



Risk Management Considerations for Fundraising Dinners

Fundraising dinners should be about raising as much money as possible for charitable organizations, not worrying about the possibility of a claim. Here are some common areas where risk can be found.

Decorations

When choosing decorations for your dinner, remember that they must be safe as well as aesthetically pleasing. While candles may look great, they also pose a fire hazard. All candles should be covered and kept away from flammable items such as napkins, table cloths and flowers.

Hanging decorations also pose a safety risk as they could become detached and fall on guests. All decorations need to be hung properly and securely.

If flowers are being used as centerpieces, pollen allergies should be taken into consideration and non-fragrant flowers should be used over strongly scented ones.

Food

It is important that the food is chosen and prepared carefully to avoid illness or allergic reactions. When preparing food keep in mind sanitary rules and health regulations. Before the event all guests should be asked if they have special dietary needs (such as vegan, vegetarian or kosher), or if they have any food allergies.

If it is not possible to do this, make sure there are plenty of food choices available and ingredients are clearly posted for guests to read. In the event that someone does have an allergic reaction, have trained first aid personnel tend to the situation.

Parking and Transportation

Parking availability can be an issue. Make sure there is adequate parking close to the venue. If parking is only available farther away, consider having a shuttle service (that must be handicap accessible). If you are hiring a third party service, enter into a contract that clearly states their responsibilities and check that they have the proper insurance. If a shuttle service is not possible, make sure there is a safe, well-lit walkway that guests can use.

If you are offering a valet service and using volunteers, it's a good idea to know the drivers. Make sure each has a valid driver's license and a clean driving record. In addition to this, you will need to obtain Garage Liability insurance coverage. If hiring a professional service, it is imperative that they have proper insurance coverage and are fully licensed. Ask to see their current insurance coverage and get a copy of it to have on hand. Again, enter into a contract with the service. You will also need to check with your municipality to determine if they require you to obtain any additional permits and/or licenses.

Volunteers

Volunteers are an integral part of your event and must be treated as such. Properly screen volunteers so you have appropriate help on the day of your event. Keep detailed records of who you hire and what task they have been assigned. Ensure that the task each person is assigned is feasible for them to complete and that they have been properly trained and equipped to do so. If volunteers will be serving or handling alcohol at the event make sure they have completed liquor service training and clearly understand the liquor laws and regulations in your province. Develop a Volunteer Policy and Procedure for volunteers to follow. The same training and screening should apply to all paid staff.

For more information on Volunteers, read our article on Risk Management Considerations for Volunteers.

Safety and Emergency Response

Regardless of what type of event you are hosting, it is necessary to have emergency and contingency plans in place. Plans should cover situations such as poor weather, power failure, fires etc. Signs should be clearly posted around the venue stating where the nearest first aid kit/ station, emergency exits, security offices, emergency telephone and fire extinguisher/fire hose are located. Ensure all temporary structures such as tents are securely fastened and that all pathways are clear and free of debris so as to reduce the occurrence of slip and falls. Garbage cans and recycling bins should be placed around the venue so as to discourage littering. Make sure to thoroughly inspect the venue before and after use and keep a record of the inspection.

Third Party Contracts

Whenever you are involving a third party it is necessary to enter into a contract with them so that everyone is clear about their respective responsibilities. The contract will state who is involved, and what insurance they need. The responsibilities of each party involved should be clearly outlined as well as which party is protected by the indemnity clause. Always have your lawyer, insurer and risk manager read over the contract before you sign it.

When holding a fundraising dinner, contracts should be made between you, the caterer, any hosting service you hire, rental companies, valet services, shuttle services etc.