Local Trust
trusting
local
people

How to organise a successful community event:

A COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

WHY DO COMMUNITY EVENTS MATTER?

SECTION 1 Design your event

SECTION 2 Plan your event

SECTION 3 Make sure everyone feels welcome

SPOTLIGHT ON: Pimlico Million's Eid Party

SECTION 4 Promote your event

SECTION 5 On the day – make the magic happen

SECTION 6 Take time to reflect

SPOTLIGHT ON: Sompting Big Local's summer festival

HELPFUL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

If you're planning an event with your community, this step-by-step action plan is for you!

Whether you're organising a summer festival, cultural celebration, street party, family fun day or a community clean-up, this guide will help you make your event a success.

It will help you think through the essentials, including who your event is for, what you want to achieve, and how to make it safe and welcoming for all. It will also guide you through things to think about on the day and how to capture what you learn, so that your next event is even better!

You'll also find tips and insights from two groups who have organised successful events in their communities: Sompting Big Local and Pimlico Million.





Above: Riverside Community Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Mark Massey

Left: Shadsworth with Whitebirk Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Orrin Saint Pierre

WHY DO COMMUNITY EVENTS MATTER?

1. **They create connection and belonging** Bringing people together helps them feel more connected, increasing their sense of belonging and community. Community events can also help people feel more positive about their local area.
2. **You can celebrate your community's diversity** Community events can create shared experiences that bridge different cultures and generations.
3. **They provide affordable family activities** Community events offer low-cost ways for families to have fun and create new memories together.

> "The Pimlico area has a large Muslim community, so Pimlico Million's Eid Party was about celebrating with them but making it a celebration for everybody."
>
> Nawal, Pimlico Million

Top tip

When seeking support for your event from funders or sponsors, highlight the specific benefits it will bring to your community.



Pimlico Million Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Lucia Senasiova

4. **You can consult with and involve your community** Community events help you gather views from people in creative and inclusive ways. By involving residents in planning and running events, you can help build people's skills and develop new community leaders.

5. **You can build new collaborations and showcase talent** You can bring different partners together to plan a community event, leading to new collaborations in the future. It can also be an opportunity to showcase local talent and support local businesses.





Far right: Shadsworth with Whitebirk Big Local Photo: Local Trust / Orrin Saint Pierre

Right: North Meets South Big Local Photo: Local Trust / Claudia Leisinger Photography

DESIGN YOUR EVENT

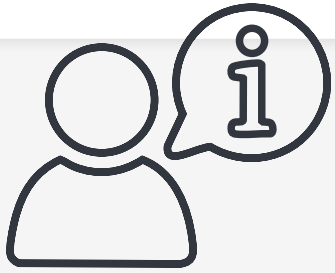


1. ASK YOUR COMMUNITY WHAT THEY WANT

Events work best when they reflect what your community wants, whether it's a summer carnival, health and wellbeing day, craft market or winter lantern parade. Take time to listen before you plan.

- Talk to residents, especially those whose voices might not normally be heard.
- Drop into coffee mornings and community meetings to gather ideas.
- Share a simple survey or poll on local social media groups.
- Include residents on your event planning group.







2. DEVELOP YOUR VISION

Once you understand what your community wants, shape a clear vision for the event to guide your decisions. Use these prompts to help you:

- What do you want your event to achieve? For example, celebrating together, consulting people, or strengthening community connections.
- Who is your 'target audience'? For example, families, young people, older residents, or people living in a particular neighbourhood.
- What atmosphere do you want to create?
- What will you call your event?
- How many people do you want to attend?

3. GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON BOARD

Collaboration will make your event stronger and shares out the workload. Think about what each partner brings to the table, for example, resources, volunteers, expertise, or funding.

- Connect with resident groups. They can help make sure the event meets the needs of the community, as well as offer volunteers and spaces.
- Approach local businesses that might be able to contribute.

Once everyone is on board, decide how you are going to work together, how often you'll meet and how you'll keep in touch between meetings.

Below: North Meets South Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Claudia Leisinger Photography

Bottom left:
Sompting Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Justine Claire



"Commissioning a youth organisation, The SID Youth, to run the event brought expertise, connections, and additional staff support. It's more expensive than doing it yourself, but you get peace of mind and expertise you wouldn't have in-house. They brought connections to suppliers and activities we'd never had access to before."

