

Planning Ahead

Getting the best from your program

What is the aim of the event?

If you are clear about the aim of the event, other questions are more readily answered and issues are more effectively handled. Your aim should be clear and straightforward and understood by your event leadership team.

Why are you having the event?

It may be for spiritual growth, recreation and relaxation, social, skill development, specific training or adventure.

- Has your promotion of the event outlined the purpose of the event?
- Are the participant's expectations in line with the organisers' expectations?

For whom are you planning?

- Number, age, interests, abilities, gender mix.
- What can the participants contribute? What interests do the participants have that can be utilised?

What values are you communicating? Serving others, co-operation, independence, sharing, personal management. What others?

How long should the activity take? A day, a weekend, a week, the holiday period? The duration of the event should depend on your aim and the age and experience of the group as well as the time available.

What are the location options? Fixed, mobile, fixed with short trips out. There can be hidden costs in day trips (travel and entrance fees) while often the beach and the bush at or near the venue can provide excellent opportunities for creative organisers.

How much will it cost? Can you afford it? Key budget items include accommodation, transport, catering, admission fees, contingencies, and equipment hire. Venue fees vary enormously depending on what you want, the location, numbers and the style of the facilities. Give clear, precise information about your group (dates, size, requirements); get a clear indication of the cost.

How will the group be structured? Whole group, small groups, mix of these. Go back to your aim - what are you trying to achieve? Are there benefits in having your group take responsibility for part of the program and organisation? Can they sometimes work in small groups as well as the full group?

What are the safety issues? Organisers are bound under a duty of care to ensure that all activities are conducted in safety for the participants. This does not mean that the activity should not go ahead if there is an element of risk, but that all risks have been assessed and either eliminated or reduced to acceptable levels.

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Organisers have available to them many methods of assessing their programs and venues. All venues should be able to provide copies of their own emergency plans and risk analyses if requested. Some centres will have obtained accreditation from other agencies. One such agency is the Christian Venues Association endorsed accreditation program – the National Accommodation, Recreation and Tourism Accreditation (NARTA Inc) program. All safety planning is best started well before it's likely to be needed. Ensure those conducting activities are appropriately trained or experienced. Ensure you (and the venue) have information about local emergency services. Remember your responsibilities to provide first-aid if necessary.

Who will lead the activity?

How will you use your leadership team? Are you, the leadership team and other campers clear about the roles and responsibilities of the leaders? Who on your team has training and specialist skills that may be required? How can you best utilise the various personalities in your team? Do they clearly understand their legal and moral responsibilities?

Will the participants 'participate'?

- Will you seek ideas and input from the campers well beforehand?
- Will you respond to their ideas and needs? Participant input can occur when you are planning as well as carrying out the activity.

What are the threads you need to draw together?

- Transport, finance, catering, accommodation, equipment, training, leaders. What else?
- Have you evaluated all the options? (e.g. 2 day versus 5 day: catered versus self-catered)

Will there be a balance of activities? Action/reflection, group/single, organised/casual, leader directed/camper input.

How will you 'sell and tell' the idea? Some activities suffer from insufficient notice and planning. There often needs to be time to enthuse, gradually building up to precise details of event.

When do you start? As early as possible. Talk to other organisers; seek ideas; make bookings well in advance; review the sequence of steps you'll need to go through; give everybody adequate notice.