



United Way
Waterloo Region
Communities

WORKPLACE SPECIAL EVENTS TOOLKIT



Bringing the FUN to Workplace Fundraising

Special events help employees see the impact of their contributions and understand the importance of supporting local programs through United Way. This guide highlights a variety of activities that raise awareness, build connection, and encourage meaningful involvement in your campaign.

Choose activities that fit your workplace's needs, whether you're planning something simple, something interactive, or something that brings the entire organization together.

MISSION

To create opportunities for a better life for everyone in our community.

VISION

A strong, inclusive Waterloo Region where individuals and families can thrive.

VALUES

Trust,
Volunteerism,
Innovation,
Leadership,
Diversity



Awareness Events



Impact Speaker Series

The Impact Speaker Series brings powerful, personal stories directly to your workplace, shared by individuals whose lives have been touched by United Way-funded agencies or by agency representatives themselves. Speakers highlight real challenges facing individuals and families in Waterloo Region and share how community programs have helped them move forward. These sessions fit naturally into meetings, lunch-and-learns, or campaign kickoffs, offering a heartfelt and meaningful way to learn about local issues.

Make the Month - Poverty Simulation

Make the Month is an interactive online simulation that gives participants a realistic glimpse into the financial challenges faced by individuals and families living in poverty. Employees navigate real-life scenarios (unexpected expenses, childcare decisions, medical needs, and competing monthly priorities) and must determine how to stretch limited resources. The activity can be completed individually or in groups, and many workplaces choose to host reflection discussions afterward to deepen learning.



Seeing is Believing Tours

Seeing is Believing Tours offer employees a firsthand look at the impact United Way-funded agencies make in our community. Staff visit local organizations, meet frontline teams, and learn about the programs their workplace contributions support. Tours can be offered to all employees or to a smaller group of campaign ambassadors who share what they learned with colleagues.

Day of Caring

Day of Caring is a United Way initiative that brings people across Waterloo Region together through meaningful, hands-on volunteer projects that support local non-profits and those who need it most. Activities may include assembling health and wellness kits, writing uplifting notes to individuals experiencing isolation, or sharing professional skills through virtual or in-person sessions. It's a tangible, personal, and impactful way for employees to give back—consider matching \$10 for every hour volunteered!



Food Events



Bake Sale

A Bake Sale is a simple, engaging way to bring the workplace together through homemade treats and shared generosity. Employees can help by baking, setting up, managing sales, or promoting the event, making it a collaborative team effort. With minimal setup, it's easy to scale to any workplace size while creating a warm, welcoming atmosphere that naturally brings people together.

Coffee cart

This lighthearted game invites employees to submit baby or pet photos while challenging colleagues to guess who's who. Volunteers help collect photos, organize the display, and tally results. Participants pay a small fee to submit guesses, and winners receive a fun prize. It's a simple activity that sparks laughter, nostalgia, and connection across the workplace.



Good Neighbour Barbecue

The Good Neighbour Barbecue brings multiple workplaces together for a shared meal and collaborative fundraiser. Volunteers help coordinate supplies, run the grill, organize activities, and welcome guests. With food, music, and games, it creates a lively block-party atmosphere that encourages connection and engagement across organizations.

Workplace Barbeque

A workplace Barbecue brings employees together outside to enjoy great food, music, and conversation. Volunteers can help with setup, ticket sales, grilling, serving, decorating, and clean-up, making it an inclusive event with roles for everyone. Selling tickets in advance builds excitement and helps estimate food quantities, and involving senior leadership as volunteer chefs always draws enthusiasm. Adding small touches like themed décor or outdoor games makes the event even more memorable.



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Chili Cook-Off

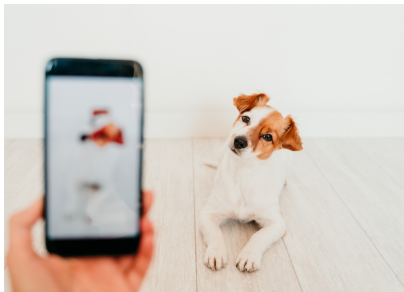
The Chili Cook-Off invites employees to enter their best recipes in a fun, flavour-filled competition. Team members can volunteer as judges, organizers, ticket sellers, decorators, or chefs, creating an event built entirely by staff. Colleagues sample each chili, vote on their favourites, and purchase bowls for lunch, transforming an ordinary midday break into a lively celebration of creativity and spice. This event works especially well in colder months and always sparks friendly rivalry.

Pancake Breakfast

A Pancake Breakfast offers employees and their families a warm, inviting start to the day with fresh pancakes, toppings, and beverages. Employees can help flip pancakes, greet guests, manage ticket sales, or assist with setup and cleanup. Promoting the event early and encouraging staff to invite family members helps create a welcoming, community-oriented atmosphere. With a bit of creativity (themed toppings, fun aprons, or leadership serving), the breakfast becomes a memorable kickoff to campaign season.



