

Tips for Hosting an Event

There are many types of events you might host, and therefore many different things to think about. Here are a few tips to help get your planning started:

Deciding to have an Event

- Before hosting any type of event, make sure you have plenty of time to plan and that you will have plenty of people to help you. A poorly-organized event will ensure that people don't come back – by having enough time and people to properly plan, you'll have what you need to ensure a successful event.
- Think about what you want to accomplish at the event. Are you trying to get media attention? Recruit new volunteers or members? Get some work done? Raise money? This will help you decide what sort of event to have.
- Different types of events include:
 - Press events. These are used for getting media attention. Examples include trail signings or dedications where you invite the public and the media. Make sure you have something concrete that you will do to attract the media. It can be an unveiling, an announcement, a ribbon cutting, the presentation of an award, etc. At the event, a few people will give short speeches and then the “main event” will occur.
 - Fundraising events. These can be silent auctions, concerts, 5ks...whatever your group of volunteers feels is most appropriate.
 - Public meetings. This type of event can be held to inform the community about your project, to gain public input or to recruit new members/volunteers.
 - Getting work done. These can be trail building days, envelope stuffing evening, telethons – any kind of project where you need a lot of hands to do work that doesn't take a lot of skill.
 - Public events. For lack of a better word, these are events you can run or participate in, like community festivals, health fairs, or recreation events.

Planning your event

- Start by planning *exactly* what you want to do.
 - Start with a basic outline
 - Assign people various jobs in planning/preparing for the event, with specific deadlines.
 - Make sure you have a very detailed plan about who will do what and when things will occur during the event itself
- Manage your planners and volunteers well
 - Give them concrete tasks and deadlines
 - If there is something specific you want a volunteer to do, be sure to give them all the details you can. Don't assume they know what you're asking them to do!
 - Make sure volunteers know they are appreciated!!
- Event details:
 - Make sure you have enough materials for all participants
 - Make sure you have any necessary permits and approvals

- Publicity
 - Depending on the size of your event, you want to begin publicizing it weeks to only days before the event. There are several options for publicizing:
 - Local newspaper's calendar section
 - Community bulletin board
 - Town website
 - Flyers
 - Local radio
 - Newsletters of organizations with a similar audience to yours
 - Media – send out press advisories several days before your event. Follow up with the reporters to see if they have any questions before the event.

On event day

- Get there with plenty of time to set up
- Have contingency plans in case volunteers don't show up
- Depending on the type of event, have refreshments
- Have take-away information
- Pay special attention to the media, making sure they get all the information they need
- See below for Volunteer Workday tips – many of these apply to events other than workdays

Tips for Successful Volunteer Workdays

Volunteer projects are a wonderful and effective way to get trails built at the same time as creating a strong level of community support for your trail. But if the project isn't well organized, you will see few or even negative results. These tips were originally published in the International Mountain Bicycling Association's Trail News newsletter with the help of Mark Flint, and passed on to us by Connections, the Newsletter of the Massachusetts Greenways and Trails Program.

1. Be Prepared: If you are running a ramshackle show, you won't get much done. Worse yet, you'll run the risk of losing volunteers. Make sure you have your tasks assigned, your tools ready, your leaders trained, and your work day planned. People will only volunteer their time if they feel their effort makes an impact.

2. Emphasize Fun: Trail work can be tough, but should also be fun. Don't take it too seriously. Use a little humor and include a fun element in the middle or afterwards - such as a BBQ, a group hike or ride, or a get-together at a local restaurant.

3. Provide Trained Leaders: Volunteers need inspiration, encouragement, and direction in order to complete the project efficiently. Leaders should know their tasks, give clear instructions, demonstrate tool use and techniques, and explain the goals so that volunteers and crew leaders are on the same page.

4. Be Safe: You want to build a trail, not the admissions list at the local hospital. Create an

emergency plan prior to your trail work day. Start off with a volunteer meeting that addresses tool safety and what to do in a crisis. Make sure leaders are aware of their responsibilities in an emergency.

5. Don't Waste Time: People volunteer because they want to do something. Strive to minimize "standing-around time" and maximize a sense of accomplishment. Start on time, make sure your project is ready to go, and plan for tangible results. Then every once in a while, step back and encourage your volunteers to take a look at what they've achieved.

6. Feed the Troops: Start with coffee and treats in the morning, and keep the chow flowing all day. Recruit a local business to sponsor lunch and don't forget a variety of cold drinks. Encourage pit stops to refuel and socialize.

7. Keep the Workday Short: Remember, these are volunteers, not contestants on "Survivor." Don't schedule projects during the hottest months. Don't work for more than four or five hours. And do take breaks.

8. Avoid Leaving a Job Half Finished: Tackle a reasonable project that can be fully completed with the volunteers and tools available. The quality of your finished work is more important than the quantity. The satisfaction of a job well done will bring people back for more.

9. Thanks and Reward Everyone: Volunteers need to know their work is valued. Thank them at arrival, thank them during the day, and thank them, when they leave. List volunteers in newsletters or put photos on your website. Hand out T-shirts or prizes. Consider an awards program. Or throw an annual party at the end of the season to recognize volunteers.

10. Record Your Success: Tally the number of volunteers, total hours logged, and time put into planning. Invite the local press to cover your event. Assign a photographer to capture "before and after" photos. This information will help in outreach and future project planning.

11. Stay in Touch: Collect names, addresses, phone numbers and emails, so you can keep volunteers involved. This is particularly important for first-timers. New volunteers are likely to return if they feel both welcomed and appreciated.