



Top Tips on Organising an Event

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Introduction

Organising an event can be a daunting prospect. The initial phase of planning and research is a crucial part of any event, and mistakes or oversights made at this stage can be difficult to remedy later on. Take time to plan well in advance and have a clear goal of what you are wanting to achieve, during and after the event; with good preparation, the task may not be as overwhelming as first envisaged.

The aim of this guide is to provide ideas and tips on issues you may wish to consider when planning your event. It is impossible to cover every scenario in a document of this size; but it will provide a structure around which to base your planning.

Different Types of Event

Whichever type of event you are planning, make sure its purpose is important enough to merit the time and expense needed to properly stage, publicise and evaluate it. Carefully match the type of event that is selected to the purpose that it serves. Ask yourselves: what are we trying to achieve? Your objectives could include the following:

- * Improved awareness.
- * Enhanced reputation.
- * Fundraising.
- * Training.
- * Launching a new service.
- * Rewarding donors/members/supporters/volunteers.
- * Recruiting donors/members/supporters/volunteers.
- * Networking.

Events generally fall into one of the following categories:

Conference

This type of event usually has a very formal agenda with a specific goal in mind. The broad objectives for holding a conference are generally to present new products, exchange information or to hold a consultation.

Festival/Gala

Festivals and galas are more likely to be of a less formal nature than a conference. The main aims of this type of event are usually to: celebrate success; raise funds; promote your organisation; or simply to encourage local participation and enjoyment.

Sporting Event

Sporting events can be one of the most ambitious events to organise. They can take many forms: county leagues; tournaments; or friendly matches. Whatever the sport, or level of skill, the people taking part do tend to be naturally competitive. Even so, sporting events can be a good way of bringing people together and building partnerships.

Before the Event

Plan Ahead

Ideally you will need to start planning your desired event between nine to 12 months in advance. However, many first-year events get started with as little as three months' lead time. Planning your event with so little time is not impossible although you will need to accomplish more in a smaller time span.

The Budget

The aim of the budget is to provide a financial blueprint for all costs relating to the event. The budget should be specific, and include both expenses and revenue opportunities.

The following list offers just a few of the many expenses to consider for your event:

- * Venue hire.
- * Printing.
- * Permits.
- * Insurance.
- * Speakers.
- * Refreshments (although this can also be a form of revenue).
- * Stationery.
- * Security.
- * Transport.

Depending on the type of event you are holding, revenue can take the form of:

- sponsorship;
- ticket sales;
- donations; and
- concession sales.

If you are holding your event to make a profit or to raise additional funds, creating a budget will help identify where your costs lie, what your breakeven point is, and most importantly, how much profit you are going to make.

The Venue

Choosing the correct venue can be one of the most important factors in determining the success of your event – this factor alone can literally make or break the whole event.

Once you have determined the scale and type of event you are planning, many other factors now need to be considered as you select the venue itself.

The first step is to check the calendar and decide on a suitable date when your intended guests are likely to be available. Take into account school holidays, and check your activity date does not clash with other local or national activities of a similar nature, or any major sporting events.

Once the date is selected, it is important to identify a choice of locations. Consider the geographical remit of your guests, try to organise the venue as central to your target audience as possible - a lengthy distance to travel can discourage or alienate part of your intended audience. At the end of the day you want to get the most out of your meeting, and the venue you choose has to add rather than detract from the experience of those attending. Take the time to choose carefully.

The following issues will need consideration:

- * The venue must have appropriate space for the type of event you are holding. Take into account different break-out rooms for conferences, space for side shows and refreshments at a fete/gala, and the size of the outdoor/indoor area for your sporting event.
- * Does the venue have adequate car parking facilities? If not, is there an 'overflow' area suitable for additional parking?
- * Is the venue accessible? You will need to consider the needs of disabled spectators and participants during the planning arrangements for your event. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 makes provision for disabled people to attend, participate in and enjoy organised events. The Disability Rights Commission has produced an Organising Accessible Events document (a weblink is detailed at the end of this guide). Some of the guidance is not applicable to small events but may be of use as a general reference.
- * Public conveniences. If the event is being held outside, you may wish to consider the provision of temporary conveniences, dependent on the number of guests you are expecting. Adequate toilet facilities should be provided for the number of people, including disabled persons, expected to attend the event.

