

Getting the Most From Your Upcoming Anniversary

Your organization's anniversary is a great marketing opportunity. It's not just a party, it's a strategic initiative to accomplish key outcomes. Fundraising can be a part of it, but it shouldn't be the only thing. It should take place over a stretch of time, ideally the whole anniversary year for a major milestone, but maybe it's a month or kicks off in January and concludes with your anniversary month. You should use a time frame that makes sense for your organization.

Five Steps to Success:

#1: Know the reason for your anniversary: Know why you are doing the celebration and clearly articulate what you will accomplish as a result of the time and effort you will put into the anniversary. It's a chance to tout your achievements over the years, strengthen key relationships with and thank staff, volunteers, donors, members, clients, and the community at large. You should also use this time to set the vision for the future while leveraging past successes and milestones.

#2: Put a stamp on it and brand your anniversary year! You might come up with a theme for the anniversary as well. You surely will want to establish your three key messages for the year. What do you want your audience to know and feel? How can they take action? You should research what the symbol is for your anniversary year, which may give you an idea for your logo. It's easier today with digital materials. Do you have a designer you use who would do this for free? Or perhaps start a contest to get ideas? Use your website to bring an anniversary focus, building on messaging and key audiences. You might highlight a monthly success story; have a contest; tell a fun historical fact each month. Use social media as a place where you can gather stories of your impact/success and deepen relationships with stakeholders.

#3: Plan early, plan often: Give yourself as much planning time as possible. A year in advance is ideal if you want to make it a significant celebration. And maybe just a few months if it is a smaller celebration. Regardless, get input from across your organization including staff and board - and engage them. Can you create a diverse committee of board, donors, and key staff to help plan? With prominent chairs? It will be great cultivation and they will help with resources. Can you create a gathering of those involved in your organization through the years to help you fill out your history and key milestones? Define your primary audience. Who are the key people/groups you are trying to reach? Be specific and be realistic. Then develop a plan to reach your key audience.

#4: Evaluate your tactics: Does every tactic and idea help you reach your key audiences? Do you have a budget? Most non-profits won't have many resources (and you will need some!), so think about what you are currently doing that you can leverage. Such as, do you have events that you can put an anniversary twist on? Print materials that need to be freshened up? Budget for PR or marketing that you can allocate to the anniversary? A donor or board member who will make a special gift to sponsor the anniversary?

Is there an initiative you can launch? Such as a commemorative year scholarship program, a new program you were going to launch anyway, a time capsule, a book, limited edition product? Do you want to create a commemorative gift to serve as a sincere thank you to your staff and supporters?

And what about the fundraising opportunity? A special endowment campaign? Anniversary gifts for a special initiative? Can you link anniversary giving to a monthly giving program?

#5: Launch and make it happen! Be strategic. Develop a celebration-long calendar of key activities and back it up with a timeline to execute (be specific about who does what and by when). Give yourself lots of time to accommodate hiccups to ensure that you have the time to really make it work. Set aside time on your calendar each week to accomplish the plan. Get your committee back together several times early on so that as momentum builds they can help drive the plan and keep you focused.

Then celebrate and enjoy your past successes while launching the next vision of your organization!