

Rowlett
T E X A S



BEGINNERS GUIDE TO SPECIAL EVENTS



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Introduction

The fact that special events like run/walks, festivals and parades are classic fundraising events for nonprofit organizations doesn't make them any easier to plan and execute. Like any event, attendance and fundraising results are very important, but special events involve extra challenges and expenses including marketing, registration, and safety.

This guide will walk you through the process of organizing a special event for your organization, covering logistics like choosing a date, and location, along with volunteer management, safety, and promotion.

If you're ready to start planning your s, let's get started!



Chapter 1

Start with the Big Questions

You need to answer five main questions in order to plan a successful event. Who, what, when, where, and why. They're the same five questions writers use when crafting a story. These questions lay the foundation for the plot and they will also help you structure your event.

We'll go through these important questions to lay out your event and start planning. If you already have one of these areas defined, you can start with that and move on to other points in whatever order makes sense for you.

WHAT? What kind of special event are you putting on?

You have lots of options, including a short fun run, a trail run or hike, the classic 5K distance or community festival. Knowing what kind of event you want to put on will help you establish the rest of the details.

Here are a few questions to help you decide what kind of event is right for your organization and community:

- **How many other events are ongoing in the community?**
- **What size event is your organization capable of running? (Look to past events and potential volunteers.)**
- **How much space can you find for this event?**
- **Do you want this to be a competitive race or a fun run?**
- **Will this event involve alcohol sales or distribution?**



It's also good to keep in mind that you can include more than one event. For example, if you're hosting a 5K, you can also add a festival for kids. Just don't overextend yourself. It's better to do one event really well than commit to too much and execute poorly.

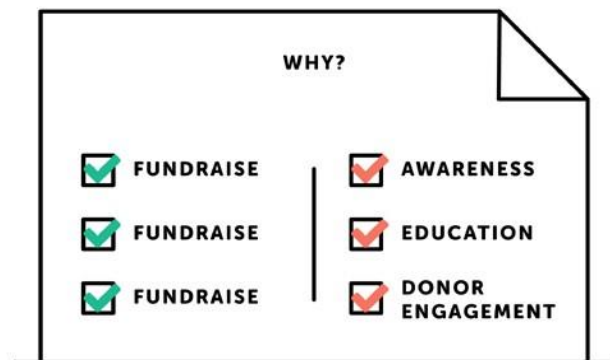


WHY? Why are you putting on this event?

There are actually two sides to the question. The first part is establishing the outcomes you want to achieve with this event. In this guide, we will assume fundraising is a priority for the reader, but *are there other objectives for your event, such as community awareness, donor engagement, and public education?*

Here are the primary goals that drive most nonprofit special events:

- **Fundraising.** Raise money for your organization through registration fees, peer-to-peer fundraising, and sponsorships.
- **Awareness.** Create awareness in the community, not just about your cause but about your organization. Reach a larger audience in future initiatives and fundraising campaigns.
- **Education.** You can make the day about fitness and nutrition, the environment, or any theme that's relevant to your cause. Use the event to empower people to take action.
- **Donor Engagement and Acquisition.** Create a face-to-face experience to bond supporters with the organization. Share results through some kind of display.



Whenever you have to make tough decisions or feel like the event is getting off track, refer to the goals of the special event to guide your decisions.



The *other side* of the why question is the *theme or reasoning you show the public*. Are they running for a specific program? Is it an annual event to cover operating costs? Is it to fix a structure or buy a van? This helps participants connect the event to a positive social outcome.

Donors and fundraisers both like to have concrete goals for their involvement with a nonprofit. Emphasizing the impact this event will have can help keep participants focused and motivated.

WHO? Who will be supporting and participating?

An event is only as good as the people involved. And it's not just about the participants.

First, you should think about who will be spearheading and leading the initiative. It may be one person at your nonprofit or a whole department. You could partner with another nonprofit or you could partner with a business or social club. *When it comes down to it, who will be responsible for the success of the event?*

You should also consider your pool of volunteers. Special events require a lot of support. If your organization already has a strong volunteer program, that's great, but you can also reach out to schools, churches, and businesses to recruit more volunteers. You can estimate how many volunteers you will need based on the number of participants and the different amenities and activities at your special event. Ultimately, though, it's better to have too many volunteers than too few.

