

1. **KEY ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL HOUSE PARTY**

1. **An Enthusiastic Host/Hostess Who has Made a Significant Gift**

- ✓ Willing to host the event in their own home (not a restaurant or theater or third party location);
- ✓ Willing to provide a mailing list of friends and acquaintances;
- ✓ Willing to make follow-up phonecalls to get people to the party;
- ✓ Willing to make a direct ask for gifts or alternatively, willing to make a strong statement of support for your group's work;
- ✓ Willing to write thank you notes;
- ✓ Not essential but it's nice if the host is willing to cover the costs of food and beverage.

Where might you find some of your best host prospects?

Also, consider having folks co-host events—this divides the work between two or more people and makes it more doable.

2. **Give Yourself Plenty of Time**

A successful house party requires planning, scripting, phonecalls and logistical arrangements. Give yourself at least 6 to 8 weeks to put together the necessary materials and identify your host. Also put together a timeline of when things need to get done.

3. **Set Specific Goals**

Set two goals for your house party in concert with your host/hostess: (a) dollars to be raised; (b) # of people to attend; (c) # of invites to be mailed; (d) # of additional hosts to be identified.

4. **The Event Should Last Roughly 2 Hours**

A good time to host events is right after the work day from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. before people have had a chance to go home. The formal presentation itself should last no more than 40 minutes. Get the formal part of the evening underway about 30 to 45 minutes after the start time.

5. **Be Sure to Invite 3 to 4 Times as Many People as You Want to Attend**

The rule of thumb is that if you want 20 people at your event you need to invite somewhere between 60 and 80 people.

6. **Make it Clear on your Invitation that the Event is a Fundraiser**

Include language on your invitation like “Donations gratefully accepted” or “Please bring your checkbooks” so that no one is surprised or offended by an “ask”.

7. **Make Follow-Up Phonecalls**

This is crucial. Many house parties have failed because invitees were not contacted by phone and asked to attend the party. It’s much harder to turn down an invitation from a friend on the phone than it is to simply send in a “No” RSVP. Make your calls a week after you’ve sent the invitations—approximately two weeks before the party. As with major donors you want to reach the person directly on the phone so it may take 2 or 3 tries before you do so. If you need to, write out a script for these phonecalls or list reasons why it’s important that the person attend the party – yes, you’ll need to do a little convincing here!

8. **Identify the Person Who Is Best Qualified to Make the Ask**

Generally speaking your host or hostess is the best person to make the ask because it is their friends and acquaintances who have come to the party. What you need to keep in mind is that it should be a peer who is making the “ask”. If the host isn’t willing to do so, then a Board member from your organization is a good candidate. Ideally, the “asker” should be someone who can speak passionately about your organization’s work and someone who has already made a significant investment in your group. If you need to, script out the “ask” and help coach the “asker”.

9. **Make a Direct and Compelling Ask**

Mention amounts and tell people what their gift will enable your organization to do. Avoid words like “support” and “help”. Be specific and direct and make eye contact with your audience as you speak. Be sure to let people know that you can accept different kinds of gifts.

10. **Give People Time to Contemplate Their Gift**

Immediately after the “ask”, give people 3 to 5 minutes to contemplate their gift and deposit envelopes in baskets around the room. One thing that can help spur people to give, is to arrange before the party for one person to stand up and publicly commit to making a donation that night. This donor might say something like: “When I came here tonight I was prepared to give \$100, but now that I’ve heard Michael and understand how important this project is, I’m going to write a check for \$250 and I urge all of you to do the same or more.”

11. **Thank People as They Leave**

Have someone stationed at the door to thank guests for coming to your party. Someone who didn't make a gift that night may turn out to be an individual who wants to make a stock donation the following week.

12. **Write Thank You Notes**

Write thank you notes for gifts the next day. Where necessary, make follow-up phonecalls to individuals who needed more time to contemplate their gift or who wanted questions answered.

Other Little Pointers From My Own Experience

1. Make sure to collect names at the door. Ask people to sign in. This will enable you to do follow-up after the event.
2. Don't put a gift basket by the front door. Certainly, this may encourage someone to make a gift but it won't be a stretch gift nor will it be one that's informed by your organization's compelling presentation.
3. Make it fun for people. Provide lots of good finger foods. Unless you are MADD or AA or the host is sensitive about serving alcohol, make it available to guests. Include some entertainment if you can (music). Remember that there has to be some incentive for invitees to come to the party.
4. Offer challenges where possible. Perhaps you can offer a Board challenge or a Host challenge. Create a thermometer like the United Way and continue to update it as the evening progresses—towards your fundraising goal. This also gives you an opportunity to convince people to make a gift—ie., “we've only got \$250 more to raise before we reach our goal tonight”.
5. Depending on the size of the crowd have a minimum of 2 and perhaps as many as 4 or 5 people representing your organization at the event. Make sure to identify yourselves by wearing specially marked nametags.
6. Have information available about how to make gifts of stock or pledges over time.