Fundraising events – whether a bake sale, concert, silent auction, spaghetti dinner, yard sale, or sporting event – can be a lot of fun and a lot of work. When done well, they can promote awareness of your center, generate positive energy, broaden your donor base, and bring in additional funds. When done poorly, they can literally cost more than they’re worth. Here are some tips as you plan the next event for your center.

√ **Start simple.** If this is your center’s first fundraising event, this might not be the time to undertake a black-tie gala. Find an event that is reasonably accomplished by the volunteers and resources available to you, and one that has a natural connect with your center. As you gain more experience, you’ll be able to branch out in new directions.

√ **Concentrate efforts.** Volunteers and supporters will get burned out by too many events. Better to have one well-executed fundraising event on an annual basis than a shotgun approach throughout the year.

√ **Plan early.** Successful events typically need to be planned several months in advance. Form a volunteer event committee to develop a detailed timeline and budget, assign tasks, and plan every aspect of the event from gift solicitation, publicity, ticket sales and the event itself. Make sure the date of the event does not conflict with holidays or other events already scheduled in the community.

√ **Know your break-even point.** Your center should have enough funds in place to cover the cost of planning and implementing an event **before** the event takes place. You otherwise risk needing to use the center’s operating funds if fundraising goals are not met.

√ **Involve as many people as possible.** Events are people intensive. Recruit help from a wide array of parents, local businesses and other community partners. (Hint: at the start of a school year, many families are very receptive to volunteer opportunities. Have a sign-up sheet for a spring event ready for parents in September.) The broader the sense of ownership and involvement, the more chance for a successful event.

√ **Make it easy to get the word out.** Students and families have a vested interest in the success of the event as it benefits your center, so make it easy for them to
involve others. Provide take-home flyers. Post notices in local shops and businesses. Place an ad or write an article for the local newspaper.

√ **Have a back-up plan.** Make sure you know what will happen if the event can’t proceed as planned, such as inclement weather on the day of a walk-a-thon. Where should people meet? What will they do instead? When, how, and by whom will this information be communicated?

√ **Keep records.** Chances are that many of your volunteers will be new on a year-to-year basis. Provide detailed written instructions to ensure a smooth transition, along with notes of what did or didn’t work well with this year’s event.

√ **Have fun.** This is a great chance to celebrate your center. Work hard…and enjoy!

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