

Best Practices: Visual & Experiential Storytelling at Fundraising Events

Fundraising events tell a story the moment someone walks in the door — sometimes even before. Every element, from décor to table placement to who greets a guest, shapes how people feel and whether they connect with your mission. Use these best practices to create an intentional, emotionally resonant experience.

Set the Tone Immediately

From music to lighting to the first face a guest sees — aim to create warmth, welcome, and a sense of purpose.

Design with the Mission in Mind

Decor, signage, and ambiance should reflect your mission and values. Use visual cues (e.g., art, quotes, photos) that center your impact and community.

Think of the Event as a Journey

Guide your guests through a carefully designed experience — from entry to ask — with pacing and emotional arcs that build connection.

Use Storytellers Strategically

Empower staff, board, or community members to share short, personal stories. Practice them in advance to ensure clarity and confidence.

Create Participatory Moments

Invite guests to write wishes, share reflections, or engage with a visual display tied to your work. This builds memory and meaning.

Pay Attention to Who's at the Center

Who gets the mic? Who's highlighted visually? Be intentional about representation and inclusion — your audience will notice.

Every Detail Sends a Signal

Table settings, food, program length, printed materials — they all convey a story. Make sure it's the story you want told.

End with Impact & Clarity

Close with a clear message: what change is possible, how they can help, and why it matters now. Give people a next step before they leave.

Personal Ask Checklist

Personal Ask Formula: Connect + Impact + Invite

Example:

- “I want to share a moment that stuck with me...” (Connect)
- “We helped a family stay in their home during a tough time...” (Impact)
- “Would you consider a gift of \$100 to support this work?” (Invite)

Checklist

- ☐ Did I start with a personal connection or moment?
- ☐ Did I share a clear and meaningful example of impact?
- ☐ Was my story short, specific, and memorable?
- ☐ Did I end with a clear and specific invitation to give?
- ☐ Would this ask feel authentic and engaging if I heard it from someone else?