

Events Planning Workshop

Chapter 1 Defining the Event

Chapter 2 Drafting the Event Plan

Chapter 3 Scripting the Event

Creating an Event

Define, Plan, and Script are the three stages of creating a community event.. Defining the Event is the first step and often is it the most difficult. Until you have defined the parameters of the event itself you shouldn't begin the planning process.

Chapter 1: Defining the Event

Target Population

Often when you ask someone who their target population is they say "everyone" – as in "everyone will love my" film, event, music, ideas... but in fact, if you look carefully, our target audience is never so broad.

For example:

1. If you are running for federal election your target population is between 18 and 80, and agrees with you on key issues like the environment, economics and peacekeeping. That would limit "everybody" quite substantially.
2. If you are putting on entertainment to generate awareness (or raise money), you would have to determine the age group most likely to enjoy your show. You need to identify those who will come because they agree with you (sometimes called "the converted"), and those whose ideas you want to influence, and of course your own network of friends and contacts. In general, you wouldn't showcase a jazz band if you wanted to attract teenagers, or street rap if you are appealing to the older set.

In defining your target group, it helps to answer these questions.

- Who do you want to attend the event?
- Who will share common values and tastes?
- Who do you want to hear about it and wish they had come too?
- What do you want the media or outside groups thinking before the event, and after it?

Exercise:

Write down as precisely as possible who your target population or audience is.

Desired Outcomes and Objectives

What do you want to achieve? Do you want to bring 20 people to see you make a presentation? Or do you want to reach 250 with your message? No matter what the event is – there are reasons for you to put it on. You need to think through what those reasons are in order to have an opportunity to fulfill them. For example, when the Wakefield Grannies – a grass-roots support group for South African grandmothers raising aids-orphaned children – hold their annual concert they state as their objectives:

- To sell 500 tickets to the event thereby raising \$6,000 to help their counterparts in South Africa, the Gogos.
- To share adequate and accurate information about the great courage and determination of the Gogos who are raising their grandchildren.
- To inform people about the Wakefield Grannies' mandate and our presence in the community.

Exercise:

Establish what the goals and objectives are for your event. Answer the questions "Why are we doing this event? What do we hope to achieve?" Make your answers as detailed and specific as possible.

Brainstorming Ideas

Now that you know exactly who you intend to reach and what you hope to achieve, this is the perfect time to stop and spend a little time brainstorming around the event.

Often when we begin to create an event plan, we already know what it is we plan to do. We may have decided to have a concert, put on a play, or hold a dinner. Ask yourself how you can enrich the event – you might have someone make a speech or tell a story. Or create a brochure or program with extra information that you can hand out. Add something special to the program – some small gift, an activity, or decorations – to make the event more exciting, more intriguing and to forward your objectives.

For example, a local theatre group has an event program to print and in it space is allocated for a message from the Director and one from the Board. Here is a perfect opportunity to articulate your message. At an event dinner, you can hold a silent auction of items donated by personalities from the community or from local stores. Or you might put in "quotation" cards that relate to your key messages at all the seating places that get people talking to each other. The creativity of your committee members for providing enrichment to the event means the possibilities are unlimited.

Exercise:

Describe the event as you have envisioned it, taking into consideration your target audience and goals.

Key Messages

Key messages describe the type of information you want to produce and the content of your communications. Although there may be specific messages you want to convey to targeted members of your stakeholders or participants, these messages should be broad enough to appeal to a wider audience. They should also be backed up with truth or evidence. They should be able to be used in different ways such as in the creation of publicity materials, choosing your event's MC (master of ceremonies) and performers, or writing the event script.

For example, during the launch of a membership campaign to raise money to build a Community Centre, these were the key messages:

- The co-operative Wakefield-La Pêche Community Centre brings together four vital community organizations to create a multi-purpose cultural and sports centre for the region.
- Membership in the Co-operative Wakefield-La Pêche Community Centre builds support for a new public facility where youth, seniors, families and community groups speaking both of our official languages can gather for a wide range of recreation and cultural activities.
- A successful membership campaign shows funders from all levels of government that the project is needed and wanted by the community, and that all related groups in the community are working together for the common good.

For another example, promoting the Great Granny Concert, the key messages would be something like this:

- AIDS is devastating Southern Africa and it will take all of us to help halt the rising death toll.