Finally, who is going to be ready on the big day? Start by looking at your audience of donors and supporters and how many of them are likely to get involved. You should also look at other local events and reach out to other community groups.

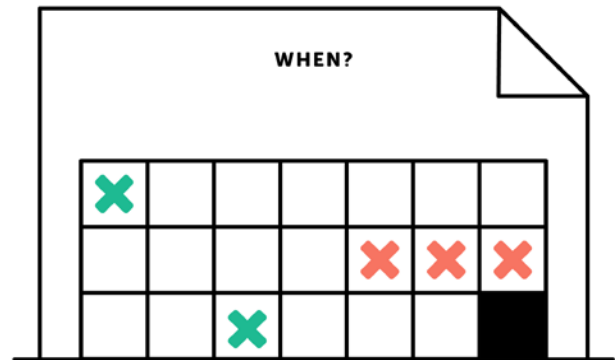


WHEN? When will your special event take place?

The sooner you set the date, the better. People can't mark their calendar and reserve the date if your event is "sometime in May." Unfortunately, setting a date goes hand in hand with finding a location (which we'll get into next).

To start, look at your organization's main calendar to see which dates are out of the question. Choose some potential days (mostly likely a few Saturdays and/or Sundays) to work with and then move on to your city's event calendar. You don't want to compete with another event that falls around the same time.

Finally, scout potential spaces such as parks, trails, or schools and find out when they are available. Ideally, you'll be able to find a date that works for you, doesn't overlap with another event, and is also available at your location. If the stars don't align the first time around, consider whether or not your organization can move its calendar around, if your potential audience will be drawn by a competing event, or if you're willing to change locations. Consider how each of your options will support your goals and make a decision from there.



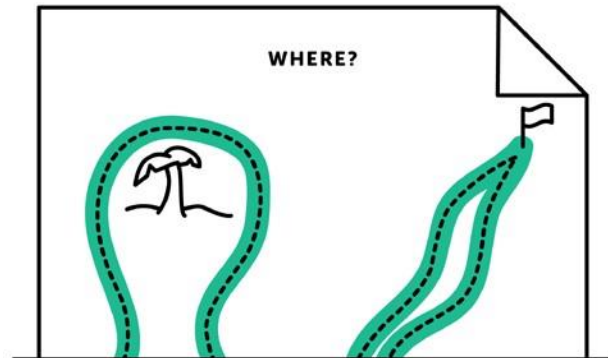
WHERE? Where will your event start and finish?

You have to start somewhere. You have to end somewhere too. When and where are closely intertwined so you should work on both issues at the same time.



Consider these factors:

- **Where have other community events like this been held?**
- **Which locations are convenient for local residential neighborhoods?**
- **Are these locations close to local businesses and potential sponsors?**
- **Will you have to pay to use this location? How much?**
- **Will potential locations have enough space for an event of this size?**
- **How many people do you expect to attend the event?**
- **Does the location have adequate parking space for your event?**



You will have to juggle several priorities when making this decision. On the one hand you want to keep cost and labor down, so you have to think about travel time, accessibility, and venue costs. But you also want a place that will work for your special event and any educational or entertainment features that you plan to incorporate.



Takeaways from Chapter 1

- Begin planning your special event by determining the goals and purpose of the event. This may include fundraising, awareness, education, and donor engagement.
- Consider your network of supporters, and the local interest in fitness, to help decide the length and size of your event. Take note of potential volunteer communities.
- Set a date and location early on to help with planning and promotion of your event. Compare the availability of possible locations with your ideal event dates.



Chapter 2

Drafting a Budget

Just as it's important to plan for the event's revenue, event organizers must also budget for a run/walk's expenses. Special events typically have higher overhead than a traditional fundraising campaign, due to the costs of equipment, first aid, insurance, T-shirts, and other amenities. Creating a budget beforehand will help you make many smaller decisions and inform your fundraising goals as well.

Begin by making a list of all the projected expenses of the event. Your list may look something like this.

