SUDC FOUNDATION

Hosting a Successful Virtual Challenge Event

What is a Virtual Challenge Event?

• **Virtual challenge events are a great fundraising tool.** They are flexible in design and easy to plan and execute because they are not as logistically complex as live challenge events. In addition, other than the cost of an online registration platform and prizes, there are very few expenses, which make these types of events the perfect fundraising option all year round.

• **A virtual challenge event is hosted online.** Participants are able to join remotely from wherever they are, instead of gathering in person. Virtual events are most often organized around a fitness goal or group activity and, just like a live event, are hosted to raise funds for a charity in remembrance of a special person or to recognize a significant date. Anyone of any ability can participate at their own pace. It can be completed at any location in the time period set forth by the event organizers.

For instance, a virtual challenge event could be a physical challenge that participants can accomplish on their own, such as a 5K run, family fun walk or a long-distance bike ride. Participants who sign up for the challenge register online and simply choose a local course to follow, often within their neighborhood or community. They complete the required distance, upload their personal finishing time and receive acknowledgement from the host. The event can take place over a weekend or a few days, rather than on a single day, which can make it more convenient for a larger number of people to participate.

Planning a Virtual Challenge Event?

• **The SUDC Foundation can help you successfully plan and execute a virtual challenge event.** Pick the type of challenge activity and the date(s) as soon as possible. This will drive all planning leading up to the event itself. Notify the SUDC Foundation of the virtual event and the date as soon as possible so we can assist you in the planning process and provide additional resources to help ensure your success.

Select a small event committee, two or three people, to assist with planning. It is essential that one person (or co-chairs) oversees the entire event. If you are hosting an SUDC Foundation event, the chairperson must be a registered member of the SUDC Foundation and have gone through the appropriate Ambassador (volunteer) orientation. The chairperson should understand the mission and the work of the SUDC Foundation and be able to clearly communicate about the SUDC Foundation's mission.

★ **When selecting the event planning committee, keep people's specific talents and connections in mind.**

- • **Key committee responsibilities:**
  - Managing timelines to ensure deadlines are met
  - Being a liaison with the SUDC Foundation to ensure graphics and platform designs meet standards and to access Foundation resources
  - Soliciting participants, online advertisers and sponsors
  - Tracking all donations, registrations and sponsorships
  - Communicating with participants, donors and sponsors throughout the event.
  - Purchasing custom swag items, with any sponsor logos, to mail to event registrants to wear on the day of the event.

- **Establish a realistic fundraising goal.** This should be a dollar amount that is achievable but is large enough to motivate participants to accomplish. Write a story highlighting how the event will memorialize a loved one or recognize a special day and generate awareness of SUDC while raising charitable funds to support the SUDC Foundation's mission.

- **Create a well-branded campaign page on one of the suggested online platforms.** Is your event going to raise funds for the SUDC Foundation, awareness of SUDC or both? Depending on the type of virtual challenge event you decide to host, there are several online platforms that offer easy set-up, personalized fundraising pages and tracking for virtual events - *Go Fund Me Charity, Race Roster and Run Sign up* to name a few. The SUDC Foundation does not advocate for a specific platform and has utilized all of these services. These recommended platforms provide an array of features that allow you to communicate and motivate participants and donors to reach your fundraising goals. The website for each platform walks you through set-up clearly. You can list the event, set up online registration and accept online donations.

The campaign page should include what the challenge expectation is, how participants can fundraise and why raising awareness of SUDC is important to you. If the event is an SUDC Foundation event, it is essential to follow our branding guidelines. This includes proper use and colors of the SUDC Foundation logo as well as consistent language when describing SUDC and the SUDC Foundation. Account access on these sites is always available to track who has registered or donated. If you need help setting this up, please let us know.

Fundraising with a Virtual Challenge Event

- **Incorporate teams in the event.** Individuals who fundraise in teams often raise more money than those that participate individually. Give your registrants the option to group together (at a safe distance in these current times) as a team. Encourage them to create teams around workplaces, families, shared interest groups or neighborhoods. Teams can set their team fundraising goal, a great motivator for members to engage with one another and to solicit outside supporters. Include incentives such as team-themed T-shirts (with any sponsor logos) or other token gifts for all team registrants and award placement medals to top performers.