- The Wakefield Grannies work as a group to offer financial and emotional support to the Alexandra Township GoGos, a group of 50 women and men caring for their AIDS-orphaned grandchildren.
- We also assist the 200 children who attend the Alexandra Clinic
- We are grateful to the Wakefield community for its support over the last four years
- We hope people will enjoy the music, food and the other activities, sign our visitors' book and send a message to Africa.

Exercise:

Prepare a statement in a concise and accurate way for each of the core things you wish to communicate at your event.

Strategic Considerations

Are there any obstacles or challenges to be overcome in achieving your objectives and communicating your key messages? These are strategic considerations. If you can identify them it is always possible to plan the event so as to a) minimize their influence and b) communicate accurate information to your potential audience.

For the Community Centre Membership Launch event we identified that:

- It would be important to ensure the Municipality continues to be engaged takes a lead role in the project
- La Pêche residents and businesses were being asked to support many deserving projects, so it would be important to ensure that ours attracted their support without causing donor overload or volunteer burnout.
- The campaign would need to be pro-active in including the community's diverse cultural elements.
- All documents would need to be offered in both official languages.

Exercise:

Discuss and identify any strategic considerations which may affect your plans for the event. Write up simple statements which indicate how you will address these considerations in order to minimize their effects.

Determining the budget

Make a list of everything you will need to buy or rent in order to present the event. Will you need to pay for the venue, insurance, or food, and rent tables

and chairs or porta-potties? Make a list of EXPENSES which includes all the costs for putting on the event. Then identify what potential revenues you will raise. Will you sell tickets, sell ads in a program, or take up a collection or goodwill offering? Can you obtain financial support from local government or businesses? Itemize all the possible sources of income and make a list under the title REVENUES. Ideally the total of the Expenses and Revenues are in balance. If they are not, you need to find ways of either cutting the costs or increasing the revenues. Get creative and convince people to donate their skills, their resources, or money!

Exercise:

Create a balanced budget for your project. Remember that you can sometimes get items under expenses covered with in-kind donations or by having sponsors. Don't forget to include the printing costs of publicity – ads, flyers etc.

Chapter 2: Drafting the Event Plan

Now that you have defined the event and why you are doing it you can begin to draft up the Event Plan. In the event plan, identify all the areas of work that will need to be covered. This includes doing publicity, setting up the venue and the chairs and tables within it, preparing food or programs or decorations. It is all the steps to get you there. Let's call them "departments". For each department you need to include a description of the area of responsibility, a sense of when it needs to be completed and the name of the person who will oversee this action or activity. Each different event has different departments and different responsibilities. It is only when you follow the steps from the beginning and adhere to the process that you will find you are creating really unique and enjoyable events.

Exercise:

Define the departments and identify the skills needed for the work to be done. Don't forget to include clean-up afterwards as a department. Decide when each thing needs to be done by. Write this up. Then hold a meeting with your event planning group to delegate and assign names to each area so that you know who will do what.

Delegating and working with others.

Delegating is easily talked about, but much more difficult to do. Your goal is to have a name next to each job whether that is "Food" or "Logistics" or

“Table Set-up”. The success of an event depends on all of the tasks being completed properly and on time.

It’s important to know exactly what is involved in each task and to have a pretty good idea who in your group will be able to take it on. If there is no one who has the needed skills, time, or connections for a particular task you will need to go on a search. Ask the members of your group to suggest people, put a note in the local newspaper under “volunteers needed”, ask other group leaders in your community for suggestions... Whatever it takes, in the end, you will have a better team if you persist in your search for resourceful people to work on the event with you.

A big part of what makes developing community events successful is the “fun factor” involved in the work. Volunteers should be approached for what they’re good at and like to do (or at least won’t mind doing if they know it’s for a good cause). Ensure that the volunteers enjoy the process of creating and staging an event, by providing encouragement, humour, and acknowledgement of their contribution.

Make sure that your volunteers:

1. Know what needs to be done, and by when.
2. Have the materials they need to do the job.
3. Have enough support from others so that they are not overwhelmed.
4. Feel appreciated by the group and the community.

There are lots of ways to ensure that people get thanked... for example an ad in the paper following the event listing the names of volunteers acknowledges their work publicly. Mostly it is about how you treat them throughout the entire process of planning and executing the project. An event planner can often be more of a cheerleader than a taskmaster. Keep your eye on the goals and your ears open to learn what hidden skills people have and what they feel is important to volunteering. As the chair of a group, your job is to coach everyone else through to the delivery of the program.

