

Free Virtual Event Planning Guide: 2021 Online Cat Conference Attendees



Top Tips for a Successful Virtual Event or Online Fundraising Campaign

- **Type:** Select the right type of event for your organization.
 - Look online at other virtual events and online fundraisers to see what others have done to help get ideas.
 - Consider transitioning an existing event your organization hosts to a virtual event.
- **Platform:** Select the right platform or technology for the type of event you want to host.
 - Online research and talking with other organizations are the best ways to learn about options.
 - Consider your donors and be sure to select a platform or technology that is truly easy to use for non-tech savvy people.
 - Consider recording the event for those who cannot make it at the appointed time.
- **Name:** Come up with a fun and engaging name and theme.
- **Look:** Develop appealing, fun graphics and a consistent look for the event's communications and marketing.
- **Purpose & Goal:** Create a purpose and financial goal for the event and share this with potential participants.
- **Activities:** Plan fun, interesting, and engaging activities as part of the event.
 - Plan the content of your virtual event carefully with the viewer/participant in mind.
 - Plan to use varied elements. For example, if you are planning a virtual behind-the-scenes tour, consider interspersing some brief pre-recorded segments – perhaps two or three with different donors or volunteers talking about what your mission means to them. You may also want to pre-record a few stories of specific animals you have helped.
 - Planning at least some pre-recorded content can be helpful and creates variety that keeps people engaged.
 - Consider the tone of the event overall and your message. You want to engage people with your mission on an emotional level while also keeping it uplifting and positive.
- **Promotion:** Market your event broadly through a variety of online and conventional media as well as direct communication with your current supporters.
 - One of the benefits of virtual events is that there are no geographic constraints – people from anywhere can participate.
- **Scripts:** Prepare detailed scripts for emcees and presenters.
 - Anyone speaking should have a detailed written plan of what to say and when. No one should be winging it.
 - Plan a call to action – someone should ask directly for donations in an inspiring, compelling manner.
 - Remember to thank people often for making the lifesaving work of your organization possible through their generosity. Sincere gratitude inspires giving.
- **Visuals:** Plan to make the event visually appealing.



- Use a consistent color theme.
- Consider the background behind anyone who is speaking.
- Consider all the details and backgrounds in photos you will use and any pre-recorded video to be sure it shows what you would want people to see (no stray coffee cups, no disorganized storage, no dirty walls or surfaces, no poop in kennels or litter boxes).
- Attention to detail creates a good impression.
- **Engagement:** Provide a way for people to comment and engage with each other or to ask questions, as appropriate to your event. This may include real-time polls, comments or chat function or posting questions.
- **Swag:** Consider sending out event swag items before the event to people who register in advance.
- **Sponsors:** Think carefully about how you can promote and thank sponsors while still keeping your participants engaged. Whatever you do be sure it is not too long and boring.
- **Rehearsal:** Plan a test run (or two) before your event to check that technology is working for you as you hope it will.
- **Communications:** Plan communication with those you want to invite that will encourage even those who are not very technically savvy to participate.
 - Many animal welfare organizations have at least some donors who are not tech savvy. Show donors that you care about them and give them the opportunity to participate by including an offer of tech help in the invitation.
 - Identify a small group of volunteers who are willing to schedule calls a day or two before your event to help tech-challenged people step through a trial run of signing into the event.
 - Additionally, offering real time tech help – before and during the event – can help donors feel valued and keep vital donors from being disappointed.

Event Ideas

The ideas for virtual events or online fundraising are as broad as your imagination. Here are some possibilities:

- Virtual kitten shower
- Walk or run (with peer-to-peer fundraising)
- Gala or happy hour
- Fashion or talent show
- Art or photography show or contest
- Talks, presentations, webinars
- Rubber duck races
- Games or game tournaments
- How-to classes
- Behind-the-scenes tour or open house
- Interviews or performances
- Birthday party or anniversary celebration
- Watch party for a film/documentary
- Wish list drive
- Adoption event
- Online auctions
- Crowdfunding



Step-by-Step Planning Guide

Three or More Months Before Event Date

- **Event Type, Name & Theme:** Decide upon the type of event and select a name and inspiring purpose or theme for your event. If you are converting an event from live to virtual, consider using the same name, event type, purpose, and theme.
- **Goals:** Set specific, measurable goals for the event
- **Event Committee:** Select members for your event committee. Be sure include a couple of tech savvy people to help with your event and people with other relevant experience, such as marketing. Appoint a chair who has led groups or managed a major project before.
- **Date:** Set a date for the event.
- **Budget:** Create a budget for the event.
- **Technical Platforms:** Research online platforms and select one. The type of event will guide you in your search. Familiar platforms, such as Zoom or WebEx for a virtual gala, EBay Charity for an auction or Go Fund Me Charity for crowd funding may help first time virtual participants feel comfortable and at home, however there are many platforms to consider. If you are planning a virtual walk or similar event you will need an online peer-to-peer fundraising platform.
- **Committee Meetings:** Schedule routine committee meetings and develop special sub committees as needed to work on various parts of the event.
- **Event Plan:** Develop a master plan and draft schedule for the event.
- **Staffing:** Determine what staffing levels and volunteers are needed.
- **Marketing:** Create a marketing plan and schedule. Be sure that the plan includes reaching out to your current supporters as well as new people.
- **Logo & Color Scheme:** Develop a logo or image and specific colors for the event to help make it attractive and special. Be sure that your event looks and sounds like fun!
- **Sponsors:** Seek local business sponsors that can help underwrite the costs of your virtual event. Define sponsorship levels and benefits and create a package to share with potential sponsors.
- **Speaker(s) and Entertainers:** Depending upon your event type, lining up speakers or entertainers can be a substantial draw. The great thing about a virtual event is that you can seek out people anywhere – speakers can do the job from their home via computer. Be clear about the length of their presentation and desired topics. Get their bio and photo (headshot) for marketing purposes.