- **Offer sponsorship opportunities.** A mutually beneficial relationship between you, the event organizer and a business or corporation which agrees to support the event. Not only are sponsors great partners for generating additional income for an event, they also provide access to a larger group of participants and positive recognition when advertising the event to potential donors. Identify sponsorship levels and benefits that you can offer each sponsor.

> **Virtual events are attractive to sponsors since all the activities and publicity take place on social media. Leverage Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn to promote sponsor content and be sure to include a link to the sponsor's website.**

- **How to approach a sponsor.** Personal connections through family, friends and colleagues are all good places to start when considering what businesses to approach. Look at the lifestyles of the individuals who will be participating in the challenge event for inspiration. What products, goods or services do these attendees frequently purchase? If you are planning a 5K run or long-distance bike ride, consider approaching a sporting goods business, local financial institution or a car dealership. A kid friendly walk? Approach family friendly establishments or toy stores. Provide pictures to each sponsor of the event participants that can be shared on their social media platforms. Continue to tag sponsors in social media posts. Remember to thank them for their support with a card or small token of appreciation.

Publicizing with a Virtual Challenge Event

A well thoughtout publicity campaign promoting registration and encouraging existing registrants to continue fundraising will keep participants engaged throughout the event. Be sure to emphasize the event is virtual so it is clear to all everyone involved and include creative messaging to drive traffic to the event page. Since all publicity will take place online, identify early on which social media channels will be the most effective for the intended audience - Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin or Twitter.

Share!

Different groups of people require different communication messaging, so be sure to not to send the same message to everyone. Segment the participants into groups, then develop a specific publicity plan relevant for each one of the groups. These groups may include:

- Friends and family
- Team organizers/leaders
- Fitness buffs
- VIPs (board members, community leaders and business owners)

- **Ideas to increase online engagement**
  - A video can be a great addition to the campaign's website and a popular way to keep participants engaged.
  - Announce participant milestones through social media channels and shoutout daily motivational phrases to keep momentum going.
  - Record all donations to the donor leaderboard to create an atmosphere of excitement as donations approach the fundraising goal.
  - Encourage participants to connect with their own online community by posting photos on their personal fundraising and social media platforms throughout their entire participation. Encourage them to share stories about why they are participating and inform them of the impact of donations on the SUDC Foundation.
  - Remind everyone to tag the SUDC Foundation and include a link to their personal fundraising page.
  - Continue to post on social media during your event to keep raising awareness and to encourage donations.
  - Post several times throughout the day of the event to push everyone over the finish line.

Important points to communicate to participants:
- **What a virtual event means to them**
- **Why the event will still be a fun and fulfilling experience**
- **How they can fundraise**
- **Expected timeline for completing event**
- **Method for submitting race times and/or other results**
- **How individuals/team scores, awards and social recognition will be communicated to everyone involved**

Concluding the Virtual Challenge Event
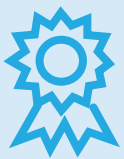
When the event is over, post on social media about the event's success. Send an email to all participants to thank them for participating, announce the total number of activities accomplished, amount raised and the impact it will have on the SUDC Foundation. The SUDC Foundation will provide tax receipts and a written formal thank- you letter for all donations made directly to the SUDC Foundation. However, you should also send a thank-you for very large donations. A handwritten note is best. And do not forget to send top performers their earned award and other tokens offered for those who completed their fundraising goal.

Please call our Director of Development if you are interested in hosting a virtual event. Foundation staff is available to help guide you through the planning process and further explain these resources to help ensure your success. You will be asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) provided by the SUDC Foundation prior to using the SUDC Foundation's name and logo. We share these MOUs to ensure your event closely aligns with the Foundation's brand, vision, mission and value proposition.

We look forward to working with you. Together, we will find an answer. ⭐