



Cabinet Office

Guidance

Organising a voluntary event: a 'can do' guide

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Contents

1. Part 1: What do I need to think about when planning an event?
2. Part 2: Do I need any licences or other sort of permission?
3. Part 3: How do I keep organisers, volunteers and participants safe?
4. Part 4: How do I make sure that food and is safe and do I need to label it?
5. Part 5: Can I close a road?
6. Part 6: Do I need insurance?
7. Part 7: Am I planning an event for which there is specialist guidance elsewhere?



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Voluntary and community events are an important aspect of everyday life that help encourage people to play a more active part in society.

They may celebrate a particular occasion, raise funds for a good cause or simply bring people in a community closer together. We have worked with a range of civil society and government organisations (some of whose own guidance we link to here) to develop this guide, which will:

- help you to plan and run successful events with a minimum of red tape
- if you are holding a particular type of event, help you to find the specific advice you need

The guide should clear up any confusion over issues such as health and safety and food hygiene, which people often think will get in the way. Organising a successful event is really all about good planning and taking sensible precautions where necessary.

This guide has seven parts and you probably won't need to read all of them, especially if you are planning a particular type of event, such as a street party or a cycle road race. There are links to more specialised guidance on these in part 7.

Part 1: What do I need to think about when planning an event?

Part 2: Do I need any licences or other sort of permission?

Part 3: How do I keep organisers, volunteers and participants safe?

Part 4: How do I make sure that food and drink is safe?

Part 5: Can I close a road?

Part 6: Do I need insurance?

Part 7: Am I planning an event for which there is specialist guidance elsewhere?

1. Part 1: What do I need to think about when planning an event?

Good planning is vital to a successful event. Whatever sort of event you want to hold, the planning will often follow the same general pattern. You need to:

1. Be clear about what you want the event to be, what you want it to achieve, and its size and scale.
2. Plan and share out the work.
3. Find out what bookings, permissions, licences you may need.
4. Think about common sense safety and access issues and whether you will need insurance.
5. Decide on a realistic budget.
6. Identify how best to publicise the event.
7. Plan the days (or days) in detail.
8. “Mop up” after the event.

1.1 Be clear about what you want the event to be, what you want it to achieve, and its size and scale

Discuss with your fellow organisers what you want the event to achieve - will it:

- raise money for a good cause
- bring the community together
- encourage a particular activity, such as a sport

You will also need to decide:

- who do you want to come to the event
- will there be activities for a range of different people
- how many people are you catering for (think of both a minimum and maximum) and do you have the right facilities

- will admission be free or will there be a charge; if the latter, will tickets need to be bought in advance or at the door - advance tickets (even if admission is free) can help you assess the level of interest and the numbers to plan for

The bigger the event, the more people you will need to plan and organise on the day itself, and the more time you will need give yourself to plan and prepare.

1.2 Plan and share out the work

If you are having a larger event you may want to form a small working group, to plan all the main dates and deadlines and help clarify how much work there is to do, and when.

For larger events consider having small groups to look at each area, such as marketing, safety and logistics (these will obviously vary depending on your event). It may also be a good idea to have one member of each group as your core organising team.

If it is a larger event, it is sensible for 1 or 2 members of the organising team to keep an overview of the entire event to:

- ensure that the different teams' plans are joining up
- keep records of the planning arrangements

When planning the date of the event, try to avoid clashes with similar events that may be taking place nearby.

You can encourage more people to get involved by:

- advertising planning meetings widely and encouraging participation at the meetings
- thinking about the timing and location of your planning meetings, and asking potential volunteers what suits them best
- publicising the event early and combine this with an appeal for people to help
- putting together a list of jobs that can easily be handed over to new volunteers, even if they don't want to come to meetings
- pinning a list or rota up on a notice board and asking people to pledge a small amount of time on the day or contributions of food, raffle prizes, etc

Think about asking other local organisations, including event organisations, to get involved. They may have the expertise to take a major part of organising the event off your hands.

