



30 things to think about when planning a community event

Most voluntary and community organisations wish to host an event at some time. Whether it's a street party, a volunteer event, a fundraiser or a firework display, such events help to encourage people to play an active part in their community. However, there's a lot you need to be aware of before you start.

Organising a successful event is really all about good planning and taking sensible precautions where necessary. This fact sheet offers 30 tips to make planning your community event a success.

PLANNING

1: Be clear on what you want to achieve...

Make sure your objectives are clear right at the start of your planning. Do you want to raise money for a good cause, bring the community together, encourage participation in local sport, ask people to take action on a particular local issue, or simply have fun?

2: ...and on who the event is for

Is your event specifically for your local community or will you want to open it up to a wider area? Is it primarily for children, or for older people? Your answers here will help you work out your planning for the day itself.

3: Make sure you give yourself enough time to organise the event

Lots of things can affect the amount of time you need to plan your event. If you have a particular venue and specific dates in mind, you need to get your booking in their calendar as early as possible. If you want to book speakers or entertainers, you need to do so well in advance. You should allow roughly three months to plan a small event, six months for a medium event, and 12-18 months for a large event

4: Set a realistic budget

It's vital that even before you book the venue you need to set a realistic budget for your event, with an allowance for contingencies. Be realistic. It's better to underestimate income and slightly overestimate costs. Have you thought about the cost of venue hire, entertainment, insurance and any necessary permits, publicity, equipment, catering, decorations, transport, volunteers' expenses, and prizes? Set up a simple spreadsheet to keep track of the money.

5: Look at ways you can generate money to cover the costs

Think about the possibility of asking for donations from local businesses, running a raffle, selling refreshments, or charging stallholders and/or catering suppliers for allowing them to sell their goods at your event. Do try to avoid charging an attendance fee, as this may increase some of your licence fees and may lead you into a formal contract to provide those goods and services, with the attendant risks if they are not provided or of inadequate quality. Identify the breakeven point and be prepared to make savings in your budget in ways that won't affect people's enjoyment of the event.

6: Apply for funding in plenty of time

If you can't cover all your costs using the suggestions above and you need to apply for funding, be aware that it can take 12-16 weeks, or sometimes even longer for an application to be granted. If you're not sure where to start, contact Northumberland CVA's funding officer, Marc Johnson by calling 01670 858688 or emailing enquire@northumberlandcva.org.uk, or visit the funding pages of our website: www.northumberlandcva.org.uk.

7: Decide if you want to involve other organisations or agencies

Involving other organisations or agencies can add an extra dimension and they may have the expertise to take a major part of organising the event off your hands. But consider carefully how you want to involve them, how they could contribute, and what they will need in terms space, facilities and catering and keep them regularly updated about what is going on.

8: Pull together a planning team

Working with a team of people will make planning your event easier. It is a good idea to have a core group of people who will help but the size of your team can vary depending on the scale of the event. Having too many people on board can confuse and complicate things if you're not careful, whereas having too few can put a greater onus on individuals to get things done. If you have decided to involve another organisation, it could be a good idea to involve them at this early stage.

9: Share out the work

Perhaps the people in your team have useful existing skills so do make use of them. Allot responsibility not just for arranging a date, booking a venue, and organising catering, but also for things like marketing, safety and logistics, which will vary depending on your event.

10: Create an action plan

Creating an action plan with deadlines/milestones for key activities and a named person to take responsibility can help to keep your planning on track. It will also help focus activity on the order in which things need to be completed. If you know how to create a Gantt chart, this is a great visual aid. It can illustrate your project schedule and show activity against time.

11: Make sure everyone knows what needs to be done and when

This is not simply about dishing out a list of tasks right at the beginning of the planning process and then leaving everyone to it. Arrange regular catch-up meetings so everyone is aware of the big picture and how their own area of responsibility fits in. Knowing that other people are waiting for a

certain task to be complete in order to carry out their own work can help team members to keep to schedule.