Licensing

Certain types of events will require licences and/or permits. Activities requiring a licence include the supply of alcohol, provision of late-night refreshment, the provision of regulated entertainment and the provision of goods and services in exchange for payment in a public place. If the event involves a parade or procession, a Public Procession Form will be required. Licence and permit applications can be made via your Local Authority, but allow time for the application to be processed and be aware that there will probably be a charge.

Insurance

It is recommended that anyone organising an event needs to arrange insurance cover to indemnify them against civil litigation. This is referred to as public liability insurance and details can be obtained from any reputable insurance company. It is worth noting that many local councils expect a minimum cover of £5million.

Property insurance is normally only required by premises owners. However, the terms of any lease or hire may make your organisation responsible for damage. This may also apply to hired equipment. Depending on the scale of the financial outlay incurred, event cancellation cover can be obtained for an organised event for unforeseen circumstances, such as bad weather.

Health & Safety

The responsibility for public safety rests with the event organiser. Carrying out a risk assessment for your event will help identify particular requirements. If food is available at the event (either free or sold) it is the responsibility of the event organiser to ensure compliance with food hygiene legislation. As the organiser, it is your responsibility to ensure that arrangements are in place for the collection and removal of litter and waste. There are specific regulations around the use of electrical equipment, generators, liquid propane gas (LPG) equipment, fairground equipment and

fireworks, which are detailed on the Health & Safety Executive website (a weblink is detailed at the end of this guide).

First Aid

Careful thought must be given to the provision of on-site medical facilities. First Aid at events is not about 'having a mate who does a bit of first aid equipped with a box of plasters', nor is it necessarily having the company First Aider, appointed under the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981. The completion of a 'Health and Safety at Work' or four-day 'First Aid at Work' course does not necessarily qualify a person as competent enough to administer first aid to members of the public. Organisers must consider the need to use the Red Cross, St John Ambulance or the local ambulance service. This is your organisation's responsibility to arrange. A weblink, for guidance about the types and numbers of medical resources, is located at the end of this guide.

Publicity

Promotion of your activity is the key to gaining maximum exposure and involvement. There are various ways to do this for example: distributing posters; handing out flyers; through your website; direct marketing (ie letters, invitations, phone calls, e-mail support, tickets); and even contacting your local newspapers and radio stations. The local press and radio thrive on local stories. If you can give them an article with a local angle they are likely to give you great coverage. Many papers and radio shows have a free 'What's On' guide.

Display posters in prominent locations wherever you can (it is important to ask permission from the person in charge of the location before putting up your publicity material). Ideas for locations include: schools; community centres; notice boards; local shops; town hall; pubs; libraries; care homes; youth clubs; local papers/radio; newspaper delivery; and churches.

Back-up Plan

What happens if things go wrong? It is certainly worth thinking of a contingency plan, for example:

- have a back-up speaker in case one cancels;
- if it rains, will you be able to reschedule or move your venue indoors?; and
- if the weather keeps your guests from arriving on time, will you delay your start time?

These are just some of the questions you may wish to consider. Remember, having the proper contingency plan in place will save you a lot of time and heartache.

During the Event

OK, it's here! Don't panic. You have everything arranged so all you need to do is stay calm and have fun.

Getting Organised

Arrive early - the more time you have before the event gets underway to prepare and do last minute checks, the more professional you and your organisation will appear to your guests.

The following list is a guide as to the types of checks and tasks you will need to do, depending on your type of event. Although the following list may seem endless, the more thought and preparation taken at this stage will only improve your chances of success.

Before your guests arrive:

- * Set up your signage for the day. Ensure toilets, First Aid Point and Information Points are easily located. You may need to put signs up around the parameter of your venue, or along major

pedestrian routes in the local area, to ensure people are aware the event is nearby (permission is required from the Council if your event is on a public highway).

