

*STRONGER  
TOGETHER*

*trellis*

# VIRTUAL EVENTS RESOURCE GUIDE

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EVENT FUNDRAISING DURING COVID-19



## A word from our team to yours

Hey Fundraising Professionals!

It's no secret fundraising has changed, but we're confident you can use a virtual gala event to meet your fundraising goals. In this guide, we'll walk you through how to create an engaging event for your donors and supporters, raise some funds, and enjoy a much needed evening to celebrate your cause. We know that this may be new for you, but we've got your back. This guide makes hosting virtual events extremely easy, giving you a step-by-step walkthrough to setting up your own, and making sure that it's a success!

In the guide you'll find information, insights and best practices around the following areas:

- Event Flow
- Speakers and Entertainment
- Branding as Stay at Home Gala
- Marketing and Public Relations
- Sponsorships
- Creating your Fundraising Event Page
- Silent and Live Auctions
- Food and Drinks
- Livestreaming Technology

This guide has been created based on over 50 wildly successful virtual events on Trellis. They've ranged in size and style, but all of them were successful in their own ways! Ideas and best practices from their events have been added to this guide, and after your event is finished I'm sure we'll add some of your unique ideas too! To learn more about past virtual events that used Trellis, click [here](#).

Additionally, in this guide, you'll notice we've included lots of ways that you can continue to support local through your virtual event. This has proven to be an extremely challenging time for non-profit and charitable organizations, and similarly for local small businesses as well. We encourage you to support local businesses wherever you can, and encourage your community to do the same.

Right now, we are hosting [live calls](#) to assist you with making the most of your online events. We'd love to learn more about your virtual event on the call, and share some relevant ideas for your cause. You can sign up for our next call [here](#).

Sincerely,  
The Trellis Team

## Event Flow

Keeping your event flowing is critical to any event, in person or virtually. Below we've outlined a sample event schedule and flow to keep the evening moving and guests engaged throughout the night. Don't worry, there is still lots of room to be creative and move things around to meet your needs to accommodate your plans for the night.

Time Slot	Entertainment
6:30	Local band playing song requests from the live chat
7:00	Emcee Welcome
7:05	Fun Interactive Element 1 - Bartender
7:10	Guest Speaker 1
7:15	Fun Interactive Element - Comedian
7:20	Guest Speaker 2
7:25	Fun Interactive Element 2 - Bartender
7:30	Guest Speaker 3
7:35	Musician living room concert
7:40	Keynote Speaker
7:50	Emcee hosted Q&A for all speakers
8:00	Emcee thanks and closing
8:10	Local band playing song requests from the live chat

It's easy to get caught up in the details of the night, so we've included some best practices to help keep you on track!

1. **Keep it short.**

As the nature of this event is very different from what your attendees may be used to, try and keep it to 90 minutes max to keep them engaged and entertained. Any longer than that and attendees tend to get restless!

2. **Keep it moving.**

Making it a virtual event means your guests won't be able to walk around and mingle with others attending. But no worries! You'll have lots of other ways to keep them engaged throughout the night and still interacting with others that are attending. However, keep the agenda moving, and have something scheduled for each minute of the event. We recommend working with 5 or 10 minute blocks as attention spans for virtual events tend to be shorter.

3. **Preserve the spirit of your event.**

If this is an annual event for your organization, work to keep the feeling and the energy the same as prior years! Welcome similar speakers and entertainers to join virtually, if it's a themed night, encourage guests to attend dressed up accordingly, and find ways to engage with attendees in a similar way that they are used to, but online instead.

4. **Open up the conversation.**

Allow attendees to participate in a live chat, or Q&A so they feel part of the event. Provide prompted questions in the chat to get the conversation started, and ask for volunteers to help moderate the conversation by answering questions and keeping others engaged. Using chat options will allow guests to connect with one another, and feel a part of the night, even if they aren't in the same space.

5. **Have options to give.**

The point of the evening is to raise money for your cause, make sure to keep that at the forefront of your event! Try and engage your donors in different ways. Try a raffle (with the winner announced during the event), a silent auction, live auction, or fund-in-need pledging drive to raise funds for your cause. When you're using Trellis, you'll be able to have all of these fundraising options in one place, making it easy for your donors too!

