

# How to Produce a 200-Mile Bike Event with a Lean Staff

event **360**

**White Paper  
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**Event 360 is proud to work with Test Positive Aware Network (TPAN) to produce The Ride for AIDS Chicago (now Ride for Life Chicago), a two-day cycling event with back-to-back century rides.**

The 2018 Ride for AIDS Chicago had more than 200 riders and crew members, covered more than 200 miles of route, and raised over \$400,000 to support TPAN's mission: saving lives and empowering those affected by HIV/AIDS and related illnesses.

This year, we challenged ourselves to simplify the event execution, so that the ride could be more cost efficient and managed by a small, lean team. Our goal is always to help our clients bring in more money for their mission, while still producing a safe, fun, and logistically-sound event. We achieved that goal and now we're sharing the lessons we learned in an effort to help you, too.

Below are five things you can do to execute your next fundraising event safely and seamlessly while working with a lean staffing model.

## 1 Engage the Right Volunteers

Executing a logistically-complicated event with limited staff doesn't have to mean producing your event with a smaller team overall. Supplement your staff with dedicated volunteers and empower those volunteers by providing proper training and delegating important tasks. For a more complex event, consider dividing your volunteers into two categories: crew members and day volunteers. Your crew members are a true extension of your staff team. They are your most loyal and trusted supporters and are involved long before event day. They may have special skills or receive more extensive training, and thus fill more critical roles like medical support and route safety. Day volunteers are important, too, but their participation starts and ends on event day and their roles are learned more quickly and require less skill. These types of roles include helping at check-in or serving snacks on the route. When all three teams—staff, crew, volunteers—work together seamlessly, you have the resources you need to execute your event.

**TIP:** Think of it like building a house. Your staff lays the foundation and builds the frame. Your crew members do the flooring, insulation, and drywall. Your day volunteers do the interior decorating. The teams contribute in different ways and have varying levels of responsibility, but all three are crucial to the success of the project.

### CREW MEMBERS

- Medical
- Route Safety
- Logistics
- Operations

### VOLUNTEERS

- Check-In
- Traffic Control
- Pit Stop Support
- T-Shirt Distribution

## 2 Look For Efficiency Wherever Possible

Small tweaks to your execution plan can drastically enhance efficiency. On a long-distance cycling event, for example, you may have two route marking teams working in tandem: one team marks from the start to the halfway point, the second marks from the halfway point to the finish. Rather than having a two-person team where one drives and one marks the route, ask your teams to find safe places to pull off the road, park the vehicle, and employ the hazard lights so that both team members can work on route marking. With both people marking the route at once, your teams can move much more quickly and cover more miles in less time. Also, when planning your route, consider repeating sections of the route on different days, when possible. This allows your route marking team to retrieve signs from the day before while setting out new ones. Little tweaks here and there can significantly enhance your available resources.

**TIP:** You may not need a staff member stationed at every pit stop. Instead, consider having two staff teams with box trucks leapfrogging each other down the route. Team A drops off supplies at Pit Stop 1 and helps the volunteers get started, then moves on and does the same at Pit Stop 3. Team B goes directly to Pit Stop 2, then moves on to Pit Stop 4, and so on. When all pit stops have been set up, both teams circle back to where they started and leap frog again as they pack up the pit stops that have closed.

### 3 Be Creative with Downtime

It is common practice to start and end each event day by getting the full team together for a meeting. When you're executing a logistically-complicated event with a lean team, however, you need to break from tradition. Each member of your staff will likely have a very different role and schedule, and downtime will be limited. Be creative about how you build in downtime and breaks. If a staff member doesn't need to be on the route until 10:00 am, don't require them to be present earlier than that just because another team has a 6:00 am start. Let them sleep while they can. Likewise, when your early team has a lull in the middle of the day, let them go back to the hotel to nap, rather than requiring them to pitch in elsewhere. Having a short break will make sure they're rested and ready to go when their next shift starts. Moving away from the traditional scheduling approach may feel counterintuitive at first, but individualizing schedules and making sure everyone has time for breaks will go a long way towards recharging your team's batteries and keeping them engaged through a long day.

**TIP:** You can build the same camaraderie and connection you would normally achieve through start-of-day and end-of-day team meetings by holding a pre-event meeting the day before to disperse necessary information and inspiration, and a post-event dinner the day after to celebrate.

### 4 Develop an Event Day Communication Strategy

Clear and thorough communication is always important, but when you are working with a small team on a complicated event, communication is even more critical. Tell your team ahead of time what needs to be communicated, how, and to whom. Also, keep in mind that if your event is spread out over a long distance, handheld radios (a common communication tool on events) don't always work. At times, people will be too far away from each other to effectively communicate. In this case, use cell phones instead and set parameters for what information needs to be texted to the entire group versus subgroups or individuals. For example, when a pit stop team has finished at one pit stop and is moving to the next, they don't need to text the entire group. They should, however, text the command center and the other pit stop team—the two teams to whom their location is most relevant. Consider your event needs, create your communication strategy, and then provide your team with written instructions and clear expectations.

**TIP:** Set up a mobile command center and assign one of your most experienced staff members to this role. This person's job is to be out on the route in an event vehicle (we recommend a minivan) serving as the central hub and point person, fielding phone calls and texts from staff and volunteers, triaging and problem-solving as needed. This role should be filled by someone who works well under pressure and is comfortable in a leadership position.

### 5 Show Your Gratitude

Experienced staff and volunteers are invaluable when you're producing an event with limited staff, and there's no better way to keep them coming back year after year than by making sure they feel valued and appreciated. Think about what you can do to make the experience such a positive one that your team will want to return next year (and the year after that!). Even when the days are long, the weather doesn't cooperate, and small emergencies pop up one after another, you can still create a positive, collaborative, appreciative environment. Gratitude is all about attitude, so say thank you, smile, give hugs and high-fives, work a little fun into every task, and then say thank you again. And again.

**TIP:** Send handwritten thank you notes to staff and key volunteers within two weeks of the event. If a small token of appreciation, like a framed team photo from the event, is in the budget, include that, too. A little gratitude goes a long way!

# A RECAP: Questions You Should Ask Yourself When Planning a Logistically-Complicated Event with a Lean Staff

- 1 VOLUNTEERS:** Am I recruiting volunteers who will integrate with and act as an extension of my staff team? Do I have a plan in place to train them? Am I prepared to delegate important tasks?
- 2 EFFICIENCY:** How else can I maximize efficiency, both in costs and in time? Where can I replace a staff member with a key volunteer? Are my staff teams working together in the most efficient way possible?
- 3 SCHEDULES:** Am I building enough downtime into my staff schedules? Am I creating individualized plans to allow my team time to rest? Can I organize pre- and post-event meetings to get the entire team together at once?
- 4 COMMUNICATION:** Have I created a clear event-day communication strategy? Have I made plans to provide my team the tools (cell phones and/or handheld radios) to implement that plan? Have I communicated the plan to my team?
- 5 GRATITUDE:** Am I adequately expressing my gratitude to everyone involved? Have I said 'thank you' today? What can I do to make the experience such a positive one that my staff and volunteers will want to return next year?

**You can produce a logistically complicated event with a lean staffing model.**



Still have questions after reading this? Give us a call, we'd be happy to chat!

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