Activities and Games



Baby/Pet Picture Match Game

This lighthearted game invites employees to submit baby or pet photos while challenging colleagues to guess who's who. Volunteers help collect photos, organize the display, and tally results. Participants pay a small fee to submit guesses, and winners receive a fun prize. It's a simple activity that sparks laughter, nostalgia, and connection across the workplace.

Casual Dress Down Day

Casual Day is an easy, fun way to encourage donations by allowing employees to dress casually on designated days. Volunteers can help promote themes like "Cozy Friday," "Sport Jersey Day," or "Red for United Way," while tracking participation and distributing passes or stickers. With virtually no setup required, it's a simple fundraising activity that boosts morale, creates a lighthearted workplace atmosphere, and works well in any office setting.



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Casino Night

Casino Night brings employees together for an evening of friendly competition and entertainment. Volunteers help run games, organize activities, manage snacks, and create a lively casino atmosphere. Employees buy in with play money that can later be exchanged for raffle entries or prizes, making it a fun and engaging way to raise funds.

Children's Drawing Contest

The Children's Drawing Contest invites employees' children (typically under age 12) to submit artwork based on a theme such as "helping others," "community," or "kindness." Volunteers can help coordinate submissions, design the display area, and manage voting. Employees contribute by paying to vote on their favourite drawings, creating a heartwarming fundraising moment that brings families into the campaign. Winners can receive small prizes or have their artwork displayed in a prominent workplace location.



Decorate Your Office Door

Decorate Your Office Door transforms the workplace into a vibrant, themed showcase of creativity and teamwork. Volunteers can help organize categories, set rules, collect materials, and coordinate voting. Staff decorate their office doors around themes such as holidays, United Way messaging, community spirit, or workplace values. Participants or teams make a small donation to enter, and coworkers pay to vote for their favourites, creating two fundraising opportunities.

Halloween Pumpkin Carving Contest

This festive activity invites employees or teams to carve pumpkins inspired by themes like creativity, humour, tradition, or United Way spirit. Volunteers can help organize pumpkin distribution, voting, displays, and decorations, while employees pay to enter and coworkers donate to vote—creating multiple fundraising opportunities. The event brings a fun, seasonal energy to the workplace and can end with a lighthearted award ceremony featuring categories like "Most Creative" or "Best Team Effort."



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Karaoke Party

A Karaoke Party turns the workplace into a lively, music-filled event where employees can sing, cheer, and support one another. Volunteers can help coordinate song lists, manage the playlist, handle setup, and run the stage area. Participants donate to enter or request songs, with additional fundraising through pledges during performances. Costumes, props, and friendly competitions add to the fun and help engage all coworkers. The event can be held at lunch, after work, or as an evening gathering.

Mini-Indy 500

The Mini-Indy 500 brings excitement to the workplace with remote-controlled car races set up on a custom track built from office supplies. Volunteers can help assemble the course, manage heats, track scores, and ensure fair play. Employees pay a fee to enter the race as individuals or teams, while spectators can place small “bets” for added fundraising impact. The playful competition creates energy and draws people to watch, cheer, and participate.



Miniature Golf

Miniature Golf transforms the office into a whimsical nine-hole golf course built using everyday materials like ramps, cups, and cardboard. Volunteers can design sections of the course, supervise play, and keep score to ensure the event runs smoothly. Employees enter as individuals or pairs and pay a small fee to compete for the lowest score or fun prizes like a “tacky golf jacket.” The creativity behind constructing the course adds to the excitement, drawing attention from across the workplace. It’s a great midday break activity that requires minimal equipment and creates lots of laughter.

Scavenger Hunt

A Scavenger Hunt brings adventure and teamwork into the workplace as employees search for items or clues that spell out “UNITED WAY.” Volunteers can design routes, hide clues, create hint cards, and run the final prize check-in. Teams pay a participation fee and compete to complete their hunts the fastest or most creatively. The activity can be customized to suit any building or work environment, making it easy to scale. Adding small challenges or trivia questions enhances the fun and deepens engagement.



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Something-a-Thon

Something-a-Thon events, such as walk-a-thons, dance-a-thons, or skip-a-thons, encourage employees to participate in an activity for a set period or distance while collecting pledges. Employees can help track progress, promote pledge sheets, and organize participant check-ins. The event can take place indoors, outdoors, or even virtually, making it flexible for all workplaces. Participants often form teams, adding a strong community-building element and boosting morale.

Ugly Tie or Ugly Earring Contest

This lighthearted contest invites employees to submit or wear their most outrageous tie or earring, sparking laughter throughout the workplace. Volunteers can organize the runway parade, tally votes, promote the event, and manage donations. Participants pay to enter, and coworkers contribute by voting for their favourites, creating dual fundraising streams. Photos can be displayed to keep the fun alive throughout the week. Themes such as “Retro Day” or “DIY Accessories” can give the event an extra boost.



