

ENERGIZE our NEIGHBORHOODS



CITY *of* BOISE GUIDE TO EVENT PLANNING



EVENT PLANNING



GUIDELINES AND BEST PRACTICES

Neighborhood events are a great way to bring residents and local groups together. Events can help make connections and build relationships, offer new experiences, celebrate historical and cultural placemaking, and create a unique identity. A successful event can become a neighborhood fixture, a source of pride and an anticipated annual event.

REMEMBER...

- **It's ok to copy a great idea.** Don't be afraid to copy or modify other community or neighborhood events. Researching what other groups or cities have done can also give you a great start.
- **Checklists are your best friend.** No matter how great your memory and organizational skills, checklists are crucial to planning and completing tasks, and meeting timelines. Forgetting one small thing or missing a deadline can impact many other parts of the planning process. Think domino effect!
- **Be prepared for things to go wrong...they will. Have a back-up plan for the back-up plan.** No matter how organized and prepared you are, things will go differently than you plan. Have back up plans! The more people/pieces involved, the more moving parts, which means the higher the chance for things to go wrong. This does not mean your event is a 'failure.' Celebrate the successes and learn from what doesn't work, then make adjustments for the next event.

RESOURCES

- **ENERGIZE OUR NEIGHBORHOODS**
Boise's Energize Our Neighborhoods initiative is aimed at celebrating neighborhoods and improving livability. Learn how the city is working to keep our neighborhoods unique and vibrant. [EnergizeOurNeighborhoods.org](https://energizeourneighborhoods.org)
- **NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT PROGRAM**
Energize Our Neighborhoods provides annual funding opportunities to neighborhoods through the Neighborhood Investment Program. Work with your registered neighborhood association to submit an application. energize.cityofboise.org/toolkit/nip/
- **GRANT OPPORTUNITIES**
There are many grant opportunities for Treasure Valley nonprofit groups, many of which are listed on the Energize website. energize.cityofboise.org/toolkit/nip/

NEIGHBORHOOD TOOLKIT

- Guide to Starting a Farmer's Market. energize.cityofboise.org/media/472760/farmers-market-guide.pdf
- Guide to Activating Your Neighborhood. energize.cityofboise.org/toolkit
- Add your neighborhood event to the Energize Our Neighborhoods Calendar. energize.cityofboise.org/calendar/
- Check out how the Vista Neighborhood partnered with the City of Boise and other entities on several exciting placemaking projects and events. energize.cityofboise.org/media/468544/vistaprojects_2015-2021.pdf

BE PREPARED

PRE-PLANNING

In order to have a successful and safe event, it is important to have a detailed and organized planning process. The best idea will not succeed without a well-thought-out and developed plan. With that in mind, you should have a certain amount of flexibility. As you get into the planning, your event may change in size or location, but the 'why' should stay in focus.

When brainstorming ideas and pre-planning, start by answering some initial questions:

- **Why?** Clearly define the event's purpose and goals. This will help you to measure the event's success. What do you want to achieve? Always keep the 'why' in mind throughout the process to help guide planning.
- **Who?** Identify your target audience so you know what will attract them to your event and what will turn them off. Defining this clearly will dictate many of your other decisions. It is also important to set a goal for number of attendees on the big day.
- **What?** When deciding the event's specific details and activities, keep the 'why' in mind to ensure alignment with the overarching goals. Knowing what you need for the event will help dictate your planning timeline.
 - Focus on quality over quantity. It can be tempting to go really big, but don't overextend yourself. Be realistic about capacity and budget. Starting with a small but quality event that will be a positive memory for attendees is far more important than big ideas and poor execution. It can always grow and expand in the future.
- **Where?** When choosing the venue, consider things like ease to deal with, safety, accessibility, fees, on-site services, hazards, neutrality, etc. Neutrality refers to the fact that a location can signify an affiliation with a belief or group, which may impact attendance.
 - **Access:** What transportation modes will attendees use? Keep parking availability for vehicles and bikes or a nearby transportation stop in mind.
 - **On-site Services:** Venues that provide tables, seating, electrical sources, Wi-Fi, IT, lighting, etc. can remove a lot of the planning burden.



- **When?** When selecting the date, consider possible conflicts such as weather, holidays, cultural/sports/religious events, school schedules or the availability of key presenters. When feasible, a great way to maximize attendance is to combine a new event with an existing one. This provides built-in attendance and also means shared outreach and promotion, increasing attendance for both groups.
- **How?** How will you pay for the event? Develop a financial plan and a detailed budget. Consider internal budgeting capacity and fundraising needs, as well as sources such as cash, grants, in-kind donations and volunteered services. Having giveaways and prizes are great incentives for folks to show up and stay throughout the event.