Two Months Out

- **Event Plan:** Continue to refine and firm up all aspects of your event plan.
- **Staffing:** Invite and schedule staff and volunteers per plan.
- **Technical Platform:** Set up online registration and/or donation platform. Make any needed arrangements for live-streaming or special software/hardware. If a location is needed, be sure to arrange this now and plan for any backgrounds needed for video.

- ❑ **Permits:** Check out the need for any permits, licenses, etc. (In some places, raffles and games of chance, even auctions, require a permit.)
- ❑ **Website Presence:** Create an event page on your website.
- ❑ **Invitations:** Send invitations. E-invites can work well for a virtual event, but depending upon your donor base, you may want to consider a postcard mailing.
- ❑ **Social Media:** Use social media (Facebook, twitter, etc.) to promote the event.
- ❑ **Video:** Consider creating a short promotional video to share.
- ❑ **Conventional Media and Community Calendars:** Be sure to get word of your event out as you would for a live event. This includes sending news release to all local media and reaching out directly to contacts.
- ❑ **Participant Information:** If your event relies on peer-to-peer fundraising, develop a toolkit for registrants with sample messages to share with their friends and tips on how to be successful. Other event types may also benefit from providing clear how-to information for those who are new to online/virtual events.
- ❑ **Swag:** Consider mailing swag to registrants especially if they are to wear a t-shirt for the event or use props.



One Month Out

- ❑ **Promotion:** Continue to promote the event through multiple channels to encourage participation (e-blasts, social media, conventional media, staff/board member outreach to contacts, etc.)
- ❑ **Contingency Plan:** Create back up plans for any potential problems, including technical difficulties.

Two Weeks Out

- ❑ **News Release:** Send news release and public service announcement to all local media and reach out directly to media contacts.
- ❑ **Swag:** Send any swag to participants.
- ❑ **Event Plan:** Finalize event plan and scripts (emcee, speaker introductions, the ask for donations, thank-you's, closing, etc.)

One Week Out

- ❑ **Final Event Committee Meeting:** Meet virtually and confirm all details against the master plan. Review contingency plans.
- ❑ **Volunteer/Staff Training:** Review event duties and timelines and provide any needed training.
- ❑ **Testing:** Do a test run with key people for any technical platforms you have chosen. Test livestreaming technology and any other technical elements that could cause issues.

One Day Before Event

- ❑ **Reminders:** Send an email or text reminder to participants, including login instructions to access your virtual or livestreamed event and be sure to include a schedule/program for the event.

- **Testing:** If live-streaming, run another test, including recording capabilities and any other technical aspects of the event that has the potential for problems.

Event Day

- **Reminders:** Send another email to participants with login instructions and schedule.
- **Recording:** If live-streaming, record your live-stream so you can later share this with participants and registrants who could not participate.
- **Social Media:** During the event, be sure that someone is continuing to post about the event to encourage donations.

After Event

- **Finances:** Gather all registration data, donations, expenses, etc. and assess the events success against your budget and goals.
- **Post Event Email:** Send an email to all participants to thank them for attending, announce the funds raised and total participants, and share the impact it will have on your work. If available, send a link to the recording of the event. Send a similar email to registrants who were not able to attend, customizing it for them.
- **Thank-you Letters:** Send thank-you letters to all participants who donated in addition to their event registration fee, as well as to all sponsors, speakers, entertainers, volunteers, committee members, media, and others who helped promote the event.
- **Peer-to-Peer Thank You's:** If the event involved peer-to-peer fundraising, thank all those who donated by supporting a friend. Gathering email addresses from the peer-to-peer fundraising software/platform you use is a good way to reach new donors.
- **Post-event Communications:** Send a news release to local media, post to your website, and share via social media the results of the event and thanks to the participants and sponsors.
- **Post-event Fundraising:** Consider post-event fundraising opportunities for those who heard about the event late and still want to contribute.
- **Post-event Debrief:** Plan a virtual meeting with the event committee, volunteers, and staff to discuss what worked well and what did not. Invite ideas for the next time. Consider a survey of event participants to get their input about what worked well and what could be done differently. Be sure to document all comments and identify those that you may want to implement next time.



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