

**Raise**<sup>®</sup>  
2025

# The Show Must Go On:

*Disaster-Proofing Your Fundraising Events*

Presented by A.J. Steinberg, CFRE  
of Queen Bee Fundraising



# Welcome

A.J. Steinberg, CFRE

Principal of Queen Bee Fundraising



# About A.J. Steinberg, CFRE



- I have been a professional event producer since 1999
- I have produced over 100 successful events
- I've raised millions of dollars for some great organizations
- I have been through a lot of disasters in the past 20 years

# What we'll cover here...

- Understanding the Impact of Disasters on Events
- Making the Critical Decision: Postpone or Cancel?
- Crisis Communication
- Supporting Your Community & Organizations
- Building Long-Term Resilience for Future Crises

# This is a safe space...

...to learn about options and get professional expertise on cancelling or postponing fundraising events.



# Understanding the Impact of Disasters on Events & Fundraising

# Disasters are a part of event planning

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9/11

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Local terrorism

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Stock market plunge

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COVID

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Earthquakes

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Devastating Fires



# Making the Critical Decision: Postpone or Cancel?

# Sometimes the decision is out of your hands

- Your venue is impacted
- Your organization's infrastructure is impacted
- A large contingent of your support base is impacted
- The time frame is too close to be able to decide

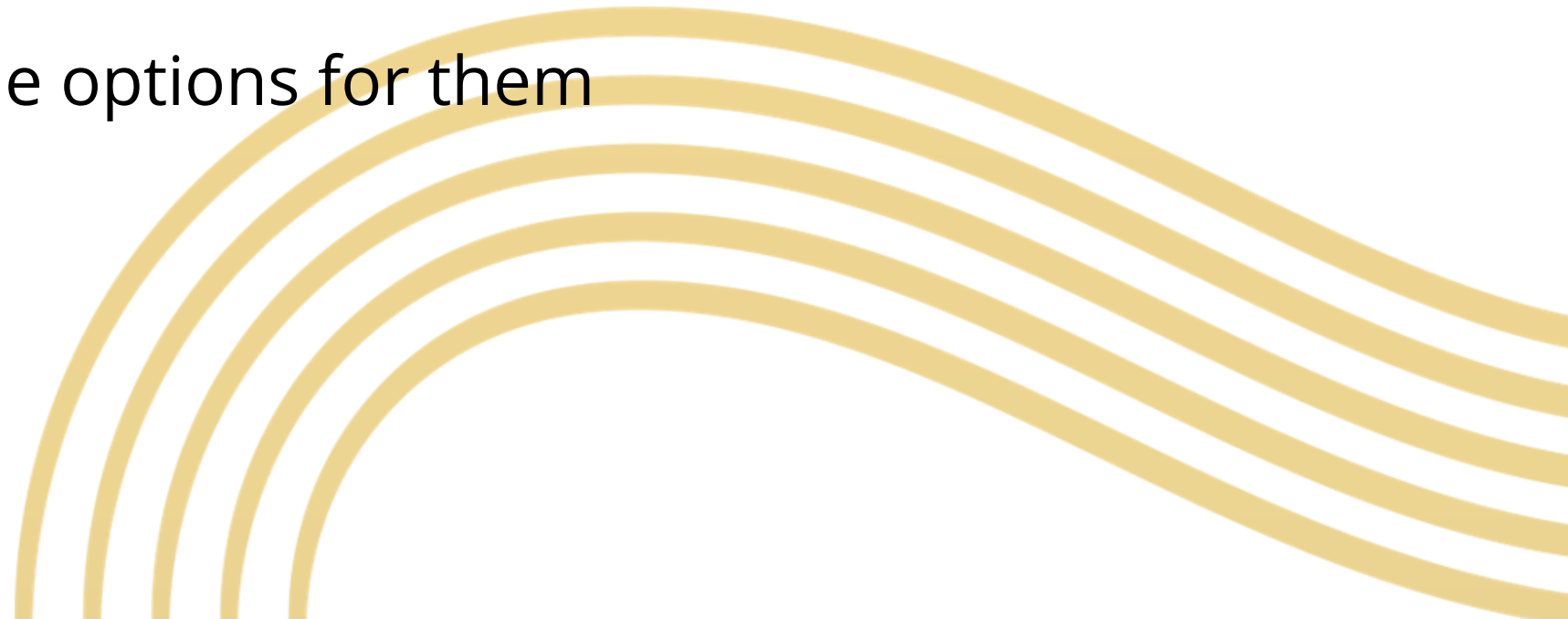


# How is the decision made?

1. Internal assessment and discussion
2. Board discussion
3. Key stakeholder discussions individually

# Discussing the decision with your Board

- Have all your ducks in a row before meeting with them
- Have an advocate for your choice of decision
- Clearly lay out the options for them



# Reasons to postpone or cancel

- Dire community impact
  - Your organization offices are directly impacted
  - Venue is impacted and won't be available
- Community sensitivity
  - Your supporter's levels of impact and empathy
  - Your committee & board's levels of impact and empathy
- Honoree, speaker, and vendor availability
  - An important element of your event is no longer available



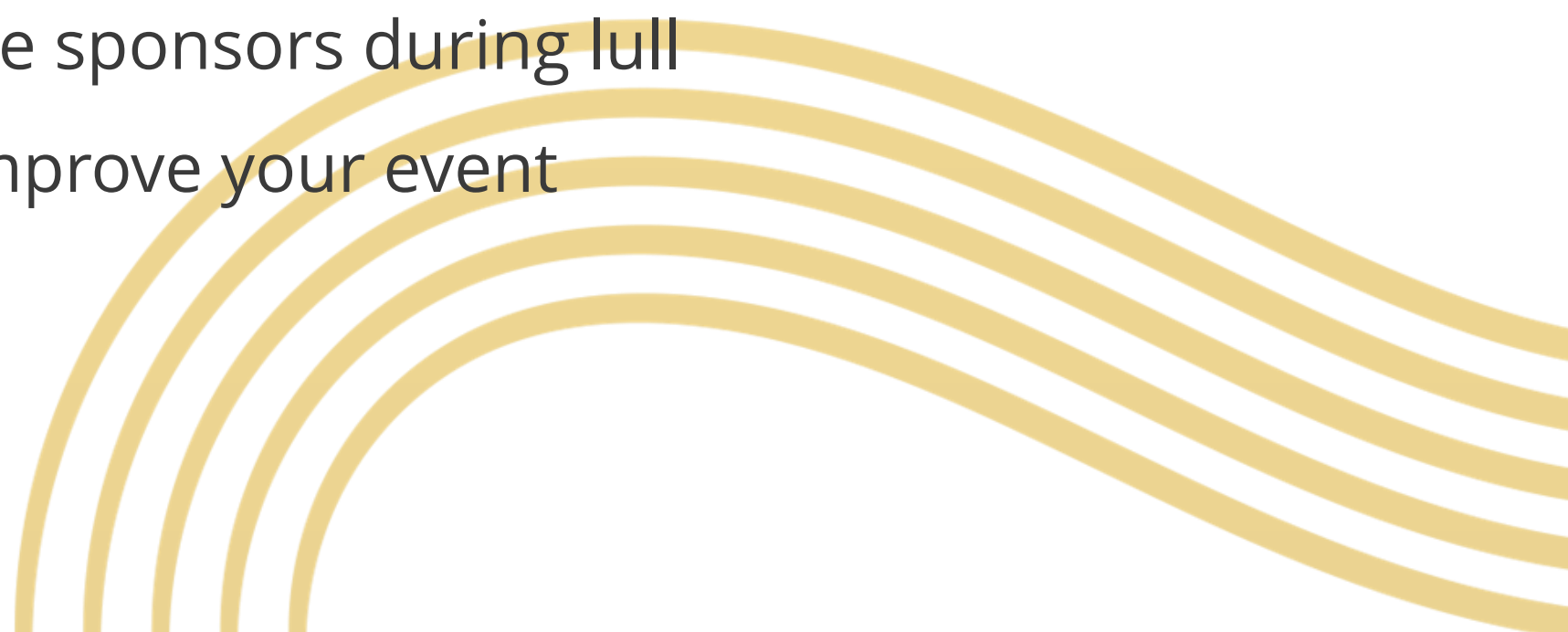
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# If you decide to postpone

