

eventbrite

Running Free Events: The Complete Handbook



Introduction

Did you know that free events can actually be a great way to make money? They're an effective way to introduce people to your services and generate leads for your business. You may also choose to use free events as "tasters" for your larger, paid-for events.

Perhaps you want to run a free event just for the good of the community? That doesn't mean it should leave you out of pocket. In this guide we will look at how to run a free event that covers its costs so you can better achieve your goals, whatever they might be.

Topics covered in this guide include finding funding, securing low cost (or free) venues, free promotion ideas, managing "no shows" and successfully converting leads.

Contents

Budgeting	04
Event Sponsorship	06
Recruiting and Managing	09
Minimise No-Shows	11
Sourcing Venues	13
Free Event Promotion Ideas	15
Following up	17

Budgeting

Just because your event is free to attend, it doesn't mean it's free to organise! There are many potential costs that you need to think about at the outset. These could include:

- Venue hire
- AV equipment hire
- Furniture hire
- Staging or marquee hire
- Catering costs
- Speakers or entertainment
- Workshop materials
- Printing and signage
- Advertising
- Insurance and licences
- Staffing and security

The good news is, that when you use Eventbrite for the ticketing and registration of your free event, you won't have any fees to pay. So that's one thing off the list! Write down everything else you'll need for the event and think about whether you can source it for free or if you'll need to pay.

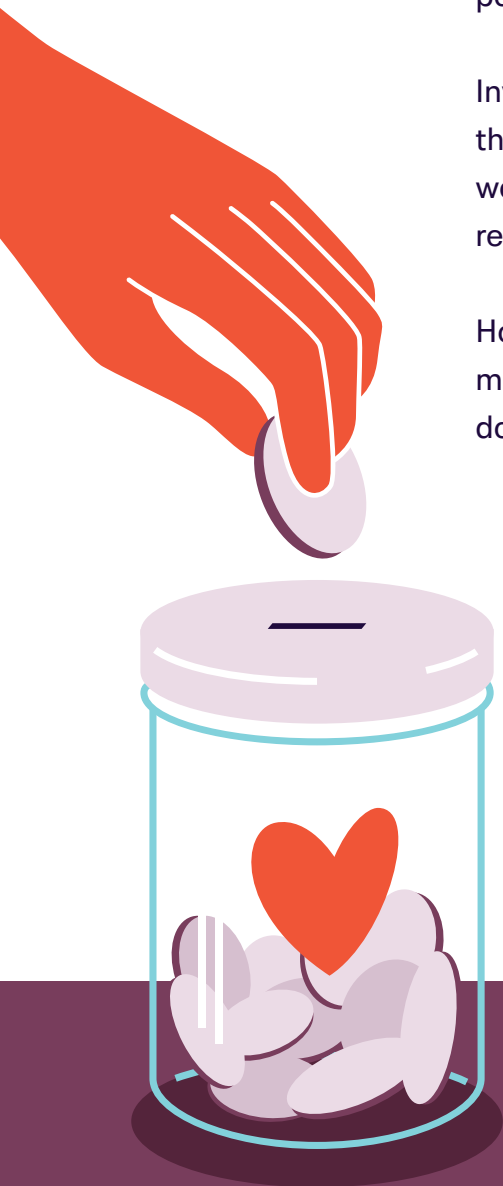
It's important to call multiple suppliers to get an idea of costs and draw up a rough budget using this [event budget template](#). Don't forget that some costs are fixed (like venue hire) and some will go up, depending on how many attendees you have (like catering). It's a good idea to factor a bit of contingency money into your budget to cover any unexpected costs.

Paying for your event

Now you know how much it's going to cost to stage your event it's time to think about where that money will come from. Will you pay out of your own pocket or [look for sponsorship](#)?

Investing in your event only makes sense if it meets your goals, so define these at the outset. If you are using the event to generate leads, how many would have to convert in order for you to break even? If you hope to raise revenue/funds directly from the event, establish your target.

Hosting a free event doesn't mean you can't make money from it - you can make a profit on food and drink, sell goods, hire exhibition space, ask for donations or charge attendees to take part in activities, games and raffles.