## **Take it up a level!**

What about hosting a live give-a-thon during the event? While the band is playing, set a goal and let guests watch live as the thermometer gets filled with donations! This is a great way to build excitement and urgency around donations, and raise some much needed funds for your cause. Click [here](#) to connect with our team about live giving, give-a-thons, or live pledging options.

# Speakers and Entertainment

With any good event, having engaging speakers and entertaining guests will take your event to the next level. As you plan who to invite to speak at your event, consider the nature and theme of your fundraiser and work to find guests that will nicely complement your existing plan. Finding the right types of entertainment for your event can be challenging, but we've created a list of best practices to help you start thinking outside the box for your virtual gala.

1. **Look for industry leaders.**  
Local or slightly further away, look for industry leaders that can inspire your audience around a specific topic. Look for those that are relevant to your event theme or organization, or simply inspiring for your audience.
2. **Bring in the right Emcee.**  
Find someone who can add humour, insight, details, and fun all at the same time, while keeping the night moving. Bring in somebody that your event attendees will be able to relate to, or will recognize to add the fun throughout the night.
3. **Hire live musicians.**  
Find bands or singers to host living room performances for your event attendees. Find a few different musical groups to perform throughout the night, to break up the speakers that you have during the gala.
4. **Find great entertainment.**  
Think outside of the box and find new entertainment that would resonate with your audience. Try stand-up comedians, magicians, live artists to create during the event (maybe while your guests are eating!), or virtual games appropriate to your audience size.
5. **Include experiential options through your gala.**  
Virtual bartenders teaching guests how to mix their own drinks, or local chefs giving inspiration for dinner or desert during the night. These are great ways to be unique with your gala, and keep your guests on their toes and 'topped up' throughout the night. Check out our list of [Trellis Partners](#) for ideas to add to your virtual event.
6. **Mix it up.**  
Keep your guests guessing what's coming next and mix up your different types of entertainment throughout the night between speakers, musicians, and live entertainment. This will keep guests more engaged, but consider whose speaking before / after and be mindful of what tone they will be setting leading to your next guest.
7. **Consider the humour.**  
Funny segments or things may happen, but that can often be difficult to translate through technology and a virtual audience. Consider having pairs of people when funny things take place to help with the 'crowd' environment.

Use and adapt our sample email to connect with local talent and speakers, asking them to be a part of your event.

Hi [First Name],

We are reaching out because we are hosting an event, our [event name] on [event date]. This event will be virtual, sharing those familiar parts of a gala, complete with food and drinks, but all from the comfort of your own home.

As part of this event, we are bringing in local speakers and entertainers to help create a strong evening of unity and start the conversation around how our community comes out of this stronger and closer.

You were one of the speakers we thought of that would be great to share your story and insights. There is an exciting schedule coming together and we feel you would be perfectly suited to help out with it.

We're planning to raise [fundraising goal] for our organization through this event. The impact of having a high quality speaker like yourself join us, will, we believe allow us to hit, and hopefully even surpass this goal! We're hoping you could speak for between 5-10 minutes during the evening. Based on some research we have conducted, we've determined that speaker engagements any longer than that for virtual events tend to get lost.

Please let us know at your earliest convenience if you'll be able to join us, we'd be thrilled to have you come on board!

Sincerely,  
[Organization Name]

## Take it to the next level!

If this is an annual gala event for your organization, draw inspiration from prior years and determine what has made your event unique and memorable in the past. Through technology, there are lots of ways to keep incorporating these elements although they may look slightly different. Work with your events team, continue brainstorming creative ideas, and make this a memorable experience for your guests once again!

# Marketing

Marketing and communications is key to getting the word out about your event! We've created a list of best practices to get you started with all things event marketing. We'd encourage you to follow these in order to create a marketing plan for your virtual gala.

