

Guidance in planning an educational event

The key to a successful event is planning and preparation. This guidance sets out all the steps you need to take to ensure that your event runs smoothly.

Before you start

Events take a lot of time and effort to plan and run, so you want to maximise your attendance. Do your homework first to make sure that there is a real need for the event, and that it will plug identified educational gaps. There are a lot of events out there already, so make sure that your chosen topic has not recently been – or will not soon be - covered locally. Check the listing pages on the GP Solutions website <http://www.bristolgpsolutions.org.uk/e1.htm> to see what else is available.

Planning the event

a) Format

Decide on the format for delivery:

- Course
- Lecture/presentation
- Interactive discussion
- Group work
- Distance learning
- Networking time at breaks and lunch

For a whole or half day event, a combination and variety of styles is best.

b) Choosing a venue

The right venue is key to the success of an event. You will need to consider:

- A location convenient to your audience
- Public transport
- Sufficient parking
- Disabled access
- Sufficient space for the format of your event (registration area, break out rooms, space for drug sponsors)
- Rooms big enough for your intended numbers
- Cost

If you don't know the venue, you may want to consider visiting to check it out before you book.

c) Choosing a date

Sometimes the date will depend upon venue availability. If possible, however, check that your event does not clash with other important local or national conferences, meeting or events that your target group may also wish to attend. Avoid obvious holidays and half term dates, and consider the regular,

weekly commitments of your target group. If you are planning a lunchtime event, consider allowing time for buffet and registration to enable those that can't leave their practices early to still arrive in time for the educational session itself.

d) Selecting the facilitator(s)

Make sure that your facilitators understand the objectives of the day, the format for delivery and the content you require from them. You may also want to see their presentation in advance to check it meets your requirements.

Check what equipment facilitators require to deliver the session. You will need to make sure that the equipment they bring is compatible with that provided by the venue (for example, is the venue lap top able to take CD roms?).

Ask facilitators to bring handouts or copies of any material that might be helpful for your participants.

Consider what fees or expenses your facilitators will be paid. This may depend upon whether presenting at the event is part of – or additional to - their ordinary job.

Make sure you send facilitators details of the venue and how to get there.

e) Booking venue facilities

Having established your facilitators' requirements and the format for the day, you will need to book the venue and appropriate resources, for example.

- Lecture theatre for plenary sessions
- Seminar and break out rooms
- Lap top (with CD and/or floppy disc drives)
- Data-projector
- Flip chart and pens
- Internet access
- Over Head Projector

It is also prudent to make sure that the venue has someone on hand throughout the event to help with any technical problems with equipment.

f) Catering

Good catering is also important. There should always be drinking water available at the venue throughout the event. Depending upon the length of your event, you will also need to consider:

- Tea and coffee on arrival/registration
- Morning tea/coffee
- Lunch
- Afternoon tea/coffee

Consider the timings and duration of refreshment breaks. As a general rule of thumb, breaks should come every 90 minutes, and should be sufficiently long for participants to spend some time chatting to each other and to any sponsors of the event. Remember that informal networking is of great benefit, and one of the reasons that adult learners attend education events.

Make sure that the venue can meet specific dietary requirements and let them know in advance what these are. There should always be a selection of vegetarian options, clearly labelled.

Make sure that you have included facilitators and drug representatives in your final catering numbers.

g) Funding the event

You will need to make sure that your income covers all your costs (venue, facilities, equipment, facilitators). Depending upon your target audience, funding may be through participants' fees and/or pharmaceutical company sponsorship.

Be clear about how many pharmaceutical companies you are inviting, how many representatives they will bring, how long they will be there, the numbers they are expecting at the event (which will relate to the amount of sponsorship they offer) and the amount of interfacing time they will have. This will need to be clarified in writing beforehand. Sponsors should be issued with their invoices on the day.

h) Publicity

Make sure you give participants plenty of notice. Consider sending out advance warning of the date and general content as soon as you can.

Follow this up with a flyer emailed and/or sent to your target audience. Make it as easy as possible for people to let you know they will be coming (post, email, telephone, fax), as you will need to be sure about your numbers in advance. Keep a reserve list if you are over subscribed, and always remember to inform participants when the event is full.

Participants will also need a map, details of how to get to the venue and a more detailed programme in advance of the event.

Don't forget to publicise your course (for free) on the GP Solutions website.

i) Personnel

Depending upon the event, you may need a chairperson to introduce all the facilitators, make sure they keep to time, co-ordinate any panel discussions and summarise the event at the end.

There should also be someone on hand on the day to support participants, liaise with the venue and iron out any problems.

The week before

You should by now have a complete list of your participants. If you are planning to deliver any group work, put the participants into their groups in advance if possible, and allocate them rooms. This will save time (and confusion) on the day.

You should also give the venue a call to check that everything is in place, and contact your facilitators to make sure they are prepared.

On the day

Your participants' first impressions on the day will be important if they are to support future events. They will expect to register their attendance. They will also appreciate an Information Pack, which may include:

- Final programme for the day
- Any workshop/group lists
- Name badges
- Feedback and evaluation forms (there are feedback and evaluation forms available to download from the CPD pages of the GP Solutions website <http://www.bristolgpsolutions.org.uk/e3.htm>)
- Contact details for facilitators
- Any hand-outs obtained from facilitators in advance
- Discreet advertising for pharmaceutical sponsors

You should also remember to bring:

- A list of participants and signature sheet for registration (the drug representatives will all want copies of the participant list).
- Invoices for the pharmaceutical representatives
- Certificates of attendance for the participants (important for their CPD folders)

Remember at the start of the day to go through the domestic arrangements:

- Fire exits and drill
- Toilet facilities
- Refreshments times and locations

At the end of the day, remember to collect all the feedback forms from the participants, and to encourage them to produce their own evaluations of their learning.

After the event

Don't forget to send a 'Thank You' to your facilitators. If there is any feedback specific from their sessions, you should provide this.

Participants' feedback needs careful consideration. This can be collated using the form 'Feedback summary of educational event'. Again, this can be downloaded from the CPD pages of the GP Solutions website - <http://www.bristolgpsolutions.org.uk/e3.htm>). Use this information to inform the planning and delivery of future events.

Further support

The GPE team can be contacted through Mandy Hall, Team Administrator, on 0117 975 9787, email mandy.hall@nbt.nhs.uk. They can provide further guidance on the planning and delivery of effective adult education.

June 2005