



Fact Sheet | Basic event management

by Samantha Morris for Landcare Queensland

Landcare groups run a variety of events. From small weed removal activities for half a dozen volunteers through to field days for a many dozen or large conventions for several hundred! But despite the variety of events, there are some basic event management guidelines that will help you piece it all together and perhaps delay the onset of grey hair. Perhaps!

In a nut-shell

There are basically two things you need to run a successful event.

- The first thing is a clear idea about the event or activity itself. For a conference this means capable speakers, good themes and strong content. For an on-ground activity this means a clear idea of what you're trying to achieve and the tools available for you to achieve it. This is what will make people come. And no amount of good marketing will convince them if you haven't thought about the content of your event.
- The second thing you need to run a successful event is the people. That means you need to think about your target audience and market accordingly.

Many groups get bogged down on the detail of events before they've even thought about what it is they want to do (take for example a landcare conference steering committee who discussed for 20 minutes the colour of the napkins for the gala dinner before they'd even decided on keynote speakers). These general tips will set you on the right path and hopefully ensure you get the important stuff right before focussing on the optional extras.

The basics

a) Understand the purpose of your event

What is it that you're trying to do? is it a PR activity? is it a genuine restoration effort? Do you really need volunteers and if so how many? What makes your event special – what sets it apart from other events?

Once you have clearly articulated the above you'll be in a much better position to choose a location or venue, select speakers or activities, and market to the right people. Always remember to design your event with the right people in mind – that is, the people that you want to turn up.

b) Early planning

Generally speaking, a conference for 250 people or more needs a good six to twelve months lead-in time and sometimes more. A field trip held locally and targeted at group members in a district will require at least eight weeks lead-in and preferably 12 to 16 weeks for effective planning and implementation. Some other general tips about early planning:

- Develop a budget. Ask as many people as possible to cast their eyes over it to make sure you haven't missed anything. Identify which products and services you need to access and work to have

them donated locally. People are more likely to donate goods and services than they are to donate money.

- Keep it simple and modest. If you haven't run many events before, take things easy the first few times around. It's easy for committees to come up with big, brassy ideas, but the reality is if you don't have a well thought out event plan, with the appropriate resources then your event will likely fail. Be conservative in your attendance estimates and income figures (if at all).
- Keep your organising committee only as big as it **needs** to be. Allocate tasks / job areas and set concrete timelines, particularly in terms of logistics and promotion. Send regular reminders to committee members about what they've committed to achieve by certain dates. If timelines are followed for events, it usually means everything falls into place nicely.
- Consider public liability insurance implications. At the very least, make sure your event is covered by existing policies and that those attending are covered as well.

c) Location and risk assessment

Choosing a location for an on-ground project is easy – it's right where the issue is occurring. But that doesn't necessarily mean it's a people-friendly site. So be sure to undertake a risk assessment before the day – check for potential hazards, clearly sign-post emergency exits or meetings points and erect fencing if necessary.

Choosing a location or venue for an indoor event can be a little trickier. You need to realistically think about how many people will turn up and choose a venue with a realistic capacity. If you've never run a workshop in your small regional town before, setting your goal at 500 attendees and booking the town hall is probably unnecessary. It's better to run a booked-out event for 20 people than to have 20 people rattling around in a massive venue.

Some other tips:

- Notify neighbours of your event and when it finishes and give them a phone number to call if they have any issues.
- Consider marking out areas for parking if people will be arriving by car and remember to fence off environmentally sensitive areas.
- Before you finalise your venue or project site, consider whether you need any permits or licences to hold an event there or to undertake work on that particular site.
- Also remember for onground projects you often need to consult with local Traditional Owners about the work being undertaken.
- Consider the provision of amenities such as shade, shelter, drinking water and toilets. If you are expecting any attendees with disabilities or special physical requirements, talk to them before you choose a venue so you can ensure their needs are met.
- Always, always have a plan B in case of inclement weather or medical emergencies.
- Consider what special clothing and equipment participants need to bring with them for your particular site or venue and let them know in your promotional material.

d) Content and run-sheet

The hardest thing about running a big event is getting everything to happen on time and as per the schedule. For onground events this is fairly easy – you need to have a clear start and end time and a general run sheet that tells you who needs to be where when. Consider who will greet people when they arrive? What time will people start to arrive? Who will brief them about the activities being undertaken? What time will meals or refreshments be served? Who will say a few words and wrap things up at the end of the day?