1. **Identify your target audience.**  
Once you know who you'd like to see attend your event, you can tailor your messaging to resonate with them. Share key details that will bring excitement, and share the value that they will receive by attending.
2. **Get creative.**  
Name your event and design a logo or some event branding for your virtual gala. This doesn't have to be anything too fancy! There are lots of tools you can use to get started, like [Canva](#) or [Adobe Spark](#), both for free.
3. **Build your event page on Trellis.**  
With Trellis, set up your event ticketing page to help share more details about your event. This is the page you'll drive donors to, to purchase tickets, bid on auction items and buy raffle tickets, but also add details about your event to encourage them to attend. We'd encourage you to include pictures and videos to really share your story.
4. **Create a Facebook Event Page, and invite people to 'join' your event.**  
This isn't where people will be purchasing their tickets, but it is a great spot to post up-to-date information, encourage conversation amongst event attendees leading up to the big day, and post exciting announcements about guest speakers, sponsors, silent and live auction items, and entertainment for everybody to see as it becomes official.
5. **Share the word.**  
Use social media to start spreading the word about your upcoming event. If you have some budget to dedicate towards your event, try social media ads as a way to attract a larger audience. With a budget of even \$100, we have seen event organizers successfully raise more for their fundraising events.
6. **Keep on sharing.**  
Send it out to your email newsletter lists, add it to your website, and work with your local network to help share the word even further.

With all fundraising events, the longer people have to know and hear about your event, the better for your ticket sales and donations raised. We'd also encourage you to continually keep updating your social media pages to have the most up to date information for those interested in your event.

We recommend creating a separate public relations strategy for your virtual event. But don't worry we've got some tips and tricks to get you start on that too!



## Public Relations

As this is likely a more novel type of event to be held in your community rather than an in-person event, the opportunity to garner lots of great media attention is even greater! Speak to what a virtual event entails, why you are excited about your upcoming fundraiser, and what event attendees can expect to see. We've crafted a sample press release to get you started.

Use this press release outline when you begin selling tickets and are ready to announce the event in your community.

[Organization name] presents their first virtual gala [event name] event.  
*Staying in is the new going out.*

[Date] [City] - A one-of-a-kind event is coming your way from [organization name] on [event date], and we'd love to see you there, from your living room of course! This virtual gala will be a chance to connect with your community and enjoy all of the familiar elements of a gala; an optional dinner (delivered to your door), game-changing speakers, a silent auction, and much more.

This evening event will unite people from across the community with the aim to strengthen community efforts and manage the effects that COVID-19 has had on [organization name]. After purchasing a ticket, attendees will receive a link to join the virtual gala.

"[Quote from organizer - why did you choose to do a virtual event? What does it mean to your organization?]"

The event will welcome local guest speakers and musicians as part of the dinner program, with the option to have a meal delivered to your door. Notable speakers participating during the night include [include a list of speakers here].

Encouraging guests to don their best (as if they were headed out for the night), log in virtually, and dine together, the evening will be hosted by [emcee name], with all the funds being directed to [organization name]. "[Quote from organizer - Why the support from your community so critical during COVID-19.]"

With norms being challenged due to COVID-19, the chance to bring a familiar gala experience to your home is exciting and an honour. At times like these, when we come together great things happen, and we know that this will be no different.



To purchase your tickets, visit [\[fundraiser page link\]](#)

We'd recommend creating three more press releases to share your event. The first announcing key sponsors supporting the event, and the second sharing news about keynote speakers that will be joining the event lineup. The final can be a thank you to your community for participating, and an announcement of how much money was raised.

Share this press release with local media outlets in your community. Create a list of news sources popular in your community, and find contact information for a reporter, or leave a news tip. We'd recommend following up 4 days after you sent your press release with any media sources that have not yet picked up the story to remind them to do so.



# Sponsorships

Similar to in-person events, securing sponsor partnerships allows you to raise more money for your fundraising event, while recognizing their business for their involvement simultaneously. As this virtual event will look different from an in-person event, you'll have to find creative ways to recognize your sponsors, but don't worry we have your back! Use this list to get you started as you brainstorm sponsor recognition options.

- Free tickets to attend the virtual gala event
- Logos included on main slide decks used throughout the event
- Explicit mentions throughout the night
- Logo recognition and bio included on the fundraising event and ticket page
- Logo recognition on donated silent auction items
- Option to distribute promotional materials or a digital 'swag bag' to all event attendees
- Press releases and social media mentions leading up to the event
- Opportunity to host elements of the gala event, like the technology partners (providing technological support), the silent auction, or the dinner portion

Check out these best practices to get you started with sponsorship requests.