Keep people involved in organising the event, and anyone else who should know, regularly updated about what is going on; if it is a larger event, this may include the local council, police and/or emergency services. This can stop an individual or an organising group from making mistakes that may be expensive.

Also, if it is a larger event, consider the impact of the event on the neighbourhood in which it takes place. Make sure that residents and businesses are aware of what is going on and have the opportunity to let you know of any concerns they may have.

1.3 Find out what bookings, permissions and licences you need

Many activities that take place during voluntary and community events don't need any licence. There is more information about this in Part 2.

You do need to:

- make sure the venue you will be using is booked and confirmed (or if it is free of charge, you have the necessary permission from the owner) allowing enough time to provide access for set up and clearing away, as well as the event itself
- think about any equipment you will need to hire and make sure you know how to use it, for example, microphones. PA systems etc
- check with entertainers what they expect you to provide and exactly what they will provide eg
 - how long does their 'show' last
 - will they perform more than once
 - what is the maximum number of people they can reach in a performance

If you are raising money for charity, you can find the good practice standards you should aim to meet in the Institute of Fundraising's Code of Fundraising Practice (<https://www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk/library/fundraising-regulation-and-the-iofs-code-of-practice/>).

1.4 Think about common sense safety, access issues and insurance

You will be responsible for the safety of volunteers and visitors at your event. Looking after people's safety at events is largely a matter of taking simple, sensible precautions that are outlined in Part 3.

You will need to consider the following:

- how will people get to the event, make sure your publicity gives details of public transport and parking
- do you need to put up signs on the surrounding roads to make the event easier to find
- is the venue accessible for wheelchair users and people with other disabilities, make sure your publicity is clear about the level of access visitors can expect

If you are holding an open air event, the weather can be fickle. So ask yourself:

- what impact heavy rain, strong winds or very hot weather could have
- is there shelter for visitors from both heavy rain and/or strong sunlight
- are there steps you can take to stop cars getting stuck – particularly as they enter or leave the car park
- is there a risk of flooding

You should also consider whether you need to get public liability insurance.

1.5 Decide on a realistic budget

All the following may involve costs you will have to meet:

- venue hire
- publicity
- equipment hire
- decorations

- entertainers
- prizes
- buying refreshments
- transport
- phone bills, postage and other administrative costs
- insurance
- volunteers' expenses
- first aid equipment and provision
- fees for licences and permissions

So you need to plan how you are going to cover them. This could be through;

- entrance fees
- grants or sponsorship
- voluntary donations
- raffles
- selling refreshments
- money-making sideshows and stalls
- charging stallholders and/or catering suppliers

Be realistic. It's better to underestimate income and slightly overestimate costs.

Even if you are aiming to break even, do allow some contingency to reduce the risk of making a loss. If you do then make some money use it to meet the cost of next time or decide beforehand a charity you can donate it to.

Talking to people who have organised similar events can provide a really helpful indication of likely costs and income.

1.6 Identify how best to publicise the event

You will need to decide:

- who you want your publicity to reach - think about where those people are most likely to see a poster or flyer, and what will attract them to the event

- how much money you have to spend on publicity
- do you want to use local media, such as newspapers and radio
- can you use digital media such as websites or social networks

Consider including some contact details with the publicity so people can contact you directly.

You should also make sure you get your publicity out early enough for it to be distributed and read - don't wait until every last detail of the event is finalised.