For larger events, developing content and your final run sheet can be quite complicated, particularly if you're holding a conference with concurrent sessions. As a guide, for larger events, it is important to follow the above points – that is, have a clear idea of what it is you're trying to achieve and who your target audience is. Then consider what speakers / topics will cater to that audience.

Also consider:

- Who will MC and Chair sessions?
- Do you need entertainment at social events?
- Who will take care of catering? What catering facilities are available onsite?
- Who will take care of handling waste and removing it from the site?
- Contacting Traditional Owners regarding a welcome to Country
- Responsible service of alcohol at social events
- Will speaker presentations be available to attendees or will you record their talks?
- Give people appropriate breaks and quality food. If you're expecting people to sit indoors all day feed them low calorie, nutritious food. If they're out in the field working, feed them food that will keep them going for the afternoon. As a rule, 30 minutes is needed for morning or afternoon tea breaks. If you want people to genuinely network consider 90 minutes for lunch.

Of course, if you are running a large event it is worth considering the engagement of a professional event manager. A dedicated event manager can save you much heartache in the long run, and might even save you money if they're also responsible for seeking sponsorship or support.

e) Timing

Before you commit to a time and date for your event, check for date clashes with similar events or even vastly different events taking place same location. Once you know your target audience you will be able to build a picture of suitable timing. If your audience is cane growers, it would be astute to hold your event at a time when growers are neither harvesting or planting. Similarly, if your target audience is Gen Y, it's best to hold an event that doesn't clash with exams or significant holidays or youth events (like music festivals).

f) Marketing and promotion

Ensure all of your promotional material has consistent information about date, time, location and contact details. And that it includes information about the highlights of your event, clearly spelling out why someone would want to come along and what makes your event unique.

- Tell everyone you know and ask them to tell others. Use all of your mailing lists, member details, friends and neighbouring groups. Use other community networks.
- Develop a basic media strategy. Remember the media will be looking for a news angle. They don't want to know that you're having a field trip, but they do want to know that John Smith and his wife Beryl are opening up their property to 50 strangers this Saturday – pick an angle for each news release and follow up by offering photos and interviews.
- Consider letterbox-dropping neighbours and asking local businesses to put up posters. And ensure that all of this promotional material contains the crucial details of date, time, location and a contact number or email address.

g) On the day

We can't stress enough the importance of being prepared with a comprehensive run-sheet that lets people know where they have to be and what they should be doing at any given time during your event. If you have a team of volunteers, it is crucial that they know what's expected of them. Here are some other tips:

- Prepare a contact list before the event and include all staff, emergency services and contractors who will be delivering or servicing your event during the day. Include keynote speakers, volunteers and anyone else who is crucial to your event. Make sure the list is complete and make sure everyone who needs one gets a copy.
- Ensure someone is in charge of meeting and greeting VIPs, keynote speakers, politicians or other significant attendees.
- Make sure sponsors or funders are acknowledged appropriately onsite.
- Delegate a photographer who captures significant elements of your event, or special people.
- Before your guests arrive take a walk around the site or venue and make sure you know where everything is: lightswitches, toilets, exits and entry points, registration desks and telephone access.
- Nominate a first aid officer and make sure they know how to contact emergency services.
- Plan ahead for evaluation and how you will ask participants if your event has been worthwhile.
- Test all of your equipment (especially electronic equipment, PAs and speakers) before participants arrive. If you're delivering a powerpoint presentation, make sure it works before anyone shows up.
- Offering gifts to speakers or special guests is appropriate, however gifts of alcohol are not (15% of Australians are considered 'at risk' drinkers). Try and source locally made gifts – they'll be warmly accepted and are much more personal than a bottle of wine.
- You may need to register attendees to be covered by insurance. Make sure you've checked and have the necessary paperwork.

h) After your event

We're usually so busy remembering how to relax after events that we forget there's still work to be done. If you've done your planning, you can prepare for these tasks before your event finishes. But they are important, so plan ahead and everyone will be happy (and wonder how you got it all done).

- Set aside some time to review the evaluations completed by attendees and to make recommendations for future events. (Bear in mind that comments like "there was too much to choose from" aren't really criticisms at all).
- Consider compiling a list of all media mentions of your event or activity and copying media clippings. This will be useful for engaging future sponsors or supporters or for reporting to funding bodies
- Send thank you notes or acknowledgements to all speakers, sponsors, volunteers and others who helped make your event possible. Do it straight away (you could even have your thank you notes ready before your event takes place) as once your event is over these things often get overlooked.
- Finalise your budget and make sure all outstanding invoices or debts are taken care of.