1. **Ask early.**  
Give your sponsors enough time to say yes and get the most out of their sponsorship. Start early, and begin promoting their involvement as soon as you can.
2. **Share what's in it for them.**  
Sponsorships are a two way street. Make sure your sponsors know what they will get out of their involvement, and include value that is worthwhile for their organization.
3. **Customize the options for your sponsors.**  
Start with a sponsorship package, but work with your sponsors to tailor their sponsorship in order to best support their needs, and desire to be involved.
4. **Explore in-kind sponsorship.**  
Find sponsors that can provide in-kind sponsorship for your event. These could be your restaurant partners, technology platforms, marketing and social media experts, or food delivery partners.

## Take it to the next level!

Find a sponsor to host an after-party to your virtual event! This will inevitably look different than a usual after-party, but you can still make it engaging! Invite your virtual gala bartender to give more drink inspiration, and host a live conversation. Ask your after-party sponsor to include some exclusive offers for these guests and create a list of prompting questions to keep the conversation going throughout the night.

## Creating your Event Page

Use [Trellis](#) to create your fundraising page, and raise more for your cause with less effort! We're your all-in one online platform for virtual, in-person, and every fundraiser in between. You'll be able to set up automated tax receipts, accept donations and ticket sales simultaneously, and incorporate engaging content on your page to better inform and excite your guests. On Trellis, you'll also be able to add additional revenue drivers like a silent auction, fund-in-need or live pledging, digital raffles, and item sales.

And the best part? Using Trellis to create your event page is as easy as 1-2-3!

1. **Sign up for your trellis.** It's free with no monthly fees, enrollment costs, or set-up charges. You can sign up [here](#).
2. **Create your event page using our Virtual Event template.** You'll have it ready to go in 5 minutes! Don't forget to fill your banking details so you can automatically receive your ticket sales as soon as you get them.
3. **Add your revenue streams and launch your fundraiser!** Add your revenue drivers like a silent auction, then use the social sharing links within Trellis to start sharing the word and inviting your network to buy tickets and start bidding on items for your virtual gala.

We've created a list of best practices to get the most out of your Trellis page. Our research shows when adding the following sections to your trellis page, you'll be able to **raise 25% more** for your cause, and that's something we could all get behind! These sections will help share your story, and encourage your supporters to donate to your cause, allowing you raise those much needed funds.

1. **Add a thermometer to your page.**  
Set a fundraising goal, and challenge your community to help you reach it. If you decide to make your fundraising goal bigger, you can always change it later on.
2. **Add donation cards.**  
Give your donors the opportunity to give beyond the price of a ticket. You'll be able to include donation upsells at checkout, but also on your main Trellis fundraising page. When setting them up, add a description to the donation to help donors understand what the funds they give will be used towards.
3. **Share the story.**  
Your organization has a great purpose and mission behind what you do, and why it matters. Make sure to share this story with your donors, using words, pictures, videos and relevant statistics (through the Impact section).

Our team at Trellis is here to support your fundraising. We really value human to human support, so that's what you'll get too! Here are some easy way to connect with our team while you're using our tools.