1.7 Plan the day (or days) in detail

Shortly before the event, you need to run through the day (or days) in detail with the organising team. You can ask yourself questions like:

- where will everybody be on the day - does everyone know their roles and responsibilities, including if something goes wrong
- is the rota full, or do you need to do a last-minute ring round to fill some gaps
- how will equipment and volunteers get to the venue - and away again
- will you be able to take hired equipment directly to and from the event, or will it need to be stored
 - how close to the event site can organisers' vehicles get, you may have to consider using a trolley or volunteers to help carry equipment closer to the site
- who is responsible for money on the day (if you if you think you may raise a large amount, consider arranging for someone to collect the money throughout the day)
- will you need a lot of change; if so, contact your bank (at least a week in advance) and ask them to put some aside for you
- will you have enough activities - long queues will spoil people's day
- what will happen if the weather is bad
- do you have enough time, materials and people for setting up and clearing away

1.8 “Mopping up” after the event

Check the terms of your hire agreement to see exactly what the owner of the venue expects you to clear up.

It's a good idea to count takings from the different sources separately, so that you know which activities made money and which didn't do so well. This will help you make a more accurate budget for your next event. It's also best to have two people at the count.

Bank cash as soon as possible.

It's always worth having a brief discussion with your organising team after the event, to talk through what went well and not so well on the day, learning lessons for the future.

If the event took place to raise money for a good cause, find a way of publicising how much money was raised and thank people for their contribution.

2. Part 2: Do I need any licences or other sort of permission?

Many activities don't need a licence. However you should check the situation early on, because if you do find you need a licence or other permission, this can take some time, even months in some cases.

This part of the guide will help you with licences and permission for the following activities:

1. Raffles, lotteries and race nights
2. Providing entertainment
3. Providing alcoholic drinks

2.1 Raffles, lotteries and race nights

You do not have to register an “incidental non-commercial lottery”. This is a term that includes raffles, sweepstakes and tombolas. Tickets for this type of lottery must be sold and the winners announced at the event. Anyone at the event (including children) can take part in this sort of lottery. The expenses that can be deducted from the proceeds must not be more than £100, and no more than £500 can be spent on prizes (not including donated prizes). See the section [providing alcoholic drinks](#) for information about alcoholic prizes.

Find out more with the Gambling Commission’s guidance on [running raffles and lotteries](https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/) (<https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/>).

Bingo and race nights

You do not need a licence to play bingo, or run a race night as long as you are playing for ‘good causes’. This means that the night:

- can only take place at events where none of the proceeds are being used for private gain
- players must be informed of the organisation or good cause that will benefit from the money raised

You can play either ‘prize bingo’ or ‘equal chance’ bingo.

For prize bingo:

- all the prizes are put up in advance and are not dependent on the number of players or amount of money collected
- there are no limits on the amount of money you can collect for admission fees or ticket sales, or on the value of prizes paid out.

For equal chance bingo:

- the amount of money paid out in prizes is dependent on how much is collected in admission charges and sale of tickets
- you can charge each person up to £8 for admission and tickets
- the total value of prizes for one off events must not be more than £600

Race Nights that are run to raise money for charity, also may not need a licence if they are run on the same basis as above.

Find out more with the Gambling Commission’s guidance on [non-commercial and private gaming and betting](https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/) (<https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/>).

2.2 Providing entertainment

The following events do not need entertainment licences between the hours of 8am and 11pm:

- performances of live unamplified music for audiences
- performances of live amplified music in licensed premises for audiences of up to 200 people
- performances of plays and dance for audiences of up to 500 people
- indoor sporting events for audiences up to 1,000 people

Other examples of performances that generally don't need a licence are:

- karaoke – between 8am and 11pm in licensed premises for audiences of 200 or less if there is any amplification
- incidental music - live music that is incidental to other activities that aren't classed as regulated entertainment

GOV.UK also holds more detail on [entertainment licensing](https://www.gov.uk/entertainment-licensing-changes-under-the-live-music-act) (<https://www.gov.uk/entertainment-licensing-changes-under-the-live-music-act>).

If you are planning on playing pre-recorded music at an event that is open to the public, check with your venue to see if it holds licences from PRS (Performing Rights Society) for Music (<http://www.prsformusic.com/Pages/default.aspx>) and PPL (Phonographic Performance Limited). (<http://www.ppluk.com/>)

If your venue does not hold these licences you should check with those organisations whether you need a licence. A fee will probably be payable.