Emma, Sompting Big Local



> “It’s about getting value for money. Don’t spend a big part of your budget on one item – have lots of little bits and pieces that you know will work.”
>
> **Emma, Sompting Big Local**

4. Budget for success

Plan your finances carefully to stay on track. Create a list of:

- All your potential costs (venue, equipment, food, entertainment, promotion, etc).
- Your income sources (grants, sponsorships, donations).
- Admission costs: Is your event free entry or paid, and is food and drink included or purchased separately?
- A contingency fund for any unexpected costs.

Create a spreadsheet to keep track of both your projected and your actual spending.

Funding for your community event

Take some time to research grants available to support your community event. For example:

Council grants: Many local authorities, town and parish councils offer grants for community events.

Local businesses: Approach them with sponsorship packages or ask for in-kind donations like the loan of equipment or prizes for a raffle.

Community project funders: National Lottery Community Fund, local Community Foundations and Co-op Local Community Fund all support projects that benefit local communities.



Heart of Sidley Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Kerrie Wood Photography

PLAN YOUR EVENT

1. CHOOSE YOUR DATE AND TIME

Select timing that works for the people you want to attend. For example, families often prefer weekends or school holidays, while older people may favour weekdays.

Remember to consult with community groups to avoid clashing with other events – and think about seasonal factors, school holidays and religious holidays too. For instance, during Ramadan, plan activities after sunset for those who are fasting.

“We found that in the summer holidays, there’s so much else going on at weekends. It’s during the week that people wanted things to do. And they were willing to take a day off work to spend the day together.”

“We held our summer event on Sompting Rec, the largest recreation ground in the area. It’s also the easiest to get equipment on and off ... and it’s in the centre, so it’s walking distance for lots of residents.”

Emma, Sompting Big Local

2. CHOOSE A SUITABLE SPACE OR VENUE

Select a space that fits with your budget and vision for the event. Ask yourself:

- Is the event outdoors or indoors? What time of year is it? Will you need a backup for bad weather?
- Is the size of the venue appropriate for the number of people you want to attend?
- Is it in a location that’s easy for people to reach by foot, car or public transport?
- Is it accessible for disabled people and families? For example, does it have step-free access and accessible toilets?
- What facilities are available (toilets, electricity, water, parking) and what will you need to bring? For example, hot water for drinks, or hiring Portaloos or generators for large events.



Sompting Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Justine Claire

3. DRAW UP YOUR PLANNING TIMELINE

Work backwards from your event date to help you stay on track with planning, and use a planning spreadsheet to track your budget, suppliers and tasks.

- Start planning six to eight months ahead for large events (more than 100 attendees) or three to four months for smaller-scale events.
- Book your space or venue first to avoid disappointment, followed by any essential suppliers, such as caterers.
- Put together a contact list including the venue, suppliers, partners and volunteers.
- Schedule regular check-ins with your event partners.
- Create a month-by-month checklist and a week-by-week task list in the final month.
- Create a detailed schedule of what will happen on the day, including time for set-up and pack-down.



Shadsworth with Whitebirk Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Orrin Saint Pierre

> **"The important thing I found was a phone call to suppliers the week before, saying 'Hey, just checking in, is everything ready?' because there's nothing worse than them not turning up."**
>
> **Emma, Sompting Big Local**

4. PLAN YOUR ACTIVITIES

Plan engaging activities that appeal to your target audience, and make sure you offer free or low-cost activities so everyone can afford to attend.

- Design activities to appeal to different preferences and energy levels. For example, active options like sports or dancing and quieter activities like craft stations or storytelling.
- Consider activities that reflect diversity in your community or bring different age groups together. For example, at Pimlico Million's Eid party, neighbours played the Bangladeshi game Carrom together.
- Create opportunities for people to perform so you can share and celebrate local talent.

5. GET CLEAR ON YOUR CATERING

Food brings people together and can encourage people to come along to your event. Plan it carefully and consider the following:

- Decide what food you will provide and how it will be served.
- Research catering suppliers and think about your criteria.
- Decide if food will be free or what the pricing will be.
- Offer food that is suitable for different dietary requirements. For example, include Halal food, vegetarian and vegan options.

Keep it green

Consider how you can minimise your event's environmental impact. For example:

- Choose reusable plates and cutlery over single-use items.
- Ask caterers to use compostable or recyclable packaging.
- Set up clearly labelled recycling stations.
- Consider vegetarian or plant-based food options.
- Try to minimise food waste and arrange for leftovers to be distributed locally.
- Use venues that are accessible by public transport, walking, or cycling.

"Food is key. If it's low quality, then you're not valuing the people who are coming ... If you had a party at your own house, you give the best of what you have."

Nawal, Pimlico Million



Mottingham Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Claudia Leisinger Photography

Don't forget to check the food hygiene standards you'll need to meet, including allergen labelling and handwashing facilities. You can get food safety advice for community events on the Food Standards Agency website.