Special Event	
<input type="checkbox"/> Insurance	<input type="checkbox"/> Tents
<input type="checkbox"/> Permits	<input type="checkbox"/> Security
<input type="checkbox"/> Marketing/Promotion	<input type="checkbox"/> First Aid
<input type="checkbox"/> Portable Toilets	<input type="checkbox"/> Trash and Food
<input type="checkbox"/> Equipment Rental	<input type="checkbox"/> Water coolers and cups
<input type="checkbox"/> Sound System Rental	<input type="checkbox"/> Miscellaneous Supplies
<input type="checkbox"/> Table and Chairs	

You can then look into pricing specific to your location and number of participants. You may be starting out with a specific amount allocated for the event. In that case, it may be necessary to use your budget to determine how large your event will be.



Takeaways from Chapter 2

- To help make financial decisions and stay on track, list out all the event's expenses and budget accordingly.
- Keep in mind there are several external costs to holding an event that need to be taken into account.



Chapter 3

Logistics and Details

There are lots of things to consider when planning your special event and once you have answered some of the big questions from chapter one, you can dive into more details. It's important to know who else will be involved with this event and get in contact with them early. Establishing sponsors and partners from the beginning will make the planning process simpler. You will also have to settle on what amenities you will provide at your event. And of course, with any event there are safety and security concerns to consider and plan for.

Who Are You Working With?

PARTNERS

It's not unusual for organizations to collaborate on run/walks and other events. It allows them to share the responsibility and expense, but also the profit. Decide early on if this will be a joint venture or if your nonprofit will be the sole beneficiary.



As with any organizational partnership, make sure both sides have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Clearly state each organization's role and any share of the revenue and get the agreement in writing.

If you choose to go it alone, that doesn't mean you can't still reach out to your local nonprofit community. Share news of your event and encourage them to participate. You can even offer space for related organizations to set up tables and share their message.



Supplies and Amenities

As special events have grown in scale and popularity, so too have the amenities that are offered. Keeping in mind the goal of raising funds, nonprofits must decide what they will offer participants at the event.

The most important component of any event is the safety of those in attendance.

Whether or not you should provide food to participants is a more complex question.

Safety and Administration

PERMITS

There are important legal and safety concerns that are inherent to any special event. Your first administrative concern is getting permission to hold your event. If you're using any public streets or places you will need approval from your city and police department. Contact your city government to find your local application process at www.rowlett.com.

SECURITY

Almost every event will require law enforcement officers in addition to security. In most cases, but not all, the officers will meet the entire need for the security function. Generally, two (2) officers will be required for most events up to 500 persons. If alcohol is sold or distributed, this number may increase. Keep in mind, the provision of officers is the responsibility of the event promoters and not the city. All costs associated with security will be the responsibility of the event organization.



TRAFFIC CONTROL and COURSE EQUIPMENT

You will most likely need some equipment to mark and separate your course from traffic or other dangers. Street closures and traffic control are the responsibility of the event organizers. Most times the city will not have the materials available to provide (even for a fee) for special events.

SANITARY NEEDS

You will also need portable toilets (approximately one for every 50 attendees). You can rent this equipment from local vendors.

INSURANCE

There are many insurance companies that offer one-time event policies for special events. Consult your own legal or insurance expert to determine what type of policy is necessary in your case. The City of Rowlett will be required to be added as *additionally insured* for the appropriate dates.



FIRST AID

Any special event has the potential for injury and you must be prepared to respond to both minor issues and emergencies.

Your first aid station should be stocked with bandages, ice, and antiseptic. If possible, you should recruit medical professionals to staff the station. Look into your state's malpractice laws to ensure you're in compliance.

Sadly, you must be prepared for a true emergency as well. You may want to consider an ambulance to stand by. In some cases, this may be required by the permit requirements. If someone has a heart attack or major injury, the few minutes it takes to call 911 can be decisive. If your event is large, you may need more than one ambulance on hand. It will probably add expense to your budget, but it will always be worth it.