2.3 Providing alcohol

You don't need a licence to provide alcohol at a private event, such as a street party, as long as it is not being sold.

You also don't need a licence if the venue has either of the following:

- a 'Premises Licence' and that there is a named 'supervisor' who holds a 'Personal Licence' to sell alcohol
- a 'Club Premises Certificate' which includes the sale of alcohol

This is something you can check with the owner of the venue.

You don't need a licence to offer bottles (or other containers) of alcohol as prizes in raffles and tombolas provided the following conditions are met:

- the raffle must be promoted as an incidental event (ie it is not the main event) within an 'exempt entertainment' – this is defined as a bazaar, sale of work, fête, dinner, dance, sporting or athletic event, or other entertainment of a similar character
- after expenses are deducted, none of the money raised by the 'entertainment' is used for private gain
- the alcohol is in a sealed container, such as an unopened bottle
- there are no prizes that are just money
- tickets are only sold during the event, not in advance
- the raffle/lottery is not the main inducement to attend

You must not sell tickets that can then be exchanged for an alcoholic drink, or to ask for a donation in return for alcohol.

If none of the above apply and you want to:

- have a bar where alcohol is sold
- sell alcohol in another way
- provide entertainment to the wider public
- charge to raise money for your event

You will need a Temporary Event Notice (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/alcohol-licensing-temporary-events-notices>).

3. Part 3: How do I keep organisers, volunteers and participants safe?

Despite the stories you might hear, health and safety law does not, generally, impose duties upon someone who is not an employer, self-employed or an employee (although civil law may apply).

In most cases, all you need to do is consider realistically what could potentially go wrong, what effect this could have on those present and what you need to do to prevent it. Focus on risks that could cause real harm and ignore the trivial.

For many events all that is required is to follow a basic series of steps. Ask yourself:

- what are the risks, high or low, of somebody being harmed by a hazard, and how serious the harm could be
- how could accidents happen and who might be harmed
- what do you need to do to control the risks and make the event safer

These are some of the things you may need to think about:

- the layout of the event to ensure people and vehicles can move about safely
- the number of people attending the event, for example, managing entrances and exits to prevent overcrowding
- keeping the venue free from slip and trip hazards
- not taking unnecessary risks when putting up large marquees, tents etc. It may be sensible to have a large marquee erected and taken down by the company it is hired from - see the guidance on safe use and operation from MUTA (<https://www.muta.org.uk/members-area/login/>)
- making sure that structures like bouncy castles you hire have an up-to-date inspection certificate and that they are properly tethered and used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and guidance - find out more about the industry's PIPA scheme (<http://www.pipa.org.uk/>)
- if hiring a fairground ride, check that it has an up to date certificate of conformity, this is equivalent to a car's MOT certificate
- electrical safety: for example, if you are using mains voltage outside use a 'trip device' to ensure that the current is promptly cut off if contact is made with any live part
- first aid arrangements

If you are using a village or community hall or similar venue, the Health and Safety Executive has a simple checklist (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/voluntary/village-halls.htm>) to help you:

- confirm that any actions needed are sensible
- deal with the risks in a proportionate way

3.1 Fire Safety

Anyone providing a venue for a public event must assess the risk from fire to those using the premises and ensure that the fire safety measures in place are suitable to protect lives in the event of a fire.

Discuss with the venue owner what fire safety arrangements are in place and make sure you know what to do should a fire break out.

Questions you should ask yourself are often a matter of common sense. For example:

- is the fire alarm working
- are the fire exits obvious and/or clearly signposted; are there enough exits to let everyone, including anyone who may be disabled or particularly vulnerable, leave quickly and easily in the event of a fire
- who will be responsible for evacuating the building should it be necessary
- are any pieces of fire safety equipment, such as fire extinguishers or fire blankets provided; are clear instructions on how to use them provided
- is there suitable access for the emergency services

Remember you may put lives at unnecessary risk if you attempt to fight the fire.

