



## **Golf Tournament Planning**

a step by step guide by Judy Knelly, Tournament Planner,  
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# Introduction

So you've been asked to run a golf tournament. Maybe your employer is sponsoring a company outing, or you are on the board of a charity that hopes to raise funds for your daughter's softball team needs new uniforms and you've been elected to raise money to make them the best dressed team in the league. Whatever the case may be, YOU have accepted the challenge of putting together a team of volunteers, finding sponsors & golfers and coordinating a full day of golf, contests, prizes, food and fun. DON'T PANIC! With a little help and planning, your event can be very successful and we want to help.

As Special Events Coordinator here at Sugarloaf Golf Club I have called on my 40+ years of experiences in the golf industry to put together a series of articles to make your job easier. I'll cover topics like these:

- Getting started ~ who's in charge?
- Put together a great team of volunteers
- Keep them motivated!
- Choosing a venue
- How to promote your event & attract golfers
- Finding sponsors
- Formats, games & contests
- The big day is here
- That's a wrap!

# First Things First

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**Your Goals:** RAISE MONEY, get organized, choose committees, gather information

Before you schedule your first official meeting you will need to do some homework. A little planning can start you off on the right foot and clearly define the contributions you expect from your committee members. I recommend putting your goals on paper and giving your volunteers a preliminary outline of your strategy. It might look something like this:

## Tournament Planning Outline

### Select Committees

**Sponsorship Committee** - charged with determining sponsorship opportunities, preparing sponsorship letter, distributing letter to all volunteers, obtaining a large prize & insurance (if desired), collecting sponsorships & gifts-in-kind, follow up calls, signage, post-tournament sponsor thank you letter, assisting event committee with distributing event flyers, finding golfers & participating in day-of-event volunteer needs.

**Event Committee** - charged with preparing & distributing event flyers, signing up golfers, pre-tournament press releases, photos & post-tournament press release, obtaining small gifts or tee shirts as handouts to golfers, setting up volunteers for tournament prep, registration and spotting on holes for on-course contests, sending thank you notes to golfers & assisting sponsorship committee with obtaining sponsors, door prizes and gifts.

Communication is key!

**Two committee chairs act as Secretary & Treasurer for event.** Treasurer collects all donations & entry fees, pays all expenses and prepares reconciliation for final tournament meeting after the event. Secretary prepares email list and communicates with all volunteers regarding progress of entries & sponsorship and coordinates press releases.

Email list - all committee members should be kept abreast of progress with a weekly email. All updates & information should be directed to you as (tournament chair) and you will send weekly email updates to all volunteers.

### Select golf course and date

This outline should really help get everyone off on the right track. Volunteers are usually excited to be a part of a fundraising event and getting them organized at the early planning stages is key (we'll talk about keeping volunteers motivated in a later installment). You will need to select your chairpersons carefully. Probably the best advice is to look for organized people with lots of contacts. You should also make sure your volunteers have something to offer besides manning a registration table. Make sure they are willing to talk your tournament up to neighbors, relatives and coworkers. They shouldn't be timid about asking everyone they know for sponsorships, donations and players!

They should be available to attend planning meetings and help during crunch time the last two weeks leading up to the tournament.

### **Remember Your Committee & Volunteer Goals:**

## **#1 GOAL IS TO RAISE FUNDS!**

The last task you should do before your preliminary meeting is to contact several golf courses. Here are some things to consider:

What will our golfers be willing to pay for an entry fee? Green fee & cart packages can vary substantially between weekdays and weekends. Ask the courses if they offer packages or discounts for off-peak times.

Will you have lunch, beverages, prizes & an awards banquet? Ask for those prices.

What dates are you considering? Ask the course for several options if you aren't tied into a specific date.

What services does the course provide? What additional charges can you expect? Many courses offer comprehensive planning assistance and others don't. Be careful ~ some courses charge for ancillary services such as scorekeeping and facility fees for banquet rooms.

**Be specific.** Communicating your needs and expectations with the golf course event planner is important.

Once you have gathered this information, you should narrow the choices to two or three courses based on which fit your needs the best. I would urge you to read all the articles in this Tournament Planning series **BEFORE** you have your first meeting. Future articles will cover topics such as how to choose a venue how to keep volunteers motivated, and how to secure & retain sponsors.

# Putting Your Team Together

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We all have strengths and weaknesses and it's your job to exploit those traits in your volunteers. In my previous article (First Things First) I suggested you keep your committee structure fairly simple by keeping your management team at you and two department heads. Sounds like you're running a business, doesn't it? Choose your chairs carefully you need two people you are comfortable working with and who will persevere. Remember, this isn't a once and done type of fundraiser and your volunteers will be expected to get out in the community and muster up all the contacts they have. Many things need to fall into place to make a successful event and your first priority should be to draft solid hard-working team members.