Vacation Day

Vacation Day allows employees to “purchase” an extra vacation day by donating the equivalent of one day’s pay to United Way. Volunteers can help coordinate sign-ups, communicate the rules, and collaborate with HR to ensure smooth implementation. This event works well because it offers significant personal value while encouraging meaningful contributions. It can be promoted alongside testimonials or examples of how donations support families across Waterloo Region. Leadership support helps legitimize and elevate the initiative.

United Way Trivia

United Way Trivia is a fun, educational activity where a different funded organization or community issue is featured each day. Employees answer short trivia questions posted in high-traffic areas or shared digitally, learning about the programs and challenges affecting local residents. It’s easy to run, simple to customize, and can spark friendly competition.



Raffles/Sales



50/50 Draw

A 50/50 Draw is an easy, fast-moving fundraiser that creates excitement across the workplace. Employees purchase tickets for a chance to win half of the total funds collected, with the remaining half donated to United Way. Volunteers can help sell tickets, promote the draw throughout the week, and run the final prize announcement. This event works well on its own or as an add-on to larger activities. It requires very little setup and consistently attracts strong participation because of the fun, low-pressure chance to win.

Win a Parking Spot

Win a Parking Spot raffles off a premium, highly coveted parking space for a week or a month. Volunteers can promote the raffle, sell tickets, and decorate the parking spot to celebrate the winner. The exclusivity of the prize creates excitement and boosts ticket sales, especially in workplaces where parking is limited. The raffle can run multiple times throughout the year for sustained fundraising. It's a simple, high-impact activity that requires virtually no cost.

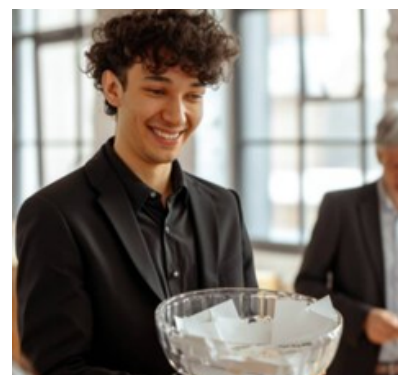


Balloon Pop

The Balloon Pop is a colourful twist on a classic raffle that brings excitement to the workplace. Employees purchase a balloon containing a slip that reveals a prize, while volunteers help fill, label, and display the balloons. Prizes can be donated by staff, leadership, or local businesses, making it a fun and cost-effective activity that's easy to set up in high-traffic areas like reception or lunchrooms.

Employee Raffle

The Employee Raffle invites staff to donate unique items or experiences such as homemade desserts, a lunch with a colleague, gift baskets, or weekend cabin stays to create a thoughtful set of prizes. Volunteers can help assemble prize packages, promote the raffle, and coordinate ticket sales leading up to the final draw. Offering early-bird incentives (such as extra tickets for early pledge submissions) helps boost campaign participation right from the start.



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Silent Auction

The Silent Auction invites departments, teams, or individuals to donate themed baskets, services, home baking, lessons, or personal expertise. Volunteers collect items, prepare displays, manage bidding, and keep the event running smoothly. Employees bid throughout the week, creating excitement and friendly competition, while the variety of items helps boost participation. Local businesses can also donate prizes, expanding the selection at no extra cost.

Ornament Raffle

The Ornament Raffle invites employees to donate purchased or handmade holiday ornaments to decorate a workplace tree. Volunteers can collect ornaments, decorate the tree, manage ticket sales, and coordinate draws. Employees purchase raffle tickets for a chance to win individual ornaments or the fully decorated tree. The festive display adds warmth to the workplace, attracts attention, and encourages ongoing participation.

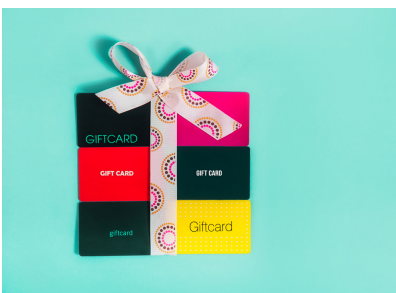


Ticket Giveaway/Gift Certificates

Ticket Giveaways give employees the chance to win passes to movies, concerts, local attractions, or donated experiences. Volunteers can organize prizes, manage ticket sales, and run the draw. Employees buy tickets or earn them by reaching pledge milestones, reinforcing giving behaviours. Running the giveaway throughout the campaign keeps excitement high as new prizes are added and anticipation builds.

Book, Music, and Video Sale

A Book, Music, and Video Sale invites employees to donate gently used items for a workplace-wide sale. Volunteers can sort, price, display, and manage the event, while employees browse and purchase affordable items. The sale can run over lunch or for several days, depending on donation volume. It's a sustainable, low-cost event that encourages recycling, sharing, and workplace participation.



Gift Card Draw

The Gift Card Draw invites employees to team up with a friend or family member and donate \$25 to United Way plus a \$25 gift card for the prize pool. Participants are entered into daily draws, with one name eliminated each day until only one winner remains. The winner receives the full collection of gift cards, while all cash donations support United Way.