



## Organising an Event

This is one of series of factsheets for voluntary and community groups issued by West Norfolk Voluntary and Community Action.

It deals with

- How to start planning
- Choosing a venue
- Publicity for your event
- Odds and ends
- The Big Day

There are some golden rules to observe whenever there is an event to be organised. Whether it is a fete, conference, exhibition, jumble sale or festival the rules invariably remain the same. It doesn't really matter what size your event is going to be, planning is just as important for a small or a large event. Smaller events just need less people to organise.

### **How to start planning?**

Forming a working group is a good start to organising an event. Make sure the size of the committee reflects the size of the event. Additional people can always be drafted in at the last minute. Four or five people on a sub committee is a good number.

Make sure that more than one person knows everything that is going on just in case someone drops out along the way. Write down everything on paper, addresses, telephone numbers etc and keep it in a file. Hold regular meetings and co-opt people with specialist skills as necessary.

Begin by making a list of everything you are going to need. For example: food, transport, entertainment, equipment. Decide who and how to get them and check what your budget is. Speakers need to be booked well in advance. Celebrities can charge a large fee even for a charitable group, unless it is dear to their heart. Members of Parliament often cancel due to parliamentary duties or electioneering. Arrange for public address equipment to be available and if it is a large or an outdoor event, ask someone at your local St John's ambulance or Red Cross to help with medical/first aid cover.

Select a date and try to make sure it doesn't clash with other activities. This doesn't have to be local event either, as an England International or a gripping episode on a popular soap opera can reduce your attendance numbers!

Select someone to act as a Deputy whose job will be to make sure everything runs smoothly on the day. This will not be an easy job so make sure you select someone who will not let you down at the last minute.

### **Choosing a venue**

Decide on a suitable venue - size, costs, location and availability. Ensure the venue meets your criteria - disabled access, parking, toilets, kitchen, electricity etc.

Ensure you have any legal requirements in place well before the day. Health and safety issues should be at the forefront of your mind - don't put tea urns etc on trestle tables, rope off areas if necessary to protect the general public and yourselves.

Make sure all electrical equipment is safe, tested and connected to a circuit breaker, as well as tucking in leads and wires.

Ask about insurance - many venues now require groups to have their own public liability insurance for events. This can be arranged at fairly low cost through an insurance broker.

Book the venue and make sure everyone knows what type of event you are hoping to stage. Some venues insist on groups using their own caterers, or have other restrictions that need to be discussed before the day. Agree the price and confirm everything in writing. Try to include how you would like the room to be set up, what time you can gain access and importantly a finish time!

### **Publicity for your event**

Produce a programme that lists everything that will happen but ensure your speaker has definitely confirmed her/his attendance before publicising your event. There is no such thing as too much publicity. Several weeks before the date start sending out fliers, leaflets and posters. If it is an invitation only event, ensure that there is a reply slip attached to the invitation which includes a telephone number for enquiries. If you are selling tickets, make sure it is easy to buy them. Arrange for several outlets to sell them for you - don't rely on one person only.

Involve the local media with a press release and respond quickly to any interest they show in your event. Try and get a local business to sponsor a large advertisement in a newspaper. Local radio will usually advertise for free for a charity event but ask first.

### **Odds and Ends**

Give specific jobs to people on the day of your event and make sure they have prominent badges or tee shirts that identify them as being involved with the organisation. Remember that stewards at an outdoor event should wear fluorescent tabards or jacket to make them more visible and safe. Select one person to meet and greet any VIP guests.

Make sure you have a reception table with someone who will give out badges or answer questions. Make sure they have a phone on the table or nearby in case of

emergencies. Do you need to be able to contact the Event Supervisor and how will you do it? You could use mobile phones, walkie-talkie, have a runner nearby or use the public address system. Placed with this desk should be a box of emergencies, blue tack, scissors, string, marker-pens etc. for those last minute adjustments. Don't forget to include a small first aid kit as well.

## **The Big Day**

Arrive early and assume that something will not be set up the way you wanted. Check all arrangements - make sure the public address system works, the water is switched on. Make sure everyone knows what they are doing as they arrive.

Move around during the event to make sure that everything is running smoothly. Make sure that everyone is in post and doing what they should be doing. Try to anticipate problems before they occur. Make a note of anything that didn't go the way you planned. Ensure that regular announcements go out over the public address system so that people know where to go. Always make sure the information desk knows where you are.

Hold a debriefing session with staff on the day to find out their impressions of how things went. Make notes and organise a wind-up meeting a week or two later to discuss the event in detail and how to improve it if you have to. **Make sure you always say thank you to everyone involved with helping, even if they only turned up for half an hour.**

Sometimes easier said than done, but try and enjoy your event !

This information has been produced by West Norfolk Voluntary and Community Action set up and owned by local groups to support, promote and develop local voluntary and community action.

We have taken all reasonable steps to make sure that this information is current and accurate. We cannot, however, guarantee its accuracy or completeness and therefore cannot accept liability for your acting, or failing to act, on the information given.

For resources, books, ideas and useful information please contact West Norfolk VCA or email [info@westnorfolkvca.org](mailto:info@westnorfolkvca.org).