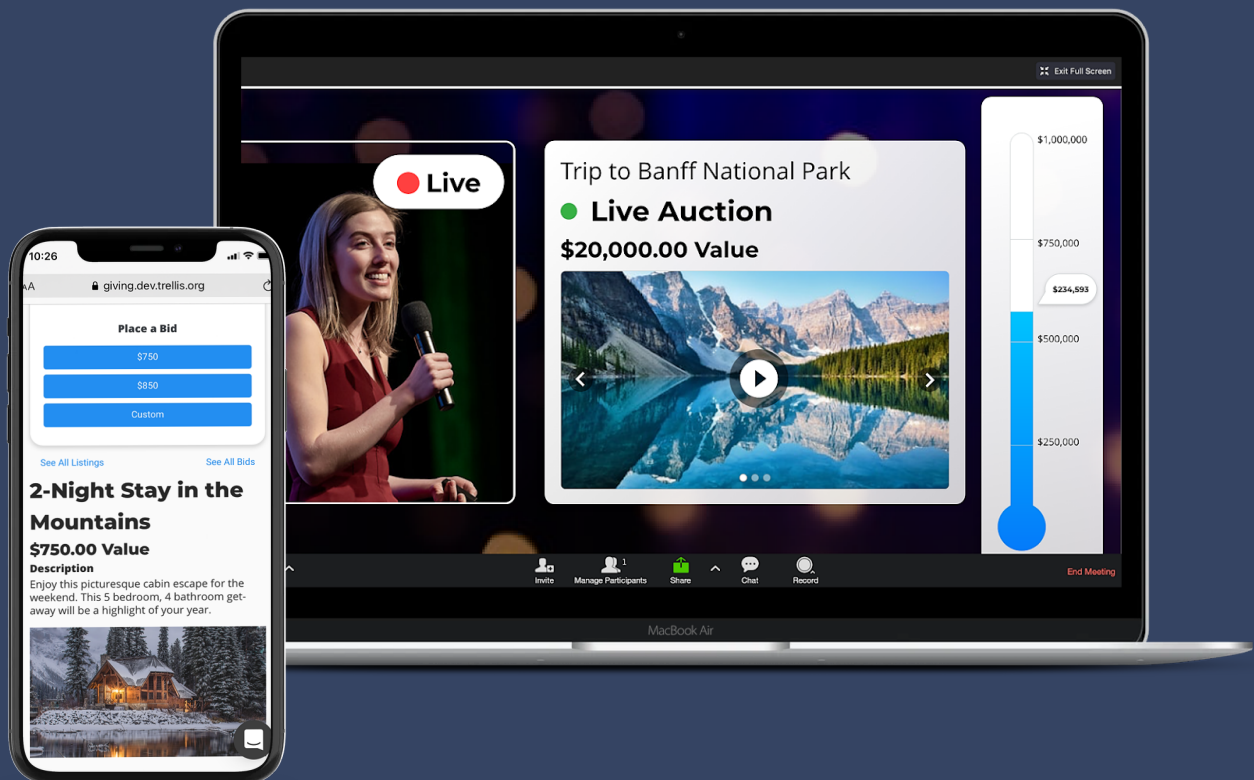
1. Use the blue chat icon when you're on Trellis and talk to our team from 9am - 5pm PST Monday through Friday.
2. Sign up for a [live support call](#), to get your questions answered face to face, human to human.
3. Visit our [help centre](#) to find videos and how-to articles.

For more details about how Trellis can support your fundraising, connect with our team on a live call. You can sign up for the next one [here](#).

## Take it up a level!

Have you done a live auction in the past? Why not try your first virtual live auction with Trellis! Our tools will allow you to raise real funds, in real time helping still hit your fundraising goals! Donors will be able to participate through their mobile devices or computers!

Keep reading to learn how to incorporate this into your virtual event!

