

Organising an event for trustees

Many self-help networks attract new members by holding a training or welcome session. This help sheet advises you on how to organise an event. You may not need to cover all these points, but you need to begin planning the event well in advance.

Identify your audience

Once you know who you are trying to attract to the event you will have a clearer idea of how to find them and encourage them to attend.

Decide on the overall objective of the event

You need to know what you want to achieve from the event. You may want to:

- Impart information/educate the audience; or
- Encourage debate on a subject; or
- Obtain feedback/views on a range of topics; or
- Encourage networking

You may be trying to achieve a number of different objectives. Deciding on objectives will help you to plan the format of the day and who to invite to speak.

Decide on the subject matter

You need to know what issues you want to cover. You may want to find out from your potential audience the issues that concern them. This will help you to identify suitable speakers.

Settle on a format/timetable

You need to decide:

- How long the event should be
- How many speakers you want
- Whether the audience will be split into smaller workshops during the event
- The optimum number of people to attend

Different formats suit different events. If you want to encourage participation and interaction, you may want to consider smaller numbers in workshops or discussion groups rather than a large conference session.

Once you know how you want to format the day you will need to set up a timetable. Leave enough time for discussions and questions at the end of each session. If you are holding sessions in different rooms, do not forget to give participants time to travel from one room to the next between sessions

Decide if you want to charge a fee

This may depend on the type of people you are trying to attract.

Choose a date and time

If participants have to travel a long distance, avoid Monday and Friday. The cost of train fares is sometimes higher on a Friday and if participants want to stay overnight before the event, they usually do not wish to do this on a Sunday.

If people are travelling on the day, try to start and finish at times when they miss the rush hour.

Trustees may also have a day job, so may find it easier to attend an evening event, although those with care responsibilities may find evenings more difficult.

Try to avoid clashing with any other events that your potential audience may wish to attend.

Identify and book a suitable venue

Once you have a format, timetable, date and idea of the optimum number of participants, you will be able to identify a venue. This should be booked well in advance. Make sure:

- It can hold your optimum number of participants comfortably
- It will provide tables, chairs and technical equipment such as microphones, overhead projector, flip charts, projector, screen, etc (if required)
- You know if it will provide any catering you will require, or is agreeable to catering being brought in
- It is conveniently located for potential participants
- It has wheelchair access
- It has toilet facilities, including disabled facilities
- You identify whether there are any other events on at the same time in the same venue (you will need to make sure the rooms you are using are well sign posted)
- The rooms you will be using are reasonably sound proofed
- There are enough power sources
- Someone from the venue will be there on the day to deal with any problems

It is wise to visit the venue before you book it to check it meets your needs.

Identify and invite suitable speakers

They will need to know:

- The time, date and venue

- What subject/issues you want them to cover
- How long they will be expected to speak
- Who the audience will be, (i.e. trustees, trustees from particular types of organisations, etc) and how many there will be
- Whether there will be time for questions/discussion
- Details of any other speakers
- What technical level they need to speak at, (are the audience experienced in the field, or completely new to it)
- Whether you can pay them expenses (or a fee)

You will need from them:

- Details of what technical equipment they need
- A brief biography for your programme
- Any dietary requirements
- Copies of any handouts in advance to put in the participants' packs

Programme/booking form

This should include:

- The purpose of the event
- When and where it is
- Who is speaking (biography and details of subjects to be covered)
- Timetable for the event
- Map of how to get there
- How to pay (if applicable)
- Facilities available (car parking, overnight accommodation, fax/phone, photocopier, refreshments, etc)
- Details of public transport to the venue
- Contact numbers of the organiser and venue
- Space for the name, contact details, organisation, choice of workshops and special needs for participants
- Details of where to return the form and a closing date for reply

Publicity

Once you have identified your target audience you need to let them know about the event. You may consider:

- Posters in suitable public places, (libraries, local shops, community hall, notice boards, post offices, etc)
- Advert in a newspaper
- Entry in an "events" diary of a local paper, trade magazine, newsletter or on a website (such as CTN's)
- Direct mail to potential participants
- Publicity through your local Council for Voluntary Service

Badges and packs

For larger events, once you know who is attending and who is speaking you will need to make up badges and participation packs. It is important to have badges containing name, role and organisation for speakers, organisers and participants. This will help people to get to know one another.

The pack should include:

- The programme, including a list of participants
- Any handouts
- Plan of the venue, with details of toilets, workshop rooms and refreshment rooms
- An outline of the workshops and where they are held
- Possibly a pen and paper for notes
- How to get hold of an organiser if they have any problems
- Feedback form

On the day

You need to make sure:

- The layout of the rooms is correct, (perhaps rows for larger formal events, a horseshoe of chairs or around a table for smaller informal events)
- The registration table is staffed before the start of the registration, and for a time after for latecomers
- People know what the procedures are for evacuating the building in case of emergency
- People know where to find toilets, cloakrooms, refreshment area, registration, workshop rooms and main conference room
- There are spare copies of handouts and programmes
- The speakers know where and when they are speaking and have tested their equipment

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