



Plaque unveiling event



Choir at a plaque event

## Developing an Effective Heritage Event

Events are a key part of a complete community heritage outreach strategy. Some common and popular types of events include:

- Plaque unveiling events
- Awards ceremonies
- Community Heritage Fairs/Open Houses

The unique content of an event is not the purpose of this entry, which is focused on organization and planning. The following information has been developed to ensure, as much as possible, that a heritage event goes off without a hitch.

Developing an effective event has four main aspects, each with its own distinct collection of issues and actions:

Planning

Lead-up Preparation

Event-day Preparation

Close-up and Wrap-up

## **Planning**

Planning is critical for the success of an event, and the more detailed the plan the better. Key parts of a plan:

- Identify an organizing committee – make sure there are effective people on the committee, and that there is an effective leader/chair.
  - Develop a contact list and contact protocols. Emails are increasingly popular ways to provide consistent and ongoing updates to the organizing committee.
  - Determine the goals and expected results of the event. Presumably these goals will include adequate attendance (this does not necessarily mean lots of people, although it can – but certainly you want the right people attending).
  - Determine likely attendance – which affects so many other aspects of the plan – venue size, time of event, food and beverage needs and costs, audio-visual needs, etc. Other goals will include provision of effective heritage messages, ensuring attendees have a good time, and reinforcing the fact that the organizing committee and the local heritage community are good at this kind of thing.
  - Assign tasks. Make sure that each major aspect of an event has a “manager:” venue identification/booking; entertainment; special guests, food, speakers, audio-visual equipment, photographer, media and communications, set-up and clean-up, assistance for special needs, chair and table set-up, program development, special seating arrangements, displays, public circulation (i.e., welcome, entry, hand-outs, directions).
- Make a checklist and follow it.
  - Determine which things have costs associated with them, and how payments will be made. Assign a financial person to oversee these aspects.
  - Develop the event program, and determine advertising and promotion needs and costs.
  - Develop communication materials, or at least get someone to attend to that function. Consider developing some material about the history of the group and its mandate and accomplishments.
  - Consider a theme for the event. This does not displace the main purpose of the event – a theme can inform certain aspects. For example food and beverages may be connected to a theme, like ethnic origins or pioneer food types. Make sure people know about the theme – it adds a sense of thoughtfulness to your planning.
  - Consider some typical situations that can be used as opportunities for an event, but which also need some planning attention:
    - Opportunities for discussion/questions
    - Opportunities to make other announcements
    - If there need to be formal breaks, determine how to get people back to the main event
    - Have each aspect of the event timed – consider signal protocols to notify people about timing
    - Consider decorative aspects, like banners and flags, that can add to the tone of the event
    - Consider offering a door prize



Plaque recipients

While this entry on the website does not have planning or programming details about the traditional types of heritage events, the following information has been developed to aid in planning:

#### Plaque unveiling events

For a plaque unveiling event, it is popular to have the plaque covered and for a dignitary to unveil it. Someone usually reads the plaque text. There are usually short speeches. There is usually food and beverages. There is usually a children's choir to sing O Canada. There are usually dignitaries. This is usually outside, so preparations need to be considered for inclement weather; these are usually in the spring-fall months – not winter. There are usually chairs for seating and a platform for special guests. There is a

master of ceremonies. It is advisable to get someone with good photographic skills at the event.

#### Awards ceremonies

These events are typically inside. The simple model for this kind of activity—main introductions, comments on winners/recipients, attendance of winners/recipients, occasionally a few words from winners/recipients, concluding remarks—can be broken up with other activities so that the proceedings can be lighter and more fun. The master of ceremonies should have a few things to say about heritage in general; it is a good idea to get a local politician involved. Determine if winners get to speak – is there enough time? There is often finger food and beverages at this type of event. Attention on seating (in particular for award recipients) will need to be considered. Invite the media. It is advisable to get someone with good photographic skills at the event.

#### Community Heritage Fairs/Open Houses

These kinds of ambitious events need lots of organization and behind-the-scenes preparation. Make sure your community is up for this, and for the number of volunteers required. You will certainly need an overall manager who can crack the whip. And lots of workers. And lots of event-day managers. Such events need to be inside or at least in protected spaces. Audio-visual aspects are usually a major aspect of these kinds of events – and given the glitches that can accompany these aspects it is essential that skilled/knowledgeable people are connected to this function. Food and beverages are a major aspect of these events – they need to be top notch and refreshed. The coffee needs to be hot!

## Lead-up Preparation

Once the planning aspect has been covered off, the next step will be the actual preparatory work required as per the tasks noted above. The key issue here is to make sure that things are on track, and that assigned people are doing the right things.

- Identify an overall project manager. Likely this will be the event chair. Use the checklist of activities and assigned managers to monitor progress of tasks. If someone falters, develop alternate personnel.
- Determine which aspects of the plan are most complex, and thus may need more thought and co-ordination – this can include development of written materials, ancillary activities that are part of the main event, etc. Make sure there is a good manager for these aspects, who understand the issues, and who can ask others for help.
- Keep in touch with special guests and special situations (food especially), to ensure ongoing attention and responses to glitches.



Open house event

## Event-day Preparation

The planning and lead-up preparation should ensure that the actual event runs smoothly. At the same time, consider these issues:

- Gather personnel at the venue as per a time that has been determined by the committee.
- Assign event-day monitors as per key aspects: arrival, welcome and directions + guest book/comments book; seating and special seating; audio-visual and lighting; display maintenance (sometimes things fall off or fall over); food/beverages, utensils and disposal.
- Let volunteers know who is in charge of what – give them a list of names.



Building brick repointing workshop

## Close-up and Wrap-up

When the event is over, it is important that managers and volunteer personnel take time to effectively clean up the venue and remove materials. Once that work is done, there is still one last step, wrap-up, that should be considered, with the following ideas:

- Gather all volunteers for a thank-you moment. Ask if there any questions or observations that can help with the next event. Distribute food left-overs if that is appropriate.
- Meet with the organizing committee a few days after the event to go over observations. Have someone take notes and another to develop that information as a small report.
- Determine outstanding costs and payment schedule.
- Have the committee chair collect the report and distribute for comments. File the report for use in the next event.



Heritage event



Parade with a heritage theme