Sensible precautions you can take to help minimise the risk of fire include:

- don't let rubbish build up and ensure any flammables are used carefully and stored properly
- keep fire exits free from obstruction
- keep any gas cylinders upright in a safe, well ventilated space away from heat sources
- if you are using a portable generator, read the user guide first, set it up in a well-ventilated area and be careful not to spill fuel when filling and refilling the tank

- if you are planning an event that includes bonfires, fireworks or Chinese/sky lanterns you should read the specialist guidance linked to in Part 7

4. Part 4: How do I make sure that food and is safe and do I need to label it?

4.1 Making sure food is safe

If you want to provide or sell food at an event, here are some basic questions you need to be able to answer:

- are the food preparation and serving facilities and equipment clean and in good repair
 - are they suitably situated so that the food does not become contaminated, for example from pests, animals or waste
- are the washing facilities adequate
- some people have food allergies; is there someone who can answer questions about the origin of the food and its ingredients

The Food Standards Agency has more information about food safety for voluntary and community events (<http://www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/guidancenotes/hygguid/charity-community-groups/>) and you can also get advice from food safety officers at your local council. (<http://food.gov.uk/enforcement/yourarea/>)

4.2 Food labelling

Food sold for a charity or other community organisation, only has to follow food labelling regulations (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1996/1499/contents/made>) if the seller is a registered food business. This includes food sold at one-off events such as village and church fêtes and school fairs.

However, labelling food voluntarily may be helpful to prospective buyers, particularly if the food contains a common allergen (<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/food-allergy/Pages/Intro1.aspx>) that buyers may need to be aware of, such as nuts in a cake.

5. Part 5: Can I close a road?

Closing a quiet street for a small community event, such as a street party, is easier than a lot of people think:

- it is common and legal for streets to be used for social events and it is reasonable for you to expect your local highway authority to be helpful
- all your council needs is a few weeks advance notice of where and when the closure (most councils only need 4 to 6 weeks) will take place so they can plan around it (for example, so they can let the emergency services know) and put in place a traffic regulation order
- check early so that you know what your council's process is; some councils have set deadlines to help them manage their work, but there are no deadlines in law, so if they look unreasonable ask your council to be flexible
- the law also does not require a fee to be charged for a road closure; if your council, or its agency, is making a charge, you have every right to question what it is for and to ask the council to cover the cost for social benefit
- if your council really needs more information, they will contact you, but they are expected to take a 'light touch' approach - if you are asked for excessive information, you can challenge the request
- some councils will lend you road signs and cones, or you can hire or buy metal signs locally

Find out more about planning street parties by following the specialist guide linked to in Part 7.

If you don't want to go to the trouble of closing a street, you can organise a street meet/gathering on private land (with the landowner's permission), such as a driveway or front garden, without any requirement to fill in council forms. Streets Alive has guidance (<http://www.streetparty.org.uk/residents/street-meet.aspx>) about how to go about it.

For a larger scale event or for proposals to close a busy or main road you should contact your council as soon as possible, and at least several months

in advance, to ensure there is enough time for your proposal to be properly considered by the highway authority and the police.

6. Part 6: Do I need insurance?

There is no law that says you must buy insurance for a voluntary or community event – but you might want to make sure you are covered in case something goes wrong and someone makes a claim against you. Having public liability insurance may give you peace of mind, but it's good planning, not insurance that stops things going wrong.

Sometimes another body, perhaps a local council you have contact with or someone that you contract with (such as a landowner if the event is taking place on their land), will require you to have public liability insurance. If this is the case you can ask why they are requiring this because it is not compulsory in law. Sometimes signing a disclaimer will be adequate instead of buying insurance.

