



# Special Events

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# *SIMPLE ADVICE BEFORE YOU PLAN ANYTHING*

## **1. Keep it simple and repeatable**

Don't try to build a gala from scratch. Start with something you can do again next year and grow.

## **2. Partner up**

Churches, schools, FFA groups, local businesses, volunteer fire departments—these are your power players. Shared events = shared workload + bigger turnout.

### **3. Make it participatory, not passive**

People show up when they're *involved*, not just watching.

### **4. Tie it directly to your mission**

Don't just raise money—help people understand *why it matters locally*.

### **5. Add a clear “why now”**

Seasonal tie-ins (harvest, holidays, back-to-school) make events feel timely and urgent.

## 🌽 Unique & FUN Food-Centered Event Ideas

### 🌶️ 1. Community Cook-Off (Chili, BBQ, Gumbo, etc.)



- Local teams compete
- Charge tasting tickets
- Let local businesses sponsor

👉 This is a rural crowd favorite

### 🍷 2. "Pie Auction" or Dessert Auction Night



- Homemade pies, cakes, and desserts auctioned live
- Add storytelling about who made them
- Can get surprisingly competitive (and profitable)

👉 Low cost, high charm.

### 🚗 3. Farm-to-Table Supper (Local Producers Spotlight)



### 📺 4. "Can-Do Challenge" Food Drive Competition

- Partner with local...
- Highlight where...
- Sell tickets for a s...



👉 This builds pride i

- Schools, businesses, or churches compete
- Bonus points for creative displays (structures made of cans!)
- Award a traveling trophy

👉 Great for awareness + inventory, not just cash.

## 🍲 5. Soup Night



## 🚚 6. "Fill the Truck" Live Event



- Simple soup +
- Guests donate
- Can include h

👉 Warm, meanin

- Park a truck at a local store or event
- Encourage real-time donations
- Add music, live updates, and goals

👉 Visual + urgent = people respond.

## 🔍 7. Breakfast for a Cause (Pancakes, Biscuits & Gravy)



### 💡 Final Thought (This Matters Most)

Don't chase "fancy."

Chase **connection + consistency.**

A simple chili cook-off done well every year will outperform a one-time "big idea" that burns your team out.

If you want, I can help you:

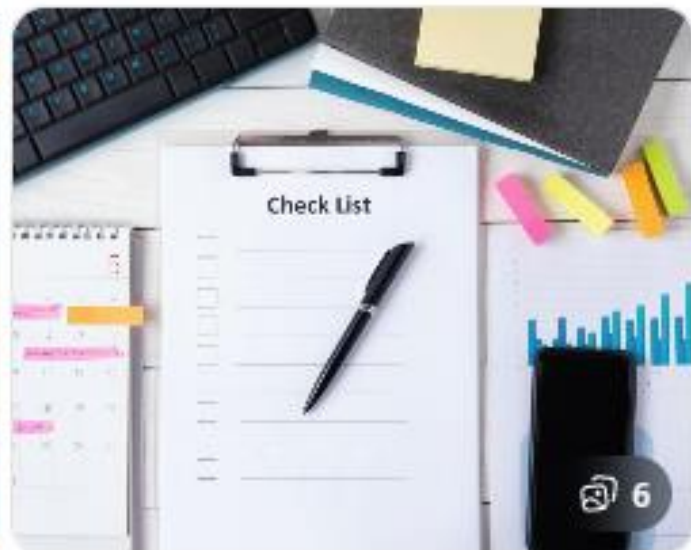
- ↳ Pick the best 1–2 events for your specific town
- ↳ Build a simple timeline + budget
- Or ↳ write sponsorship asks to local businesses

That's where these events really start to scale.

# EVENT TIMELINE



## 10–12 Weeks Out: Foundation Phase



- Set **date, time, and location**
- Define **goal** (fundraising amount, awareness, food drive, etc.)
- Build a **small planning team** (don't overcomplicate this)
- Outline budget (even if it's basic)
- Decide:
  - Entry fees
  - Ticket pricing
  - Sponsorship levels

👉 If you don't lock this in early, everything else gets messy.

## 8–10 Weeks Out: Secure & Recruit



- Start **securing sponsors**
- Recruit **cook teams**
- Line up **judges** (local personalities = bonus)
- Confirm major needs:
  - Tables, tents, permits (if needed)
- Create a **simple event flyer + social graphics**

 This is where momentum starts—or stalls.

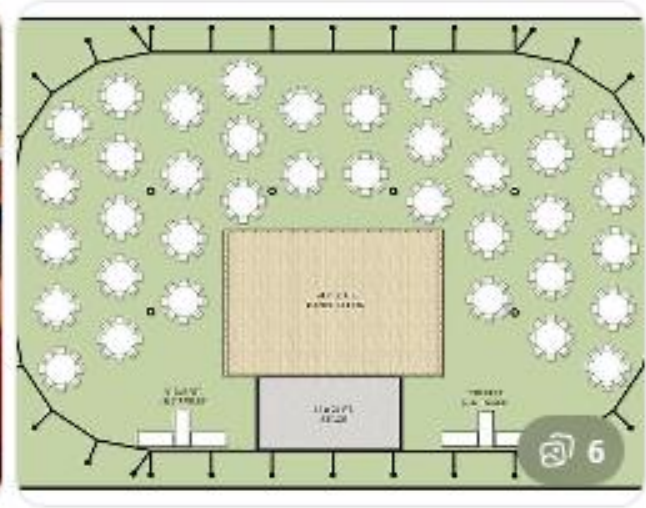
## 📅 6–8 Weeks Out: Promote & Build Buzz



- Launch social media promotion
- Email your donor + partner lists
- Push to:
  - Local radio
  - Churches
  - Schools
- Highlight:
  - Teams competing
  - Sponsors
  - What funds support (**this matters most**)

👉 Don't just say "chili cook-off"—say *why it matters locally*.