Creating a Timeline or Action Plan

It may not always be necessary to prepare a detailed timeline or action plan in advance. Too often, the creation of an action plan absorbs more hours than the actual doing. Sometimes you may be better off just to have a timeline for publicity before the event, but an Event Script for the event itself. It is important in this area to be flexible and open to streamlining the planning. Yet the important thing is that you THINK THROUGH THE LEAD UP TO THE EVENT ONE STEP AT A TIME. Your goal is to cover all the essentials

and to still leave an hour or so available on the day of the event to deal with whatever might have been missed.

“As a theatre publicist (at The Berkshire Theatre Festival in the United States) I regularly found that we could take an hour or two off on the actual opening night because we had organized everything for the publicity, seating, receptions and media kits so carefully that we were finished ahead of time. And if anything went wrong, this advance efficiency left us with time to react: What if an actor got sick and couldn’t go on, or the play programs failed to arrive from the printers? The point of planning is to ensure that such disasters are contained and don’t ruin the overall effort.” – Brenda Rooney

Publicity Planning and Execution

Posters, Video clips on YouTube, Websites, Event Listings, Advertising, Signage, Press Releases, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), Story Pitches to the media all come under the heading of Publicity. When you create a Publicity Plan you choose the tools you will use to reach your potential audience and then you identify how and when you will use them. Every event is different and the tools work differently in different environments. For example, if you live in an area where there is no daily paper, no local radio station or television news you will need to rely on different tools. Suddenly signage and email lists will be much more effective for getting your messages out. Below is a short list of Publicity Tools and a description of each.

Publicity Tools

This list is NOT exhaustive. Each of the following tools has strengths and weaknesses when applied to different scenarios. Some tools are more useful in small communities, schools or other organizations, and others will reach across the country.

Community Resources - New and innovative partnerships can be created if you look at your community and the resources it has. Working with partners and sponsors helps to save money and can extend your outreach, especially when email lists and other resources are brought to the table. For example a TV or radio broadcaster or local newspaper as a media sponsor can offer valuable advertising. Other organizations may provide access to thousands of members by allowing you to piggyback on their existing distribution methods.

Posters – Large and small posters announcing events can be printed or emailed. They provide the what, when, where, and how much, but they must first engage the casual viewer. A study found that you have two seconds to capture the viewer’s attention

Flyers – Small versions of posters, they can also be inserted into carry bags, in displays and on counters where they may be picked up. They can carry more information than posters. You can even print them four to a page to save on the costs.

Internet – You can use networking groups or access other groups through their email list (*Twitter, FaceBook, MySpace* are all recent examples of outreach tools on the internet). Many communities now have e-mail lists for community events. Individuals connected to your group may also have large mailing lists and can use them to do outreach with flyers, letters and other information. This is a very effective method.

Websites – Websites can be effective tools for the exchange of ideas, for marketing, for outreach, but remember that they require regular updates. Links can be emailed, imbedded in the text or offered in other website listings. Check out www.thegrannies.org as an example.

Community Calendar Announcement - A brief description (who, what, when, where, and perhaps why) of a community need or activity, included in a radio or television "community calendar". Before sending it to the radio station make sure you read it out loud and time it. It should not be more than 60 seconds long and should be very easy to read, as most announcers will not have the opportunity to rehearse it.

Event Listing - A brief description (who, what, when, where, and perhaps why) of a community event, need, etc., listed free in a special section of the local newspaper or magazine. There are often advance deadlines that you must meet to have your listing included in time for people to see it soon enough to respond.

Donated Ad - Advertising time or space donated by the medium or someone else, including a regular advertiser in that medium, a corporate sponsor, or community business. A donated ad, paid for by several sponsors, may include a box at the bottom identifying the business donors.

Feature - A story that gives detailed information on an issue, a trend, a situation, an industry, a company or organization, or a person. A feature often focuses on the human element. It is designed to enlighten, entertain, and/or educate readers. Ideas for features can be pitched to various media, keeping in mind their own audience and preference for news slant.

Guest Editorial - An analysis of or commentary on news events or public concerns, written by someone whose credibility is based on his/her knowledge of a particular subject and/or position in an organization.