SECTION 2:

6. THINK SAFETY FIRST

Your event needs to create an environment where everyone can enjoy themselves safely.

- Check what permissions you need from your local council well in advance. For example, if you want to close a road for your event, or need a temporary events notice.
- Complete a risk assessment of the venue and your planned activities.
- Create a first aid plan and find out where the nearest defibrillator is located, using the online defib finder website.
- Check your public liability insurance and verify that external suppliers have relevant insurance, certifications and risk assessments.
- Consider whether you need security staff for large events.



North Meets South Big Local Photo: Local Trust / Claudia Leisinger Photography

You can find safety advice and guidance online, including:

- Event safety: From the Health and Safety Executive
- Keeping organisers, volunteers and participants safe: From gov.uk
- Risk assessments: From the Resource Centre

Safeguarding

Include safeguarding in your risk assessment, and plan how to keep children, young people and vulnerable adults safe.

- Brief staff and volunteers on your safeguarding plan and how to report any concerns.
- Designate a point for lost children at larger events, staffed with two DBS-checked adults.
- Have adequate adult supervision ratios for children's activities.
- Consider using a wristband system with contact details
- Establish a consent process for photography and filming.
- Contact your Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) and Local Safeguarding Adults Board (LSAB) for specific guidance. The NSPCC also has helpful resources on event safeguarding.

7. PLAN FOR THE UNEXPECTED

Prepare for things that might go wrong. With a Plan B in place, you'll know how to respond.

- Have weather plans in place for rain, or extreme hot or cold weather.
- Plan how you would communicate any last-minute changes to attendees.
- Build flexibility into your budget and event schedule to respond to any unexpected situations.
- Test any equipment you'll be using before the day of the event.

"When recruiting volunteers, we'll say: 'We need 12 volunteers for this task, eight volunteers for that' and have a clear role description with tasks designated for two hours."

Nawal, Pimlico Million



8. CREATE A REWARDING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Volunteers are essential for the smooth running of community events. Create clear roles and think about how to make it a rewarding experience for everyone.

- Work out how many volunteers you need and where you will find them. You could partner with local groups to secure reliable volunteers.
- Define specific volunteer roles so everyone knows what they are doing and break tasks into manageable shifts.
- Consider paid roles for certain tasks. For example, heavy lifting, and set-up and pack-down.
- Hold a briefing session before the event and let volunteers know about safety procedures and who to contact if any issues arise.



Left: Pimlico Million Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Lucia Senasiova

Right: Shadsworth with Whitebirk Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Orrin Saint Pierre

9. ORGANISE PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILMING

Photography and filming at your event can help capture special moments and promote future events, but it's important to manage it carefully.

- Brief your photographer, videographer or volunteer on the type of photography or film footage you want, and make sure they are clear on the consent process.
- Create a consent process including:
  - Consent forms for parents, carers or guardians of children under 18 to sign.
  - An opt-out system for people who don't want to appear in photos and footage, such as brightly coloured stickers or wristbands.
  - Photography and filming notices to display at the event, with details of how photos and film footage will be used and how people can opt-out, on the day and after the event.
  - An agreed system to link photos and film footage to specific consent forms, and to delete any photos of people who have opted out or where consent has not been obtained.







Top: Heart of Sidley Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Kerrie Wood Photography

Middle: North Meets South Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Claudia Leisinger Photography

Bottom: Heart of Sidley Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Kerrie Wood Photography

CHECKLIST







Essential questions to ask yourself

- ☐ Is your event's purpose clear, and does it meet a community need?
- ☐ Have you listened to a diverse range of community voices?
- ☐ Do you have the right partners and supporters on board?
- ☐ Is your budget realistic and have you identified funding sources?
- ☐ Is your venue accessible and easy to get to?
- ☐ Are your activities inclusive, and will they appeal to your target audiences?
- ☐ Have you planned what food will be available and how to serve it safely?
- ☐ Have you completed a risk assessment and checked insurance requirements?
- ☐ Do you have clear roles for volunteers and enough people to help?
- ☐ Is your safeguarding plan in place to protect children and vulnerable adults?
- ☐ Have you planned how to manage photography, and created a consent process?









MAKE SURE EVERYONE FEELS WELCOME

Think about how to create a welcoming experience for everyone in your community.

- Use warm and inclusive language in your promotion that speaks directly to people. For example, words like 'we', 'our', and 'you' can create a sense of belonging.
- Translate key information into languages commonly spoken in your area.
- Design activities and food that reflect the diversity of your community and create meaningful opportunities for different cultural groups to share their traditions.
- Let people know what to expect from the event in your marketing materials, for example, include information about accessibility and food options.

