



Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

| GIVING

Gala Tool Kit

**Your guide to creating a successful
gala fundraiser**



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Thank you for your interest in organizing a gala to benefit life-changing cancer research and world-class care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK).

Common Gala or Party Event Types

Your first step is selecting what type of party you would like to host. Each offers a different method to achieve your fundraising goals. There are several formats to choose from:

Gala

An elegant experience for which guests can purchase tickets, tables, sponsorships, and auction items at a premium price.

Cocktail Party

This social, fun-filled evening at a midlevel price point generates revenue through tickets, auction items, and raffle sales.

Dinner party

An intimate experience allows the host to personally share their mission with a few engaged prospects or donors.



Raising Money Through Your Gala or Party Fundraiser

While event logistics may feel overwhelming, your MSK contact is here to support you. To help prioritize your plans, **we recommend spending the majority of your time strategizing how your event will raise funds.** The fundraising aspect of your event matters most because it directly impacts your cause! Here are some fun and effective ways to fundraise for MSK through your event.

Sponsorships

Sponsorships are a meaningful way to create partnerships and allow companies and individuals to receive special benefits, such as logo usage on event banners and in program books, in exchange for a higher level of support. Sponsorships are usually tiered — higher priced sponsorships result in more perks. Here are a few sponsorship levels to consider.

- **Presenting or title sponsor:** Your event should have only one presenting or title sponsor, reserved for the company or individual who makes the largest donation to your event.
- **Event sponsor:** Offer two or three event sponsorship levels below your presenting sponsor, such as bronze, silver, and gold. Each level up should be more expensive and include more benefits than the level beneath it.
- **Matching sponsor:** A matching sponsor will match all donations up to the amount they are comfortable giving. Set this number in advance and advertise the match. Some ideas include the first \$5,000 raised will be matched or all event-day gifts will be matched up to \$10,000
- **Table sponsors:** Table sponsors pay for all seats at a table in a preferred location at your event, typically at each seat at the table will cost slightly above the price of buying individual tickets.
- **In-kind sponsors:** An in-kind sponsor donates goods or services to your event, like entertainment, centerpieces, or goodie bags. These donations help keep your cost of fundraising low. In return, in-kind sponsors receive special recognition.

Be sure to use appropriate tax deductibility when offering sponsorship packages. [Click here](#) to learn more from the IRS website.

Host Committee

The primary role of a host committee is to raise money for the event by leveraging members' networks for support. Host committee members are leaders of the event and take ownership in its success.

Host committee members agree to support the event at a monetary level that is determined by the event organizer. In the give-or-get model, members agree to secure a set amount in sponsorships, ticket sales, or auction donations. Instead, members might make an outright donation of a set amount. For example, a \$10,000 table would sell for \$15,000 to a host committee member. In return for either commitment, they receive recognition on the invitation, on the website, and on stage.

Host committee responsibilities include:

- Encouraging their friends, family, or colleagues to buy tickets
- Collecting auction items from local businesses
- Making vendor connections for door prizes or event catering
- Selling sponsorship packages to contacts

To maximize your host committee:

- Members should be highly engaged members of your existing network, with connections and the willingness to solicit support. The more people on your committee, the more impact they can make collectively.
- Ensure that expectations are clear and your host committee has all of the material and information needed to support the event.
- Meet with the committee at least once a month leading up to the event.

Pro Tip: Set expectations for each committee or board member and check in on their progress.

Auctions: Create partnerships with local businesses and solicit them for donated items or experiences to be auctioned off to the highest bidder at the event.

Decide whether the auction will be a live or silent one.

- If your guests like public recognition, a live auction is a great fit. An auctioneer solicits the crowd, encouraging bidders to increase their donations to win an item. To create even more excitement, consider hiring a professional auctioneer or asking a gregarious volunteer to lead a live auction.
- In a silent auction, guests discreetly write their bids on a bid sheet. Items are typically displayed in a bustling area at the event. To maximize revenue, consider grouping items into premium packages.

Here are a few tips to secure auction items:

- Organize an auction committee so members can leverage their networks to secure donated items and experiences.
- Create a list of local businesses that have the capacity to donate.
- When seeking in-kind donations, write a letter that explains what you are asking for, what the event supports, why it's important, and donation instructions. [Click here to read a sample solicitation letter.](#)

In an online silent auction, guests bid through a mobile phone, computer, or tablet. Online platforms increase participation by allowing those who could not attend your event to join in.

An open appeal: As part of the speaking program at the reception, ask a board member, honoree, or volunteer to share how donations from the audience make an impact and to commit to giving a certain amount.

- Before your event, contact the individuals most likely to support this effort and ask them to commit to raising their hands. Their interest will encourage other guests to participate.
- Ask the speaker to share their personal connection to the cause.
- Update the crowd on the fundraising total and how close you are to your fundraising goal.
- Start at a high donation amount and work down, asking for donations at all levels.
- Place QR codes directly on tables or programs for easy donating.

