

# TOP 10 VIRTUAL EVENT IDEAS

Finding and Creating the ***Perfect Virtual Event***  
for Your Organization



# INTRODUCTION

Perhaps it was wishful thinking that virtual fundraising events would be a temporary solution for nonprofit organizations. But due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, virtual events look like they will be with us for the foreseeable future. And that's okay. As it turns out, there are quite a number of virtual fundraising opportunities that organizations can capitalize on.

While organizations do need to think about how to move forward with implementing virtual events (check out our [blog post](#)), it's important to remember that fundraising best practices have not changed. The good news is you already have the tools at hand to create successful virtual events that will achieve your engagement and revenue goals. Now is the time to start getting creative!

Charity Dynamics' Brenda Miele and Sue Dalos outline 10 virtual event ideas and strategies, along with some practical tips for implementation. As you go through the list, think about which ones would best resonate with your mission, your existing fundraising programs and, most important, your audience.



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# VIRTUAL GALA EXPERIENCE

Topping the list of fundraising activities are virtual galas, mainly because there are a number of ways organizations can use this versatile option: “no dinner” dinners, telethon-style showcases, musical performances, dance parties, virtual conferences and speaking engagements and more.

You can bring a virtual gala to life by providing a livestream link for ticket holders only so they can access and participate in your evening’s content.

For example, attendees can hold their own dinner party at home — creating their take on a shared recipe and dressing in their finest gala attire.

Invite everyone to share photos and videos of their finished dishes and fashion style on social before, during and after the event (using the event hashtag, of course).

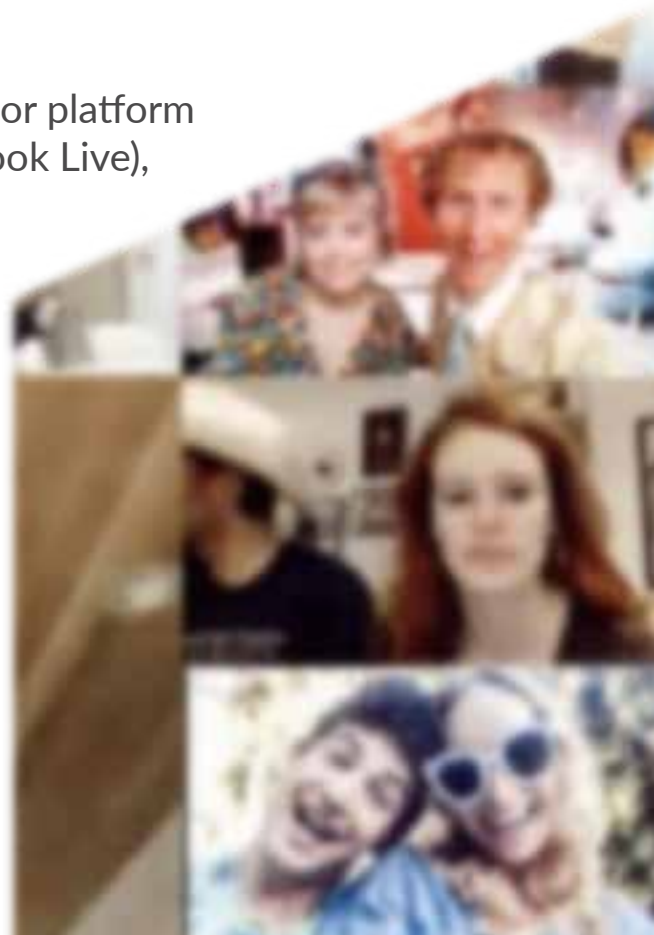
# How can your organization set up an effective and engaging virtual gala?

Here are four key steps:

- **Set up your event landing page.** Share your story (why are you hosting this event?), lay out the theme and showcase the agenda. Use your social channels to develop a dynamic feed based on your event hashtag.
- **Set up a way to collect registrations and donations.** Your fundraising platform likely has a way to enable ticketing and receipting based on the tax-deductible value of the event. If not, there are plenty of third party tools that can provide this in a pinch! Don't forget to use autoresponders to provide password-protected links and login information for the livestream. You could also implement an online auction to supplement donation opportunities.
- **Test event technology.** No matter what tech or platform you're using (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Facebook Live), be sure to do a dry run the day of the event with your speakers or performers and your team. Check all of the recording, streaming, chat and login functions.
- **Thank your participants, sponsors and donors.** Throughout the event and on social media, recognize your participants, sponsors and donors. After, send personalized thank you notes to attendees, letting them know the impact of their participation and support.