Letter to the Editor - A letter written for and sent to a newspaper or magazine to present an organization's position, make a correction, or respond to another story or letter.

Press Release - A press release can be distributed on paper, on disk, by email, by a PR newswire or posted on a website. A Press release has a flag with the words ***For Immediate Release*** in large type near the top of the page. The Press Release announces information about an event you hope the media will cover. It should be concise, but it may contain quotes from those involved to generate interest.

Promotional "prop" or symbol - Inexpensive but interesting and relevant items sent with "soft" publicity materials to attract media attention and, perhaps, serve as a prop for the visual media, particularly television. A promotional prop might be a sample DVD or CD of the creative work that you are launching, or even hand-delivering to the local media a piece of cake in a box along with the press release about the dinner you are planning!

Publicity Photos - Photographs taken for publicity purposes and submitted electronically (with a graphic cutline), to the print media. Photos may be accompanied by a news release, fact sheet, or other publicity material.

Public Service Announcement (PSA) - A free broadcast announcement that promotes the programs, activities, or services of a government agency, not-for-profit organization, or any other group that serves community interests. Information for PSAs can be prepared in point form, as a script, or pre-recorded on tape. All are submitted to the broadcasters PSA director. Some broadcasters will also accept PSAs in video format.

Signage – Large signs which draw the attention of passersby. Sandwich boards and bulletin displays are very useful for building a presence in a community or neighbourhood. They are re-usable and can be made by painting on wood or fabric. Cloth banners can be draped on the sides of buildings or even across streets.

Exercise:

Draft a Publicity Plan using the key messages, your event description, and the list of Publicity Tools. Make sure you work out your budget and brainstorm opportunities for in-kind donations and sponsor support. Create a timeline for completion of each activity or element in the plan.

Chapter 3: Scripting the Event

Think of the Event as a big show. It needs a script. The script for an event can be very detailed, or as simple as a list of speaking notes for the MC. It depends on the size and complexity of the event itself. If you are having three or four performing groups come onstage, for example, you will need to establish whether they'll need a sound system, microphones, or just space to

perform. Where will the equipment for sound and lighting be set up? What will the MC say between acts? How can you build in all of your Key Messages so that the MC doesn't miss anything? When does a presentation screen need to be lowered or the lights go up? All of this should go into the script.

Usually the script has a column on the left that names the person who will be speaking (along with the time, if appropriate), and then the content follows across the page.

Here is a snippet from a script for the Great Granny Concert on the Wakefield Covered Bridge.

3rd Annual GREAT GRANNY CONCERT

2:30 – 5:30 p.m. - August 24th

Script – Draft 2

Italics indicate instructions. There will be 5 mics on-stage.

Pre-show music fades out and Ilse and Mercedes (MCs) step up to the microphones and the show begins at 2:30 p.m.

Ilse Welcome everyone to the GREAT GRANNY CONCERT. We have a wonderful show for you today. But first a word from my friend and fellow Granny - Mercedes Telles.

Mercedes It is great to see you all here. Ilse Turnsen and I will be your MCs today.

You know, every penny raised today will go directly to help the families in Alexandra Township. To date the Wakefield Grannies, with the help of all of you, have raised over \$44,000 to help the Gogos at the East Bank Clinic as they care for their orphaned grandchildren. That shows that we can do something as individuals and as small groups to make a difference. That is certainly something that our community can be proud of.

Ilse The money we make goes directly to help the women at the East Bank Clinic in Alexandra Township as they raise their orphaned grandchildren. There are 40 women and over 200 children in need of our support. To date we have raised over \$44,000 and that is something for all of us to be proud of and it shows that even in small communities we can make a difference in the world.

We have had enormous support within Wakefield for our events, our plant sales, in fact all of our activities. And often it is those closest to us who do the most and get the least acknowledgement...so on behalf of all the Wakefield Grannies we want to thank our friends and families who do so much. And speaking of family and friends we welcome to the stage our very own quartet - The Notables – to open the 3rd GREAT GRANNY CONCERT.

Mercedes Ladies and gentlemen please put your hands together to welcome Wakefield's very own quartet – The Notables.

THE NOTABLES SING for 30 minutes. (3:05 p.m.)