- When would be new optimal date
- Will venue & vendors & speakers be available
- Will guests and sponsors stay on board
- What will your new messaging be

# If you must postpone consider...


- Pivoting your messaging
- Staying engaged with guests
- How to promote sponsors during lull
- How you can improve your event



# If you decide to cancel

- Check what your insurance covers
- Offer guests an option to donate rather than refund
- What can you offer of value to sponsors
- How will you keep in touch with guests and sponsors

# If you must cancel, consider...

- Printing the tribute book digitally
  - Putting your auction online
  - Lining up a virtual fundraiser
  - Calling loyal supporters to check in
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# In the future...

- Include a cancellation clause as a part of your ticket
- Look carefully at venue and vendor cancellation clauses
- Have written protocols to help guide you
- Look into getting event insurance

# Crisis Communication



# Crisis Communication - why it matters

- Communication preserves trust and credibility
- Helps prevent panic, confusion, and misinformation
- Keeps donors, attendees, and stakeholders engaged

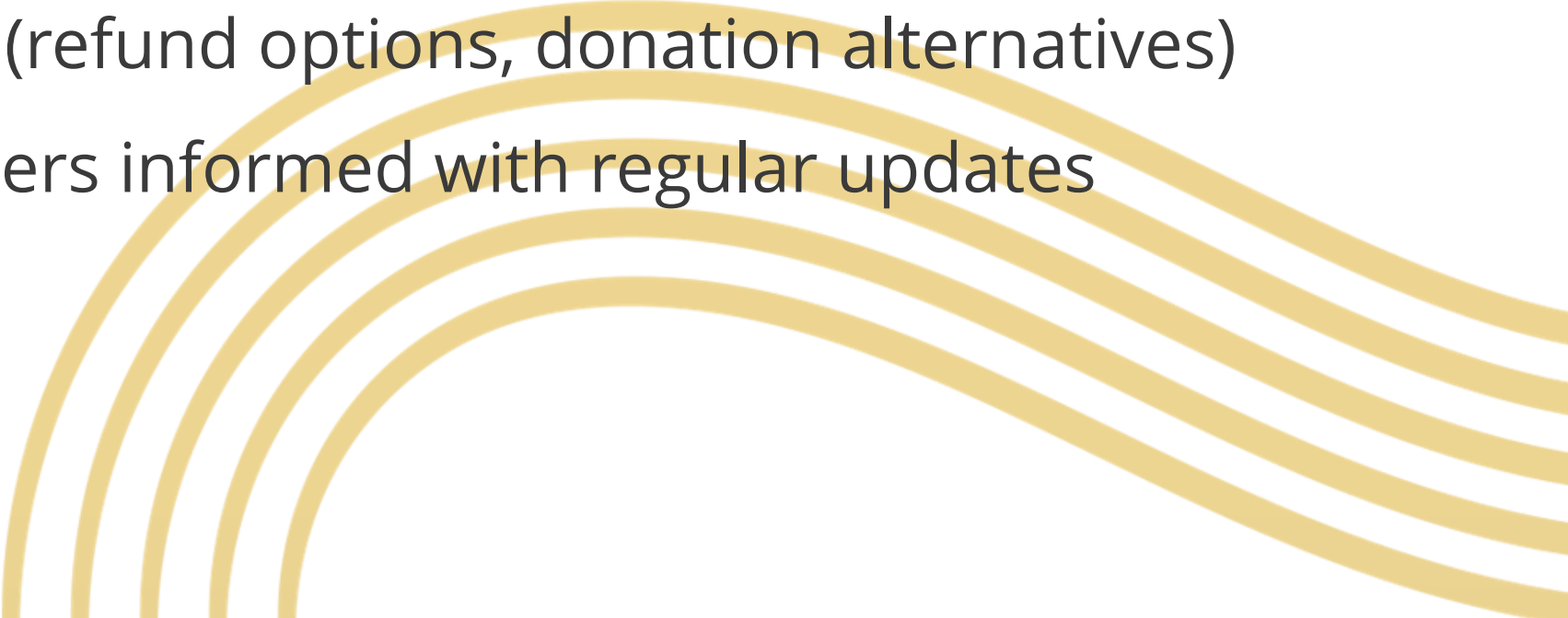


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# The First 24 Hours– immediate priorities