*Idea #1 (continued)*

## VIRTUAL GALA EXPERIENCE



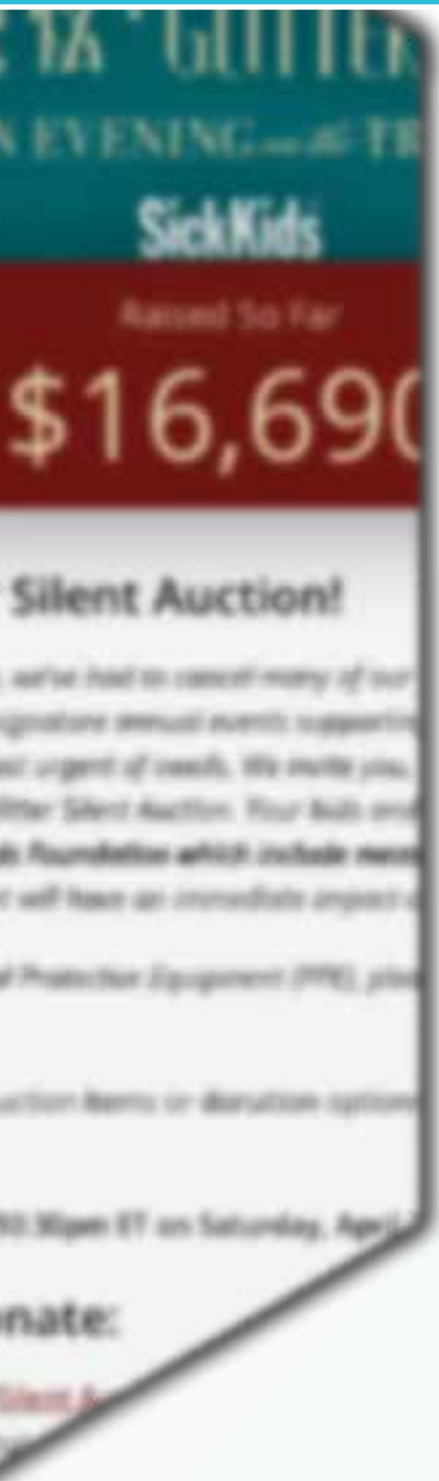


## Idea #2

# SILENT AUCTION

Even before the need to go virtual, online auctions have been a popular and effective fundraising solution. You put items up for bid, the highest bid by a certain date and time wins, and the proceeds go to your organization. There is silent auction software that can handle most of the details or you can go through online auction sites. They can accept bids, notify winning bidders and accept payment once the auction has closed.

