The OPAL guide to…

Running public outreach events

Most natural history groups will organise or attend public events from time to time, in order to raise the profile of the group, entertain existing members and attract new ones. Events could range from guided walks and field trips to BioBlitzes and county shows. This guide includes tips and advice on some of the main considerations when running or attending public events, including:

- Event planning
- Event publicity
- Risk Assessments
- Public liability insurance
- Child protection plans
- What is a CRB check and who needs one?
- Photographing members of the public

Event planning

The amount of organising required will vary depending upon the scale of the event but all will follow a basic process:

1. Decide what you are trying to achieve and what type of event would best meet these aims
2. Ask for volunteers in the group to help to plan and organise the event
3. Identify what resources (people and funds) will be required. Are funds available or will they need to be raised to pay for the event?
4. Approach partner organisations and sponsors if appropriate
5. Plan the event itself – location, date and infrastructure required
6. Don’t forget
   a) Legalities (insurance, risk assessments, land access, emergency services)
   b) Health and Safety (is the area suitable?, first aid, security)
   c) Contingencies (what if it rains all day?)
7. Promote the event (see Event Publicity section below)
8. Post event - thank people, measure success/outcomes

A highly detailed and really useful guide to planning and hosting a community event has been written by GreenSpace, a charity funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

OPAL has produced a detailed guide to organising a BioBlitz as well as a simple 10 point summary guide. Many of the points in these will be relevant to other public-facing events and are really good starting points. Both guides can be found here.

Event publicity

It sounds obvious, but make sure that you publicise the event to the people you would like to take part. Originally designed for use by OPAL staff, the OPAL Media Guide gives advice on how to deal with the media, including writing press releases, issuing
photo calls and giving interviews. All the principles are applicable to any group that wishes to publicise its activities.

Don’t forget local publicity such as distributing fliers or displaying posters at the venue and in the surrounding area in the weeks leading up to the event. Simple word of mouth can also be a good tool, so tell everyone you know that the event is happening! To work effectively, posters and fliers must be eye-catching, simple and contain all the basic information about the event. Think carefully about how and where to display/distribute them so that you do not waste resources on ineffective materials. The OPAL Guide to Setting up a New Voluntary Natural History Group includes more suggestions for promotional activities.

Risk assessments

Risk assessments are a normal part of event/activity planning and help you to keep everyone as safe as possible. They do not eliminate risk and they are not designed to prevent you from doing activities that you would like to do. Writing a risk assessment simply makes you think about the risks involved and identify where steps can be taken to reduce that risk. It is then up to you/your organisation to decide whether the remaining risk is acceptable.

Risk assessments may seem like an onerous task, but once you have an example for each of your main types of activity they can simply be adapted for each new situation.

You can download an example risk assessment below. Risk assessments should begin with brief information about the event/activity that is covered, who has written the risk assessment and when. The key elements to include in a risk assessment are:

- to identify what the hazard is (the thing that may cause harm)
- to identify who may be harmed and how
- to assess the level of risk – you should consider both the severity of the incident and the likelihood of it happening
- to identify control measures that can be taken to reduce the level of risk
- to assess whether the remaining risk (after control measures are taken) is acceptable and if further action is required

There are many websites that provide advice on risk assessments and example layouts. The Health and Safety Executive is just one.

Public liability insurance

Public liability insurance is essential for any organisation that arranges activities attended by the public. Public liability insurance indemnifies the organisation, its trustees, members, employees and volunteers from claims made by members of the public for injury, loss or damage inflicted in the course of the activity or event. It protects you financially if the unlikely happens and someone gets hurt or equipment is lost or damaged at your event. For more information visit the Charity Commission website or contact an insurance company or broker.
Child Protection Plans

A Child Protection Plan is not compulsory when running public events, and whether you need one will depend on the activities available and who you expect to take part. If you do work with children or vulnerable adults it is a worthwhile document to produce as it sets out clearly how particular incidents should be dealt with. You can refer to a document such as this in your risk assessment.

More information including a step by step guide to creating and implementing a Child Protection Plan (and many other useful resources) can be found on the Safe Network website.

What is a CRB check and who needs one?

CRB stands for Criminal Records Bureau. Having a CRB check is one way that we can all help to protect children and vulnerable adults. When you apply for a CRB check, the Criminal Records Bureau review information held about you on the Police National Computer and the Independent Safeguarding Authority databases.

Many organisations now recommend that a CRB check is made on all staff and volunteers who have direct access to or who work with children or vulnerable adults but there are no hard and fast rules as to who must have a CRB check. For many public-facing events and activities where there will be a large number of people around at all times, it is not a legal necessity that all staff and volunteers are checked. Anyone working in a one-on-one situation with children or vulnerable adults should definitely have a CRB check, and it is good practice for event organisers and core staff to be CRB checked too.

Applying for a CRB check involves completing a fairly straightforward form, giving details of your recent addresses and the role in which you will come into contact with children or vulnerable adults. You will also need to supply some proof of identity. Your application is then processed by a registered body or umbrella organisation to the CRB. A Standard or Enhanced disclosure can be requested with umbrella organisations typically charging a small admin fee on top of the CRB standard charge. Visit the Home Office website for more information.

A CRB check is a check at a point in time and good practice would suggest such checks should be made on a regular basis which would depend upon the level of contact between the individual and vulnerable groups. A CRB check is not a guarantee that an individual is suitable for working with children and vulnerable adults as it only shows whether they have a criminal record. Hence a CRB check is only one element of ensuring an organisation works in a safe and responsible manner and it is no replacement for effective working policies, practices and people management.

The CRB checking process is currently being reviewed. The above advice is accurate as of November 2010, and we will update this guide when further information becomes available.
Photographing members of the public

If you are going to take photographs or film members of the public, whether adults or children, you need to get their written permission. This is a result of the Data Protection Act (1998) which concerns the handling and storing of information on individuals and the desire to protect individual privacy.

You need to advise the individual(s) of the reasons for taking the photograph or film and how you plan to use the image(s), for example in your newsletter, on your website or on publicity materials for your group. Should you be taking photographs or filming children (under the age of 18) then you need to gain the consent of the parent or guardian.

You do not need to get consent for photography if the individual(s) pictured are not clearly identifiable, e.g. in a crowd scene or with their back to the camera.

If a particular property is being photographed and it can clearly be identified the permission of the owner is also required.

The Data Protection Act 1998 also concerns the storage of information and the consent form needs to be stored or readily referenced to the photograph/film and vice versa. How long the images are to be stored will depend on the purpose of the photograph/film and it could vary from weeks to several years.

When photographs are going to be used on websites and any other means that could be viewed from outside the UK please note that the Data Protection Act only covers the UK.

Download an example Photo Consent Form.