

Affiliate Benchmark Practice Form



One unique feature of the NWF affiliate network is the opportunity to share information with organizations that are in the same business yet are not competitors. This allows us to collect and distribute “how to” information on successful capacity building programs.

Please provide the following information so we can share your successes with all of our affiliates:

Category: Membership Fundraising Board/Staff Development Education
 Advocacy Information Systems Other

Name of Affiliate: Environmental League of Massachusetts

Title of Program: Earth Night

Description of the Program: Earth Night is an annual fundraising event held in November (as opposed to Earth Day in April.) The event is developed with the intent to host a seriously memorable and fun occasion. Unique locations it has been held include the Museum of Science, the New England Aquarium, the Massachusetts State House, and a cruise ship terminal. Legal Sea Food, as well as other restaurants and stores donate thousands of dollars worth of food each year. Live and silent auction items have included a hybrid Toyota Prius, rollerblading with Senator John Kerry, and vacations in exotic places like the Amazon, Tuscany, and Vermont. Either a DJ or live musicians provide music. Past performers include Keith Lockhart and string players from the Boston Symphony, and jazz icon Herb Pomeroy. There is also an Earth Fair where several dozen companies and organizations set up interactive displays that teach the guests about all the good things they are doing for mother earth. The event draws 500-700 guests.

Total length of event: 4 hours (7 to 11 on a Saturday night)

Total length of speaking program: under 4 minutes. Really.

Steps involved in starting-up the program, and associated timings: (how and when)

1st: Reserve the location eight to ten months ahead of time.

2nd: Recruit corporate sponsors (companies that might not make a grant to support your organization may be prepared to give some money to sponsor a party.)

3rd: Organize committees - one to sell tickets, another to solicit auction donations, another to arrange food, decorations, entertainment.

4th: Everybody sells tickets.

5th: Recruit an auctioneer.

6th: Find a radio station to sponsor you and provide some free promotion.

7th: Arrange for a sound system and stage lighting.

Impact of the program with historic trends: (i.e. gross vs. net raised, number new members)

Raised \$34,000 gross in 1996 (1st year), \$130,000 gross in 2003 (best year so far). Net varies and depends upon next question (see below).

Cost of the Event or Activity: Depends. Biggest factor is can you get the food donated? Can you get an appropriate interesting venue donated? How about printing and decorations? Do you have to rent tables, chairs, linens, etc. or can you get those donated? Cost can go from just a few thousand dollars to 50-60 thousand depending on the answers to these questions.

Personnel support required by volunteers and/or staff: (how many and total hours)

The Environmental League used to have a development staff person who spent roughly 1/3 of his/her time per year on Earth Night. Now we hire a firm to organize it and keep pushing our board and volunteers to do all the things that make this event happen. Active committee has a core of two dozen or so who start nine or ten months before the event. Leadership of committee comes mostly from ELM board members. Figure another few dozen volunteers the night of the event.

What you consider the “Keys to Success” of this event: Board commitment to put in time and use their connections in the community; willingness to sell tickets, tables, sponsorships; someone managing the whole thing, keeping detailed lists, and losing sleep over the possibility that something will fall through the cracks.

What pitfalls to avoid or lessons you have learned putting this event together: You will make money from auctions and corporate sponsorship and Earth Fair booths that you won't make any other way. The trick is to go beyond your core supporters (who will give you money any way) and bring in new guests who can then become donors in other non-event ways as well. Also, consider creative ways to keep your costs down.

If you have questions or want to discuss the specifics of event please contact:

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