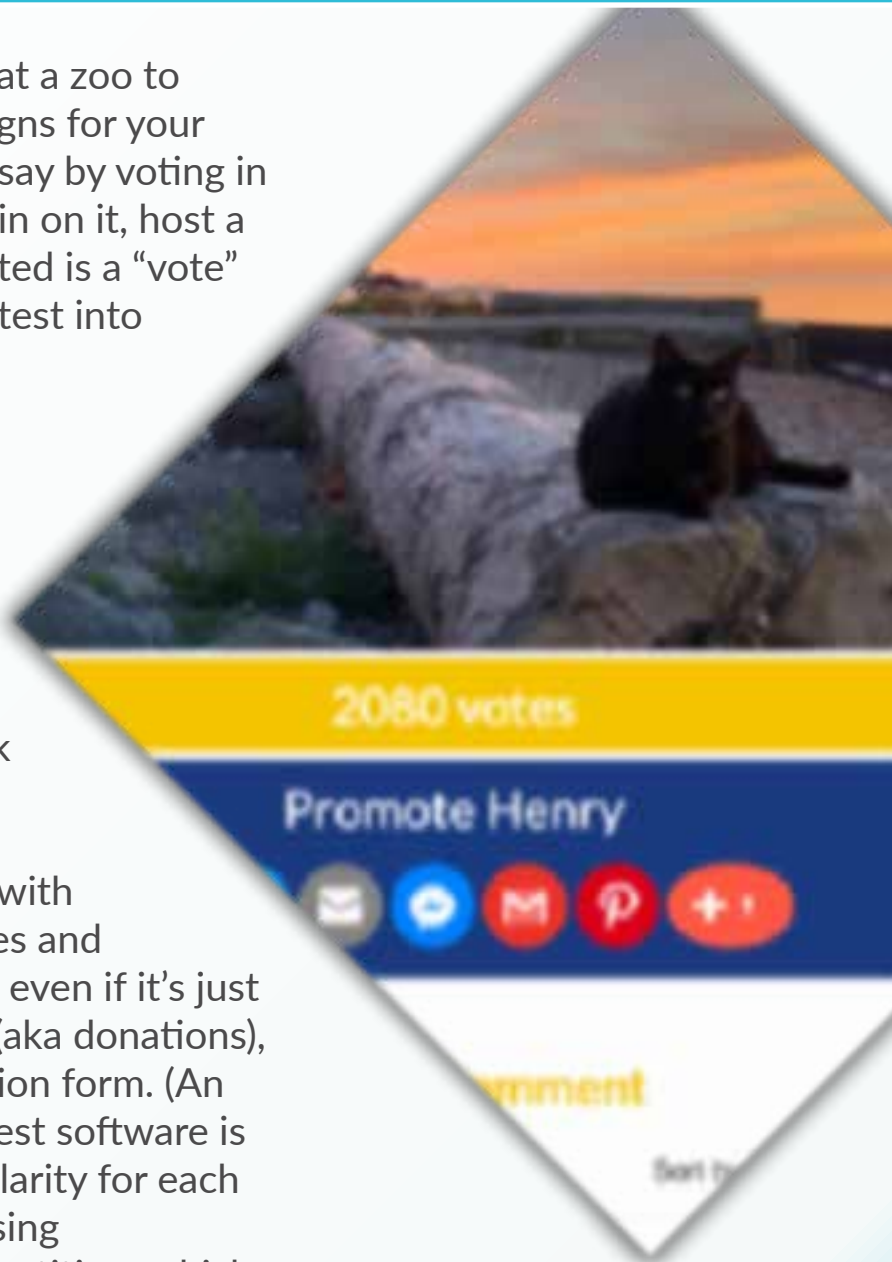
As for items, reach out to your supporters and sponsors. Prizes can include a variety of products, services or experiences—and you can bundle or package certain items together in themed “gift baskets.” As with any event, you would promote it on your website and social media channels and encourage supporters to share the auction link—and be sure to let people know when the auction is ending to create that sense of urgency to bid!



# VOTING CONTEST

From naming a newborn animal at a zoo to selecting the T-shirt or logo designs for your event, people love to have their say by voting in contests. To put a fundraising spin on it, host a contest where every dollar donated is a “vote” to select the winner. Tie the contest into your cause or mission—like the aforementioned naming of baby animals at the zoo to benefit its conservation efforts. Or you can highlight your hard-working staff and dedicated supporters with fun contests like “best dressed,” “best joke,” “best dance move,” or “best work of art.”

To create a voting contest, start with choosing your start and end dates and decide on a prize for the winner, even if it’s just “bragging rights.” To track votes (aka donations), assign each item a unique donation form. (An example of donate-to-vote contest software is [GoGo Photo Contest](#).) The popularity for each item can be shown via a fundraising thermometer to encourage competition, which can be furthered through social media and email to communicate the voting progress.



Idea #4

## TRIED & TRUE TELETHONS

Telethons have served as successful fundraising mechanisms for many years, but thanks to technology, you can now take them to a new level—and online. By using a livestreaming tool, such as Facebook Live, Instagram or YouTube Live, you can make a simple, direct appeal from your office by streaming live for a predetermined amount of time. It's a simple way to engage with supporters and meet them where they are by providing options to donate by phone, text or social.