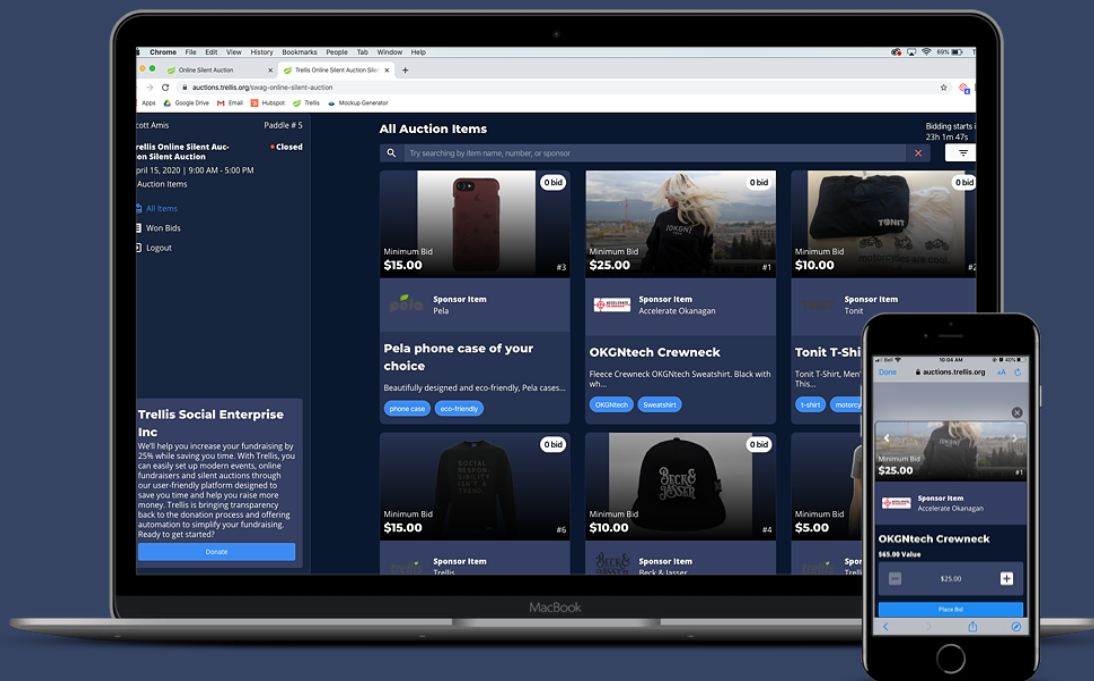


# Silent and Live Auctions

If you're hosting your gala virtually, why not throw in a virtual silent auction for good measure! Setting up an online silent auction is a great way to keep the spirit of your virtual gala alive, and raise more funds for your cause.

You'll be able to set up your online silent auction through [Trellis](#), allowing it to seamlessly connect to your existing event fundraising page and fundraising thermometer.

Similar to in-person silent auctions, work with local partners to gather amazing items and in-kind services to auction off throughout the night. Upload images of your items directly to the Trellis online auction tool and make sure to include a quick description of each item. Offer your guests *max bid* and *buy now* options, and automatically notify guests any time they've been outbid on an item to increase the total amount raised.



Similar to a silent auction, you'll be able to set up your live auction on Trellis as well! Add items, engaging videos and images to create a schedule for the live giving element of your event. Through Trellis you'll be able to see real time as guests bid on items, and watch your fundraising thermometer grow. After the live auction is closed, guests will be prompted to pay for their items

directly through Trellis, further simplifying the process for you! To learn more about Live Auctions with Trellis click [here](#).

Need help securing auction items? Read our best practices guide [here](#) to get started!

## **Want to take it up a level?**

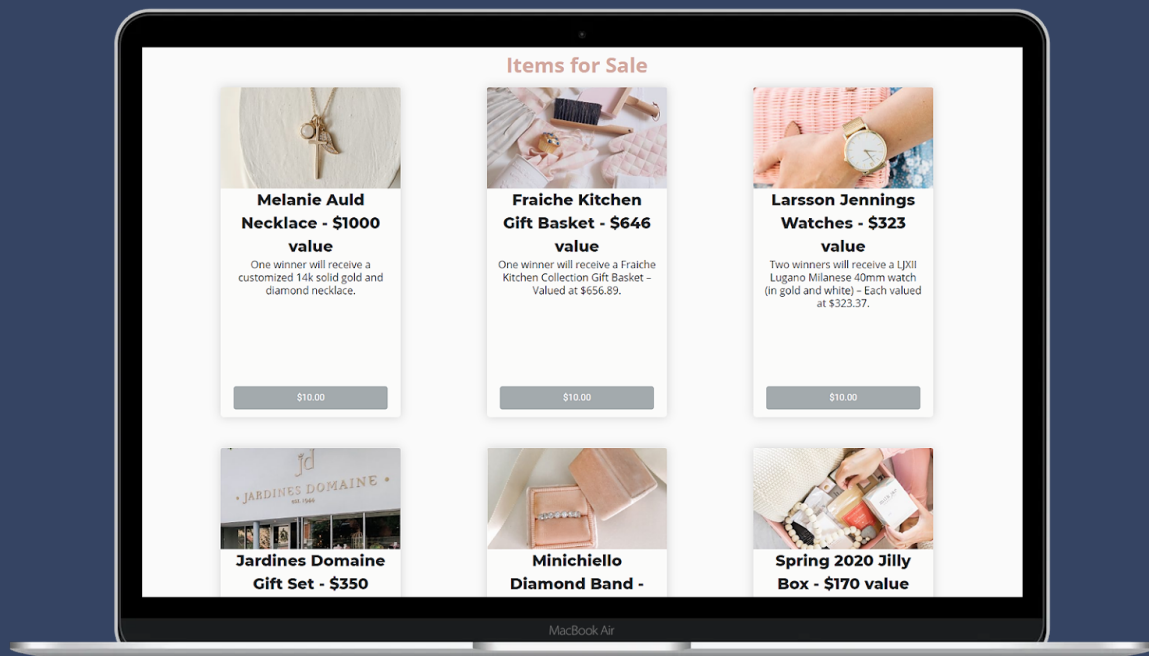
Why not start the bidding for your silent auction a week before the actual event? This will keep the excitement up leading to the big day, and also give attendees time to prepare and decide what they would like to bid on and how much they are willing to spend. But, make sure to keep some awesome prizes hidden until the event starts to keep the energy high and make sure people continue browsing and bidding on your items!