Event Sponsorship

One of the best ways to pay for your free event is via sponsorship. Why might a business be interested in sponsoring your event? There are three main reasons:

- Corporate Social Responsibility - a company wants to support your cause in order to "give back"
- Exposure - a company wants to promote itself to your audience
- Image - a company wants to align itself to the values of your event

What opportunities can you offer for the above? You don't have to have hundreds of attendees or be very high profile in order to have something a business might want to be associated with.

In some cases, small niche events can be desirable since they provide companies with access to a very targeted audience. And don't forget that small local businesses might not have the budget to support big established events, so the chance to sponsor yours might be a welcome opportunity.

Follow the steps below ([and download this template](#)) to craft a successful sponsorship proposal:

Identify your niche

Think about why a sponsor might want to be associated with your event - what is your audience demographic? Are you trying to achieve a social goal with your event such as educating people about food or providing a platform for underrepresented artists? What does your event stand for and how is it perceived by others?

Once you've established exactly who you are, you can go looking for companies or brands that have a synergy. Demonstrate that you share values or that your event attendees mirror their target segment. Spend time to tailor every approach you make in order to show you've selected their company for a reason.

Spell out what's in it for them

As well as showing that your event is a great fit, you'll need to tell a potential sponsor exactly what they'll get in exchange for their money. You don't have to restrict yourself to cash support, however; you can also look for in-kind sponsorship. For example, if you want to provide food at your event, you might ask your local bakers to donate sandwiches and buns.

For larger events where more money is required, rather than look for one company to sponsor the event in its entirety, you might have more luck creating tiered sponsorship packages. Accepting sponsorship for individual things, such as the wine, printing or AV, provides a lower entry level for small firms.

Here are some benefits you could offer to sponsors:

- Digital branding and online promotion - their branding on your website and event registration page, banner ads, social media posts, guest blogs
- Physical branding at your event - their branding on posters, presentations and event materials
- Distribution of sales materials - give out brochures, flyers or goodie bags with branded gifts
- Access to audience - enable them to have an exhibition stand, present a talk or network with attendees
- CSR opportunities - provide a chance for staff to get involved with your organisation's activities

Consider partnerships

Sponsorship is not the only way to fund your event - if you're a business, you might choose to partner with another company to split costs. You don't have to view them as competition just because you're targeting the same customers.

Let's say you're a life coach hosting free seminars, you could partner with a yoga teacher to add a pranayama breathing session to your event. Not only does it enrich your event offering, it means you can pool resources. And since there are now two of you promoting the event to your respective networks, it increases your chances of making it a success.



Recruiting and Managing

Trying to run an event by yourself can be quite an undertaking, especially if you're doing it as a side hustle, and have another job too! Don't be afraid to ask for help - lean on friends and family and colleagues within your business or organisation.

For larger events, such as fetes, fairs and festivals, you'll need a whole army of volunteers. Volunteers can help with tasks like stewarding, attendee check-in, manning stalls, rubbish management, catering and collecting donations.

So, where do you find them?

Turn to your network

The first place to look for potential volunteers is among your existing supporters; a school might ask parents or a church might ask it's congregation, for example. Put a shout out on your social media channels, email newsletter and notice board.

Outside of your own network, you can turn to other community groups such as the Girl Guides or Scouts. Colleges and universities can also be great places to find volunteers, especially among students on event management courses who need practical work experience.

Communicate clearly

Where possible, give volunteers roles that reflect their skillset, or let them have a say in what they'd like to help with. Once all the roles have been allocated, keep in touch with your volunteers and let them communicate with each other by setting up a Facebook or WhatsApp group.

You might even want to consider using a free project management tool such as Trello, which everyone can have access to so they can keep you updated on their progress.

Prior to event day, send out a pre-event reminder email including all of the key details - such as directions and parking information. And ask anyone who thinks they might not make it to let you know - it's wise to allow for 5-10% of volunteers not turning up on the day.

