

Events Programming Toolkit

Written and produced by Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service

Introduction

An events programme can run alongside regular exhibitions and normal visiting. Many visitors look for something extra. From Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service's (WAAS) perspective an events programme can help attract visitors, appeal to specific audiences, and help people discover more about our organisation and our collections. It can also help build relationships with customers who may visit regularly and is fun, both for us and our visitors. Creating an events programme, rather than hosting ad hoc events, helps organisations to plan so the events programme is sustainable and links them to organisational objectives.

Events can include special event days, talks, tours (outside or behind the scenes), workshops, informal learning, family crafts, quizzes.

Guiding principles

- 1. Keep it realistic** - We all have pressures on our time, skills and budgets. Ensure the programme is deliverable and don't be afraid to start small.
- 2. Provide events people want** - Check to see what sort of events people would like, and if you are charging what they would pay for them.
- 3. Fun!** - People want events which are enjoyable. A programme will have a mix but ensure that enjoyment is built into these in different ways.
- 4. Think about a pattern through the year** - Customers, staff and volunteers will know what to expect and work can be spread out. This may link to national events like Remembrance Day or Christmas, local events like parades or fetes, your exhibition programme, or you might run particular annual or regular events at similar times.
- 5. Repeat if you can, although with a twist** - Lots of work goes into events so if you can repeat these and just change a few details, such as the topic, that will help you. This may also help with sustainability as resources could be reused and the hard work is not lost after the event.

Set your goals

Remember to set SMART goals

Specific: Set out a list of events for the year (or other defined time period). Is there anything you want people to do as a response or in advance (consider delegation)?

Measurable: Set targets for visitors and attendees. Do you have specific groups of people you are targeting?

Achievable: Have you taken all costs and time into account?

Realistic: Can this programme of events be delivered within your resources?

Time: Set dates into your calendar – not just event dates but planning and preparation too. Do you have enough time to plan and deliver it?

Conduct an audit

- Work with colleagues, think about the year and national and local events. What can you link to? Some may not be relevant but others may be. e.g. local carnivals and festivals, Christmas, Heritage Open Days. Also link to your exhibition programme.
- What are your strengths? This includes the skills and expertise of your team, as well as your venue and collections. List events which you can run or host considering the resources to hand at the time.
- What is your capacity? How much time can people dedicate to planning and delivery, remembering that these can take longer to prepare than you sometimes think. Bear in mind "what if" scenarios.
- Check what kind of events other sites host near you – either you might want to link in existing activities or run similar events if they are popular, or you may want to avoid if you think there isn't the demand for this at more than one venue. Think of complimenting rather than competing.
- What do people want? Do you know from questionnaires or from informal feedback, speaking to people, possibly social media and web 'hit' analysis? Try to find out what goes well at similar venues.

Guidance and tips

- Brainstorm ideas and narrow these down – possible / desirable / achievable. Think about your strengths (staff and collections) and what people want. Have a look at similar venues and organisations for ideas. Use themes – these may be yearly themes like Halloween, Heritage Open Day and Easter, local events, or your own yearly cycle of activity.
- Do you have a budget for events you need to stick to? Otherwise you'll need to charge to cover costs or look to apply for funding. How will you do this and how long will it take?
- Check to see if there are external suppliers you can use – speakers, living history groups, local groups. They can provide new skills and resources and may do some of the work for you. Check any costs for them.
- Plan the overall programme – Compile an overview to understand how it looks. Check if there are any clashes internally or with any neighbouring events. Have you got enough time to plan, prepare and deliver alongside your other activities?
- Plan the events – Follow normal planning. Come up with a timetable of actions (perhaps using a Gantt chart or spreadsheet – start with sticky notes and whiteboard), a budget, and ensure you know who does what and who will be responsible. List what you need to prepare: people to inform, resources to print, equipment to buy, publicity to write and distribute. Then have a timed plan for the day.
- Write risk assessments – Check that you have thought of everything and you can run events safely. Is your space big enough and appropriate?
- Booking – If booking is needed how will you organise this, an online system (your own or external like Eventbrite) or ask customers to ring or email in? Ensure all staff and volunteers are clear about procedures and policies.
- Marketing – Have an overall plan to publicise your events programme as a whole, but also market events individually as they may have different audiences. Use mailing lists, internal advertising, social media, newspapers and radio.

Handy hints

- Be realistic about what you can produce within your resources. You don't want it to seem like a millstone around you.
- See if there are people you can work with to deliver events. For instance; adult learning workshops, speakers, re-enactors. You provide the venue and they can run an activity, which can benefit both of you.
- Check if volunteers or staff would need DBS checking
- Don't underestimate the time it takes for preparing, gathering, printing, laminating and putting together!

Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service case study - events programme

Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service produce an events guide twice a year with a mix of talks, workshops, walks and events. Some events are delivered every year because they are popular, such as our family history and house history workshops. Some are linked to specific projects, others responding to suggestions. We have some children's activities too. We try to have a good mix for different audiences and try to ensure they are fun!

An event guide is produced twice a year and distributed around the county, as well as publicising individual events.

Our events are all linked to our organisation and our strengths, using our collections or resources, or passing on our knowledge.

Many of our events have to cover costs so we need to select carefully, thinking about costs and what people will pay for.

We utilise the annual calendar, having Christmas events for instance. However, some annual events, we decide not to run, such as Heritage Open Days, as many other venues already host these. Other events will be linked to our live projects.

We keep records of numbers, and where possible get feedback about what people thought of our events.

Action plan

Short term actions

- Meet with your team to brainstorm. Have a look at what you have done before (if any). What went well and what didn't? Are there suggestions visitors have made? Speak to your team about these ideas to get their views. What ideas do you have?
- Identify your strengths and key themes. Ensure events have some link to your venue and organisation. Are there untapped skills within your team?
- Produce a calendar of dates and festivals, both national and local dates. Are there events to link to, or ones to leave? Are there dates to avoid?
- Revisit what your priorities are so that your events programme will support these.
- Draft an events programme.

TOP TIP: Compile as many ideas as possible, and then narrow down.

Medium term actions

- Plan each event separately but have an overall plan too so there are no 'pinch points' you're not expecting. Does everyone know what's happening? Do you need to buy new equipment? If external suppliers are coming what are their needs and requirements? You don't want to find they are expecting you to provide something you don't have on the day.
- Check space and facilities are adequate for what you are planning and if changes are needed on the day. If ICT is needed does everyone know how to use it? Write a risk assessment.
- If external people are delivering, ensure one of your team is allocated to look after them and ensure it goes smoothly.
- Produce a publicity plan – How will you let people know? Events guide, press releases, posters, social media, newsletter etc.
- Is booking required and if so how will customers do it? If people book take contact details in case of problems. Make sure everyone knows the procedures for when people ring or come to ask to book.

TOP TIP: Produce a plan of action for the overall programme, checking that there are no 'pinch points'.

Long term actions

- Set up evaluation tools. As well as capturing numbers of visitors can you find out what people thought of your event? Are there any other outputs or outcomes you would like, such as signing up for a Friends group?
- Keep in touch with attendees though mailing lists (with permission!) and social media.
- Start planning your next programme in good time, using your experiences to guide you. Try to repeat what is popular.
- Use photos (with permission) and details of your events after they've happened. Build up interest, especially when you may repeat another time. Photos of happy people are great for boosting your profile.
- If surveying visitors (and potential visitors) include questions about events they would like.

TOP TIP: Repeat where you can. Think about a little twist such as a change of theme but most of your event will already be planned.

Evaluation

You will want to evaluate individual events as well as the overall programme. The most common things to measure is attendees. If higher or lower than expected was there a reason?

It is good to get qualitative feedback too and find out what people think. This can be through comments in a visitor book, questionnaires and informal feedback. There are simple ways to get people to say if they enjoyed something or not, such as a poster to put a tick on, or children's sheet with smiley or grumpy faces.

Feedback from staff can be helpful to understand what people thought but also how the logistics went. Try to work out how much time was spent on events too. Is it proportionate to the event?

Resources & further reading

Tips

How to plan an event www.wildapricot.com/blog/how-to-plan-an-event

Top 7 museum programming ideas to engage your visitors
<https://blog.doubleknot.com/2017/11/27/museum-programming-ideas/>

Museum exhibition planning tool
https://hcommons.org/app/uploads/sites/1000580/2017/07/2014_MuseumExhibitionPlanningTool_SchnitzerMuseumUOregon.pdf Provides checklists which can be useful for events too.

Ideas

Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service 2019 events
www.worcestershire.gov.uk/downloads/file/4177/events_guide

Museums Worcestershire current events www.museumsworcestershire.org.uk

Heritage Open Days (also provides tips) www.heritageopendays.org.uk/

Organisations who might be able to help

Association of Independent Museums www.aim-museums.co.uk/

Museums Association www.museumsassociation.org/

Explore the Past

**Worcestershire Archive
and Archaeology Service**

The Hive, Sawmill Walk, The Butts,
Worcester WR1 3PD

01905 822866

www.explorethepast.co.uk



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