If you do decide you need insurance remember that before you buy it, you should check the terms of the policy carefully to make sure you know exactly what cover it provides and any requirements you may have to meet.

If you are holding the event in your home or garden you may be covered by the public liability section of your own home insurance policy. You can check this yourself and talk to your insurer if you have any questions.

If you are renting or using someone else's building, you may be covered by their insurance, do check to see if this is the case.

If you are hiring equipment such as a marquee or bouncy castle check with the company you are hiring it from whether their terms of hire include insurance and read any conditions carefully (particularly any exclusions).

If external businesses are providing services, such as food or rides, you should check they have their own insurance, and that it is in force on the day of the event.

Find out more about event insurance with the Association of British Insurers' 'Celebrate – An ABI guide to planning an event' (pdf, 29.6 KB) (<https://www.abi.org.uk/globalassets/sitecore/files/documents/publications/public/migrated/liability/abi-guide-to-planning-an-event.pdf>).

6.1 What is Public Liability Insurance?

This insurance covers the organisers of an event providing them with financial protection if they are held to blame for injury to a person or for loss or damage to property and sued.

You can buy different levels of cover, from £1 million upwards. This seems a lot but costs are relatively low, sometimes as little as £50 or £60. How much you need varies according to:

- the type of event and activities you are planning
- how many people will attend

If you are unsure, talk to your own insurer or an insurance broker who will be able to advise you.

You do need to be sure that the policy you buy covers all the activities you want included, so be open and clear with the insurer or broker you talk to. And make sure that you check the terms of the policy and in particular any exclusions.

You can find a specialist insurance broker on the internet or on the British Insurance Brokers Association (BIBA) website. (<http://www.biba.org.uk/>)

7. Part 7: Am I planning an event for which there is specialist guidance elsewhere?

There is a lot of good guidance available for particular types of event. Some of it is linked to below.

7.1 Community events

The Local Government Association's top tips (<https://www.local.gov.uk/top-tips-holding-public-event-your-community>) for holding a public event in your community.

7.2 Street Parties

Your guide to organising a street party

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/your-guide-to-organising-a-street-party>)
on GOV.UK.

The Street Party Site (<http://www.streetparty.org.uk/>) provided by Streets Alive.

7.3 Firework displays and Chinese/sky lanterns

The Health and Safety Executive's Giving your own firework display: How to run and fire it safely (<https://www.shetland.gov.uk/tradingstandards>).

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents' (RoSPA) Safer Fireworks.
(<http://www.saferfireworks.com/index.htm>)

RoSPA advice on using Chinese/sky lanterns.

(<http://www.rospa.com/homesafety/adviceandinformation/product/chinese-lanterns.aspx>)

7.4 Cycling events

If you're planning an event, from a family fun ride to a challenging sportive, British Cycling can help you

(<http://www.britishcycling.org.uk/sportiveeventorganisers>) organise and publicise it, and provide event insurance.

7.5 Running road races

You can find out about organising road running races with Run Britain.

(<http://www.runbritain.com/race-directors-club>)

7.6 Car treasure hunts

The Motor Sports Association has [guidance on organising car treasure hunts](https://www.motorsportuk.org/) (<https://www.motorsportuk.org/>).

7.7 The Big Lunch

The Big Lunch (<http://www.thebiglunch.com/join-in/5-steps-to-organising.php>) is an Eden Project idea to help bring communities together.

7.8 Children's Play

Playing Out (<http://playingout.net/>) aims to increase children's safe access to informal play in residential streets through resident-led street play sessions.

The first Wednesday in August is National Playday. To support Playday there is a Get Organised guide (<http://www.playday.org.uk/get-involved/>) for planning local events to support children's play. The guide can be used for similar events at any time.

7.9 Community Games

The Community Games (<http://www.communitygames.org.uk/>) are an opportunity to bring communities together to take part in sporting and cultural activities inspired by London 2012.

Games are organised in a way that works for the community and celebrates its uniqueness.



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