

## Special Events

### 2. Scale back and barter.

WEAVE Inc. in Sacramento, Calif. ([www.weaveinc.org](http://www.weaveinc.org)), scheduled three fundraising events in 2008, its 30th anniversary year, and garnered early sponsorship commitments for all of them. After two successful events, fundraising took a downward turn just as it was time to secure funds for the October gala.

“We had projected \$125,000 in sponsorships based on earlier commitments,” says Julie Seewald Bornhoeft, CFRE, director of development and community relations at WEAVE. “But \$10,000 commitments were becoming \$5,000 or \$2,500, and some donors pulled out entirely. The moment we started seeing that, we scaled it back dramatically.”

The theme of the October event was “Flashback to 1978,” and Bornhoeft’s team found numerous ways to cut corners without diluting the ambiance. They retained the disco ball and era-specific music, but reduced costs by bartering marketing benefits for such vendors as the light company, the band and the deejay. They relied on volunteers instead of hiring an event planner and used donated record albums as centerpieces and auction bid cards. Rather than making a video, they substituted a creative PowerPoint, complete with 1970s photos of their board members.

Overall, the organization netted \$89,000 compared to the projected goal of \$120,000, but that included outstanding auction results—\$62,000 versus the \$20,000 originally projected.

“The event created nostalgia, and people saw it as an escape. There was a real energy in the room,” Bornhoeft says. “There’s an immense loyalty to our organization, and people were feeling really good that we had made it for 30 years. They were going to support WEAVE by either running the price up or buying an auction item!”

### 3. Adjust the format.

Planners at The Educational Alliance in New York ([www.edalliance.org](http://www.edalliance.org)) found that changing the venue and the program for their annual gala resulted in an event that was not only well-received by the guests, but that also matched the less formal preferences of the honoree and his family.

“We weren’t looking to go to the most lavish place. We moved to a different location that didn’t feel over-the-top expensive,” says Maidelle Goodman Benamy, senior vice president of development. “We negotiated with every single vendor.”

Instead of the traditional cocktail reception followed by a sit-down dinner with a program, there was an extended cocktail reception, followed by the program and a dessert reception—a format that the attendees loved.

“We put a note in the invitation that said there wouldn’t be a dinner, and people thought we were being mindful about the economy,” says Robin Bernstein, president of The Educational Alliance. “They were also mindful that they got out an hour earlier for a during-the-week event!”

Although the organization had raised more than \$1 mil-

## On the Road Again

Organizations have not given up on including enticing travel packages in their auctions, but economic worries have prompted fundraisers to choose vacation jaunts that are a little closer to home.

“The recession has scared people,” says Michelle Cohen, president of Mitch-Stuart Inc. ([www.mitchstuart.com](http://www.mitchstuart.com)). “In the first quarter of 2009, we created more getaway trips with a two- or three-night stay in a hotel and no air fare. Instead of a \$2,000–\$3,000 trip, the trip would cost \$800–\$900. We’re beginning to see the more expensive trips being requested and successfully bid on.”

Mitch-Stuart CEO Stuart Paskow adds that some organizations order the trip packages from the company and then put the trips on their websites after the auction. They encourage their constituents to bid in an ongoing online auction, or they just put a price on the trips and sell them. Either way, the trip packages can be a source of ongoing, passive income.

Paskow and Cohen recently launched a corporate program in which a corporation can run an online auction of travel packages on their intranet for their employees, with the proceeds going to a designated nonprofit.

“This is a whole new concept in workplace giving,” Cohen says. “Corporations want to be socially responsible and linked to charities. A nonprofit could actually approach one of their corporate sponsors and ask if they would be willing to participate.”

Paskow says people seem to be over the media-driven recession pandemic. “Things are picking up,” he notes. “There has been a recent influx of people inquiring about Super Bowl trips and ticket prices for the Master’s in 2010. We are also seeing more interest in intercontinental and transatlantic travel.

“People are starting to travel again. We’re cautiously optimistic that the light at the end of the tunnel isn’t a train.”

