



Community Events are a useful tool to create a public presence, market a community/business/non-profit and can be a source of income. Events take a considerable amount of careful planning for success and monetary gain. Your event strategy is an important part of the event's success. We hope this information helps you plan carefully for success!

### Key Resources

- Someone experienced in event planning and coordination
- Location to host event (a good place to start is the city's website or Convention & Visitors Bureau)
- City/Government required permits
- Food/Beverage
- Marketing/Advertising
- Committed volunteers
- Funding source(s)

### Key Project Steps & Best Practices

#### 1) Discuss Event Inspiration & Objectives

- Why are you having an event?
- What will happen at the event?
- Who is the event for?
- Who will plan and run the event?
- Do you need the event to make money or are covering your expense enough?
- Develop success criteria: How will success of event be evaluated?
- Check calendars to Identify any "competition" from existing events/holidays in the region: how do we best compete with existing events??
- Based on your Objectives: what time of year is best for event?

#### 2) Develop a Timeline (most events need a twelve month cycle of pre-production to be very successful)

- Think through the time you need to find a location, get needed permits, fundraise, market the event, get volunteers to assist, then set a reasonable event date as a starting point
- Start coordination with volunteers, local authorities and possible vendors
- Develop a 'punch' list of what needs to be done by when
- Don't plan the event for just one year – plan to repeat your event annually for 3-5 years. This will show attendees and sponsors that you are serious about your event, its success, and its longevity.
- Once you have established your event date, don't change it from year to year. This confuses attendees. They should know when your event will be happening every year so they can make plans to attend (i.e. a BBQ Festival the first weekend of April every year.)

#### 3) Determine Location

- Decide if this is an indoor or outdoor event. If outdoor, determine if you want a rain date or an alternate location if inclement weather strikes, or, it is necessary to cancel
- Research options --determine if security, catering, permits, additional seating are required to use this space and determine who provides/pays for these elements of the event
- Evaluate cost to use the space (either in hard dollars and/or in volunteer hours to prep it)
- Insure adequate parking
- Discuss AV needs/availability of the facility or will you need to rent/borrow
- Have contract/reservation drawn up and signed with venue owner/manager

#### 4) Identify Target Audience

- Who/what group(s) of people is this event specifically for
- Determine if you are meeting the audience's needs with this event
- Decide how will you reach/market/advertise to your key targets

#### 5) Consider Key/VIP Attendees

- Identify key/very important people that are 'must attends' that you need to get on their calendar now
- Contact them/their office directly with an invitation
- Determine if there are any specific requirements for them attending

#### 6) Determine Permits/Law Enforcement/Local government requirements

- Event permit needed
- Insurance required
- Security needed
- Zoning issues
- Food/beverage permits
- Utility permits

#### 7) Food/Beverage Needs

- Determine how important this is to the overall success of your event (ie. Central to success....to....Just minimal beverages required)
- Consider the constraints of your budget and host location
- Get appropriate permits if needed –if using vendors they may cover this
- If catering is hired, get detailed, signed contract(s) including taxes, server & deliver costs
- What decorations are needed

#### 8) Develop Budget

- Based on event objectives compile all Costs of event --including location, permits, parking, utilities set-up, janitorial, food/beverage, marketing, transportation, AV, etc.
- Detail a plan to cover for these costs -donations, sponsorships, entry/entrance fees, parking fees, concessions, raffle, a mix of these, etc.
- Develop estimated budget for event
- Finalize budget for event

#### 9) Consider Marketing

- Design event logo/graphic/color scheme
- Determine what signage is provided/needed to make the event/venue work effectively
- Use all available channels to promote event - including Email, Social media, Community newsletter/calendar, Newspaper advertising, Local organizations, Community center, Mailed invitations/flyers, etc
- Determine costs for each of these and then based on your budget, determine how to best use advertising budget dollars/or donated resources.
- Geo Tagging (allowing Google Maps users to locate your event)

## 10) Recruit Volunteers

- Identify individual or groups that would be interested in supporting with an event like this - consider individuals, community orgs, school groups, professional organizations, local companies, government, non-profit orgs, or volunteer networks (ex. VolunteerMatch.org or Greenville Roundtowners)
- Determine how do connect with potential volunteers
- Write a list of everything that volunteer labor could cover
- Recruit a Volunteer Coordinator to find and get commitments from individuals and/or groups for a set number of people to do specific tasks
- Recruit individuals and/or organizations for financial support/in-kind donations
- Veterans/Retirees

## 11) Evaluation/Wrap up

- Review success criteria that you identified in initial event planning: evaluate event results
- Host a post-event debrief with key volunteers as a thank you, and, to get their feedback. Ask questions: Where were we successful? Where did we get stuck? What should we do differently should we do this event again?
- Wrap budget with an official profit & loss statement. File necessary government/tax forms
- If you plan to do the event the following year, immediately book your venue and date.
- Start thinking about your next event that could grow your community vibrancy!

# LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

- Have something to do for attendees of all ages. Consider a craft booth or inflatables for the children, rather than just having adult centered activities.
- Pay attention to permitting required in your community. In many cases you will have to work with the city and the local police department, especially if you need to close down a street to hold the event on. In some cases, there is an additional cost including paying for the police to work the event, signage for detours around a closed street, and permit filing costs.
- The weather will always have an effect on event turn out, even if it is a Rain or Shine event. Consider having either a backup rain location or a rain date which you advertise with the original date.
- Marketing and maintaining relationships is essential. Local vendors, business owners, news outlets, nonprofit organizations, and city officials are essential in planning a successful event.
- Volunteers are essential in making any event successful. A good way to recruit volunteers is to work with local schools. Many schools require their students to have service hours. Also, have more volunteers than you think you will need. Thank your volunteers!
- Give yourself plenty of time to plan the event. Deadlines come faster than expected.
- Listen to the community about what they want the event to be, they will be the ones attending it. Ask for feedback on the event so it can be improved the following year.
- Give people a reason to come back. Plan a fun, interactive, and organized event to ensure you will have a great turn out year after year.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How can I help cover the cost of the event?** *In many cases, ticket or entry costs don't completely offset the cost of the event. The most popular way of covering event costs is the selling of sponsorships. Think about your event and the local companies that will benefit from the event and start there.*
- **What do I need to do if food will be served at the event?** *Be sure to check with your local government if food will be served at your event. In many cases special permits and DHEC inspections are required.*
- **What do I need to do if alcohol will be served at the event?** *Be sure to check with your local government if you will be serving alcohol at your event. Special permitting and security may be required.*
- **How can I engage local businesses?** *Consider offering lower booth rent at the event to local businesses. Also, ask for their feedback and consider their advice when planning the event.*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Need more information? Contact one of the individuals below who helped plan a successful event in their community:**

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This How-To: Event Planning Guide is part of the How-To Guides for Community Vibrancy, an initiative of Ten at the Top's Community Vibrancy Task Force. The task force includes stakeholders from across the Upstate with a goal to maintain and reinvigorate the vibrancy in our region's small towns and urban areas. For more information about Ten at the Top, please visit [www.tenatthetop.org](http://www.tenatthetop.org).

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