Ticket Sales

Depending on the style of your event, your ticket prices will vary. Gala tickets sell at a premium price, while cocktail party tickets sell at an affordable price. Dinner parties do not typically use ticket sales. Instead, most dinner parties have an underwriter; this friend, family member, or company covers all of the expenses. A gala or cocktail party may have an underwriter as well. Utilize the following tips to maximize revenue through ticket sales:

- Consider how much each ticket will need to cost to cover your expenses and allow for significant funds to be donated to charity. Typically, you will want at least 50% of the ticket cost to be a donation.
- Sell whole tables to table sponsors. Purchasers will fill the seats with their family and friends — bringing more people into your network.

General Donations

On the invitation, always offer the option to make an outright donation to your cause. If a supporter is unable to attend, they may make a donation instead. MSK's event fundraising pages make collecting donations quick and easy. [Click here](#) to learn more about MSK fundraising pages.

Event Logistics

Venue

Finding a venue that works for your event and budget is an important step in the planning process. Start early to give yourself plenty of time and options. The most common venues are golf or country clubs, public golf courses, local resorts or hotels, and mini-golf courses. Here are a few things to consider when looking for a venue:

- **Start with your network.** Lean on your personal network to find a great site that they have a connection with. You may be able to get a site donated or at a reduced cost.
- **Research similar events that take place in your area.** Are those events using venues that you might be able to use too? Are there especially desirable venues that will help drive attendance for your event?
- **Avoid locations that are hard to find or out of the way.** No matter how inexpensive hard to find venues may be, it will be more difficult to attract guests to attend.
- **Ask about all fees associated with the venue up front.** Get all fees in writing — you do not want any unexpected surprises.
- **Ask about restrictions.** Policies on bringing in outside food or drink, local noise ordinances, and occupancy limits are a few areas to consider.
- **Speak with the person who will be your main point of contact on the day of the event.** Have a meeting before you decide to use a particular venue, so you can discuss what kind of support they will offer and if they have hosted similar events in the past.
- **Tour the venue in person.** Visit yourself before you sign on the dotted line.

Event Prep

To prepare for a successful event:

- Formulate a plan in case of inclement weather.
- Address any dietary restrictions with the caterers.
- Make sure you are close to hitting your goal for number of guests.
- Calculate your expenses and how much revenue you will need to generate on event day.
- Send your participants a “Know Before You Go” communication to answer frequently asked questions, including arrival time, parking information, and warm-up location.
- Make a volunteer and production plan. Make a volunteer plan with specific jobs for all volunteers and event day schedule.
- Build pre-event excitement through social media and exclusive guest communications.

Event Day

- Set up a check-in table with registration lists and for ticket sales, so you know who is in attendance. A VIP check-in table will make your top sponsors feel extra special.
- Assign volunteers to specific roles.
- Have a system in place for day-of ticket sales and registrations.
- Ensure that the auction table is in an accessible, highly trafficked area.
- Double-check that the VIP and reserved seating is in place.
- Stick to your schedule.
- If you have speakers or presenters, create and follow a day of schedule.
- Take photos and post on social media throughout the day.
- Livestream the event to supporters around the world.

Event Follow-Up

Fundraising does not end when your gala does! Long-term stewardship is key to keeping your guests engaged until your next event.

- Thank your guests, sponsors, and volunteers.
- Share your fundraising total and inspire last-minute donations through a targeted email and social media push. Include photos from your event.
- Solicit feedback! Find out what participants enjoyed and how you can improve next year.



Host a Virtual Gala

Consider taking your gala or party virtual to involve your network near and far in your fundraising endeavors. Virtual events can expand your outreach and expose your event to a larger audience. Here is a brief framework to get you started:

- **Livestream your gala:** Capture exciting moments such as keynote speakers, talent, and auction winner announcements.
- **Incorporate social media:** Spread the word about your event. Encourage attendees to dress up and post pictures while at your virtual party.
- **Utilize a custom QR code:** Generate a custom QR code that links directly to your MSK fundraising page and share it on all communication channels for easy access.
- **Host a virtual reception:** Ask a local bar or restaurant to demonstrate a signature cocktail and dinner recipe for your supporters to view via livestream or Zoom. Alternatively, you can ask your partner restaurant to prepare a meal for supporters to pick up and enjoy at home.
- **Host a virtual auction/ opportunity drawing:** During your virtual reception, present auction items, include a text-to-bid feature, and announce the prize winner(s).
- **Include digital sponsorship opportunities:** Incorporate an online sponsorship option for your sponsors to help mitigate event costs.

Ready to create a gala fundraiser? Click [here](#) to get started!



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To learn more about fundraising for MSK please contact us at communityfundraising@mskcc.org