Permissions/Codes/Requirements. Permissions, permits and licensing approvals require specific time frames. Depending on the event, you may need approval from local authorities, street closures, certificates for special equipment, an alcohol license, etc. Make sure you look into requirements for liability insurance, public codes and event safety guidelines. Check that individual performers have any required insurance, risk assessments or clearances.

- **City of Boise Special Events Application.** Any event that is held on public property, open to the general public and advertised requires a Special Events Application from the City of Boise. Events held on private property (regardless of the number of participants) do not require a Special Events Application. However, your event may still be subject to other permits or permissions.

BE PREPARED



- The Special Events application includes a checklist of city requirements for permits, liability insurance, street closures, trash/recycling, food concessions, etc. cityclerk.cityofboise.org/special-events/
- It is strongly recommended that applications be submitted 120 days prior to the event (the minimum is 45 days).
- Events such as festivals, parades and farmers markets require review by the citywide special events team.
- Any event using a city park must complete the entire Special Events application and may need additional permits from the Parks and Recreation Department. Park Special Event Coordinator, (208) 608-7618.
- Block parties require street closures and a Citizen's Use Permit through the Police Department. They do not require liability insurance. <https://cityofboise.org/citizen-use-permit-for-nno/>
- To request donated services for trash/recycling pickup for an event, call (208) 608-7136. Free service is considered for nonprofit groups whose events do not benefit a person or religious/political group.

Promotional Materials Review. Promotional materials/signs placed along streets must be reviewed by the City of Boise Planning Dept., 208-608-7100.

Attendee Needs. The expected number of attendees will significantly affect logistics. It is important to consider needs such as first-aid stations, rest areas, toilets, handicap-accessibility and safety provisions for young children.

Sponsors and Donations. Tap into all of your networks to identify potential participants, vendors, sponsors and donors. Local businesses will likely be willing to

donate food/beverages, prize items, etc. Whether someone is sponsoring/donating a venue, product, service or labor, make sure they see and feel your gratitude and receive recognition!

Fundraising Platforms. In addition to the fundraising 'usual suspects,' crowd-funding is a way to get small amounts of money from many different people for a particular project or cause. Post the information on the online platform, dictate the timeline and monetary goal, and provide visuals/promotional materials to attract support. There are a few popular platforms that have some differences:

- **Indiegogo.** You keep the funds, even if the target amount is not met. www.indiegogo.com/choose-your-platform?
- **Generosity.** Indiegogo's separate platform for socially-minded fundraising causes. www.generosity.com/
- **Kickstarter.** If the target goal is not met, all donors' money is refunded www.kickstarter.com/about?
- **ioby.** Combines the ideas of crowd-funding and resource-organizing. Their "crowd-resourcing" platform gives neighborhoods and communities the ability to organize any type of 'capital' from within the neighborhood to make it a better place. This could include cash, social networks, in-kind donations, volunteer time, advocacy, etc. www.ioby.org/about

Timeline and Checklists. When planning an event, make an overall timeline/checklist and work backwards from there. Be sure to add every single step, no matter how small - think of each step as pieces to the larger puzzle. It's a good idea to factor in extra time throughout the process so one delay won't have a domino effect. Create multiple sub-checklists throughout the planning process, including before, during and after the event.

GET ORGANIZED



Documentation. Throughout the entire planning process, keep records and copies of planning documents, arrangements, expenses, assessments, communications, permits/permissions, etc.

ORGANIZING

Roles and Responsibilities. One person can't do everything! Establish groups or committees to spread out the tasks and responsibilities, and designate chairs or co-chairs to lead them. When forming committees, keep in mind categories such as venue management, speakers/vendors, entertainment, publicity, sponsors and volunteer management.

Establishing clear roles and timelines with regular check-in meetings will help ensure follow-through and accountability. Also make sure that points of contact are clearly defined. If a vendor tells a random committee member they can't make it, and that information doesn't make its way to the person in charge of vendors, you've got a problem.

You will need help on the big day, so keep in mind the number of volunteers needed for specific stations/activities. Make sure at least 1-2 primary organizers are free to walk the event to ensure things are in order or handle unexpected situations.

Site Plan. Identify the location of all stations, facilities, attractions, activities, etc. This should include alternative planning for inclement weather and vendor changes/no-shows. It is also important for creating a necessary emergency plan.

Logistics. Logistics include pre, during, and post-event. Temporary structures may have sourcing needs and site/safety requirements. Additional permits may be

required. Any appliances (electricity, gas, water) should be tested before the event. Make arrangements for breaking down and cleaning up after the event.