## Online Raffles, Draws and 50/50s

Raffles are a great way to raise extra money at an event (in-person or virtual), and they can also be successfully run online with Trellis!

Similar to a silent auction, reach out to your network or local businesses to have them donate items for your raffle. Add pictures and descriptions of each item to get your supporters excited, and set an attractive price point for donors.

Encourage your guests and network to buy tickets for items they want to win, and during your virtual event announce the winners.



Celebrity influencer Jillian Harris ran a flash online raffle for a local organization called Mamas for Mamas, raising over \$220,000 on [Trellis](#)! They kept their raffle ticket prices at \$10, \$15, or \$20, making it easy and enticing for people to participate.

Make sure to have your raffle tickets available for people to buy while buying their event tickets too! You'll need a charitable gaming license to run your event, but no worries we'll help you with that too! Read this [Digital Raffle Resource Guide](#) to get started.



## Food and Drinks

A key portion of every gala is the meal! Work with local restaurants to offer meals for your event, delivered directly to your event attendees doors. This element of a virtual event can be challenging, as there are many details to coordinate. But, we've listed some best practices to get you started, and staying on the right track!

1. **Keep it simple.**  
This element helps take your event to the next level, but can easily take up a lot of your time. Work with your event team to develop community partnerships with local restaurants to provide the food.
2. **Limit the options.**  
Everybody likes choices... until there are too many! Narrow the different restaurants you are partnering with to a maximum of 2. That way, you can also ensure the restaurants you are working with get lots of value from their involvement with your event. This will also help limit the number of vendors you have to coordinate.
3. **Consider the drive time.**  
Although offering food to all your guests is a great way to provide value and add another amazing element to your virtual gala, consider the time it will take to deliver meals to all of your guests. Consider offering meals to those that live within a 10 mile radius, or offer deliveries for those that live close by, and pick-up options for those that are further away.
4. **Partner with a local taxi or delivery service.**  
You'll have lots of other details to coordinate on the day of your event, so try and offload this job to a local taxi or delivery service company. They'll be able to coordinate all food deliveries and make sure meals arrive on time while you can get back to the other details.

And what would a good meal be without a drink to compliment it? Drinks are a key part of any good in-person event, and we don't think that should change for your virtual event! Welcome a local bartender in your lineup of guests for the night and ask them to share some speciality cocktails for the evening.

Make sure to tailor these for your audience, even opting for some non-alcoholic drinks for younger participants!

When sharing exciting details around the drink menu for the night, send out a shopping list ahead of time so attendees can make sure they have what they need on hand for the night.

## Take it up a level!

Want to make this more interactive for your guests? Why not partner with a local chef or business like [Cheftorial](#) to offer your guests an interactive cooking demonstration and class. Your event participants will get to learn a new recipe and enjoy their meal during the rest of your event. And, our partner Cheftorial works directly with HelloFresh to have ingredient baskets dropped off your donors doors before the event even begins! Hey, we're all about making your event planning easy!

This interactive option will help create an unforgettable experience for your guests, that will have them talking about it for months to come!



# Livestreaming Technology

When running a virtual event, the software you use can be thought of as the venue. It's critical to get the right space (virtual or in person) to facilitate the evening without distracting from the actual event planned.

