, you can expect around 30% to attend. If you send cold invites, less will attend (generally 10% would be a good turnout). If sending a cold invite, include an explanation as to why you would like to invite them to try and make it as warm as possible.

### FOR EXAMPLE:

*“Our organisation saves local hedgehogs and, as the biggest supplier of food for woodland creatures in the region, this is a great opportunity for you to meet other people who are passionate about healthy hedgehogs.”*

*“As a highly regarded member of the local community, this is a fantastic opportunity for you to hear first-hand from those most affected by poverty in our area”.*

*“We were delighted when you sponsored Graham Johnson for our Park Run in July. He did a fantastic job, and we were inspired by the number of people who got behind him and helped him to smash his fundraising target. As you were generously part of this success, we want to invite you along to this event to find out more about the impact you have helped us to achieve this year.”*

When preparing your guest list, think about your current supporters, or anyone who has supported you in the last three years:

- Ambassadors
- Trust and Foundation Trustees
- Corporate Partners
- Event Participants
- Individual Donors
- Community Groups
- Stakeholders
- Commissioners

### SECONDLY, THINK ABOUT POTENTIAL SUPPORTERS:

- **Corporates:**  
Avoid mass-mailing every company in the area. Instead, think about where there is the most potential, the most tangible cause-related link or if they are due to renew a Charity of the Year partnership. Does your organisation have any contacts in local companies or have a dream corporate partner?
- **Potential Ambassadors:**  
Not just celebrities (although, they would be great if you have access to any!), but think about influential people whose presence would add impact on the day for example the local Mayor, Members of Parliament and other prominent figures in your community.
- **Local community groups with a propensity to support:**  
Rotary Clubs, Women’s Institutes, Freemasons, Church Groups
- **Potential major donors:**  
local philanthropists, businesspeople etc.

**Finally, consider whether you are allowing attendees to bring a guest or send a representative on their behalf. They may not be able to come, but could send a colleague or another person who may be interested in supporting your work. Some attendees are more likely to come along if they can bring a guest.**



### **WHAT:**

The event should offer an interesting insight into your work, the form in which you do that will depend on your cause, resources and creativity. A good mix of mini workshops, talks, case studies and videos are likely to gather everyone's attention. You may choose to have market stalls, host an open-day or showcase your recent work. But, in order to best engage attendees, it is vital that this event is not used as a money-making exercise. Avoid requests for support on the day, there will be plenty of opportunities for that after the event.

When arranging speakers, think about who are the most inspirational, interesting and engaging people that can represent your charity. The recipe for success is likely to include a good mix of the following:

#### **COMPERE/HOST**

Pick someone who will be able to manage the room well. A local comedian, an inspiring colleague, a member of your senior team or yourself.

#### **BENEFICIARIES**

The best placed people to inspire support are the people who benefit from your work. Pick confident beneficiaries, or someone with a particularly moving story. If your beneficiaries may be reluctant due to confidence, offer to host a Q&A session with the host asking predetermined questions, so that they can prepare in advance. If you are unable to ask beneficiaries to speak, think about showing videos etc.

#### **AMBASSADORS**

Think major donors, really engaged long-term supporters, celebrities, volunteers etc. People who are already inspired by your work and do a great job supporting you.

#### **CORPORATE PARTNER**

If you have potential corporate supporters in the audience, invite a current or previous corporate partner to share what they have done to support your organisation and why.

#### **COLLEAGUES**

Ask a few colleagues from different areas of your organisation to speak to provide an insight into a key topic and their day to day role. Consider doing this part interactively; if you do educational sessions or awareness workshops, offer a mini-version on the day.

**Be sure to schedule in at least 30 minutes networking on arrival to allow for latecomers, but more importantly, it is your chance to build relationships with all of the fantastic supporters who have gone out of their way to attend your event. Similarly, expect to hang around after the event to continue to build those relationships!**

Finally, think about the little things that make a big impact on the day. Offer refreshments: tea and coffee, biscuits, bacon sandwiches, cakes, wine, etc. Think about the time of day that you are hosting your event and, budget permitting, provide what you can to make attendees feel extra special. You can prepare delegate bags to include; treats, branded merchandise, information, an agenda, printed versions of case-studies and success stories that they can share.



### WHERE AND WHEN:

The ideal venue would be your own premises, this way you can give supporters the opportunity to see for themselves where you do your work. However, in some cases practicality or safeguarding issues may make this difficult. If you are not on your organisation's premises, try and find a practical venue that will have some appeal. Somewhere quirky or creative, somewhere people may not have been before.

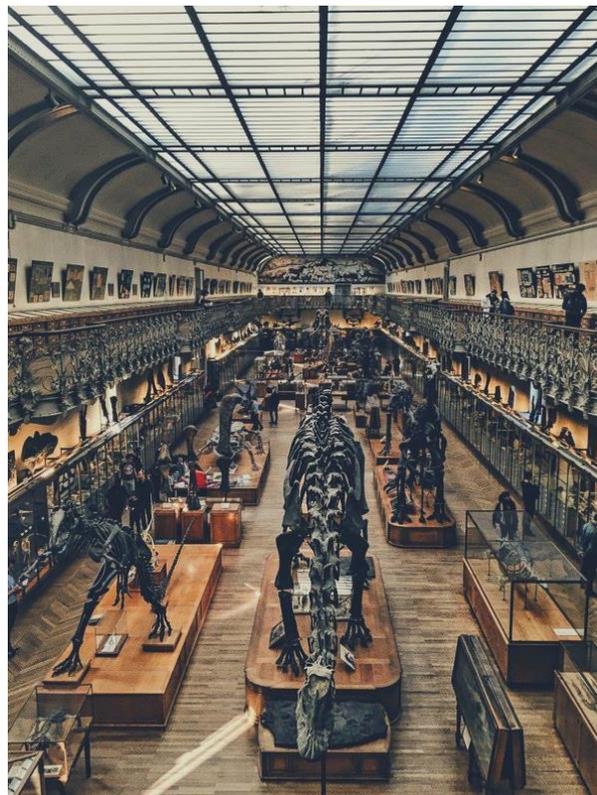
Great venue ideas may include:

- Museums
- Galleries
- Landmarks
- Libraries
- Stadiums
- Warehouses, etc.

