

Donation Request Timeline Planner

A backward-planning worksheet for donation requests - what to send and when, counted in weeks before your event rather than dates on a calendar, with worked plans for a fall auction and a spring gala.

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Historically, programs in our directory most often listed lead times between two weeks and 60 days, with six weeks the single most common stated window. That spread is why a donation plan has to be built backward from your event date rather than forward from whatever week you happened to start.

This planner never names a month or a date. Every row counts weeks before event day, so the same sheet works for an event in any season and does not go stale between one year and the next. Print it, write your event date at the top, and fill in the dates yourself - that one calculation is the only calendar work the plan requires. For the reasoning behind the windows, see [how far in advance to request donations](#); for the letters themselves, see the [donation request letter workbook](#) and the rest of our [free fundraising resources](#).

Why backward planning works

A donation program does not care when you started. It has its own review queue, its own approval layers, and its own idea of what counts as enough notice - and the only thing you control is how much runway you leave in front of it.

Counting backward makes the constraint visible. Instead of asking "have I sent enough requests yet?", you are asking "what has to be true this week for the event to have a full prize table?" Those are different questions, and only the second one tells you when you are behind.

Two rules make the rest of this planner work:

- **High value goes first.** A stay, a travel certificate, or a signed team item passes through more hands than a gift card, so it needs the longest runway you can give it.
- **Low value goes last.** Gift cards, certificates, and treat items are the asks a local manager can often decide quickly, which makes them the right way to fill gaps close to the event.

The master backward plan

Use this as the spine for any event. The worked plans further down adapt it for two common cases.

Weeks before your event	What to do	Why this week
10-12 weeks	Set your item wish list and split it into high-value asks and quick asks. Gather your paperwork: tax documentation, letterhead, event details.	Programs that ask for documentation will ask for it at the worst moment. Having it ready once makes every later request fast.
8-10 weeks	Send every high-value request: stays, travel, premium experiences, team items. Start your tracking sheet with the first send.	These are the requests that pass through the most approvals, so they need the runway.
6-8 weeks	Send the main wave - merchandise, tickets, restaurant certificates, product baskets.	The most commonly stated window sits here, so this is where the bulk of your asks belong.
5-6 weeks	Send one polite follow-up on the high-value requests you sent first. Nothing more.	One reminder after a couple of weeks of silence is organized; a second is pressure.
4 weeks	Compare what has arrived against your wish list and fill the gaps with shorter-window asks. Confirm shipping or pickup for every yes.	This is the last week a gap is comfortable to fix rather than urgent.
2-3 weeks	Quick asks only - gift cards and small certificates a local manager can approve. Stop sending anything that needs corporate review.	A request that needs a review queue will not clear one in this window.
1 week	Collect outstanding items, check certificates for expiration and blackout terms, and write your item descriptions.	Terms you discover on event day become a problem for the winner, not the donor.
Event week	Confirm every promised item is physically in hand, and note which companies came through.	Next year's list starts warm if you write it down while it is fresh.

Worked plan: a fall auction

A fall auction is the straightforward case. Nothing in the calendar interrupts the runway, so the master plan applies almost unchanged - the discipline is simply doing each step in its week rather than letting the first month drift.

- 1. 10 weeks before.** Finalize the wish list. Split it: high-value asks such as stays, travel, and a signed team jersey on one side; quick asks such as gift cards, certificates, and treat baskets on the other. Send every high-value request now, paperwork attached.
- 2. 8 weeks before.** Send the main wave - merchandise, tickets, restaurant certificates. Log every request in one place: company, date sent, contact, what you asked for.

3. **6 weeks before.** Treat this as the last comfortable send date for moderate asks. Send one follow-up on the high-value requests from week ten.
4. **4 weeks before.** Compare arrivals against the wish list and fill gaps with shorter-window asks. Confirm shipping or pickup for every commitment.
5. **2 weeks before.** Quick asks only, where a local manager can decide on the spot.
6. **Event week.** Collect outstanding items, verify certificate terms, and record which companies said yes.

Worked plan: a spring gala

A spring gala carries one extra wrinkle: counting backward can land your first sends in the winter holiday stretch, when many programs slow down or pause their request queues. Shift those sends earlier rather than later - a paused queue reads your request when it reopens, and you want to be near the front of it.

1. **12 weeks before.** If this week falls near the winter holidays, send high-value requests before the break rather than after.
2. **10 weeks before.** Send high-value asks if the step above did not already cover them: stays, travel, multi-night trips, premium experiences.
3. **8 weeks before.** Send the main wave of moderate asks and open your tracking sheet if it is not already running.
4. **6 weeks before.** Follow up once on anything unanswered, and fill program gaps - a gala benefits from several reliable certificate-style items alongside the marquee ones.
5. **4 weeks before.** Confirm delivery for every committed item, write item descriptions, and check the fine print on stays for blackout and expiration terms.
6. **2 weeks before.** Last small asks only, then shift fully to logistics: display, bid sheets, and thank-you plans.

Your tracking sheet

One row per request, filled in as you go. This is the sheet that turns "I think we asked them" into an answer.

Company	Week sent	Contact	What you asked for	Answer	Item in hand

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Two columns do more work than the rest. **Week sent** tells you when a follow-up is due without any arithmetic. **Item in hand** is the only column that matters on event day, and it is the one groups most often forget to keep, which is how a promised certificate becomes a missing prize.

Before you start counting

Two things to settle before the first week of the plan.

- **Know what each program actually gives.** Check the company's page in the [donor directory](#) - we track 4,000+ companies, and each page describes what that program has historically offered and where to check its current status. An ask matched to the program is worth more than an ask sent early.
- **Have your paperwork ready.** Many programs ask for nonprofit documentation up front. If your group does not hold its own tax-exempt status, work through the [donation eligibility checklist](#) before week one rather than during week eight.

Common questions

How far ahead should you send donation requests?

Historically, programs in our directory most often listed lead times between two weeks and 60 days, with six weeks the single most common stated window - so plan backward from your event date and send high-value asks first.

Is it ever too late to ask for a donation?

Rarely truly too late. Inside the final couple of weeks, narrow your asks to items a local manager can approve on the spot, such as gift cards and small certificates, and stop sending anything that needs a corporate review.

Should you follow up on a donation request?

Once, politely, after a couple of weeks of silence. One reminder reads as organized; repeated reminders read as pressure, and the person reading it is often a coordinator working through a stack of requests like yours.