

Common Questions Regarding Procurement

I am supposed to procure \$ _____ worth of items for the Auction. I do not know where to start! Any ideas?
Start with yourself! What can you donate? What about the people you work with or your neighbors? How about the people who ask YOU for donations throughout the year? Time to return the favor! What about relatives who are interested in your success? Clients are a good source as are vendors to your company. They all want you to be successful. It is easier to ask others to help if you have first started with yourself!

OK, so I know a lot of people. I just don't feel right asking them for something. How do I approach them without imposing?

You are not imposing. Remember, your friends and associates want to help you. They just need to know how. Make it easy for them by not asking for SOMETHING. Ask for something SPECIFIC. You will be amazed at how responsive people are when they don't have to think or make a decision. The biggest block to getting donations is expecting the people you ask to know WHAT to donate. Take the decision process to the next level. Decide ahead of time what the donor COULD donate. Then ask them if they would be willing to help your organization by donating THAT item. Most people will say yes or offer an alternate idea.

Most of my associates are Attorneys or Accountants. Should I be asking for legal assistance or tax help to be donated?

While both of these ideas will sell, they must be sold in the Silent Auction portion of your program. Your guests will simply not bid on them during your Live Auction segment. As an alternative, try to see what special interests your associates have when they are not working. Do they go boating, fishing, flying, or backpacking? Perhaps they have a condo at a resort or a cabin in the mountains. Do they belong to a golf club? Would they donate a ride in a classic car or are they gourmet chefs who might be interested in doing a special dinner as an auction item? Don't just think of your associates by their profession. Most good donation ideas come from what people do in their spare time.

I have a friend who has a great item and he only wants \$500 back if it sells for more than that at the auction. Should I accept it?

This is called a "consignment" item. Generally, consignments are a bad idea for your organization. Look at it this way, if this item sells for \$600 and you give your friend \$500, the organization only makes \$100. However, \$600 of "bidding power" was taken out of the room. The person who benefits most is your friend. Thank him for his generosity and ask him to let you have the item at no cost or encourage him to sell it on his own and give you the proceeds he is comfortable in donating to your organization.

I can get a cruise package for half price but only if it sells for more than a set amount. If it does not get the minimum we do not have to buy it. Does this sound like a good deal?

This is known as selling an item with a "reserve" amount. It works the same as a consignment sale. The cruise package is the one exception to the no consignment rule. Since cruises are very popular, there is an advantage to having one in the Live Auction. It will generate a lot of pre-auction interest and will in most cases help your audience development. Try to limit this sort of "Marquis" item to just one in your event as any proceeds from this reserve sale are limited by the amount you will have to pay for the item.

My next-door neighbor has a great lawnmower he had had for 10 years. He wants to get rid of it. Should we take it at our auction?

Generally, you should strive to accept only new merchandise. You do not want your guests to get the feeling they are attending a "garage sale". The exception is genuine "antiques" and very unique limited availability items such as sports memorabilia.

My mother wants to help but she does not know what to donate. Any ideas?

Does she do any creative work? Excellent ideas include: knitted sweaters, homemade pies & breads, quilts, or a gourmet dinner.

What do you think about celebrity dinners and/or outings?

Fantastic items! Especially when the celebrity has local ties.

Would an airplane ride be a good item?

Absolutely! Also any other “unique experiences” will sell well. Some examples: A ride in a speedboat, a cruise on a yacht, a classic car tour, a motorcycle adventure to the mountains, or anything else that people can not just go to the store to buy.

I like to fish and have a nice boat. How would a day of fishing do at the auction?

Great! Throw in a picnic lunch or stop at a waterfront restaurant to complete the package.

My company makes some very interesting products. Would a tour of the plant be a good item?

Now you are thinking! Remember, people like to buy unique experiences and unusual items. “Think Unique” when you are involved with auction procurement and you can’t go wrong!

Do sports tickets do well at a benefit auction?

Yes, but make sure you add some unique feature to them to ensure the greatest value. How about packaging them with dinner? If you have Husky tickets a good combination with these is a boat cruise to the stadium.

Some of the people I talk to do not really want to donate any tangible items. Can we take a cash donation?

That is a super option! Cash is always good. There will be expenses for your event such as decorations, mailings and other out of pocket costs. Cash underwriting is an excellent revenue source.

I am going prospecting for items at the shopping mall. Do you have any suggestions on how to get the stores to give me items for the auction?

Most of the time the people who will be working in these stores do not have the authority to give much away. You may be able to get a few small items but the best way is to find out who owns the store or is the general manager. Once you have the name, contact them directly. This may require setting an appointment to meet them. Suggest an item you would like to have from their store so they do not have to think WHAT to donate. This type of procurement is “cold calling” and is the least effective strategy to obtain auction items. Concentrate first on people you know then as a last resort possibly attempt this strategy.

I do not have time to contact a bunch of people to get items because I work all day and when I get home I am beat. How can I help?

You have more time than you think! It is best to contact potential donors as you go about your normal routine. For example, at your work ask your co-workers. If you have vendors calling, ask them for a donation. Your clients as well may also be willing to assist you. You just have to ask.

I am new to the area and do not know very many people. How do I get started?

Start with making a list of the people you do know regardless of whether they live by you locally or not. Include relatives, old friends, former neighbors, and past employers & coworkers. Now see if any of them would be willing to help you by getting TWO items each. They could donate one item and get one more from someone they know. In this way only 5 of your contacts could net you 12 items, (2 items from each of the 5 contacts plus 2 you would get on your own. This makes a total of 12!).

Remember to “THINK UNIQUE”!