- * Make sure that all facilities, seating areas and any equipment (ie PowerPoint, sound system, lighting etc), are correctly sited. Be certain that the first aid facilities, fire extinguishers and any cash collection boxes are in place.
- * Ensure all staging, seating, marquees and lighting structures have been erected safely (if applicable) and that certification has been obtained from the relevant contractors as a record.
- * Have a walk around and check that all health and safety requirements are met.
- * Check to see if the refreshments/food are in hand.
- * If people are being asked to register, you need to decide where you are going to do it and who is going to staff a desk.
- * Make sure that all staff/volunteers/stewards have arrived and are in their correct location, and stewards are wearing the correct clothing for easy identification.
- * If you are having litter pickers throughout the day, ensure they have the relevant equipment and know where spare supplies are kept, eg refuse sacks.
- * Finally, do one last walkabout of the site, checking for potential health and safety risks, eg uncontained power cables or trip hazards.

Time to Start

This is it, there is no turning back! Your facilitator or guest speaker should be in position and ready to open/start the event – GOOD LUCK. All your hard work and preparation now comes together, but this is no time to rest on your laurels. Throughout the day keep checking that your guests are alright, that no safety hazards have appeared and that the programme for the day is running to schedule.

In the event of an accident occurring during the day, the names and addresses of witnesses should be obtained, photographs taken if possible, and a report made.

Evaluation/Feedback

Gaining feedback from your guests can be done in a number of ways. The most common are: people attending being given a questionnaire to complete; talking to people; or sending out evaluation forms afterwards.

After the Event

Clearing Up

Organisers are responsible for keeping the event area clean and tidy (free of litter and refuse) while the event is taking place. The organisers are also responsible for ensuring that the area is left free of rubbish after the event. If possible, have litter pickers on duty throughout the day and ensure adequate support is allocated for a full clean up once the event has finished. Many hands make light work!

As an organisation, try and endeavour to have provisions in place to recycle as much of the rubbish as possible, but check first with the refuse collection service that they will be able to collect recycling from you.

Because many of your guests will be leaving the event at the same time, ensure that traffic moves safely by allocating some colleagues/volunteers to traffic duties if necessary. Suppliers should remove all their own equipment. However, you need to keep track of any equipment you have borrowed or hired for the event and make sure people know where to take it to be stored in the short term.

As you wander around it makes sense to clear away any signage you've put up. Make sure you have also cleared away any advertising signage in the local area by the next day.

After all the equipment has been packed away and your guests have left, another inspection should be carried out to make sure nothing has been left on the site that could be hazardous to future users. This inspection will also identify any damage, which may have been caused during the event. If any structures are left overnight, ensure they are left in a safe condition and are safe from vandalism etc. If numerous structures are left, specific security arrangements may be required.

If an accident did occur, a copy of the completed report will need to be sent to the premises/landowner. You will also need to advise your own insurance company. If any accident or dangerous occurrence is reported, action must be taken to prevent any further incidents taking place. Keep a copy of all completed accident forms. Should any person declare an intention to make a claim following an alleged incident associated with the event, you should contact your insurers immediately.

Evaluation

Hold an evaluation meeting to debrief on the event. This will help you identify the positives and the negatives of the event. Keep a record of the outcomes so that they can be noted for future occasions. If there were any problems ensure you write down how they were solved.

Evaluate the feedback using whatever method you choose and take notice of comments made for any future events.

Write a brief report and include any photographs, press coverage etc. Keep this with a copy of your budget and final accounts.

Thank-you Letters

Finally, write and thank everyone who has taken part in the event, no matter how large or small a part they have played (this includes sponsors, volunteers, staff, the supplier of the venue and anyone else who has played a part in the event).

What Next

That's it, you did it! Now you can start planning your next event. Use what happened with your event wisely. Take on board the comments from your guests - it will be an impossible task to change/include everything that is requested, but many improvements will be possible.

Sample Checklist

Event Date.....

Event Name.....