> "In terms of being inclusive, when we do our flyers, we make it very clear that this is a celebration of everybody. The language that we use is quite clear that this is not just a Muslim celebration, this is a celebration for children and families and community."
>
> **Nawal, Pimlico Million**



Pimlico Million Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Lucia Senasiova

SPOTLIGHT ON: PIMLICO MILLION'S EID PARTY

Pimlico Million's Eid Party has become an annual event, attracting over 500 people each year. The event celebrates Eid in a way that welcomes everyone. As Nawal Lakhdar, Community Engagement Leader, explains: "It brings neighbours together to celebrate with each other."

The celebration is held on the Churchill Gardens Estate. It's the most populated part of the area, offers an outdoor space (as well as a community hall in case of rain), and is within easy walking distance for many residents. The space is also accessible with ramps.

The event has enabled Pimlico Million to engage with people in a social, fun and informative way – and collaboration is at the heart of its success. Seven local organisations, including Churchill Gardens Residents Association, Westminster City Council, Westminster Bangladeshi Welfare Trust and Westminster Bangladeshi Association, work together and share resources.

Each partner contributes something unique – from the council lending gazebos to local groups bringing traditional games like Carrom, which create interaction between neighbours. Henna and face painting are popular too. Pimlico Million prioritises quality in all aspects of the event, and food is at the heart of the celebration.



Both photos:
Pimlico Million Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Lucia Senasiova

The impact goes far beyond the day itself. As Nawal says:

"Seeing an elderly Bangladeshi lady talking to her white neighbour, just having a cup of tea and eating rice together – it does make you feel that you're doing something magical.

"The first time we did this event, a local Imam was tearful and said it was the first time he felt culturally celebrated. It's about creating a sense of belonging, that you belong here and you're celebrated by your neighbours."

PROMOTE YOUR EVENT



1. Plan your marketing

Start promoting your event six to eight weeks in advance and create a simple plan that outlines what you'll do, and when.

- Consider who you want to reach and how they typically find information.
- Think about existing channels you can tap into, for example school newsletters, local clubs, faith groups, WhatsApp groups, and community noticeboards. Plan how you'll share information through each channel.
- Highlight the benefits of your event. For example, 'quality family time' or 'try something new'.

2. Create eye-catching visuals

- Work with a designer or use free tools like Canva.
- Print posters and flyers to display in community spaces and create online versions for digital use.
- Ensure key details about your event (date, time, location and cost) are clearly visible.



3. Share your event online

Social media is a cost-effective way to engage with people before, during and after your event. Remember to:

- Post regularly with different types of content. For example, use photos, videos, polls and questions to maintain interest.
- Include clear calls to action in your posts. For example, 'share with a friend', 'volunteer' and 'book a stall'.

If you have an email list, send updates as the event approaches.

Engage your local media

Download this useful guide to sending press releases and working with the media on the Media Trust website.

Making the most of Facebook

There are lots of ways to promote your event on Facebook. You could:

1. Create your own Facebook event and encourage sharing.
2. Post details of your event on local Facebook groups (just remember to check the group rules first).

If you add your event poster as a photo to Facebook, include key information in the post text too, and add alt-text to your image. This will make it more accessible for everyone.



North Meets South Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Claudia Leisinger Photography

"Keep reminding people. Not everybody sees your original post. So, if you keep posting it, then there's a chance more people will see it. And there's nothing wrong with asking people to share it."

Emma, Sompting Big Local

ON THE DAY – MAKE THE MAGIC HAPPEN

1. Get set up

Arrive with plenty of time to set up. Bring your schedule and list of key contacts.

- Set up your welcome points first, so they're ready when people arrive. Make sure there is a good supply of opt-out stickers or wristbands.
- Put up clear signage, so people know where to find the toilets and refreshments.
- Display your photography and filming notices.
- Welcome and brief your suppliers.

2. Brief your volunteers

Gather your volunteers for a briefing before the event starts. Make sure everyone knows their specific role and what they're doing when, as well as:

- the emergency and safeguarding procedures
- photography opt-out processes
- their point of contact during the event

Top tip

Responding to challenges on the day

No matter how well you plan, there will be unexpected challenges on event day. Remind yourself of your contingency plans and be ready to troubleshoot any issues. **Remember: most problems can be resolved and often go unnoticed by attendees.**

> **"Trust in yourself and trust in your team, and if you don't get it all right this time, learn from it. Don't be scared to get it wrong."**
>
> **Emma, Sompting Big Local**



Par Bay Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Charlotte Sams

3. Gather feedback

Set up simple ways for people to share what they think, like a feedback board or a voting system, and ask your volunteers to note any feedback or suggestions.