## 📅 3-4 Weeks Out: Lock It In

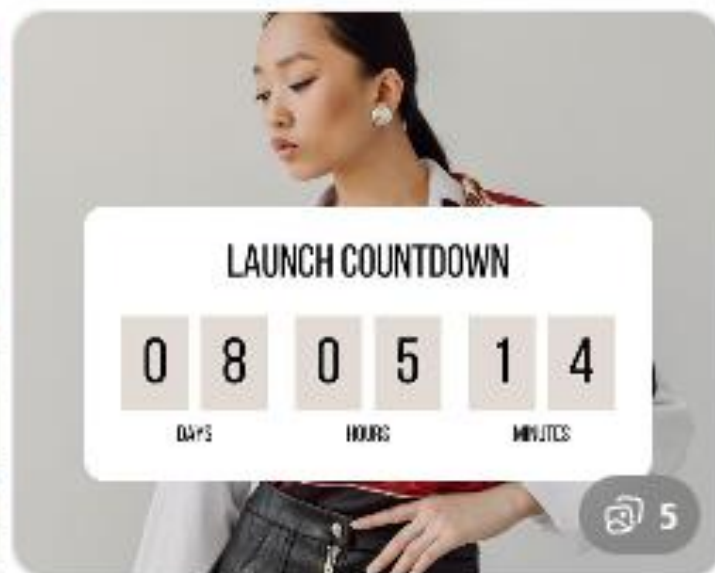


- Finalize:
    - Number of teams
    - Judges
    - Volunteers
  - Create **event-day schedule**
  - Order/confirm:
    - Supplies
    - Signage
    - Awards/trophies
  - Assign **clear roles** (who owns what)
- 👉 This is where good events separate from chaotic ones.

# 📅 1 Week Out: Final Push

EVENT PACKING LIST | [Event Name]  
Updated [Date]  
Access by [Name]

✓	ITEM	PREP	ENV	PACK	STING
	Colligations				
	• [Item 1]				
	• [Item 2]				
	• [Item 3]				
	• [Item 4]				
	• [Item 5]				
	• [Item 6]				
	• [Item 7]				
	• [Item 8]				
	• [Item 9]				
	• [Item 10]				
	• [Item 11]				
	• [Item 12]				
	• [Item 13]				
	• [Item 14]				
	• [Item 15]				
	• [Item 16]				
	• [Item 17]				
	• [Item 18]				
	• [Item 19]				
	• [Item 20]				



- Push **daily reminders** on social
  - Confirm all participants (teams, judges, sponsors)
  - Prep materials:
    - Tickets
    - Voting supplies
    - Donation stations
  - Walk through the event mentally:
    - Arrival → setup → flow → cleanup
- 👉 If something feels unclear now, it *will* be a problem on event day.



## Event Day: Execute & Enjoy



- Arrive early (earlier than you think)
  - Keep it **simple and fun**
  - Take LOTS of photos/videos
  - Thank sponsors publicly
  - Make donating easy and visible
- 👉 Energy matters more than perfection.

## 📅 1-3 Days After: Follow-Up (Most People Skip This—Don't)



- Post **thank yous + results** on social
- Send **personal thank-you emails**
- Share:
  - Amount raised
  - Impact (meals provided, etc.)
- Do a **quick team debrief**:
  - What worked
  - What didn't

👉 This is how you turn a one-time event into a *repeatable success*.

## Real Talk (This Will Save You Headaches)

- Don't overbuild your first event—simple wins
- Focus on 3 things only:
  1. Great teams
  2. Strong community turnout
  3. Clear mission message

If you nail those, everything else is extra.

# DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1. Does anyone at your table have a successful event they can share and what made it work?**
- 2. Who could you partner with in your area, and who might be a good fit to sponsor your event?**

# Presenters

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What is some good advice for small, rural food pantries wanting to have a special event? What are some unique food related special events they could host?

You don't need a big budget or a huge population to pull off a great event—you need **connection, creativity, and a clear purpose**. In small, rural communities, the advantage is *relationships*. Lean into that. The best events feel local, personal, and meaningful—not overly polished.

Here's how to think about it—and some ideas that actually work:

What is a good tentative timeline when developing a special event, such as a chili cook-off?

If you want a chili cook-off (or any small event) to actually run smoothly—and not stress your team out—you need a **simple, disciplined timeline**. Most people underestimate how early you need to start.

Here's a realistic, no-nonsense timeline that works well for small to mid-size nonprofit events:

### 10–12 Weeks Out: Foundation Phase



# **Session 4: Special Event Fundraising**

- 1. Share a successful event your site hosted. What made it work?**
- 2. Who might be a good fit to sponsor an event at your site? Why?**