Set clear expectations

Before your event starts, have a team meeting with all your volunteers and check that everyone knows exactly what they're supposed to be doing. Don't forget to thank everyone during the orientation so volunteers know that they're appreciated. For most volunteers feeling appreciated is enough of a reward for donating their time but you might want to organise a small treat like some drinks afterwards, and time to allow everyone to mingle and feel that they achieved something together.

Minimise No-Shows

One of the biggest challenges of organising free events is getting people to show up. While it might be easier to give away tickets than sell them, free events often have a high on-the-day dropout rate.

“No shows” for free events typically range from 50-60%, compared to 20% or less for paid events. This means you might sell out your event only to find that half of the people don’t turn up.

Not only is it hugely disappointing, it can put you in an awkward position with sponsors, speakers or other stakeholders, such as exhibitors who might have paid to be at your event. Here are some ways to mitigate that risk:

Understand you have to oversell

The most important rule of free events is always overselling. Given the average 50% drop-out rate, you’d need to shift 200 tickets if you wanted 100 people to turn up. At the very least, you should aim to allocate 50% more tickets than available places.

You might be worried about what would happen if everybody turned up, but it is highly unlikely. Even airlines regularly oversell their seats because they know there will always be a percentage of people who don’t make it. You can keep track of how many registrations you’ve had with real-time reporting in your Eventbrite dashboard. You can also check your stats on the go using the Eventbrite Organiser app.

Keep attendees accountable

While shifting more tickets is important, it's not purely a numbers game - you don't want just anyone signing up for the sake of it, you want them to be serious about attending.

Use your event copy to help weed out the flakier customers, explaining that tickets to the event are limited. Request that anybody who can't make it lets you know so that their ticket can be reallocated. Perhaps even set up a waiting list to give the impression of scarcity?

Email attendees before the event with a reminder of the event details and ask again at that point for people to notify you if they cannot attend. You might also like to set up a mandatory check-in 48-hours beforehand, giving you advance notice of numbers.

Get commitment

Taking payment for refreshments or merchandise up front is one way to get monetary commitment from your free event attendees. For example, you could have a ticket option that includes a hot drink and snack for £5. It's only a small amount of money but once people have bought into an event they're much more likely to attend.

Engaging people by asking them to make choices related to their event attendance also helps foster commitment. You could ask them to select break out sessions, book a specific time for a workshop, or make meal choices.

Finally, offering attendees a reward is another good way to increase attendance. By providing a gift voucher for your business, for example, it can also help convert event goers into paying customers.

Sourcing Venues

Organisers of free events often want free venues and they can be hard to find. If you don't have any budget for hiring a venue, you have three options:

- Use a space you already have access to
- Partner with a business or organisation that can offer you space
- Get attendees to pay for the space through bar spend

Consider the options below and download [The Complete Guide to Finding Your Venue](#) for more ideas.

Work with what you have

If you have an office, shop or business premises, consider if you could use the space for your event. Attendees might even consider it a benefit to get a glimpse behind the scenes. Equally, your own home (or garden) could be a suitable location for smaller, more intimate affairs.

Alternatively, if you have a business partner, client or supplier who has the perfect space, suggest hosting the event at theirs. You might be able to lean on the strength of your relationship alone to get them to agree.

Pitch your value

If you want to use someone else's venue, aim to select a partner that would appreciate having access to your audience. Offer them the chance to make a short pitch to your attendees or give out promotional materials in exchange for hosting the event.

Alternatively, if your event is charitable in nature, approach venue owners who share your values. You might be offered free access to space owned by religious organisations, non-profits or community-minded businesses.

Commit to a minimum spend

Agreeing to spend even a small amount of money with a venue will really open up what's available to you. Minimum spend venues can be found from as little as £50. All you need to do is guarantee that this figure will be spent on F&B during the event.

Lots of cafes, bars and pubs have private rooms that they operate on this basis and they could be the perfect choice if your attendees are likely to want to purchase refreshments. Just bear in mind that if there is a shortfall in what's taken over the bar, you'll be responsible for making it up.