- Acknowledge the situation
- Be transparent about what the crisis' impact
- Show empathy and provide next steps
- Provide initial updates
- Let people know you're working on a plan

# What to say in a crisis

- Express concern and empathy for those affected
  - Be clear about the decision to cancel/postpone
  - Offer solutions (refund options, donation alternatives)
  - Keep stakeholders informed with regular updates
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## Sample Event Postponement Messaging

### *Fire or Earthquake*

“Due to the [recent disaster], we have made the difficult decision to postpone [event name], which was originally scheduled for [date]. **Our hearts go out to everyone affected by this crisis, and our top priority is the safety and well-being of our attendees, staff, and community.**”

We appreciate your understanding and patience as we work to determine a new date. We will provide updates as soon as possible and remain committed to coming together when the time is right.

**Thank you for your continued support during this challenging time.** If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to [contact information].”

## Sample Event Postponement Messaging

### *COVID or Pandemic*

“Due to the ongoing impact of [COVID-19/pandemic], we have made the difficult decision to postpone [event name], originally scheduled for [date]. **The health and safety of our attendees, staff, and community remain our highest priority.**

We appreciate your patience and support as we navigate this situation. We are actively working to determine a new date and will share updates as soon as they become available.

**Thank you for your understanding and for standing with us during these uncertain times.** If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to [contact information].”

# Sample Event Cancellation Messaging

“We regret to inform you that due to [reason, e.g., the recent disaster, ongoing public health concerns], we have made the difficult decision to cancel [event name], which was originally scheduled for [date]. While we were hopeful to reschedule, it has become clear that moving forward with the event is not possible at this time.

**We deeply appreciate your support and understanding.** Though we won't be gathering in person, our mission remains unchanged, and we hope you will continue to stand with us in other ways. **If you would like to support our work, please consider [alternative action, such as making a donation, participating in a virtual event, or volunteering].**

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to [contact information]. Thank you for being part of our community, and we look forward to connecting with you again soon.”

# Supporting Your Community & Organizations

# Supporting your community

- Identify immediate needs of entire community
- Leverage your networks
- Determine your organization's role
- Use your volunteers from event for disaster relief



# Using your event to raise awareness & funds

- Shift ticket sales to become donations
- Host a virtual fundraiser
- Support other organizations



# Messaging tips for continued engagement

- Be transparent about crisis' impact on your organization
- Clearly outline what your nonprofit is doing to help
- Encourage donations, volunteering, or sharing resources
- Keep updates flowing

# Building Long-Term Resilience for Future Crises

# Learning from past crises

- What strategies worked?
- What organizational mistakes were made?
- What can be improved?



# Creating a crisis-ready event plan

- Risk assessment – identify potential threats
- Contingency plans – have a plan B and plan C
- Crisis communication strategy – who to contact first
- Crisis communication strategy – pre-written messaging
- Consider event insurance when planning any event
- Contracts – ensure contracts have flexibility for emergencies

# Strengthening your financial resilience

- Set aside reserves for unexpected event disruptions
- Insurance coverage for event cancellation
- Reduce reliance on fundraising events
- Develop a rapid-response fundraising strategy



# Recap & Takeaways

A blue-tinted photograph of a canal scene. In the center, a small boat filled with people is moving down the water. To the left, there's an outdoor seating area with several tables and umbrellas. In the background, a bridge with a decorative railing spans the canal. The scene is surrounded by trees and buildings. The overall atmosphere is serene and scenic.

# Takeaways & Action Steps

- Be proactive, not reactive – start planning now
- Communicate clearly and quickly – transparency builds trust
- Adapt and pivot as needed – flexibility is key to surviving
- Strengthen financial and operational resilience
- Learn from past crises to improve future response strategies

**QUESTIONS?**

**Time to hear from you!**



**Give feedback to A.J.**

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