

## 32nd Annual Gala Raises \$785,000

### Gala Cost-Saving Measures Dos and Don'ts

Seattle University development staff have discovered key tips and ways to cut annual gala costs:

1. **Entertainment selection** — Choose cover bands and local celebrities instead of big names for most events. In their early years, gala planners booked bigger names, and making this switch cut costs substantially. If the event's honoree is a bigger name, or if it is an anniversary year, they go bigger with the entertainment.
2. **Cork costs** — Find a connection to get wine donated or given at cost. Work with volunteer leaders to see if someone has an in. Alcohol is one of the biggest costs, and this can help save substantially, plus allow featuring of local wines.
3. **Print materials** — Don't skimp on these. This is a high-end event, and materials should be high quality. SU staff are intentional with making material feel welcoming and inviting, using embossing or die cuts to create something more high-end than typical pieces. This gets expensive but it looks great and adds to the event.
4. **Video** — Hire this out. You want it to be professional quality, and it can also be time-consuming. Don't try to assign this to someone on staff. If possible, work with a vendor with whom you have a prior relationship, so they are familiar with your needs and branding.

For over three decades, Seattle University has raised significant funds for scholarships through their Annual Gala. The event, held in November, typically raises \$600,000 to \$800,000. Funds come in through sponsorships, ticket sales and an ask the night of the event. Tickets cost \$500, and attendance ranges from 600-700 guests. The majority of funds, usually all but \$100-150K, come in before the event.

Cathy Reilly, director of annual giving, explains the process, "We have a lot of sponsorships that come in from different sources — corporate, individuals, and vendors. Two individuals or couples are chosen to chair the event who are leaders in the local business community, which further assists in obtaining sponsorships."

The evening starts with a 1 1/2 to 2 hour cocktail reception. During this time, student ambassadors mingle with guests. "The point of the event is to raise funds for scholarships," Reilly notes, "so it is important to allow donors to meet students and have the opportunity to interact. We are intentional, having engineering students talk to those supporting engineering programs, for example."

Following is the dinner portion, which includes the evening's program — a video, remarks from the president, and presentation of a medal to the event's honoree. To select the honoree, Reilly creates a short list of donors for review, selection and approval by the president of the university and the board.

The second half of the event is about the students. A student speaker shares his or her story, telling what it's like to be a student at Seattle University and letting donors know what they have made possible.

Reilly credits their success to several key strategies. "Our attendance has been trending downward in the past five years, but we are still netting more. This is because we have gotten better at getting the right people in the room. We work with the chairs and

honorees to determine who would want to be there, even if they don't have a relationship with the university, because they have one with the honoree. We ask, who would want to be there to help honor them."

"The second strategy is student involvement. We invest a lot in selecting, coaching and practicing with the student speaker. The night of, we have student ambassadors sign thank-you notes for all donations made during the event. It is important to facilitate introductions between supporters and beneficiaries and find new ways to do that each year. For example, feature décor with student pictures and quotes," Reilly suggests.

"Thirdly, we follow up with post-event stewardship. Shortly after the event, we run an ad in the newspaper listing all sponsors \$10K and up. We send the sponsor a copy of the ad with a thank you, including a specific student's profile and personal note. In the spring, a thank-you lunch is held, to which all sponsors and attendees are invited, to meet student scholars and see the impact of their giving."

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### Increase Survey Responses And Improve Your Event

Using a survey to evaluate an event? Need to get attendees' opinions about your organization?

If you rely on surveys to get answers to important questions, follow these six principles to improve your results:

1. Determine what you want your survey to accomplish.
2. Keep the survey as short as possible.
3. Make questions easy to answer.
4. Eliminate questions with obvious answers.
5. Make response methods simple — checkoffs or multiple choice.
6. Offer an incentive for completing and returning the survey.

### Special Events Tip

- After booking the location for a special event, find out who will be using that space ahead of you. They may have certain materials — decorations, lighting, equipment and more — that would work in nicely with your event.