



### Events: Introduction to Events

#### The A-Z of planning an event

Before you start the actual planning of an event, you need to do some research and define certain areas:

- What are the event's objectives? Why are you holding it?
- What is the target audience? Who do you want to attend / invite?
- What is the message? Is it a party or a launch, do you want to raise money, what do you want people to know about at the end of it?

You can then:

- Establish what activities are needed to meet these objectives
- Set your budget
- Put in place review and evaluation methods

An event can be as simple as a meeting or office gathering, a conference with exhibitors, a press briefing, or a major Awards presentation dinner for a 1,000 guests. It is an organised activity, formal or informal, which achieves set objectives and enhances your organisation's reputation within a laid-down budget.

#### Key elements

Planning an event takes a number of different factors into account, of which the key elements are:

- **Date** – firstly check your proposed time and date against other events or happenings which impact on the same target audience, regionally or locally, depending on the event. If someone else has already booked an event on the date you plan – and they will be trying to attract similar people to your guest list, now is the time to reschedule your date.
- **Time management**  
For a conference, you need to decide whether to hold it over one day or two – which can depend on the distance people travel, the delegate fee and what kind of speaker line-up you organise. Will it be a lunch or a dinner? Are there speeches or presentations?

Linked to any event should be an Action Plan showing what needs to be done and when. Allow plenty of time for marketing activities, travel times, and time to book ahead for speakers and celebrities. And ensure you have sufficient staff to carry out all the work that needs to be done over the coming months / weeks / days.

- **Location** – in some areas it is easy to find suitable venues that can hold the number of people you expect to attend. In other areas you may find you need to book a location anything up to two years ahead to get the venue that suits you. Do make sure you get a written quotation from the venue, outlining in detail what you will get for your money and the cost of any "additional" items, as well as their cancellation policy.
- **Attractions** – what is going to encourage delegates or guests to attend your event? Is it great speakers, celebrities, an amazing new venue, or is it a special celebration?

Speakers need to tell the audience something they don't already know if they are to attract delegates to your conference. Specialists need to be good communicators and able to hold the interest of the audience. You need to be very clear in your briefing invitation to them about what you want them to achieve, how long they should speak for, the date and venue, and whether you will pay them.

Celebrities should be contracted to perform specific tasks at particular times. Sometimes these contracts involve you in additional costs, which can make or break an event – so read them carefully before you sign.

Once you have identified and addressed all of these, you can start looking at financial issues.

## **Budget**

This is probably the most crucial part of planning an event and key to your success or failure!

If you've planned carefully, you can now work out what your costs are going to be and how you are going to achieve your profit without over-charging and putting guests or delegates off.

Some of the key elements to include in your budget are:

Costs such as –

- Staffing
- Venue hire, catering, AV
- Speakers, entertainment or MC and their travel/accommodation costs
- Marketing
- Printing brochures, tickets, programme, menus, awards
- Photography and video

Income such as –

- Delegate fees / ticket sales
- Exhibition stands
- Sponsorship
- Advertising in programmes

It is always a good idea to credit check any third party contractors to whom you are going to pay deposits/forward payments. In some small measure this may reassure you that they are going to be around at the time of your event.

You should also look at insuring your event against cancellation and personal safety, if possible, as this can be an expense well spent.

The most important item to work out is your break-even costs, then your desired profit margin and finally, for evaluation purposes, your ROI (return on investment). This shows whether your event is likely to be a success and will confirm whether or not it should be held at this particular time in this particular venue and this format.

## **Marketing**

Before you can start marketing your event, you need to have finalised your programme - decided on speakers and topics if it is a conference; planned celebrity / musical attractions for a party; decided on the MC and format if it is an awards evening; and so on.

It is not sufficient to tell your audience that you are holding an event just once – you need to keep reminding them. If the event is open to the public, you need news releases and perhaps an advertising programme to keep it front of mind. If you have a celebrity, make sure everyone knows about their appearance date.

Today there are a huge variety of options available to market any event from traditional press and brochure packs, to websites and emails, through to “Tweets” and blogs. Try and “live” through the event and see how you can sell it most effectively to your target audience.

## **Exhibitors and Sponsors**

If you are planning to raise additional funding from exhibitors or sponsors you need to allow time to contact suitable potential target organisations - so they can gain maximum publicity from being associated with your event, as well as including the expense in their relevant budget.

Once they have agreed to come on board, special contracts should be drawn up for these organisations, outlining the benefits of association to them, as well as to yourself, i.e. what do they get in return for their money and what do you get in return for being associated with them.

## **Contracts**

These are hugely important to the success of your event. Anyone agreeing to do anything for you in terms of your event should have a clear contract stating what they have agreed to do, by when, what the cost will be, how and when they will be paid, any cancellation agreement, and clearly naming the individual / organisation involved. Sometimes you will find it useful to include certain targets that must be met within these contracts.

Even speakers should have contracts known as briefings, which set out clearly the where, when, why, how and what they are expected to deliver; and whether or not you will be paying a fee or refunding any expenses.

## **On the day**

By now you will have a well-worked Action Plan with contact details, clear and detailed timings, and notes of everyone's individual responsibilities. It should include delivery times for crucial equipment, setting up key guest places at dinners – which can make or break an event, and time for final rehearsals with your MC or celebrity.

Do you have a Plan B in place in case it rains on your outdoor event? How will you handle a power cut? Who will step in if one of your key speakers is held up at the airport or on a train? Where can you get additional supplies if you have an unexpectedly heavy demand on food or drinks?

Whatever happens, you need to remain calm and in control. Sort out each problem as it comes along and delegate to the staff member best able to handle the different issues. Keep smiling and your guests will work along with you. Start shouting and you are lost!

## **Evaluation and Wrap Up**

There are two kinds of results: qualitative and quantitative. Most events are measured quantitatively by the kind of experience the guests / delegates experienced. But keeping within budget, achieving fund raising targets, and making headlines in key publications are also measures of the success of some events.

At conferences you might ask delegates to complete Evaluation forms – what did they think of the speakers, did they learn anything new, and so on. But whatever you do, and however you measure your subsequent success, remember that you are only as good as your last event – so everyone needs to be as near perfect as possible. And the best way to achieve that is with the 3 P's – Plan, Plan and Plan.

**A series of best practice case studies on this topic can be found in the information centre along with other skills guides.**

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**Further information:** The CIPR runs regular training workshops on Event management and details can be found at [workshops@cipr.co.uk](mailto:workshops@cipr.co.uk)



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