

Step-by-step: silent auction

Great for: Adults **Fun factor:** ★★★★★ **Effort:** ★★★★★ **£ potential:** ★★★★★

A silent auction enables you to be much more creative with prizes and offers far greater profit potential...

Step-by-step

1. **Two to three months before:** Once you know the date of your event you can start requesting auction prize donations via email, phone or face-to-face. Let companies know what sort of prizes you are after and what coverage they can expect in return. If you are fundraising towards a specific goal, include details. Invite parents to contribute auction prizes, too. Aim for a minimum of 10 high-quality prizes.
2. **Three to four weeks before:** Chase up companies that haven't yet responded and keep records detailing those who have agreed to support you, what prizes they have offered, as well as those who turned down your request and why. Start drumming up excitement by announcing prizes on social media. Display the list on the school noticeboard for everyone to see and send out a letter to parents with a reply slip for those who are unable to attend the event but want to place bids.
3. **Two weeks before:** Write descriptions and create images of your prizes for an online auction. If people can't see the prizes in person, it's important to highlight the main benefits and provide a clear photo. For a paper auction, prepare bidding sheets, including details of the prize and the value. Leave space for names, numbers and the amounts bid. Think about your display - if you only have a small number of items, and it's an informal event, attach bidding sheets to a board, or you may want to place the items themselves or photographs on a table with the bidding sheets on clipboards.
4. **One week before:** If many of your prizes are vouchers or have been received via email, print them off and place in envelopes, writing the details on the front ready to hand out to winners. Given that many people will walk away from your event having been outbid, think about giving them other opportunities to support your cause by setting up a table that allows them to sponsor smaller items, such as £10 towards library resources, £20 towards Santa's grotto presents, etc.
5. **On the day:** Check your online auction is up and running and that all links work. Send out a message on social media to encourage bids. For a live auction, set up your display - include a set of terms next to your bidding sheets. Make sure you have lots of pens! Five minutes before the end, announce that your auction is about to close. Once the auction ends, collect in bid sheets and announce your winners - some may already have left, so call them in the next few days to arrange collection of prizes and payment. Explain that prizes need to be collected and paid for within a certain timeframe. Where the bid is a service (i.e. singing lessons) stipulate appropriate 'use-by' dates.

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6. **After the event:** There may be things that, for whatever reason, did not receive any bids or did not reach the reserve price - keep a note of these and let the donors know. If people change their mind about their bid, offer it to the next highest bidder. Thank everyone, and cultivate your donors by sending thank you letters detailing how much the event raised and how this has contributed towards your fundraising goal.

Tips & advice

Legalities: There are no licensing requirements for a silent auction, however you will need to consider the Sale of Goods Act when providing descriptions and stating the value of each item. Parents are providing their names and contact details voluntarily, but these should be destroyed at the end of your event.

Blind auction: If your supporters would prefer to remain anonymous, invite anyone who wants to bid to register for a unique number. Then all they do is write down their bidder number and the amount against the lots. You reconcile winners and award prizes.

Be organised: Get requests for prizes sent out before other PTAs start asking! Write descriptions or set up bid sheets, prepare thank you letters ready to send to donors, and be firm with deadlines. Keep detailed notes for future reference: how much did each prize raise; which prizes received the most bids?

State your terms: Explain that winning bids need to be collected and paid for within a certain timeframe, and that the winner of the lot should arrange collection. If two people bid the same amount, invite them to submit a sealed bid on a piece of paper - the highest bid wins. Where appropriate, include 'use-by' dates. Display your terms next to your bidding sheets.

Reserve price and 'buy it now'! Consider including a reserve price (around 10% of the total value) for prizes with a high value. Offer a 'buy it now' option on some of the prizes - especially those with a lower value.

Be creative: The more unique and interesting the prizes you secure, the more excitement (and bids) you will generate. But people also need everyday services, so approach solicitors, garages and hairdressers too.