**You need to think about the best date and time for your event. Unavoidably, the date and time you pick won't work for everyone, but the most important thing to do is tailor the time and date to your audience. For example, if the majority of your target attendees are professionals, avoid expecting them to take a chunk of time out during the day.**

The length of the event is entirely up to you, but, an hour and a half to two hours tends to be a great fit.

Whatever time of day you choose, tailor your event accordingly. For example, if you do a breakfast event, consider providing bacon sandwiches, tea and coffee.



You could always involve your supporters in these decisions! Consider putting these questions to your social media followers or send out a survey. Not only will this help you to know your audience, it will create a buzz around your event.

### HOW:

The ultimate way to invite guests to your event would be to post personalised letters telling them what they can expect from the event and why you want them to attend, so if you have the time and resource to do this – please do!

If you are time-poor or have a particularly long list of invitees, the best option would be to have a few tailored templates of letters that are appropriate to the audience. For example, you would have one letter for current supporters and one letter for potential supporters and cold invites.

### PERSONALISED EXAMPLE:

*Dear XXX,*

*I hope that your recent bake-a-thon went well, I was keeping an eye on twitter and the cupcakes looked delicious! As you are always so good to our organisation, we feel it is time that we return the favour. It is my pleasure to invite you and a guest to a special event at XXX on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018.*

*This is our opportunity to thank you for the whopping £9,200 you have raised this year, share with you how our work is progressing and introduce you to some of the beneficiaries that have been supported by your generous donations. Plus, we'll bake the cakes for a change!*

### SUPPORTER TEMPLATE EXAMPLE:

*Dear XXX,*

*As a valued supporter of our charity we would like to thank you for your continued generosity. It is my pleasure to invite you and a guest to a special event at XXX on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018.*

*This is our opportunity to thank you for your support, share with you how our ongoing work is progressing and also talk about our future plans across the region in 2019.*

### COLD INVITE EXAMPLE:

*Dear XXX,*

*Our charity is the UK's leading charity working to tackle the issue of... We currently support X people in the region through our Y and Z services. In order to support the growth of our work, we have an increasing need to raise support and awareness from across the region. It is my pleasure to invite you and a guest to a special event at XXX on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018.*

*This is our opportunity to inform you of the scale of this issue in your community, share with you how our ongoing work is progressing and also to talk about our exciting plans for 2019.*

Be sure to post the invites with enough notice (ideally four to six weeks) and specify a deadline for replies. Set out what attendees should expect from the outset, so include whether you will be providing refreshments, who will be speaking and on what topics. The invitation is your opportunity to encourage attendance so make the event sound as interesting as possible!

If the invitee has a specific contact or account manager within your organisation, then send the letter from that person. If not, ask your Chief Executive or a member of the Senior Team if you can send a letter from them.

When sending the letters, email may seem like the best option as it is quick and free. However, emails are likely to be forgotten about or deleted on receipt. A letter is, by far, the best form of communication for invitations. However, I do recommend that you follow-up your invitations with calls. Ask whether they are attending and, if there is a large gap between a RSVP and the event, call the week before to confirm attendance and let your attendees know how much you are looking forward to seeing them.

Most importantly, do not include a request for support in the letter. This is an opportunity to engage support in a meaningful, long-term way. Guests are unlikely to attend if they think they are coming along to an hour-long pitch for their money or time.



### WHAT'S NEXT?

It is vital that you network on the day. Remember people's names and anything they say to you that you could build a relationship around in the future. It can be a great idea to keep a little notebook somewhere so after you have spoken to each person, you can subtly record key points to remember. Don't try and do all of this yourself, ask a few colleagues to do this too so that you can build a record of potential leads to support your follow-up.

You may not have personalised the invites, but it is crucial that you personalise your follow-up communications. Use the information you have gathered to lead the conversation. Call to personally thank individuals for attending; set-up meetings with potential corporate and major donors; send an event invite personally to that person who was thinking about running a half marathon; focus on building connections.

Make your follow-up conversations a priority rather than an after-thought. Schedule time to ensure that you speak to everyone who attended. If you get through to voicemail, then leave a message and try again the following day. Make each call as personal as possible and focus on conversation. Ask if they enjoyed the event, what they got from it and whether there is anything specific they would like to know more about.

This event is a relationship-building exercise, the connections you make can have a long-term sustainable financial impact on your organisation. Charity support works both ways and this is a fantastic tool for delighting your donors and making them feel part of the work they help you to achieve.



**If you would like support to create the perfect supporter engagement event for your charity, or if you have any questions, please do get in touch.**

**Also, if you decide to host your own supporter engagement event, please do let us know – we would love to hear how you get on!**



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