

SHOP FOR A CAUSE DAY

A Portland Downtown Event

OVERVIEW

The spirit of giving. Fabulous shopping. Making a difference. These are the hallmarks of Portland Downtown's Shop for a Cause Day – a cherished community event that captures hearts while creating change.

Shop for a Cause Day is designed to raise funds and awareness for local nonprofit organizations while – at the same time – showcasing our vibrant small-business community. To participate in the event, merchants agree to donate a portion of their sales on event day to a selected nonprofit beneficiary. Customers support the cause – and their favorite local shops – by making purchases at any of the participating locations. It's a true win-win for all – and a heartwarming display of how our entire community comes together to lend a helping hand to our friends and neighbors.

The overall goals of Shop for a Cause Day are to:

- Unify our downtown merchants – and the community at large – around a common charitable cause;
- Enhance the visibility of local nonprofit organizations whose work has a positive impact on our downtown;
- Raise money to support the beneficiaries' programs and services; and
- Increase foot traffic and boost sales at participating shops.

Shop for a Cause is held the Saturday after our Tree Lighting Celebration in November and – due to its popularity and success – we added a summer edition of the event in 2016.

EXECUTION

Pre-event: The nonprofit beneficiaries of Shop for a Cause Day are selected by downtown merchants through a simple nomination process followed by voting via an online survey. To be eligible as a nominee, the organization must: 1) Be a 501c3 nonprofit organization; 2) Be based in Portland, Maine; and 3) Provide programs, services, or events that have a positive impact on our downtown.

Once the beneficiary is selected, we ask merchants to officially register as a participating Shop for a Cause location. By registering for the event, merchants agree to donate a portion of their sales on event day to the selected nonprofit beneficiary. Merchants have the option to donate a percentage of their sales or a flat amount.

Registration closes about a month before the event to allow plenty of time for marketing and promotions. In the weeks and days leading up to the big day we:

- Collaborate closely with the nonprofit to ensure effective cross-promotion across our print, online, and social channels;
- Reinforce the why of the event by sharing photos, videos, and stories that illustrate the nonprofit's mission and impact;
- Deliver promotional materials such as stickers, door signs, and counter cards to participating businesses; and
- Communicate regularly with participating merchants, offering "Tips for Success" and a handy "What to Expect Guide."

Day-of: The day of fabulous shopping and fundraising begins with an easy-to-implement 'kickoff party' at a central downtown location. For our most recent holiday Shop for a Cause Day, the kickoff was hosted by a local bank that sponsored the event. From 10am to noon, shoppers could swing by the bank to pick up a complimentary shopping bag, coffee and refreshments, a list of the participating locations, and a Shop for a Cause sticker to wear as a 'badge of honor' for supporting the cause. Even better: guests had the opportunity to chat with friendly representatives from the nonprofit beneficiary – another wonderful way for shoppers to be reminded of the purpose of the event. The rest of the day essentially ran itself – with shoppers and businesses

alike enjoying a lively day of shopping and giving back. A roaming community chorus added to the spirit of the day, delighting shoppers with carols that were both merry and moving.

Post-event: In the weeks following Shop for a Cause Day, Portland Downtown collects and tracks donation checks from the participating businesses. Once we receive all of the contributions, we invite merchants, the media, and other event partners to a check presentation where we officially announce the grand total raised. Suffice it to say: it's a humbling moment when we're able to present a nonprofit with funds that could quite literally change lives.

OUTCOME

Amistad, Inc., a peer support and recovery center, was selected as the beneficiary of Shop for a Cause Day this past November. On Valentine's Day (how perfect is that?) we were honored to present Amistad with a check for \$10,000 on behalf of our 50 participating businesses. Incredible!

Brian Townsend, Executive Director of Amistad, said: "Our organization serves hundreds of community members struggling with mental illness, addiction, homelessness, food insecurity, and other life challenges. The love shown us by our friends and neighbors through the Shop for a Cause event will help us provide the basic needs supports, recovery resources, and community connections that people need in order to reclaim and transform their lives."

The visibility Amistad received was just as significant as the money raised. Thanks to fantastic media coverage, Shop for a Cause shined a much-needed spotlight on Amistad's programs and services, which had recently been affected by significant budget cuts. More downtown businesses, residents, and visitors suddenly became aware of the organization and its crucial work – which also opened up an important dialogue about how homelessness and addiction impacts our community. In fact, Amistad subsequently has partnered with Portland Downtown on the development of a new Peer Outreach Worker Program that will address these on-going challenges.

Other recent Shop for a Cause successes include:

- \$8,000 raised for Preble Street, a resource center for hundreds of people experiencing homelessness (November 2015)
- \$3,500 raised for Portland Trails, an urban land trust that maintains 70 miles of hiking, walking, and biking trails (June 2016)
- \$8,000 raised for Milestone Recovery, an emergency shelter and detox center for people facing addiction and homelessness (November 2016)
- \$4,500 raised for The Locker Project, a program that provides nourishing snacks and meals to food-insecure students (June 2017)

SUSTAINABILITY & REPLICATION

From an administrative standpoint, Shop for a Cause Day is a relatively easy and inexpensive event to implement – making it an attractive option for small BIDs with limited budgets. We recommend starting with a small collective of participating businesses (15–20) and then building upon successes year after year. *See our slideshow for more ideas about how to launch Shop for a Cause in your community.*

Of all the events produced by Portland Downtown, Shop for a Cause Day is a clear favorite amongst our merchants. In fact, business participation in our holiday Shop for a Cause Day increased 25% from 2016 to 2017 – one of our best indicators of success. The event gives merchants an opportunity to support causes that are of special importance to them, as businesspeople who live and work downtown. While Shop for a Cause most often supports organizations specializing in social services, it has also benefitted groups dedicated to preserving Portland's parks, trails, and green spaces. The positive impacts of Shop for a Cause Day are felt long after the event itself. It first benefits our small business community, then our amazing nonprofits, and – ultimately – our community as a whole.