

## Information Sheet: Organising an event

Organising and setting up your own event may seem a bit of a frightening prospect, but it can also be exciting and exhilarating. It puts you firmly in control, means you can make the decisions which you know are right for you, your community or your organisation, and can give you the opportunity to take risks, do something new and perhaps to gain some new skills.

There are, as with all things, a few simple dos and don'ts which will help you to create a successful event whilst ensuring you don't have too many sleepless nights.

Firstly, consider the help you have available. Do you and your team have the right mix of skills and knowledge? If not, who else could you bring in to fill any gaps? Have you included everybody in your community? Are you planning to set up a committee or a steering group? Can you bring in other agencies or individuals to help with very specific areas of work? A group of a few people working together can get you through the difficult times without being unwieldy and slowing decision-making. Surround yourself by "doers". Enthuse people!

Be clear about what you want to achieve and why. You need to set the boundaries of your event and make sure that the scope isn't too broad. If your plan is unmanageable from the outset you will become disillusioned, so you need to get together as a group and agree what you want to do, what roles and responsibilities exist within the group and agree a communication structure which should minimise any last minute problems which may occur. It's very easy to have too many ideas at once – try to think long term and prioritise.

Keep things simple and clear.

Things to think through straight away:

- What is the aim or purpose of your event
- Who will take part?
- When should it take place? How will you ensure you get the timing right? What other events take place locally at that time?
- Who is the audience? How do you know there is a need for your event?
- How will you target the right audience for your work?
- What will the benefits be to the audience, the participants and the wider community
- How will you involve the community?
- How will you involve other organisations? Other individuals?
- When and where will it take place? Inside? Outside? Do you have suitable venue in mind? What kind of access does it have? Does it have parking? The right facilities? Is it available?
- Who will produce your event and what skills do they need?
- What resources are needed? Venue? Budget? PA? Equipment? Volunteers? Professional help?
- What is the timescale and are there any key deadlines? Funding? Licences?
- How will you manage your cash-flow? Most funders pay in arrears and many tickets are purchased on the day – will that cause you any problems? What do you have to pay upfront?
- What financial controls do you need to have in place? Do you have a suitable bank account you can use?
- How will you promote and market the event? Do you know enough about where your target audience can be found? Do you have access to expertise in free techniques such as social media?
- How will you document and evaluate the event? What evidence do you need to collect for funders and stakeholders?

As organisers of the event you also have some statutory obligations which you *must* take into account:

### *Insurance:*

Get some early advice on the different kind of insurance policies which you will need to have in place. You will definitely require Public Liability insurance and a cover of £3-5 million is usually considered a minimum. A separate guidance sheet is available on insurance, but *always* ensure that you seek professional advice and find an insurance company that understands and has experience of dealing with your area of interest.

### *Health and Safety:*

As organiser of the event you are responsible for ensuring that guidelines around health and safety are followed. This will include undertaking a risk assessment for the venue and your activities, and it may involve asking those delivering elements of the event to undertake their own risk assessment. Some good basic advice and a variety of downloadable leaflets can be found on the website of the Health and Safety Executive at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk). You could also seek advice from those who have run similar events in the past as they may have expertise they are willing to share with you. You will also need to consider first aid provision.

### *Licensing:*

It is a good plan to seek advice on licensing as soon as possible, because the process of applying for the appropriate licence can take several months. There may also be a requirement to notify the police. You will find the Licensing team at Ryedale District Council very helpful. Have a look at [www.ryedale.gov.uk](http://www.ryedale.gov.uk) Seek advice even if you do not believe you need a licence – it is better to be sure.

### *Budgeting:*

Your finances require early attention because if you are planning to apply for external funding you will need to take application deadlines and assessment times into account. It is not unusual for applications to take three months to process and some funds with fewer deadlines through the year may take up to 6 months. A separate sheet is available which offers some guidance on how to put a budget together, but the best advice is to be realistic and don't ever pull figures "out of the air". Get as many quotations as you can for all the areas of work which you require and don't forget to take "hidden" costs into account. Try not to make your life harder than it needs to be by being overly parsimonious – delivering on a tight budget is admirable, but delivering on an overly tight budget is merely impossible. Areas which you will need to take into account:

- Venue hire
- Volunteer expenses
- Professional fees
- Materials
- Publicity and marketing
- Stationery, telephone and administration
- Insurance
- Fees for licences etc.
- Hire or purchase of equipment
- Technical support including technician's fees, set-up and installation costs
- Contingency (usually about 5%)
- Evaluation

You should cost for services at the correct "going rate" and not assume that because you are committed to a project that everybody else involved will also be willing to work for free or a reduced fee. If people *are* willing to work for free the cost of their work should still be included in the budget, but shown as in-kind support.

You will also need to consider what income you may be able to generate, so it will be necessary to determine from the outset if your event is to be free, subsidised or full-cost. You may generate income through:

- Ticket sales or entrance fees
- Sponsorship – in-kind or in-cash
- Commission or sales
- Funding or grant aid
- Advertising in a programme or similar

It may well be that when you have completed your budget you realise that the full scale event is unrealistic and you need to scale it back in some way. It is a good idea to do this at an early point rather than making commitments and then having to cancel them. You may also decide to apply for funding - *all* funders will require you to have a realistic budget in place.

The next stage is to consider how you will promote your event to ensure that your target audience are aware of it. You should already have a good idea that there is an appetite for your event – through vox pops, questionnaires,

surveys etc. – but you'll still need a robust plan for getting people through the doors. There is a separate information sheet on this subject, but some basics to take into account are:

- Some forms of promotion are free! Email your contacts, ask them to circulate your email to their own contacts. Use websites where you can post information free of charge e.g. [www.visitryedale.co.uk](http://www.visitryedale.co.uk) Use Twitter, Facebook etc. to their full advantage – there is a lot of evidence showing that the use of social media drives website traffic. Think about using MailChimp or similar – it's easy to learn and a simple way of producing a professional looking e.newsletter
- Local listings in newspapers are often free to community groups and a good press release could also get you priceless editorial
- Consider whether you have community partners who could help you – do your partners send out newsletters or mailings that you could “piggyback”? Remember that they cannot give you the details of their mailing list because of the Data Protection Act, but they could include material on your behalf – you could offer to stuff their envelopes for free in return. They may just need an attractive paragraph for their e.newsletter.
- Copy deadlines can be months ahead, so if you are planning to place advertisements check the deadlines well in advance
- If you send a press release always follow it up with a phone call – journalists receive literally hundreds of press releases and yours needs to stand out. Make your story human and local.
- Remember to credit your funders on *everything* you produce. Check their guidelines for how they expect to be credited – if you don't follow their guidance they may be unable to release your grant
- Remember to invite your funders and ask if they have any networks which you can use to circulate publicity material

Remember that there will always be unforeseen problems and that you cannot plan for every single eventuality. The important thing is to learn from what goes wrong, to respond as flexibly as you can, to treat problems as hiccups not disasters and to make sure that enough helpers will be around to spread the load as lightly as possible.

Make a checklist for the day itself – try to plan in advance and consider what it would be useful to have with you: blu-tac, drawing pins, paper, additional signs, tools, contact numbers, lists etc. Think about your own comfort too – a change of clothes (and shoes), somewhere you can have an undisturbed five minute break, a snack and a bottle of water are all indispensable.

Remember to talk to your Community Officer, who will be able to offer you help and support with all aspects of your event.