

# Event Organizer 101

## Twelve basic steps to follow when selecting, organizing and conducting a community event

*Custom-tailor these steps to reflect your own ideas and special needs of your event, organization and neighborhood.*

### Step 1: *Explore the Possibilities*

Let the group figure out activities that everyone can support. It is essential that the group identify activities that residents will support. A fish fry will work in one neighborhood, while a cocktail party would be better in another. To get a feel what kind of event to organize, observe events sponsored by church and civic groups. Avoid simply copying the event – expand your horizons.

### Step 2: *Select the Event*

Events serve many purposes: raise money, allow people to socialize, recruit new members, and generate community support. Make sure that the event fits the purpose. Do you want to raise awareness? Raise funds, or simply get people together? Once the type of event and the objectives of the event have been figured out, then a couple other steps are needed before preparing and planning for the event should get started.

- ✧ Does the group have the capacity to carry out the event? Does it have the skills or connections it needs in order to make the event happen?
- ✧ Is there enthusiasm and commitment from the group to make the event happen? Will it complicate or compromise the other activities of the group or does it compliment?? There will need to be several people working on the event.
- ✧ Make a “back-of-the-envelope” budget and see where and what the costs could be and whether some kind of start-up funds are needed.

### Step 3: *Appoint an Event Pointperson*

There will need to be a core group of people to organize and carry out the event. From this group, there will need to be one *willing* volunteer capable of being the pointperson (aka coordinator) of the event.

This person will be part nag and part cheerleader as they make sure that the planning process is carried out well, timetables are created and deadlines met. This person is important because they will not only monitor progress, but also prevent duplication of efforts and handle the inevitable crisis or two.

### Step 4: *Form a Planning Team*

Create a planning committee or a group of people who will coordinate the event. These folks will take the lead on planning and coordinating the event. One person can not, and should not do it alone!



### Step 5: *Define Tasks*

List the specific tasks that need to get done by one or more persons. No one person can nor should do it all! Divide the work into manageable pieces and share the load. Figure out what the workload will be, how it can be divided up and who will be in charge of what. Once the workload is defined, then it becomes much easier to figure out how to get it done. Below are some possible scenarios to consider:

#### **Example: Pancake Breakfast**

- ✧ Publicity and Decorations
- ✧ Block Captains
- ✧ Volunteers
- ✧ Tickets and finance
- ✧ Food
- ✧ Door Prizes
- ✧ Picnic Tables
- ✧ Cooking set-up
- ✧ Photographer
- ✧ Chefs
- ✧ Cleanup
- ✧ Thank Yous

#### **Example: Garden Festival**

- ✧ Arts, crafts and flea market
- ✧ Set-up (and Clean-up)
- ✧ Entertainment
- ✧ Games
- ✧ Publicity
- ✧ Transportation, parking and barricades
- ✧ Creating Brochures, posters and tickets
- ✧ Bake Sale
- ✧ Photographer
- ✧ Information booth
- ✧ Food/refreshments (including sales)
- ✧ Ticket Sales

### Step 6: *Determine the Budget*

Look at the list of tasks to figure out total budget and expectations. Sometimes items or skills can be donated or lent. If a donation is unsure at the time, be prepared to pay for the item (rent or own) or skill set (graphic design). It is always better to know about possible costs than to be facing an unexpected cost as the event nears. Some folks like to then add another 30% to the overall budget for unexpected costs or unanticipated cost increases.

### Step 7: *Develop a Timetable*

Put together a timetable so all the deadlines will be met. Under each task, figure out the steps that need to be taken and when they need to be done. Sometimes it can be helpful to work backwards from the date. Give "slush time" to complete tasks whenever possible (20% more time than anticipated). By breaking down each task into very discrete and doable pieces it helps get the job done. It also helps with monitoring the progress of the event, and assess if a task has become larger or more difficult than anticipated, whether to find an extra person or get outside assistance. It happens.

### Step 8: *Recruit Volunteers*

After identifying specific tasks, the group should reach out to involve other members and residents. This will spread out the workload so that everyone can enjoy themselves and not feel overburdened. Also, when more people are involved, they have a personal investment in the event (and organization) and will likely invite friends and family to attend.

When recruiting volunteers be specific and personal. Never assume that volunteers will arrive solely because of a printed appeal or a public announcement. Instead, call or visit the member or resident and explain why they are needed and ask them to do a very specific and manageable task. Get a yes or no answer. Invite the volunteer to participate in any planning meetings, but do not demand that they attend.

**Step 9: Do It! – Have a fantastic event!**

Having completed the steps 1-8, the planning team should be organized to produce the event. This preparation will make it easier but not easy. To be successful, many people will have to work cooperatively together, learn new skills, shoulder responsibilities and be prepared to handle the unexpected.

Carefully coordinate all activities on the day of the event. Prepare a fact sheet to be used by volunteers and the planning team. It will describe each major activity, its location, time and name of person in charge. In addition, it will:

- ✧ Detail standard procedures, such as how money will be collected
- ✧ Provide answers to likely questions (i.e. “where’s the bathroom?”)
- ✧ List emergency phone numbers.

**Step 10: Clean Up & Give Thanks**

An event is not finished when everyone goes home. Always plan in advance to have volunteers assigned to take down decorations, remove signs and posters, and put back any tables or chairs. It is important to have the person in charge of the set-up available during the clean-up to tell folks what goes where, and it is also nice to have some new people with fresh energy to help with take-down.

“Thank you’s” are essential. All organizers should personally thank each person during the event and again by written card or note. Donors should be acknowledged during the event either with signs or in the event program, and with a follow-up letter.

**Step 11: Conduct an Evaluation**

The experience gained by a group in conducting a community event is an invaluable asset that can make it easier to coordinate the same or similar event or a more ambitious one in the future.

Soon after the event, the planning team should meet afterwards to discuss their experiences and lessons learned; such as, what worked well, what could have been done better, and how the event could be improved and/or expanded. Use the above steps in this document to help evaluate not only the event itself, but the planning and preparation of the event.

All planning documents, including worksheets, letter templates, budgets, receipts, records of donations, lists of volunteers and guest registers should be assembled and stored for future reference – all of this will make any future event that much easier to organize and coordinate.

**Step 12: Give yourself and your team members a pat on the back!**

Make sure that everyone is recognized for their efforts and have fun together afterwards. Invite all the volunteers as well. Have a small potluck or go out together. And remember, it gets easier with each event. Good Job!

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This document can be found on the Gardening Matters website at  
[www.gardeningmatters.org](http://www.gardeningmatters.org) >Resources>Community

These organizing tips were pulled from the more detailed handout, "Community Event Organizer", provided by the Philadelphia Horticultural Society in spring 2007 to participants of the ACGA teleconference on event organizing. That publication was based on a brochure originally published in 1980 Conserve Neighborhoods, a newsletter of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



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