

Event Planning Tips

Planning Special Events: Blueprint For Success

by Debora Meskauskas

A special event is a one-time event focused on a specific purpose such as a groundbreaking, grand opening or other significant occasion in the life of a library. Special events may also be created for other targeted purposes such as a jobs fair; awards banquet or logo contest.

These one time special events are different from "programs" offered on a continuing basis such as a lecture series, summer reading club or story hour. The following steps are offered to help guide your event planning:

1. Develop strategies for success

- Make sure the purpose for the special event is important enough to merit the time and expense needed to properly stage, publicize and evaluate the event.
- Carefully match the type of event that is selected to the purpose that it serves. Do you want to reach out to new users or thank your supporters?
- Ensure that the library staff fully supports the special event. Select a working committee with broad representation.
- Target groups that have a special stake in the event such as library users, funders, politicians, business leaders, senior citizens or parents.
- Start planning at least three months, and in many cases, a year ahead of time.
- Develop ways to evaluate the event's success. Measurable event objectives may include attendance, the amount of money raised, the number of library cards issued or increases in circulation.
- Talk to other librarians who have successfully staged similar events.

2. Make a checklist

A checklist provides a step-by-step guide to organizing and executing a special event. See sample checklist on next page.

3. Create a budget

The objective is to provide event planners with a financial blueprint. The budget should be specific, and include revenue opportunities (sponsorship, ticket sales, donations, concession sales) as well as expenses printing, permits, insurance, speakers, food, supplies, security).

4. Consider logistics

With many activities going on simultaneously, there are many details to be checked. Major areas to consider and plan for include: size of space or building used, utility support needed, setup (tables and chairs, tents, portable toilets, parking, signage) coordination, cleanup, emergency plans, transportation, and public services such as police and fire departments.

Sample Check List

The following checklist provides a step-by-step guide to organizing and executing an open house. Include projected deadlines for each step.

- ✓ Select chair and members of your planning committee.
- ✓ Develop a master plan and set the event date.
- ✓ Select chairs for subcommittees such as refreshments, setup and cleanup, tour guides, traffic and safety, volunteers speakers, and invitations.
- ✓ Organize volunteers for each committee.
- ✓ Formulate a publicity plan. Decide when/how media should be contacted. Be sure to alert the media of photo and interview opportunities.
- ✓ Prepare copy for program and printed materials.
- ✓ Hold a "tie down" meeting the day before the event. Distribute a schedule of events to each committee member. Discuss assignments. Distribute identification badges. Answer any questions.
- ✓ Set up several registration tables and stagger tour schedules to avoid bottlenecks. Distribute a program as guests arrive, so they know what to expect.
- ✓ After the event, mail the printed program with an appropriate letter to "significant others" who were unable to attend.
- ✓ Remember to thank everyone who participated. Send photos if possible.
- ✓ Conduct an evaluation

5. Plan publicity

Promoting a special event takes creative thinking balanced with practicality. The primary objective is to publicize the event, but secondary objectives should be considered.

- Are you trying to inform, educate or entertain?
- Increase awareness or attendance of the event?
- Build a base support from a specific audience?
- Facilitate good community relations?

Brainstorm all the available media in including marquees, school newsletters, church announcements, and cable and commercial stations. Make a detailed list with names of whom to contact and when.

6. Evaluate the event

Take time to evaluate right after the event while the details are fresh. You may want to consider having a questionnaire for participants to fill out. Some general evaluative criteria include:

- Did the event fulfill its goals and objectives? Why or why not?
- Identify what worked and what needs fine-tuning. Which vendors should be used again?
- What items were missing on the checklist?
- Was the event well attended?
- Was informal and formal feedback about the event positive?
- Given all that went into staging, was it worth doing?

Finally, it is important to remember to celebrate your successes and to thank all those who contributed.

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Excerpted from "Part-Time Public Relations with Full-Time Results," which covers topics ranging from how to write a news release to desktop publishing. Published by ALA Editions, 65 pages, \$16 or \$4.40 for ALA members. To order call 1-800-545-2433, press 7.

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