## **Sponsorship Team**

- Determine sponsorship opportunities
- Prepare sponsor letter
- Organize volunteers to solicit businesses & individuals
- Be sure volunteers follow-up
- Determine if a hole-in-one contest will be part of the event
- Secure insurance or sponsorship for above
- Collect gifts
- Coordinate any advance ticket sales for prizes/raffles
- Secure sponsor signs & advertiser program
- Price & order any player gifts (tee-shirts, etc)
- Send sponsor thank you letters

## **Tournament Team**

- Determine format & price
- Prepare tournament flyers
- Distribute flyers to volunteers
- Determine on course contests and secure volunteers
- Prepare a day of schedule
- Secure volunteers for registration
- Secure volunteers for set-up & cleanup
- Coordinate registration with golf course
- Determine when payment is expected
- Prepare goody bags
- Send player thank you letters with save the date cards for next year's event

Once you have chosen committee chairs, give them clearly defined objectives. Here are a few ideas:

### **Sponsorship Team Chair/Tournament Team Chair**

- Assign tasks with clear objectives
- Communicate progress to you
- Reconcile income and expenses

Consider one more position that can make a huge difference in every aspect of your event planning. Call on one of your volunteers who is computer literate and has the time to coordinate your email lists and do any online planning. This person should work with your golf course planner to coordinate joint efforts at internet marketing, we also recommend you to check <https://www.salesforce.com/blog/2019/04/improve-customer-service-care.html>, to find the best strategies to grow your business online. I think this could make the difference in so many areas of your planning, from finding sponsors, keeping in touch with your committees and registering more golfers.

### **FYI: You have a few responsibilities, too!**

- Follow your timeline! (we'll provide a sample timeline in a future article)
- Communicate with Chairs/track progress
- Address any committee concerns promptly
- Disseminate information as needed
- Communicate with golf course events coordinator
- Coordinate Publicity
- Prepare documents & final reconciliation of all income & expenses for post-tournament meeting
- Thank committee chairs & volunteers

# Timeline for Success

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I have seen incredibly successful fundraisers put together in six weeks and I've seen tournaments that were a year in the planning fall well short of the tournament director's expectations either in low sponsorship or in number of golfers. This timeline can't provide the manpower you will need, but it can provide some ideas you may have not thought of using (like press releases ~ they are free advertisement!).

## **9 to 12 months out:**

- Hold initial planning meeting with Chairs and key volunteers
- Contact golf course(s), obtain rate & availability information
- If possible, regarding contests they will man
- Begin gathering supplies (cash boxes, tickets, pens, markers, tape, sunscreen, cameras, etc)
- Prepare programs

## **1 to 5 days before event:**

- Contact golf course with list of golfers & pairings
- Have final volunteer meeting & wrap up last minute entries & sponsors
- Gather all supplies
- Prepare notes for banquet (Thank you's!)
- Finalize contests, raffles, door prizes, give-aways
- Make any gift baskets for door prizes or raffles
- Print Rules sheets

## **The day of:**

- Possible breakfast meeting at course with volunteers
- Make sure all jobs are covered
- Set up registration area
- Put up signage
- Greet all golfers personally
- Make sure contest markers are placed on course
- Make announcements before start
- Coordinate scoring & summary of winners with golf course
- Oversee post-banquet announcement of winners
- Clean up supplies
- Arrange payment to golf course

## **Within 2 weeks prior:**

- Have final meeting/wrap-up party
- Thank all golfers, sponsors and volunteers
- Pay all outstanding bills, prepare final written accounting
- Prepare letter to editor thanking community publically
- Secure venue & date for next year's event

This list probably looks daunting at first glance, but you'll notice a common theme ~ communicate, communicate, communicate

# Motivate Your Volunteers

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**Positive feedback:** Weekly emails are a great way to keep your volunteers informed. Let them know how many sponsorships have been secured and how many golfers have signed up. Recognize individual or group accomplishments. Stay positive and motivated yourself! Share your enthusiasm. Emails are so easy to send in bulk and only take a moment of your time. Set a specific day of the week and time to send your group emails. Your volunteers will look forward to your updates.

**Rewards/Recognition:** A simple thank you note is a great way to let a volunteer know you recognize their efforts to make your event successful. Getting to know them personally is good on two levels, it keeps your communication open and, as you get to know your volunteers on a personal level, you can better determine if their talents are being used in the best possible manner. When you schedule press release photos, include several volunteers in the photo and accompanying news article.

**Be available to your volunteers :** Communicate If a volunteer calls or emails you with questions or concerns, respond quickly! Making your volunteer's issues your priority is a great way to keep them motivated.

**Food!?!** I know, this sounds crazy, but have food at your meetings! Every major motivational speaker will tell you food is a huge motivator! It can be simple chips & dip, a veggie tray or light snacks or a volunteer breakfast the morning of the event. A few years ago we had a very big fundraiser with about a dozen very active volunteers who all came from out of town. The entire tournament was put together long distance. The night before the tournament the volunteers filtered into the clubhouse to prepare for the big day. The tournament director had made arrangements for a light dinner for the volunteers and when we finished our work, we all took an hour or so to relax, talk out some last-minute details and take a deep breath. As I looked at the relaxed smiles and light conversation around that table, I remember thinking it was such a nice way to reward the people who collectively were responsible for a very successful event.

**Post-Tournament Recognition:** Even though you are probably exhausted after pulling off an incredibly successful event, DON'T forget to give your volunteers the recognition they deserve! Why not send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper and publicly thank your volunteers. Let your community know what the results of your efforts were. Were there direct benefits to your community? This is also a great way to get volunteers for next year! Do you have room in your budget for a post-tournament barbeque, picnic or banquet? If so, thank each volunteer personally and try to mention how important their individual contribution was. You don't have to present a thank you gift to everyone, but sometimes something as simple as a certificate of appreciation for each volunteer means a lot.

**What NOT to do:** NEVER treat your volunteers in a condescending manner. Remember, they are volunteering their time and energy for a cause they feel good about. Keeping your volunteers happy is the key to keeping them motivated.