

Share & Reapply: Spotlight on Success

Inspiring Excellence in AFP Chapters

At AFP Central OH, we believe in the power of sharing success stories to inspire and elevate our community of fundraising professionals. One of our proudest moments this year was the success of our Cocktails and Calamities event.

About the Cocktails and Calamities Event: Our best-attended event of the year, Cocktails and Calamities, is an evening of networking, appetizers, beverages, and fellowship, centered around tales of failure, accidents, crises, and calamities. C&C gives fundraisers an opportunity to present an event from their past where things did NOT go as planned and then detail how they overcame it and what they learned.

It focuses on what can go wrong and what was done about it, rather than just celebrating successes or tips and tricks. C&C showcases the blunders, mishaps, and awkward situations we all run into as fundraisers and celebrates how individuals can weather them in a supportive way. It is informal and accessible, making it a great event for both new and experienced fundraisers. Since we have new speakers every year, the content is always changing.

It remains a time-honored tradition for Central Ohio AFP and is a fantastic way to engage our membership, recruit new members, and build a community.

- **Objective:** C&C aims to develop our membership by giving real-world examples of how to deal with difficult (and even calamitous) situations, illustrate how to apply fundraising techniques, increase the transparency of the profession, serve as a point of comfort for fundraisers who may otherwise feel alone, and build fellowship.
- **Key Strategies:** We employed the following key strategies to achieve our goal:
 - **Work with Local Nonprofits and Volunteers:** As this is one of our chapter's biggest events, there is a lot that goes into the planning to make sure the event is a success. We do not work with any formal sponsors, but we do love when we can choose a venue that showcases the mission of a local nonprofit. For C&C 2024, we held the event at a beautiful event space in downtown Columbus called the Grange Insurance Audubon Center, an environmental 501(c)(3). Another important element of the planning process is selecting and vetting speakers, ensuring that they are there to share an experience, as opposed to a promotional angle. Beyond that, there is a lot of logistics to work through, such as contracting vendors and organizing volunteers.
 - **Take Advantage of Your Marketing Channels:** We use our social media accounts and email marketing service to advertise to our members and online followers. Anyone interested in the profession is invited, member or not. After the event, we follow up with attendees through a survey, which also allows us to continuously learn from previous years and improve the event.
- **Results:** The event has been a massive success for us! We regularly have nearly 100 attendees and are able to showcase a variety of presenters, some of whom are familiar faces in our chapter

and others who are brand new. It allows our membership to learn from their peers and concoct creative solutions to problems they themselves are likely facing.

This year's event was the most well attended monthly program of the season. It was hosted at a local nonprofit which allowed them to showcase their mission. We had dozens of first-time attendees and a handful of first-time presenters. Our presenters talked about "Calamities" ranging from technology failures to interpersonal conflict, to no-show funders. We got rave reviews from attendees and are so grateful to our chapter membership, leadership, and the committee who makes it possible.

Why our Cocktails and Calamities Event Matters: This event provides a friendly, welcoming environment for fundraisers to learn from one another's challenges. It offers a platform to discuss our failures, which is not usually something that people are comfortable doing, but it is an exercise that is essential if we want to improve our work.

How You Can Replicate our Cocktails and Calamities Event: We believe that the success of our event can be replicated by other AFP chapters. Here are the key tips to consider:

1. **Encourage Honesty:** Encourage people to show up authentically, warts and all. We learn the most from our failures and admitting them makes us stronger.
2. **Put Thought into Speaker Selection:** Reach out to speakers with a wide range of experience and backgrounds; blunders can occur whether you are one week or twenty years on the job. Curate your presenters and don't be afraid to coach them on how to run a small group Q+A, and screen their presentations ahead of time.
3. **Keep Attendees Engaged:** We rotate speakers every 10-15 minutes, either with the audience staying seated and the speakers rotating, or with the speakers in different places around the venue and attendees rotating in small groups. I recommend the latter as people are more likely to engage in more intimate settings, especially around potentially uncomfortable topics.
4. **Get to Know Your New and Prospective Members:** These events are GREAT ways to engage new or prospective members; while we all may not fundraise in the same way or have the same professional development or career goals, we all make mistakes! C&C allows us to learn from them, support our colleagues, and celebrate the tenacity needed to be a fundraiser.
5. **Share Your Success:** Once you've achieved success with your event, share your results, best practices, and lessons learned with other chapters and the AFP community.

Get Started Today: We encourage you to consider adopting a similar event to make a positive impact on your chapter and community. Together, we can continue to elevate the fundraising profession and create lasting change.

Let's share success, inspire change, and make a difference together.