

Silent Auction Procurement Checklist

A step-by-step checklist for sourcing silent auction items - the procurement sequence, what to ask each type of company for, a request tracking table, and the presentation checks that turn a donated item into a bid-worthy lot.

Checklists · ultimatedonations.org/resources/silent-auction-procurement-checklist

Silent auction procurement is a sequencing problem before it is a persuasion problem. The items that anchor a strong auction - a getaway, a signed team item, a premium package - pass through the most approvals, so they have to be requested first, while the smaller items that fill the table can be gathered much later. Get that order wrong and you spend the final weeks chasing the one thing that could not be hurried.

This checklist runs the whole procurement job in order: sequence, then what to ask each type of company for, then a tracking table, then the presentation checks that decide whether a donated item actually draws bids. For the companies themselves, start with [which companies donate silent auction items](#); the rest of the library is at [free fundraising resources](#).

Step 1: set the table before you ask

- Agree what the auction is for and how many items the room can carry without the bidding thinning out.
- Split the list into anchors, mid-table items, and fillers, and name the anchors specifically rather than as a category.
- Match the list to the room. A golf-heavy crowd and a school-family crowd want different tables, and an item nobody in the room wants is a gap, not a lot.
- Decide who is asking for what, and write it down, so two volunteers do not send the same company two different requests.
- Gather the paperwork every program is likely to ask for: nonprofit documentation, letterhead, event details, and a named contact. The [donation eligibility checklist](#) covers what to collect.

Step 2: send in the right order

The rule is simple - the longer the approval chain, the earlier the ask. Anchors first, fillers last.

Sequence	Send these	Why in this order
First wave	Stays, travel, cruises, premium experiences, professional team items	The longest approval chains: a general manager, a community relations office, sometimes a corporate office as well

Sequence	Send these	Why in this order
Second wave	Premium products, attraction and event admissions, local one-of-a-kind experiences	Moderate review, and often a form with a fixed review window
Third wave	Restaurant certificates, local services, merchandise for bundling	Frequently decided by a local manager, so they forgive a later start
Final fill	Gift cards and small certificates to complete bundles and close gaps	The asks a manager can most often approve quickly

For the week-by-week version of this sequence, use the [donation request timeline planner](#). The one rule worth repeating: send the first wave the day you set your event date.

Step 3: ask each company type for the right thing

A request that names one specific item is easy to say yes to; an open-ended ask is easy to defer. Use this as your ask sheet.

Company type	Ask for	Worth knowing
Hotel or resort	A one-night or weekend stay certificate, or a room-and-amenity package	Certificates commonly carry expiration and blackout terms - ask for them in writing when the item is confirmed
Cruise or travel company	A voyage or travel certificate, usually with its own booking conditions	The longest lead times of anything you will request
Professional sports team	Signed team memorabilia or game tickets, described by team rather than by any individual	Requests commonly route through a community relations office or a team foundation, often on a fixed review schedule
Premium national brand	One recognizable product that anchors a bundle - home technology, drinkware, outdoor gear, an instrument	Ask the program what it has historically given rather than naming a specific model
Attraction, park, or venue	Admission passes, ideally in family-sized sets	Ticket inventory is date-specific, so allow time for the program to match your date
Restaurant	A dinner certificate, a chef's table experience, or a catering package	Local ties carry weight; ask at the location nearest your audience, outside a meal rush

Company type	Ask for	Worth knowing
Locally owned company	Whatever is genuinely one of a kind - a marina afternoon, a farm visit, a workshop session	Often decided on the spot by an owner, and often the most talked-about lot of the night
Golf club or course	A tee time, a lesson package, or equipment	Pairs naturally with equipment donations into a single stronger lot

Check each company's page in the [donor directory](#) before writing - we track 4,000+ companies, and each page describes what that program has historically offered and where to check its current status. Then adapt the wording from the [donation request letter workbook](#).

Step 4: track every request

One row per request, updated as answers arrive. The last two columns are the ones that keep an auction honest: an item is not yours until it is in hand, and a lot with unknown terms is a problem waiting for its winner.

Company	Wave	Contact	Item requested	Answer	In hand	Terms noted

Follow up once, politely, after a couple of weeks of silence, then let it rest. A quiet program is a pass for this cycle, not a permanent no, and a gracious note is what makes next year's ask easier.

Step 5: presentation checks before the table opens

A donated item becomes a bid-worthy lot at this step, not at the moment it arrives.

- **Every item is physically present and accounted for** against the tracking sheet - no lot on the table that is still "coming".

- **Every description is accurate and specific.** Describe memorabilia by team, and never promise a particular signature until the item is in hand and you have seen it.
- **Authenticity documentation is noted** on the sheet where the donor supplied it. Serious bidders look for it.
- **Certificate terms are printed on the sheet:** expiration, blackout periods, booking conditions, and anything the winner must do to redeem.
- **Any value shown is the value the donor stated**, recorded exactly as given. Do not estimate one yourself.
- **Bundled lots are described as one item** with a full contents list, so bidders know what they are bidding on.
- **Each lot has a number** matching its bid sheet, its display card, and your tracking sheet.
- **Bid sheets carry the closing time**, and the closing time is announced more than once.
- **Photographs of the anchors exist** before event day, for promotion and for the record.
- **Handoff is planned:** who matches winners to items, who records the handoff, and what happens to anything unclaimed.

Step 6: close the loop

Thank every donor in writing within the week, whether their item drew a flurry of bids or a single one, and include what the event supported. Then record two lists while they are fresh: which companies said yes, and which categories of item drew the most competition in your room.

Those two lists are the whole starting point for next year. A warm list, a known table shape, and a sequence you have already run once turn the hardest part of the job - the first wave - into a single evening's work.

Common questions

What kinds of items work best at a silent auction?

Items guests cannot simply buy off a shelf - getaways and experiences, signed team memorabilia, one-of-a-kind local outings, and recognizable premium products. Scarcity in the room is what draws competing bids.

Which companies donate silent auction items?

In our directory, hotels and resorts, professional sports teams, and premium national brands are the categories where high-value items show up, and many of those companies have a donation program page describing how to apply. Locally owned companies are worth asking too, since a one-of-a-kind local outing is something guests cannot buy elsewhere.

How early do you need to request auction items?

Earlier than anything else on your list. 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 - and high-value items sit at the long end of that range.