Takeaways from Chapter 3

- Choose your partners and sponsors carefully and get all agreements in writing.
- Recruit volunteers from local schools, religious organizations, and companies.
- Decide what amenities your special event will include.
- Apply for any permits or use of public spaces through your city government.
- Look into first aid services and liability or event insurance.



Chapter 4

Managing the Big Day

It is reassuring to get on top of planning and promoting your special event, but there will always be plenty to do the week and day of your event. You can start the week well-prepared by planning how you will use your staff and volunteers to accomplish tasks that can't be done ahead of time.

A good first step is to create a checklist of all the areas that will need to be set up and all the stations you will need people to be working at during the event.

How to Manage Staff and Volunteers

Managing the people working at your event can be daunting, especially if many of them are new to your nonprofit. It helps to think of how any large operation functions.

A car company, for example, will have employees working on design, safety, manufacturing, fuel efficiency, and sales, but what makes it work is specialization and leadership. There is a department specifically working on the design of the car and those employees focus on this task and look to their department head for guidance. They don't need to be trained in sales techniques. That's not to say the various departments don't talk to each other, but specialization allows individuals to focus on one task without juggling everything else. Consider looking at your special event as an organization with different departments. Some of the areas you will need people to help with are ...

- Registration and check-in
- Water stations and food
- Firstaid
- Security
- Parking
- Entertainment and other activities



REGISTRATION & CHECK-IN	
Jane - LEAD	Sid
Paul	Nanci
COURSE, START & FINISH	
TIMING	WATER STATIONS
Pat - LEAD	Joey
Sally	Fatima
POST-RACE CELEBRATION	

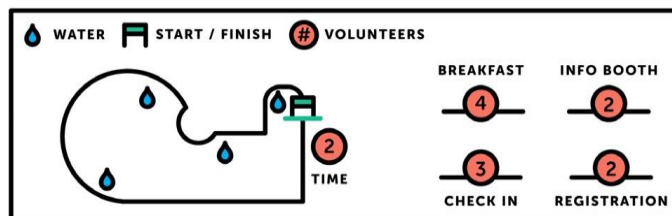
By splitting your staff and volunteers into these different departments, you are making sure everyone knows what they are responsible for and where they should be. Every group, however, should have a leader, someone you have worked with and who you can trust to make decisions. Ideally, this will be a member of staff, but committed volunteers and supporters are also good choices.

When you schedule and check in your volunteers, tell them who their team leader is so they can ask for direction if they need it. The team leader can then explain to their volunteers what each individual will be doing that day.

Every volunteer should know who their supervisor is and supervisors can stay in touch with cell phones or walkie-talkies. It's always smart to save and print a contact list ahead of time.

Signs, Directions, and Parking

One group of volunteers should post signs and direct participants to the appropriate parking area. You should know the exact location and parking situation ahead of time, so that you can include the information on your website and fundraising pages. Even then, walk yourself through the experience of someone trying to find your event.



You can create a map like this one to plan where each station will be and how many people will be staffing them.



If there is restricted parking near your event, make that clear to attendees and volunteers. Registration, first aid, and information booths should all be clearly marked as well.

Takeaways from Chapter 5

- Split your event responsibilities into different categories and assign a team leader to each area. Then assign a team of volunteers for each type of work.
- To help with set-up and clean-up, create an event map and mark each area clearly with a banner or sign.
- Have separate tables to check in participants who registered online and people who are registering the day of the event. Even if you're using tablets or laptops, have a printed registration list and forms on hand, just in case.



Conclusion

Crossing the Finish Line and Following Up

When the last participant has crossed the finish line and the crowd has gone home, you can finally breathe a sigh of relief. Pat yourself on the back for getting this far, but like any other campaign, your special event isn't truly over until you reengage with supporters and learn from your results.

First things first, you will need to do some cleaning up. Be sure that your volunteer schedule includes people to help pack up and collect trash. Any rented equipment (portable toilets, sound systems, road barriers) should be returned promptly to avoid extra fees.

Organizing a charity or special event can be an intimidating project, especially if you haven't done it before. We hope this guide has helped you develop a plan for your next event and given you some tips to raise more money and get a bigger turnout.

If you want to learn more about fundraising and events, check out website at www.rowlett.org.