Time	√	Task
At least six months before the event		Determine the goals for the event
		Draft initial budget
		Start researching facilities
Five months before		Set a date
		Decide on a rough programme/schedule of events
		Reserve selected venue

	Contact guest speakers, performers or lecturers
	Research catering options
Three to four months before	Decide on caterer
	Draft promotional material
	Review and finalise event needs (sound system, lighting, parking spaces, security)
	Reserve rental equipment
Two months before	Start to sell tickets (if relevant)
Six weeks before	Send invitations
	Recruit volunteers to help with event (if relevant)
Two weeks before	Finalise event schedule
	Contact local newspapers
	Distribute publicity flyers
One week before	Confirm guest speakers, performers, lecturers, food, security, and venue
Day of event	Meet with colleagues, stewards, volunteers
	Set up
	Clean up
After event	Thank everyone who made the event possible
	Meet with colleagues to evaluate
	Pay bills

Top Tips from the People Who Know

Below are tips from people who have planned events, made mistakes and learned from them:

Mel Welch – Chairman of Investment Panel for Sports Leeds and a former member of Sports Council (GB) Olympic Review Group

- * Think of everything that could go wrong – and then make arrangements to prevent it, if possible, or otherwise to devise a contingency plan.
- * People stop thinking for themselves when in a crowd. The herd instinct takes over, do not rely on individual initiative to solve simple problems. Everything must be foolproof. No level of detail can be taken for granted.
- * You can never have too many signs. Everything needs to be signposted at every possible place – for competitors, officials and spectators.

- * Once the event starts, it will take care of itself, provided you have appointed enough officials of the right quality and experience. Do not have a direct role yourself – that way you are always able to watch over everything and troubleshoot if/when necessary.
- * Always work to this adage: “If it can be done, we can do it. If it can’t be done, it can’t be done”. That way you can enjoy the satisfaction after the event of a job well done.

Moira Hunter – National Association of Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)

- * Keep a list and add to it every time you think of something new. It's probably a good idea to keep it next to your bed, because things you've forgotten will come to you at four in the morning!
- * Check that the delegate details on your database are consistent with those on the original booking forms before sending out confirmations to delegates or lists to venues.
- * Ensure that the venue has noted and understood your delegates' special dietary and access requirements and double check on the day.
- * Use a tried and tested audiovisual supplier for plenary sessions. There's nothing worse than poor quality sound.
- * Have a contingency plan for speakers or facilitators who let you down at the last minute or who turn up late!

NSPCC (National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children)

- * Choose a date and venue. Decide if you will be holding your activity at home, at the office, in the garden or somewhere a little different. Think about what time of the year is best and find out what else is going on in the local area.
- * Plan your theme. This could be a Big Bike Ride, Stop for Tea Party, or something completely original.
- * Invite your guests. The more guests you have, the more funds can be raised. E-mail, phone and send out the details of your event to all your friends, family and colleagues.
- * Get some help. Contact your local shops, pubs and restaurants to donate items, prizes or display posters.
- * Have fun and make it safe. The key to a great event, and successful fundraising, is to enjoy yourself. The more fun you have, the more your guests are likely to give! As well as having fun it is vital that, in holding any event, you protect yourself and others and are careful to safeguard children.
- * Thank your guests. Everyone who comes to your event will be making a difference, so let them know how much they have helped to raise.

Where to Go for Help

- * *Disability Rights Commission – [Organising Accessible Events](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/Pages/default.aspx) document*
Website: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/Pages/default.aspx>
- * *NHS Ambulance Trusts*
Website: <http://www.nhsconfed.org/ambulance-trusts/index.cfm>
- * *HMSO Guide to Health, Safety and Welfare at Pop Concerts and Similar Events (referred to as the 'Purple Guide')*
Website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/index.htm>
- * *HMSO Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds (known as the Green Guide)*
Website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/index.htm>
- * Regulations around the use of electrical equipment, generators, liquid propane gas (LPG) equipment, fairground equipment and fireworks
Website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/index.htm>

* *NSPCC – Safeguarding Children*

Website:

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/getinvolved/raisemoney/guidetofundraising/planningtips/safeguardingchildren/safeguarding_wda33498.html

Remember

Events that are well organised can be great fun and encourage audiences and visitors to return in the future. Badly organised events are remembered for all the wrong reasons...