



SA-UK Trust Network

Fundraising Events in the UK

It's best to not even consider arranging a fundraising event in the UK if you don't have a drawcard to guarantee that it is sold out, or at least a large, active and dedicated UK-based volunteer events committee. UK event organising companies promote their services. Even those offering services to non-profits have fancy advertising and strap lines such as, *We'll be your team in London; Leave it all to us!; We'll take the hassles out of your events – you get to bank the money.*

It's like walking through treacle. None can provide a satisfactory answer to the simple question, 'Do you sell tickets?' and variations such as, 'How would you suggest that we get people to attend?' or, 'Please connect me with a few referee organisations in southern Africa for whom you filled their venue from your efforts/event-goer lists'. A few had the honesty to admit that they don't do this, but sadly, the majority reverted to their sales patter.

Additional Benefits

Events are a good way to raise money **if** you get the basics right. Added to money raised at the actual event, there are numerous other short-, medium- and long-term benefits:

- Immediate money. An event is a great way to raise undesignated funding (unless you publicise a stated purpose for the proceeds).
- A positive by-product of both ticket sale publicity and a great post-event opportunity is awareness of the plight of the beneficiaries in South Africa and the NPO. Such publicity can be in the large UK print media, on radio and television and via social media. A fundraising event can 'put an organisation on the map'.
- Recruiting volunteers is often done successfully via an event – both generated by pre- and post-publicity and on the night.
- Ongoing donors – those wonderful debit order-signing individuals who are the lifeblood of NPOs – are regularly signed up on such occasions.
- Sometimes (and this happened to me), one might have a staff member, trustee or benefactor of a UK donor trust present. Many – in fact, the majority – have a 'no unsolicited proposals' policy. Having someone invite an application simply from attending an event, is heaven-sent.
- Donors recruited at an event, whether individuals or from a trust, may well continue to give in the medium or even long term (and potentially leave a legacy).

Founding chair of the Network, Jill Ritchie says: I have often arranged events in London without volunteer recruitment as a goal and have had guests ask me how they could go about volunteering. I once arranged a UK event for an animal conservation organisation that bought equipment for local anti-poaching authorities in a southern African country

– effectively a branch of the local police. The drawcard was having a member of the British Royal family present, and we had a large and well-connected volunteer events committee who helped to fill the room. The night was sold out and a wealthy supporter of the organisation flew the head of the anti-poaching unit to London. I naturally added the policeman to the speaker list.

During the dinner break, two men (whom I did not know and who had been sold tickets by an enthusiastic volunteer), asked me to introduce them to the cop, as they wanted to offer their voluntary services. It turned out that they were members of the British Army's elite SAS and they wanted to spend their holidays assisting in tracking and arresting animal poachers in Africa!

Plan

Even if you have the two key ingredients for successful events – a drawcard and a large and committed team of volunteers – it is vital to plan the event early and plan it well, preferably at least a year in advance.

Date

As soon as the speaker, entertainer or other drawcard is secured, the date should be confirmed. London is immensely busy. (The event may not necessarily happen in London, but most do.)

Factors to Consider when Selecting a Date

Time of the year: If your potential audience is London or largely UK-based, July, August and the first half of September are unlikely to work. Brits go on holiday during this mid-summer period. The country (and London in particular) is very busy with an influx of tourists, who are not the target audience for fundraising events. Ideal months for events are March, April (stay away from the Easter weekend), May and early June or October and early November. June and early July are filled with corporate and tertiary year-end functions and there is also a spate of Christmas parties making mid-November and December less than ideal when competing for venues and diary space. Those who can, often go away for short Christmas and early January trips to the sun. Although February is a popular month for ballet, opera and theatre in the UK, it is generally the coldest month and the time of the year most likely to have bad weather, including snow, sleet and dangerous icy roads and pavements. However, the Network's experienced event organisers have arranged sold-out events in London in February.

Day of the week: Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays are not ideal fundraising event evenings. Many Londoners go away for weekends, and a large number only return early on a Monday. Londoners work very hard – 12- or 14-hour days are normal – and take their weekends off seriously. Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays are good for events. Mondays should be considered only as plan C or D. Aside from public holidays, which should be avoided, the UK also has periodic bank holidays. This gives them a long weekend with a Monday off. An internet search will provide a list of bank holidays well in advance. It's best to avoid the Thursday before or Tuesday after a bank holiday weekend.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that a great venue alone is enough of an attraction. For instance, it is easy to have a friendly member of parliament or of the House of Lords arrange for the free use of a room in the centuries-old Houses of Parliament. Simply the use of an historical or 'posh' venue is not sufficient to fill the room in this immensely busy city.

London is home to many membership clubs, some with ideal event venues and the staff are geared for events. A member must make the booking, but these are worth investigating.

The single most dangerous yet alarmingly neglected aspect of fundraising event planning is the budget. It should be the first step. If the figures do not add up, abandon the idea. If an excellent concept needs to be put on hold until sponsorship is secured, then so be it. Consider how much should be raised to make an event worthwhile. Calculate the budget in GB pounds and then convert the conservatively estimated profit to ZAR to decide whether to proceed. It can be dangerous to take a decision to proceed with an event even if the figures don't look healthy, and then rely on add-ons such as an auction or raffle to increase the income.