You could also create a short survey that volunteers can use to gather quick responses or use QR codes around the event, linking to a short online survey.

4. Have fun!

After all your hard work, take some time to enjoy the event!

> "We always have someone asking: 'What do you think, are you enjoying it, what's your best bit? We also had a frame with tubes and asked people to put a counter in a tube to say whether they liked it or not. We didn't have any in the 'no' tube!"
>
> Emma, Sompting Big Local

> "This is real joy that we're bringing, and when you see the children playing and doing activities, it shows you that you are doing it for the right reasons."
>
> Nawal, Pimlico Million





Far right: Riverside Community Big Local Photo: Local Trust / Mark

Right: Shadsworth with Whitebirk Big Local Photo: Local Trust / Orrin Saint Pierre

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Once your event is over, take time to say thank you and reflect. This will help you build on your success for the future.

1. Say thank you

Send personal thank you messages to your volunteers, partners and suppliers, and share positive feedback with everyone involved. Share photos and stories from the event on social media and with the local media.

> **"It's important to reflect, but equally important to continue engaging with those who have been involved and helped us deliver our community event. As our learnings continue to grow, we can improve our events year on year, bringing creativity and new ideas to meet the needs of people locally."**
>
> **Nawal, Pimlico Million**

2. Capture your learning

Have a debrief soon after your event. Discuss what went well and what was challenging, and bring together feedback from your attendees, suppliers and volunteers.

Assess whether you achieved the goals you set at the beginning and whether you reached everyone you hoped to. Keep a note of any learning points and what you would do differently next time.

3. Build on your success

Think about whether the partnerships formed through your event could lead to future collaborations – and consider whether your event could become a regular fixture in the community calendar (and what you need to do to make this happen!)



Latch Ford Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Wesley Russell

SPOTLIGHT ON: SOMPTING BIG LOCAL'S SUMMER FESTIVAL

Sompting Big Local grew their annual summer event into a family fun day that attracted more than 600 people in 2024. Held on a Friday during the first week of the summer holidays, it offered an accessible day of free entertainment.

The festival evolved in response to community feedback. **"Originally, we focused on young people, but parents told us they wanted activities for young children too,"** says Emma Crowter, from Sompting Big Local. **"Many families in our area can't afford funfairs where rides cost £3 each, so they'd avoid going rather than telling their kids no."**

Working with local youth organisation The SID Youth, Sompting Big Local created a full programme of activities including street theatre, a mobile gaming van, dance performances, a magician, and a police car which children could sit inside. A local music charity, Audio Active, also provided a stage with young performers.

Food options were kept affordable.

"We had just one ice cream van and one burger van. Instead of getting a percentage of their takings, we asked them to keep prices low for residents. Many families brought picnics, which we encouraged." says Emma.

The impact of the festival was clear to see.

"We noticed a shift in social media sentiment towards Sompting Big Local. It's more positive now. People appreciate having a fun, free day out where their only expense might be buying a burger."





Both photos: Sompting Big Local Photo: Local Trust / Justine Claire

HELPFUL RESOURCES



Organising a voluntary event – a 'can do' guide, Gov UK website

Your guide to organising a street party, Gov UK website



Focus on: Accessibility

A Disability and Access events checklist, Creative Lives

Guidance to thinking about accessibility when planning activities and events, Resource Centre

Focus on: Health and Safety

Running an event safely, Health and Safety Executive

Risk assessments for community groups, Resource Centre

Food safety at community events, Food Standards Agency

Focus on: Safeguarding

Contact your Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) and Local Safeguarding Adults Board (LSAB) for specific safeguarding guidance. The NSPCC also has helpful resources on event safeguarding.



Top tip

Get in touch with your local authority

Check what event planning resources your local authority has available. Many have template event management plans that you must use if you're planning a large-scale event in a public space like a park. These are useful tools to draw on, even if your local authority doesn't require one for a smaller community event. Here's an example from Enfield Council.

About Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources, and decision-making into the hands of communities.

We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, resident-led funding, and to draw on the learning from our work delivering the Big Local programme to promote a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place.

localtrust.org.uk

About Big Local

Big Local is a resident-led funding programme, providing 150 areas in England with £1.15m each to spend across 10 to 15 years to create lasting change in their neighbourhoods. The programme is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

This action plan was written by Tamsin Curror.

Front cover: Heart of Sidley Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Kerrie Wood Photography

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