12: Pick a date and time

The date you pick for your event is very important to make sure the people you're aiming the event at are able to attend. For a family fun day, a weekend or a date during school holidays would be best, but if it's an action day or a then maybe a week day during term time would be better. Ensure everyone involved in running the event is available on the date and that your venue and any guests or entertainers are also available. Think about the time too, and what that may mean for traffic, school runs, availability of public transport and the safety of attendees. And try to avoid clashes with similar events that may be taking place nearby

13: Ensure your chosen venue is appropriate for your event

Do you need outside space, one big room or more than one smaller room? Is your venue fully accessible to all? Is it easy to find? Is it close to public transport links? Is car parking adequate? Think about catering facilities – are they adequate too? Can you bring your own refreshments or do you need to have them supplied by the venue? Are there enough toilets? Are Health & Safety provisions clear? If you need additional support equipment, will it be available? And very importantly, is the venue within your budget?

14: Think about the amount of people you can invite

Work out the number of people you want to invite. Can you fit the maximum amount in? Are facilities adequate? Can you afford to cater for them all? Remember that the bigger the event, the more people you will need to plan and organise on the day itself, and the more time you will need give yourself to plan and prepare beforehand.

15: Decide on your activities

Will you have activities for a range of different people? Consider families, children and people with different needs. Consider the impact of the event on your neighbourhood, particularly the noise level – make sure it isn't too loud and doesn't go on too late. Make sure that residents and businesses are aware of what is going on and have the opportunity to let you know of any concerns they may have. There may be specialist guidance available for the sort of activities you want to put on – see the list at the end of this blog (The list is not exhaustive. If you can't find what you're looking for, google it and see what comes up).

16: Apply for any special licences or permissions you may need

Many community activities don't need a licence, but you do need to check the situation early on because it can sometimes take a long time to apply. Read our [Factsheet 'Organising a Community Event'](#) for more information on any permissions you may need and how to go about applying. Check if your venue is already licenced if you want to sell alcohol, provide late night refreshment (hot food or drink served after 11.00pm), show films or theatre performances, put on music and dancing. If not, you may be able to get a Temporary Event Notice from Northumberland County Council: <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Business/Licences/Alcohol-entertainment.aspx>.

17: Think about publicising the event

First things first, make sure you know how much money you have to spend on publicity. Then, once you have all the details booked, and you know who it's targeted at, you can begin to publicise it. It may sound obvious but ensure that the date and time of the event, the venue and the attractions of the day are clear. It is also a good idea to provide contact details so people can find out further information if they need it.

You should also make sure you get your publicity out early enough for it to be distributed and read - don't wait until the last moment to advertise.

18: Decide where to place your publicity

How and where you publicise the event depends on the scale, budget and resources you have. Think about who you want it to reach and where those people are most likely to see your information, as well as what images are most likely to attract them to the event. Put flyers through letterboxes and posters in shop windows or on community noticeboards. Leave leaflets in places where the people you want to reach are likely to go. Use social media. Send a letter or advert in a community newsletter, put a piece in the local paper or find out if local radio could make an announcement for the event.

SAFETY

19: Make sure you have insurance to cover the event

There is no law that says you must buy public liability insurance for a voluntary or community event but you have a responsibility to do what you can to ensure people don't get hurt and so you might want to make sure you are covered in case something goes wrong and someone makes a claim against you. However, if most of the people who come to your activities are members or supporters of your organisation they are unlikely to want to make a claim against you. It's also possible that the venue you've chosen might have their own public liability insurance that also covers your activities. On the other hand, if the venue doesn't have its own insurance it may insist that your event is insured and, if you're applying for funding, some funders insist on you having insurance as a condition of awarding a grant. See www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/public-liability/ for more information. Remember though, that having insurance is no substitute for thorough planning.

20: Make sure any food you serve is safe

If you want to provide or sell food at an event, here are some basic questions you need to be able to answer: Are the food preparation and serving facilities and equipment clean and in good repair? Are they suitably situated so that the food does not become contaminated? Are the washing facilities adequate? Is there someone who can answer questions about the origin of the food and its ingredients for people who have food allergies? Visit the Food Standards Agency website for more information on [food safety for voluntary and community events](#) and/or get advice from [food safety officers at your local council](#).

