

Volunteering in the 21st Century



Events

Community groups host events for many reasons: as fundraisers, for marketing and promotion and celebrate milestones and special occasions. Some events occur regularly and are at the core of what a community group does, such as the weekly football match or a monthly market. Others are sporadic or one-off events such as a gala dinner or 25th anniversary celebration. Events can be great fun, successfully bringing people together and achieving celebrated results. On the flipside, events can be a huge strain, causing great amounts of stress and effort from volunteers sometimes for little return. Events also expose community groups to increased risks as they venture into unfamiliar territory and deal with an unknown public. Striking the balance between stress and success is the key to conducting a good event.

Event committee

A good event is run by a strong team and establishing an event sub-committee is a good starting point. Appointing an Event Manager can assist with overall co-ordination and ensures that one person is responsible for “ticking the boxes”. Members of an event sub-committee can then be delegated specific roles: ticketing, sponsorship, entertainment, publicity, risk management, etc. The Event Manager helps ensure that all these roles are fulfilled in a timely manner.

Principles of good governance and effective committees still apply. Remember to take comprehensive notes and minutes of meetings, recording decisions made and actions delegated. Meetings need to be focused, timely and allow for broad input.

Why? What? Who? Where? When?

An event sub-committee should conduct a brainstorming exercise to determine the core values of the event and provide the specifics of

Why are we holding the event?

What will happen at the event? What are we trying to achieve?

Who is the event for? Who is the target market? Who are our stakeholders?

When and **Where** is the event being held?

A final key question to be asked – **How much?** – relates to the expense of the event, that is how much will it cost to run. If the event is a fundraiser you also need to establish how much money you are seeking to raise. These key budget issues will determine many specific details of your event including its size, scope and cost to attend.

Research

Much time, effort and grief can be saved by undertaking research into the success or failure of other events conducted in your community or by your community group. If this event has been held in the past, examine how it was conducted, noting what worked and what didn't work. If this is a new event, consider if something similar has been held before, and if not, why not? What other events are taking place when you are proposing to hold your event? Make sure you don't clash with significant occasions or school holidays.

Consider the extent of support and willing helpers your group has to conduct the event. Are members still engaged or is the proposed date during an off season? What costs are associated with the event and does your group have the available funds to pay for the event? Even fundraisers have considerable expenses which need to be paid upfront.

Finally, research the legal implications of your event: do you need special permits? Does your existing insurance permit the proposed event?

Budget

Once you have researched potential costs, you can flesh out more realistic expenses to form a budget. Consider costs such as venue hire, entertainment, food, insurance, advertising, printing, security, postage. Allow for unforeseen expenses and contingencies. Determine your financial goal – how much are you seeking to raise? Nominate a committee member to be responsible for financial matters and establish an agreed process for approving costs and for reimbursement of expenses.

Event plan

Planning is essential and this means starting well in advance. Start with a check list, recording all the tasks required to conduct your event. For example: book a face-painter, buy first aid kit, recruit bar staff, conduct risk assessment, speak to local council. Group similar items under sub-headings. You will find that many of these issues arise when undertaking your research, so start taking notes early!

Next prioritise your list and create a timeline, indicating when actions need to be accomplished by. Now allocate responsibility for each action to individual committee members.

Continue to add to your checklist and remember to save the information for future events. This checklist forms the blueprint of your event plan.



Promotion and publicity

Central to a successful event is ensuring that people know about it and they attend. This is where publicity and promotion plays such an important role. Events don't require extensive advertising budgets but they do require creativity and a comprehensive approach to ensure you get your message out. Again, planning is the key.

In small communities, events are news worthy and groups should capitalize on their local media. Write a media release or arrange an interview with your local paper and ensure there are dynamic photos to accompany your story. Notices can be placed in local community directories and calendar of events while posters and handbills should be distributed four to six weeks prior. Involve everyone who is participating in your event to help promote it. This is especially relevant if you have hired entertainers who can promote your event through their own marketing streams or market vendors who can take your promotional material to other events.

Speak to your local council about how they can assist you get the word out through their networks, publications and website, and don't forget to target local schools and other community groups. If your community group uses social media, remember to promote your event on facebook and Twitter.

Risk management & insurance

Risk management is one of the most crucial elements of event management and yet is a key activity which community groups often fail to address. A risk assessment should be conducted early in the planning process to determine the viability of the event. Confirm that your existing insurance coverage will extend to cover the proposed event – this is not a given and an additional policy may be required.

Events are particularly risky for community groups because they often involve groups and individuals over whom your group has no or limited control. When involving other groups or businesses, such as food vendors or entertainers, you need to ensure that they have their own public liability insurance. You must also ensure that they are compliant with relevant legislation and regulations including food safety, liquor licensing and working with children. Your risk assessment should pay close attention to the site and venue of your event and consider all potential risks and hazards including traffic and waste management and environmental factors. Online resource agency, Our Community, produce a comprehensive Risk Management Checklist for events which can be downloaded from their website www.ourcommunity.com.au/insurance

You will need to ensure that first aid and qualified first aid attendants are available and that processes are in place to record any accidents or incidents. Ensure that your event considers patrons health and wellbeing by providing water, shade and sunscreen if relevant.

Evaluation and acknowledgment

Overlooking post-event tasks is a common error many community groups make. Your early planning and preparation will ensure you have a successful event and you should continue to capitalize on this organised approach by making sure you wrap up loose ends including:

- Reconcile your finances and prepare a report of the event's results.
- Distribute a media release describing the outcomes of the event.
- Prepare and issue Certificate of Thanks to sponsors and local businesses who supported your event.
- Write letters of thanks and acknowledge volunteers for their contribution on the day.
- Gather the Event Committee together for a celebration and reflection on the event. What worked and what could have worked better?
- Conduct an evaluation of the event, asking all stakeholders for their thoughts, experiences, ideas.
- Ensure your paperwork, records and information is organised and ready to assist the next year's Event Committee.
- Prepare for next year's event, including setting the date and booking the venue.