We know for many organizations this part of a virtual event can be nerve-wracking and all new. We've broken down everything you need to know about hosting a successful livestream for your event. From tools to use and where to start, to making your experience look professional, and insights on what to do yourself vs. when to call in an external company. After reading our [Livestream Resource Guide](#), and implementing the ideas included, you'll be ready to take on any virtual event!

And to get you started, check out our list of best practices for livestreaming events.

1. **Own the spotlight.**  
As event organizers, make sure you are the only one who has control over who can present and speak during the event. Reduce the access event attendees have to reduce the chance for surprise speakers during the event!
2. **Customize your event software.**  
Change the names, logos, and branding wherever possible to reflect your event. This will help make the event feel more personal and feel more intentionally planned for event attendees.
3. **Have support available.**  
As everybody has different levels of comfort with technology, make sure to have a team member ready during the event to answer any technical support questions people may have while they are getting logged into the event and during the actual event.
4. **Send the event link at the last minute.**  
Hold onto the event link until the last minute, so guests have less opportunities to share the link with those that have not purchased tickets. This will also give you a chance to finalize details about the event software platform leading up to the event, if you need to make any changes.
5. **Have a strong internet connection.**  
Make sure whoever is in charge of running the virtual event through their computer has a great internet connection. We recommend upload speeds greater than 4 MBPS. You can speed test your internet [here](#).
6. **Do a run through!**  
Practice switching between your videos, testing your audio, and getting comfortable using the different tools for your livestream element.

## Using Zoom Webinar

We've created the following videos and tools for those using Zoom Webinar, to take out the guesswork (and the stress!) of hosting an online event. Watch all the videos below and follow along as we walk you through how to set up your virtual event for success!

1. [How to export your guest list from trellis](#)
2. [Zoom buying and webinar set up](#)
3. [Zoom features walkthrough](#)
4. [Show flow walkthrough video](#)

We encourage you to restart your computer within a few hours of starting your virtual event, as the host of your webinar. We'd also encourage you to close all nonessential windows and applications on your computer. Finally, schedule a test run with a couple of participants (like we did in the last video!) to try the tools and get comfortable navigating Zoom Webinar.

## What to take it to the next level?

Set up an exit survey for participants to complete when the event ends. On tools like Zoom Webinar, this will allow you to easily grab key information and feedback from your guests while it's still fresh. You can set up a quick online survey through tools like [Google Forms](#) for free!

Using surveys and feedback forms will allow you to plan for your next virtual event, and understand what resonated with event attendees better.

# Making the Most of Your Virtual Event

Virtual events may be new for your organization, so we've compiled a final list of best practices to make sure you make the most of it! As seasoned virtual event experts, or first-timers, we hope this will give you inspiration and new ideas to meet and exceed your fundraising goals.

1. **Remind event attendees to give.**

With in-person galas, there are often lots of times throughout the night when guests are encouraged to give or donate to your cause. With your virtual event, we encourage you to do the same. This task will likely fall onto the Emcee to add throughout the evening. Remember, different parts of your event will resonate with different attendees, so keep giving the top of mind for everyone, and have different options to give available like silent auctions, live auctions, pledging, donations, and raffle tickets.

2. **Add a live thermometer event attendees can see throughout your event.**

Add it as a set screen visible at all times during the event, or keep referring back to it during the gala. This visual reminder to give will add a sense of urgency and comradery to meet your fundraising goal.

3. **Make it easy to give.**

Through your silent auction and donations, make it easy for your participants to give. Have links readily available, and simplify the process by hosting it all on one fundraising page so your guests aren't stuck searching!

These best practices will allow you to raise more for your cause, and when seamlessly integrated into your virtual gala, will feel natural to your event attendees.

We know that hosting virtual events may be unknown and bring new challenges to your organization, but we hope this guide will provide a starting point for you. Our team of fundraising specialists have specifically created these resources for you to support your fundraising needs. If you have any questions about any of the information provided above, [please connect with our team](#) and we'd be glad to support you.

We are also currently offering free live calls with our team to discuss your virtual events, and how Trellis can support. [Sign up](#) for the next one here.

Or for support using the Trellis platform, sign up for a Support Drop-In call [here](#).

We've got your back,  
The Trellis Team