Prepared Help. Be sure to properly train and manage anyone involved in the event, and confirm them again before the event! It is helpful for those working the event to have some kind of identifying/visible clothing or indicator.

Communications/Promotion. Create a detailed plan and timeline for promoting your event. Marketing materials and effective outreach are key to getting the desired attendance. Also, people need a good reason to show up – include a variety of motivators and make it clear how they will benefit.

'Branding' your event with a catchy name and slogan, as well as a logo, will help it stick in peoples' minds. Be ready with mixed materials such as texts of different length and good visuals (photos) for emails, social media posts, press-releases, flyers or newsletters. Be mindful of how much detail to give, because specifics may change. You want to avoid advertising a particular item or performance and then not delivering. Be general when possible. For example, if you want to have live music, but you're still lining up performers, don't list names that may change.

Photography/Social Media. Don't forget to designate someone to take photos on the big day! It is important to document the event for reports, promotional materials and future events. Posting photos and video to social media sites during and after the event is an important way to promote and capture the day. After all the hard work, being able to look back at photos/videos is a great way to celebrate, reflect and close out an event.

GET ORGANIZED



Outreach. If you want people to come, get the word out early and often! Be tireless in your marketing. Take advantage of all forms of outreach: newsletters, press releases, website, Facebook, Twitter, phone calls, email, face to face (get out and do some good old fashioned canvassing!). Be sure all planning committee members, vendors or sponsors also exhaust their outreach opportunities and networks. You could even ask all partners to be accountable for bringing a certain number of people to the event.

Don't just target individuals – look to groups, venues and similar events as well: church bulletins, supermarkets, sports games, school newsletters, parent associations, community bulletin boards, book clubs, libraries, hair salons, etc. However you do your outreach, keep in mind two of the most important rules of organizing:

- In order to reach your target attendance goal, invite and confirm double the number of participants you want to actually show up. A standard rule of thumb is to account for up to a 50% 'flake rate.'
- The more direct the contact, the more likely someone will show up. That means that a phone call is more effective than an email, and a face-to-face encounter is more effective than a phone call. The more you can personally engage with someone, the more likely they will attend. Having a conversation is a good opportunity to ask questions about other pressing neighborhood issues, meetings or planning needs.

Advance Registration, Reminders and Confirmations. As much as possible, confirm attendees in advance. Research shows that if someone registers for an event, they are more likely to attend. Using a digital plat-

form is preferred so you have a real-time count and a centralized database of contact information. Google Forms and Eventbrite are great free options for creating online registrations and tracking responses. You should also have a paper option available.

Once people register, remind them and confirm, confirm, confirm! It is not enough to just invite more than you want to show up and then hope that they do. Depending on how far out the event is, you should send periodic reminders, then make a final confirmation 1-2 days before the event. The importance of final confirmations cannot be over-emphasized! If at all possible, these should be made by phone versus email. A few people can easily tackle a call list with a phone bank and it could be the final personalized touch that gets folks out to the event.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

Checklist. Complete a final checklist that includes a last walk-through of the venue, programming run-throughs, plus tests and inspections (outlets, power sources, water).

Access Routes. Be sure to check routes and access points before the event in case of any blockages, construction, closures, etc. Clearly mark entrance/exit points and emergency routes.

Arrival. Have a plan to direct people where to go and when. Decide if you need greeters, a program or signs/markers and put them into place. It is also extremely important to be able to accurately track attendance. Think about how to contain/minimize entrance points and have tables or greeters with clipboards to sign-in attendees. You don't want to impede the flow too much, but you'll need some basic contact information. This is where the digital pre-registration can be very helpful. Through Google Forms, you would be able to print off the names of everyone who registered, and then it's just a matter of checking them in. If using Eventbrite, you can use a tablet or phone to check in people who pre-registered.

Confirm Vendors and Help. Make sure to confirm all vendors/performers, volunteers and anyone else involved in the day. You want to limit surprises on the day of the event, and the more time you have to make adjustments and changes, the better. If you don't make

THE BIG DAY

final reminder calls and only 2 of your 6 volunteers show up to greet and sign people in, the attendees' first impression could be that it is unorganized and poorly planned, which could negatively taint an otherwise wonderful experience.

Backups. It is highly unlikely that everything will go perfectly. Always have backup plans! What if catering arrangements fall through? What if the sound system fails or there is a power outage? What if a key presenter/vendor does not show up? What if it rains? What if volunteers don't show up on the day? Is there overflow parking if you have more people than expected? Be prepared!

THE DAY OF THE EVENT

Be Flexible. Read the crowd! Chat with folks and ask for their input throughout the event. If attendees are having a great time, then keep doing what you're doing. If their reaction is not what you want, figure out if you can change things up on the spot.

