

Planning and Executing an Outreach Event 101

THE SPACE

- Will your event be indoors or outdoors?
 - o If outdoors, do you need some sort of canopy or cover? Keep in mind that large tents (20'x40') cost at least \$350 each. It might be cheaper to rent a more-expensive place (e.g. Durham Central Park) which provides a cover for you than to rent an open space and tent
- Do you need electricity?
 - o Some spaces have limited access or none. Be sure to inform your partners if they can't plug in!
 - o Always pack extra extension cords and power strips
- Will you need sound, alcohol, food, event permits? Does your event require insurance? Always start the permit application process well in advance (~3 months)
 - o All events held on city property require permits
 - o All events with alcohol require permits
 - o All events that involve street closures require permits
 - o Some events that have bands/loud music require permits
 - o Permits sometimes cost money
- Will there be access to restrooms? Will you need to rent porta-Johns?
- Will they provide waste disposal for you? Will you need to bring your own recycling/garbage/compost bins?
- Is there access to drinking water?
 - o Look for nearby water fountains or bring water coolers and cups
- Is there available parking in your location?
- Some locations offer reservation discounts for non-profits, be sure to ask!
- If possible, tour the facility prior to committing. Ask the location's event coordinator the questions listed above
 - o Some event coordinators are better/worse at communicating than others, ask for the best way and times to reach them so things go smoothly

EQUIPMENT

- Things you might need to rent:
 - o Tables, chairs, garbage bins, restroom facilities, canopies, coolers, lighting, sound system
- You might have access to things around the university that are free/cheaper
 - o GPSC lets you loan indoor/outdoor tables, canopies, coolers, chairs for short periods of time (they also let you reserve spaces in the GPSC house for free if your event is small)
 - o The Nicholas School could provide some small things (coolers)
- Don't be afraid to spend money (if you have it) on renting equipment. Sometimes the convenience of a rental company delivering and picking up everything is worth it. It's

much more stressful to have to find and deal with 10 free tables from 10 different places than to spend \$60 on 10 tables from a rental company

PARTNERS

- Begin contacting partners several months in advance (~3) to see who might be interested in joining you. A good first contact gives as much information as possible and asks for their input
 - o Introduce yourself, give them a brief description of what your event is about, ask them if they are available on tentative dates or if there are any dates that are bad for them (e.g. I'm thinking of planning this event in the month of August, are there any weeks that you already have booked?), give them potential time commitments (e.g. this event will last for 6 hours)
 - o Ask them to spread the word to other interested partners
- Summer is a busy time for a lot of organizations (especially those focused on environmental health). Be sure to contact them well in advance to check their availability if your event is in the summer. It's okay if you don't have the entire event planned when you first contact them
- Keep in touch every few weeks with updates
 - o This will help remind people that your event is coming up and will help everyone feel more at ease when they're in the loop
- Ask your partners for help/recommendations
 - o Most groups are more than willing to help you reach out to other people they know who could be of use
 - e.g. I asked partners if they knew of any local musicians, one was able to put me in touch with her neighbor who was in a band
- Expect people to be non-responsive and join/cancel at the last minute
 - o Sometimes if there's no response after one email, it's helpful to email a week later asking if they received the earlier email. Sometimes they just forgot to respond the first time and will likely be very apologetic
 - o Sometimes calling is a better way to reach people than email
 - o If you've called, left messages, two emails and they haven't responded, they're probably not interested or they're terrible at communicating. Move on and focus on people who are responsive and eager to be involved
 - o Even if you give a deadline for joining, people will likely still email you a few days before the event asking if there is space. If you plan ahead for this you can probably accommodate them

ADVERTISING

- The best way to get people to come to an event is to hold it in a place with a lot of nearby foot traffic. Make it convenient for people to come by, attract people who weren't planning on being there. Location is important!
- Ask all of your partners to advertise through their own websites/listservs

- Get Duke to somehow advertise your event (through the Nicholas School, Sustainable Duke, student/staff/faculty listservs)
- Email electronic flyers/notices through local neighborhood listservs
 - o You may want to be a part of the community to send an email through a neighborhood listserv
- Post flyers around town, in nearby shops/restaurants
 - o 20 half-page flyers cost about \$10 at a FedEx printing shop
- Print a large banner to post during your event
 - o Large enough so that people can see it from a distance and know what event they're at
- Have signs pointing people in the right direction the day of
- If the event is free to the public, say so!

THE DAY OF

- Have extra of everything if you can (tables, chairs, space, anything!)
- Other helpful things to pack:
 - o First aid kit, scissors, tape, extension cords, paper, pens, zip ties, sunscreen, bug spray, water
- Try to have everything packed and prepared as much as possible the day before so you aren't rushing and forgetting things the day of
- Accept/ask for help! It's much easier to have 5 people set up 10 tables and tents than do it all yourself. Most people won't mind taking down what they used during the event

FUN EXTRAS FOR YOUR EVENT

- Contact your local school science teachers. Ask if they could give their students extra credit/incentives for attending. Have games and activities there and provide a sort of bingo table where kids get a stamp/sticker for every activity they complete
- Have a friend with a nice camera go around and take pictures during the event, create a dropbox after it's over to share with partners
- If your event is during a meal time, check and see if local food trucks or food stands would be willing to park nearby. They often are willing to come out for free as long as they are guaranteed a good crowd. If you can't guarantee a crowd, they might ask to leave early if there isn't good business. Even having them there for an hour or two might help attract more people
- Provide swag for attendees (reusable bags, water bottles, koozies, pens, shirts, etc.)
- Interactive games/activities are the best way to capture a child's attention (their parents will like it too). Most partners already have some type of activity that they have prepared for outreach events, but be sure to tell them it could be a good idea to plan one