

Walk to Cure Arthritis Volunteer Led Events Kickoff Events

Why Walk to Cure Arthritis Kickoff Events are Important

A Walk to Cure Arthritis kickoff event is a high-energy event that begins your official Walk season by captivating your audience with emotional speakers, empowering stories, an exciting atmosphere, and a powerful mission call to action to help the Arthritis Foundation conquer arthritis. The Walk kickoff should be designed to motivate everyone involved and set the tone for your entire season and event. EVERY interaction with our participants counts – and contributes to their overall experience. The overall experience directly correlates to the financial success of our events. Consequently, it's important to ensure every interaction is positive, uplifting, and meaningful, especially when it comes to kickoffs. For many, a Walk kickoff is likely their first interaction with the Arthritis Foundation. We must make a lasting first impression that will keep them coming back for more throughout the year if we what to achieve our bold goals.

Investing the time and effort to plan a high-quality kickoff event can:

1. Help retain teams
2. Recruit new teams
3. Inspire teams to become more engaged and raise more money
4. Motivate people to make a commitment
5. Help to recruit and retain sponsors, leadership volunteers, and much more

Kickoff Logistics

The first element to holding a successful Walk to Cure Arthritis kickoff event is to find a location for your party. A few things to keep in mind when you're looking for a location:

- **Size:** The location should be big enough to accommodate everyone in attendance.
- **Audio/visual:** If you're planning to show videos or need microphones or other A/V equipment, you'll need to take that into consideration when choosing your location. You want to ensure that everyone can hear the speakers and program.
- **Cost:** Being good stewards of our donors' dollars is critical. Try to get space donated or at a reduced or discounted rate.
- **Geography:** Think about where in your community might be a convenient location for potential attendees. You don't want an inconvenient location or traffic to be a factor in people's decision whether or not to attend.
- **Wow factor:** Think outside of the box. Is there a cool new venue in town that might help draw attendance? You obviously want people there for the right reasons – to kick off Walk – but an exciting location might help round out the great experience.

Recommended Kickoff Guest List

The more people that attend a kickoff and are motivated and inspired, the more successful your event will be. Below is a list of potential invitees to target for your kickoff event.

- Committee members
- Team Captains and Co-Captains
- Lapsed Team Captains (last two years)
- Top fundraisers
- Prospective teams
- Corporate sponsors
- Community leaders
- Anyone you want to get engaged in Walk to Cure Arthritis
- People that have shown interest in forming a team

How to Get People to Your Kickoff

To get people to your Walk to Cure Arthritis kickoff, you must invite them. Of course, there are the more traditional methods, like mailing an invitation, but your strategy should really go beyond that. The Walk to Cure Arthritis kickoff is special, so you should promote it like a special event. Alert the media, make sure your kickoff is listed on online event calendars, promote it on your event website, send out emails to your list, and use your local event social media channels. These are all great ways to appeal to the masses.

In addition to mass communication about your kickoff, also make personal asks. As you're conducting visits to your Team Captains, hand deliver a kickoff invitation with homemade cookies or a Walk treat to plant that seed several weeks in advance. Ask your teams that are already registered to bring someone new with them who is interested in getting involved in Walk. As you're out in the community making cold calls or recruitment visits, use a kickoff invitation as a leave behind if the prospect seemed interested in learning more, or hang event posters at local hot spots promoting your kickoff.

Decorating Your Event Space

Choose a theme that helps make your kickoff event fun and meaningful. For example, you could leverage the feeling that is generated from a sports team for your kickoff events to come together to all focus on the same goal: winning the fight against arthritis once and for all. Then the kickoff event could take on a tailgate look and feel. Below are several items to consider and plan for as you prepare for your event:

- Decorations
- Pre-set items – Meeting attendance cards or Team Captain packets, program, information (possibly in the program) about how the dollars raised through Walk help the Arthritis Foundation save lives, promotional items
- Food/beverages
- Upbeat music
- Screen
- Projector

Preparing for the Kickoff

- Secure an emcee for the evening – someone enthusiastic, passionate, and inspiring. Local news or radio personalities make great emcees
- Make sure your honorees will be in attendance and are prepared to speak
- Ask committee members to wear attire to keep the theme going
- Other fun ways to develop the theme

At the Kickoff

- Have greeters at the doors welcoming everyone as they arrive.
- Have a slide show of pictures (possibly with quotes) on the screen as people walk in that connect back to our mission and create an emotional connection.
- Have upbeat music playing
- Ask committee members to walk around the room greeting people and making them feel special.
- Set a party atmosphere that makes people feel excited to be part of Walk and to support the Arthritis Foundation.

Kickoff Agenda

- Welcome
- Thank sponsors & committee
- Recognize top fundraisers and teams from last year
- Introduce Corporate Chair
- Share goals – fundraising, team recruitment, etc.
- Honorees provide inspiration and motivation
 - Make the ask of those who haven't signed up
- Share fundraising tips
 - Using the mobile app & website HQ
 - Who to ask

Follow-up

- Thank participants for coming as they exit.
- Be prepared to answer questions they may have and be sure to emphasize how participating in Walk and the money raised makes a difference.
- Ensure they have any information they need: contact info, meeting dates, event website, etc.
- Thank everyone who played a role in planning and preparing for the kickoff.
- Reach out to those who didn't attend to share information about this year's Walk and ask them to be involved.
- Follow up with those who did to ensure they honor their commitment.
- Decide who will make follow-up phone calls to interested Team Captains and participants.
- Send thank-you notes to the speakers and any honored guests (mayor, superintendent of schools, etc.).
- Keep the momentum going!