Optics. Visuals are important and will impact how attendees perceive and experience the event. Try to see the event like them, and adjust things accordingly! Turnout is a great example. People notice if an event looks poorly attended. If the event was set up for a crowd of 150 people, but only 75 show up, it may look empty. You can rearrange things closer together so the crowd is more condensed. The event will look full and attendees will think it is packed. You can do a lot with arrangement and visuals to create the desired perception and experience. Be creative!

They don't know what you don't tell them. Don't point out the problems! Remember that outside of major issues, people won't know something went wrong unless you tell them. Attendees won't know that there was supposed to be a bubble station and now there's just face-painting. They will assume things are going along as intended.

AFTER THE EVENT

Cleanup and Inspection. After cleaning up, it is important to conduct a final inspection to ensure nothing has been left behind, trash has been removed and identify any issues/damage, etc.



Evaluation. It is important to develop a review process in order to know whether your event was successful. Assess the measurable outcomes developed in the planning process, identify what went well and what didn't, areas for improvement and ideas for future events. It is important to ask for formal input by attendees, vendors and anyone involved in the planning process. You can have paper evaluations at stations throughout the event, but it may be difficult to get them completed on the spot. A great option is to ask people to complete an online survey. This can be done as part of an email follow-up to the event. Create a survey using a free program like Survey Monkey and send the link for people to complete online. The program tabulates the responses for you in a printable version.

Follow-up Email. Use your mailing list and attendee contact details to send an event summary with photos and outcomes of the event. This is another opportunity to thank sponsors, donors, volunteers and to highlight their impact. You may want to tie this to a newsletter, annual report or other scheduled publication.

Thank You. A 'thank you' goes a long way! Be sure to personally thank sponsors and donors with a call, card or memorable event materials.

Updated Mailing List. Attendees are now part of your support base! Be sure to add them to your mailing list for future events, activities and support needs.

AVOID COMMON MISTAKES

COMMON MISTAKES

Take a moment to review some of the most common mistakes so you can be sure to avoid them! It is easy to underestimate the importance of tasks or assume that common sense will get you through. Preventable mistakes can make the best ideas fall flat on the big day.

Not getting started early enough. Things often take longer than expected, so don't procrastinate!

Not thoroughly checking for conflicting events. Do your research and avoid dates with competing events. If someone has to choose between two events, there is a 50% chance they will not choose yours! Don't risk it. Once a date is selected, get it on people's calendars early with 'Save the Dates.'

Not making a checklist and timeline. With so many things to take care of, it is easy to miss a step or not properly manage time.

Not having enough help. It is better to have more people than not enough! Be sure you have accurate contact information for everyone who will be helping and confirm with them. Not having enough people will slow down everything, could make the event look/feel unorganized, and may turn people off from staying. The more help, the easier it is to address problems and act quickly. Select your help wisely and assign tasks that are best suited to individuals. A negative/unfriendly encounter with event help will stay in the mind of an attendee and could mar even the best event.

Not confirming vendors. It is a good idea to have vendors sign a contract to hold them responsible, but a contract won't help if your vendor is a 'no-show' on the day of the event. Confirm with each vendor at least twice leading up to the event, as scheduling errors and miscommunication can easily occur.

Not planning for a 'flake rate.' Everyone you invited will not show up. Everyone who confirmed will not show up. People you were absolutely sure would come will not show up. Factor in a flake rate so you can hit your target attendance goal!

Not having a backup plan. Yes, more backup plans. Things you never thought could go wrong will go wrong the day of the event. Imagine all possible scenarios. Hopefully, you just have to deal with small things, but being prepared with alternate plans and problem-solving in the moment are important to make the event go as smoothly as possible. And remember, unless you tell them, the attendees won't know if something goes differently than planned!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **A Best Practice Guide to Event Planning published by ESAG.** <http://www.hull.gov.uk/sites/hull/files/media/Editor%20-%20CET/Event%20Planning%20Guide.pdf>
- **Why You Need an Event Planning Checklist.** www.thebalance.com/why-you-need-an-event-planning-checklist-4017891
- **42 Tips For Producing a Memorable Small Business Event.** smallbiztrends.com/2013/06/small-business-event-planning-tips.html
- **Event Planning Guide: Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Badgerland.** www.gsbadgerland.org/content/dam/gsbadgerland/documents/Program/Community%20Event%20Planning%20Guide.pdf
- **Event Planning Checklists.** www.wildapricot.com/articles/event-checklist
- **Survey Monkey.** www.surveymonkey.com/
- **Boise Police Department.** police.cityofboise.org/bpd-me/



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