

Putting on a Yard Sale

Are you thinking about putting on a yard sale to raise funds for your organization? If so, here are some suggestions for how to put on a successful event.

Gather items. Mail out a postcard to all your contacts and members asking for items and give them a phone number to call to arrange a pickup or drop-off of items. You could also canvass your area with a folded trash bag and a flyer for each house. Leave the trash bag with a note about the event and a date when you'll return to pick things up. If you are a (501)(c)(3) nonprofit, you can remind people that their donations are tax-deductible and you will write them a receipt.



Arrange for pickup or drop-off. Publish a central phone number to coordinate all the interactions for picking up or dropping off items. Set up a voice-mail service for a month or two if that works best. Don't forget to find a storage area so you'll have a place to put the stuff when it starts coming in. If you gather a lot of items, you may want to pre-arrange for another charity with a thrift shop to do a pickup at the end. Set up some system to receive things that people bring in just before or during the sale.

Arrange pricing. Define your pricing system – you could use color-coded stickers for certain price ranges or set a price for books or other groups of items. You could have a prep party at the storage area to prepare price stickers, clean items, and test electrical items. Also, you may be surprised by what some donated things are really worth, and you can be sure that the dealers will know. Try and find a volunteer or friend who has some real knowledge of antiques to go through the items before the event and evaluate them.

Recruit volunteers. Get a team of volunteers together to help out on the day of the sale. If you have many volunteers, you may want to distribute a list of rules beforehand so everyone has the same information about prices and security. Warn them, too, about dealers who like to take advantage and create a frantic atmosphere with bullying and pushiness.

Decide how people will pay. One way is to have a central cashier system with volunteers writing up tabs of the items and prices. Sometimes too many people taking money can lead to confusion, so you may just want to have people pay as they leave. Make sure you have an ample supply of cash to start, so you don't run out of change.

Decide on security. Depending on the size of your event, you'll want to define what kind of security you'll need.

Do some advertising. There are many inexpensive ways to advertise your sale: Call your local radio or TV stations and ask them to do public service announcements (PSAs) to promote your yard sale. Make up small handbills and flyers to distribute. Ask local businesses to put up the flyers. Put a notice in the local newspaper.

Promote your organization. At the actual event, make sure you have a separate table with information about your group. Have a member sign-up sheet and a donation box. Someone who can talk about your work clearly and knowledgeably should sit at the table to answer questions.

Depending on the size of your event, here are some things you'll need on the day of the sale:

- Canopies (if you expect a hot day or just for the visual presentation)
- Tables and chairs
- Signs like "Cashier," "Books," etc.
- Electrical outlets
- Duct tape, to secure electrical cords and to prevent tripping
- Batteries, to prove things work
- Caution tape, to define exits and pathways
- Clothes racks and hangers
- Blankets, for clothing and other items spread on the ground
- Index cards, to display and secure jewelry (pierce earrings through the cards)
- Shopping bags and cardboard boxes, for buyers to put their purchases in
- Colored stickers and/or price tags
- Fanny packs, for collecting money
- Volunteer badges
- Money float with lots of change
- Money rollers and wrappers, for counting up money after the sale
- Pens and pads to write up sales
- Volunteer sign-in sheet
- Refreshments (water, sodas, etc.) for volunteers
- Lots of trash bags and boxes for cleanup
- Brochures and information about your organization, including a donation box and member sign-up sheet