Part of the appeal of telethons is the variety of entertainment provided, so put your creativity to work by going behind the scenes with a tour of your organization, introducing your staff and dedicated volunteers, showcasing success stories, providing sneak peeks into upcoming projects or events and, of course, highlighting your mission.

You can engage with your viewers by answering their questions, providing online polls and allowing them to tell you why they are supporting your organization. Don't forget to include the important progress bar or thermometer on your website and celebrate each new milestone reached during the telethon timeframe.

## Idea #5

# MAKE THE ORDINARY EXTRAORDINARY!

Not every fundraising idea has to translate into a strictly peer-to-peer option; pay-to-play fundraising, or paying a fee to participate, can be effective too. One way to capitalize on this method is to “make the ordinary extraordinary” by virtualizing family game night or promoting group movie nights.

Virtual movie nights, for example, can use Netflix’s “watch together” functionality with each viewer making a donation to join in—just like paying a ticket price when going to the theater. Provide movie theme nights or watch suggestions, or even host a watch party yourselves, selecting a film that connects to your mission and have a livestreamed discussion afterward.

Game nights are a great option as well. There are plenty of apps like Houseparty and Squad that offer in-app games for groups. Or, as with telethons, you can use livestreaming tools to set up game nights, provide an easy donation form and engage with and cheer on participants.





# SOCIAL AMBASSADORS AMPLIFICATION

For #GivingTuesdayNow this past May, the Greater Chicago Food Depository sent an email to supporters encouraging them to become Social Ambassadors and help spread the word about their cause to their broader networks, increasing the organization's reach.

The email did not include a direct donation ask. But the next time the organization does send out fundraising appeals, it will have a dedicated group of Social Ambassadors ready to jump onboard to amplify their message and extend its reach 10-fold!



[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

Could your organization benefit from Social Ambassadors? The idea behind Social Ambassadors is that these already dedicated supporters and volunteers are ready and willing to help further your mission and message through their social channels.

Setting up a Social Ambassador program is simple and offers several benefits: increased publicity and range for your organization, new donors and stronger relationships with your loyal and longtime supporters. Read more in our Social Ambassadors Tip Sheet.

While your staff is great at coming up with creative fundraising ideas, why not let your supporters do some of the creative heavy lifting too? They are actively looking for ways to help and stay involved, and plenty of simple challenges can be conducted from the comfort of their own homes.

**These do-it-yourself fundraising challenge ideas include:**

- Readathons or bookathons, in which participants ask people to support them by the book or by the minute.
- All-day game challenge, in which participants collect pledges for playing a video game or board game for a certain timeframe.
- Physical challenges, in which participants complete an activity such as climbing stars, walking a certain distance, jumping rope, doing a certain number of push-ups or sit-ups, etc. for pledge amounts.
- “Dare” challenges, in which for a specific amount, each person does a task that a friend dares them to do (safely, of course — think ice bucket challenge).

Your organization can set up an online DIY peer-to-peer fundraising platform and invite supporters to participate and raise funds as individuals or in teams. Consider linking to third-party tools that can help bring your challenge to life. For example, Peloton offers a 90-day free trial, which would benefit participants in a physical challenge. Many video gamers already have Twitch accounts to be able to stream all the action! Encourage competition among participants by including leaderboards on your website and send and post fun and inspiring messages to your participants to keep them motivated and engaged.

*Idea #7*



# FUNDRAISING CHALLENGE

## Idea #8

# LIVESTREAM AN EVENT

Several of the event ideas already discussed include livestreaming as a way to connect with your audience virtually and in real-time. It's probably the closest you can get right now to that in-person connection and energy, so take advantage of the technology. For instance, Zoom can be incorporated into Facebook Live (or Instagram) for a benefit danceathon, or you can create pay-to-play events, such as hosting a yoga or cooking class, where people pay a fee to join the livestream.

Have a little money to invest? These platforms are getting decent reviews: Twitch (primarily for online gamers), Tiltify and Streamlabs. These livestreaming platforms host all the action so you don't have to worry about bandwidth. Make sure to either embed or link to them from your site to ensure that participants can register and fundraise through your platform first.