21: Carry out a Risk Assessment

Carry out a risk assessment of the venue and any equipment you are using. Mostly this involves using common sense but there is also lots of information available online – in particular on the Health and Safety Executive website: www.hse.gov.uk/event-safety/managing-an-event.htm.

22: Don't forget about Fire Safety...

Anyone providing a venue for a public event must assess the risk from fire to those using the premises and ensure that the fire safety measures in place are suitable to protect lives in the event of a fire. Make sure you know what fire safety arrangements are in place at your venue and make sure you know what to do should a fire break out. Ask: Is the fire alarm working? Are the fire exits obvious and/or clearly signposted? Are there enough exits to let everyone, including anyone who may be disabled or particularly vulnerable, leave quickly and easily in the event of a fire? Who will be responsible for evacuating the building should it be necessary? Where are fire extinguishers or fire blankets situated? Is there suitable access for the emergency services? If you are planning an event that includes bonfires, fireworks or Chinese/sky lanterns you should visit the specialist guidance link at the foot of this blog

23: ...or First Aid

Decide who will be responsible for first aid on the day. For large events, you could ask a first aid organisation to attend. Even if you are just using your own volunteers, you need to have a visible first aid point at large events and people who are taking the role of first aiders. Some of your volunteers may already have first aid training, or the venue may have its own first aiders.

ON THE DAY

24: Arrive early to set things up

Ensure everything is set up according to your plans. Confirm that everyone knows what their specific roles are. Make sure the official personnel and anyone involved in health and safety are clearly identified and ensure that facilities such as toilets and refreshments are clearly signposted.

25: Record the event

If you are keeping a record of attendees, set up a signing in sheet at the entrance to your event. Take photographs and/or videos of the event - ensuring you have permission from attendees beforehand. Ask people to tell you how they're enjoying themselves and record their comments – again, with permission, or ask them to fill in evaluation forms. You could put up signs informing people that you will be photographing the event, although you still need to ask individual permission when taking the actual photos, and you should gain parental consent before photographing children.

26: Keep checking

Regularly check to make sure that rubbish isn't building up, and keep fire exits free from obstruction. And make sure that those manning stalls or organising activities don't run out of supplies or small change. Keep an eye out for potential issues and tackle them before they become real problems – it helps if you've encouraged everyone at the event to take responsibility for themselves and their children.

27: Relax and try to enjoy it!

You've worked long and hard to make this event a success. Once you are sure everything is running smoothly, take a moment, breath out slowly and enjoy yourself.

AFTER THE EVENT

28: Keep the money safe

If you've organised a fundraising event with different stalls, you might want to count takings from the different stalls separately and bank the cash as soon as possible. Counting takings separately will allow you work out which activities made money and which didn't do so well so you can make a more accurate budget for your next event.

29: Clean up

Check the terms of your venue hire agreement to see exactly what the owner of the venue expects you to clear up and make sure you leave those areas clean and tidy.

30: Thank everyone

Remember to thank your planning team, other volunteers and helpers; they've done a sterling job. Don't forget to also report back to and thank funders, sponsors, etc. Use some of the photographs and quotes you gathered on the day to illustrate how your event went and if your event was a fundraiser, let people know how much you raised on the day.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Specialist guidance

- Street Parties:
 - [Your guide to organising a street party](#) (GOV.UK)
 - [The Street Party Site](#) (Streets Alive)
- Firework displays and Chinese/sky lanterns
 - [Giving your own firework display: How to run and fire it safely](#) (Health and Safety Executive)
 - [Firework Safety](#) (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents)
 - [Chinese/sky lanterns](#) (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents)
- Cycling events
 - [Event Organiser](#) (British Cycling)
- Road races
 - [Race Directors' Club](#) (Run Britain)
- Community Games
 - [Organise a Games](#) (Community Games)
- Screening a film
 - [Planning a Film Screening](#) (Film Bank Media)
- Music
 - [Public Performance Licencing](#)
 - [PRS for Music](#)

- Street Collections
 - [Street Collection Permit](#) (Northumberland County Council)

General guidance

- [Organising a Community Event](#) (Northumberland CVA)
- [Organising a voluntary event: a 'Can do' guide](#) (GOV.UK)
- [Guidance on running events safely](#) (HSE)

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