Ilse and Mercedes return quickly to the mics. While the MCs speak the Notables leave the stage. (From now on I won't "work the English-French mix" – Mercedes and Ilse can work this out)

MCs Thank you. That was conductor Germain Bertrand with John Hardie, Martin Podehl and Thomas Minde. As members of the Castenschall Choir they sang for the Grannies at our very first concert in 2005. Their first performance as a quartet was at the Granny Gathering in celebration of the visit of Rose, Lucia, Petronella and Magdeline to our village in 2006. They have performed at every Granny event since and their support and their music is uplifting and much appreciated.

We want to draw your attention to the Granny tables and the activities there. We have food and drinks available. There is a wonderful slide show on the history of the Wakefield Grannies and our partners in Alex at the information table. Of course you won't want to miss the CD Exchange – where for a small donation you can choose from over 900 donated CDs. Plus we have Gogolakka, an African spice created by some of our Wakefield Grannies so you can spice up your meals, jewellery and more. So make sure you take a moment to check out the Granny Marketplace.

Speaking of making history...this is our 4th year - having been brought together by our founder Norma Geggie in the fall of 2004. Norma has been a leader in our community for many years. But who would have dreamed that the group she launched four years ago would grow into a national movement of women which includes over 220 groups from coast to coast and which, through the Stephen Lewis Foundation, supports women's projects in 14 African countries? She has a story to relate from her recent trip to South Africa so now will you please welcome Norma Geggie.

Norma comes up and reads her speech. (3:20 p.m.) While the MCs speak the World Voices Choir will assemble on stage.

MCs The next group are called THE WORLD VOICES CHOIR. They are led by a remarkable young conductor, Jeannie Hunter, and they hail from Brookfield High School. This is a group that seeks to combine excellence in performance with a love of world music and a passion for global citizenship. As such they are the perfect group to reflect the goals and aspirations of the Wakefield Grannies.

They have exciting news to share with us. Today is the LAUNCH of a brand new CD of their music. The CD is called "We Have a Dream" and the title track is a choral arrangement drawn from the famous speech made by Martin Luther King. And yes, we have the CDs available at the Granny Marketplace so don't go home without one.

And while they are getting ready – we want to tell you about "our dream". You see the World Voices Choir is hoping to travel to South Africa to sing and to experience the unique culture and profound beauty of the place. And of course our dream is that one day they will sing for the children and Gogos in Alex. That the community we are so closely attached to, that produced Lindiwe's amazing message of hope and thanks will hear these wonderful voices and our connection will grow even more.

Please welcome THE WORLD VOICES CHOIR!

The choir sings for 45 minutes. Choir leaves the stage area and SIFA comes up while MCs speak. (4:05 p.m.)

MCs Wasn't that amazing? So don't forget to get a copy of their CD "We Have a Dream" and remember that when you do you will help to make their trip to South Africa and Alex a possibility.

Earlier today Pierrot Vadeboncoeur led two drumming classes here on the bridge. They provided us with a wonderful energy while we prepared the covered bridge for you. As a special treat, his drummers will join the World Voices Choir onstage for the concert finale so stick around. We are looking forward to that.

The Event Script is given to those who need to know what is happening. This would include your publicity people, the front door or box office people, the people who operate the event lighting or music... It's needed by the MC and the event's Keynote Speaker. Many an event has been saved by a good script. Without one, all it takes is one performer, presenter, or key volunteer not to show up, and the event could go off the rails. But with a good script everyone still knows what essentially needs to be done – what the presenter was to say, for example, so that the MC can adlib the presentation information and move on to the rest of the event.

Exercise:

Create your own version of an event script. The most important things are that you identify exactly what is supposed to happen from an hour or so before the event begins, and who will be saying what when, once the event has begun.

In Conclusion - Evaluate

So, you can see that Defining the Event, the Event Plan, and the Script are all part of one process which takes you from the first step to the presentation of a successful community event. It's always wise to take time to draw your crew together after your event to evaluate both the plan and the event itself. Make notes from their comments (remembering that those who don't learn from history are condemned to repeat it). But most of all, make sure that everyone feels their work is valued – by you, by your organization, and by the community as a whole.

"To me, planning a community event and pulling it off is one of life's great exhilarating experiences, better than downhill skiing or riding a roller coaster. It's an exciting adventure each time. And while you're helping others, you foster unique relationships with the wide variety of interesting people who have joined you in making it happen!" – Brenda Rooney