# MAKE YOUR IN-PERSON EVENT VIRTUAL

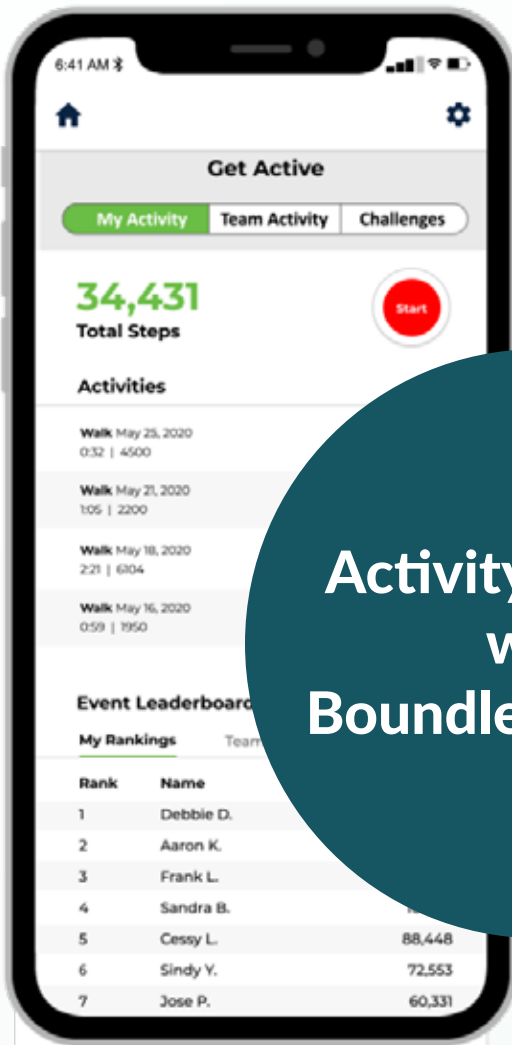
This is really about taking what you already have and thinking through how you can virtualize it. If your main fundraiser is an annual walk, set up a virtual walk: Participants can register as individuals or teams to fundraise through your peer-to-peer platform.

Give them distances or timeframes to choose from; it could be all participants doing the walk distance by themselves (or on a treadmill at home) on a certain day or getting pledges to walk a specific number of miles for a specific number of days, and so on.

Just as with your in-person events, you would still send coaching or mission emails, and think of ways to recognize your supporters, such as mailing race T-shirts to those who meet the fundraising minimum. If you do, make sure to ask participants to share a photo of themselves wearing the T-shirt on social media using your event hashtag.



# AMP UP YOUR EVENT



## Activity Tracking with Boundless Motion

Some fundraising events have been virtual long before the coronavirus pandemic, so look to those examples for ways to transition your events.

Talk with these organizations about how they did it—what tools are they using, what steps and best practices did they put in place?

For rides, walks and runs, look at utilizing tracking apps, such as fitness trackers or GPS apps, that can help participants train on their own and receive credit for their progress.

All of this can be reflected on their fundraising pages, which they can customize and share, no different from regular peer-to-peer events.

Think of how you can bring participants together virtually for kickoff events or post event celebration using the aforementioned livestreaming tools.

LEARN MORE



# SO MUCH TO CHOOSE FROM!

All of the above sounds amazing, right?!? With the myriad of fundraising ideas and online tools available, it can be overwhelming. To determine the best foray into the virtual world for your organization and its constituents:

- First, think about your different audiences and which virtual activities would resonate best with them.
- Consider the technical and resource requirements to execute those activities and what you have available to you.
- Don't forget about your sponsors and how they may help with either the technical aspects, programming or participant experience.
- Remember that relevance and resonance are the keys to any successful fundraiser, not flashy tools, so keep your mission front and center.
- Still not sure? Reach out to your constituents and ask. They'd be happy to tell you what they are looking for in a virtual fundraising experience.

At the end of the day, your supporters want you to be successful, and they know you need to fundraise to fulfill your mission. Choose a virtual avenue, be clear with the ask and intended experience, and learn from the endeavor to improve and refine over time. A creative and adventurous mindset of "test & learn" will go a long way in today's ever-changing environment.