Free Event Promotion Ideas

When you're hosting events with free tickets, there may not be the budget for paid marketing. But there are actually tons of free ways to promote your event. You can download our checklist of [75 totally free event promotion tactics](#) or try out the top 10 below:

#1 Create a Facebook event

Use Eventbrite's "Add to Facebook" tool to instantly create an event listing on Facebook. The integration lets people register for your event without having to leave Facebook and typically results in twice as many registrations.

#2 Host a social media event

Use Eventbrite's "Add to Facebook" tool to instantly create an event listing on Facebook. The integration lets people register for your event without having to leave Facebook and typically results in twice as many registrations.

#3 Share your event on LinkedIn

Post your registration page URL on LinkedIn to let your professional network know about your event. You can also directly invite contacts through the platform's messaging facility, and share your event in relevant groups.

#4 Write a press release

If your free event is being held to benefit the community, let local press and radio know about it. Write a press release with quotes explaining what you're doing and why, sharing any personal stories that capture the human interest angle. Include a high quality, engaging image for extra coverage.

#5 Ask partners

Get everyone involved in your event on board with promotion. This includes speakers, sponsors, staff and volunteers. Utilising other people's audiences and networks is one of the best ways to market an event for free, so ask them to share your event on their social channels.

#6 Make a video for your Instagram Story

Chatting to camera is a super easy way to tell people about your event on Instagram. Or you can make more sophisticated video to share on IGTV. There are lots of ways you can use self-produced videos to promote your events on social media.

#7 Email your database

If you already have a GDPR compliant database of customers or contacts it makes sense to let them know about your event, since they've already shown interest in what you do. If the aim of your event is to attract a new audience, ask them to bring along a friend.

#8 Put up posters

Posters and flyers, while not completely free, can be printed cheaply at home or via an online print shop. Meanwhile, tools like Canva provide lots of free templates making it easy to create something professional looking.

#9 Add to your email signature

You've probably been overlooking this free real estate, but it provides a way to promote your event every single time you send out an email. You can add your event name, date, venue and a link to your registration page.

#10 Get listed

What sites do people looking for things to do in your local area use? Make sure your event is included in any "what's on" calendars. Eventbrite gives you a head start - when you make your event "public", it will appear on our discovery platform, potentially exposing it to thousands of searchers.

Following up

When revenue from ticket sales isn't your key indicator of success, it's really important to have a post event follow up strategy in place. How will you measure if your event met its goals? How will you gain ongoing benefits from the event?

The steps you take after your event will depend on its purpose. Was your intention to change attitudes or raise awareness? [A post event survey](#) enables you to track audience sentiment and see what impact you've had.

Was the aim of your free event to drive leads for your business? How will you nurture those leads after the event? How will you track conversions after one month, three, six, so you can understand the true value your event delivered?

If you're a charity or community organisation, how will you maximise the opportunity to build relationships with supporters? Staying in touch means you have a readymade audience for your next fundraising campaign or event.

Data protection

It's important to note that new data protection rules in Europe mean you cannot contact attendees after your event without their permission. Fortunately, Eventbrite makes it simple to collect that permission during the registration process.

If you wish to share attendee data with your sponsors or partners you must explicitly state the names of the third parties and get consent. Securely storing data is also vital, which is why Eventbrite only works with compliant technology partners.

When you export attendee data using any of our 100+ partners on our [Eventbrite App Marketplace](#), you can be sure it will be handled securely. Tools to help you gain maximum value from the information you hold on your event attendees include customer relationship management (CRM) platforms.

A CRM system creates a profile for each attendee and tracks all the ongoing interaction you have with them. Having this information at your fingertips helps you to build relationships and increase your conversions. HubSpot offers a [free CRM solution](#) for small businesses.

Making your free event pay

Building audiences through free events gives you a host of options for the future. Once you have an established community there are all sorts of possibilities for monetising it - just look at how successful Facebook has become!

Free events are also a great way to hone your skills before moving to paid events. And when you do, you'll hopefully already have a loyal following. But whatever direction you decide to take, following the advice in this guide will make sure your free events always pay off.

Ready to set up your free event? [Let's go!](#)

Still need support? Our event experts will be happy to advise - [contact us here](#), or call 0800 652 4993.



Powered three million events in 2017.

Hundreds of thousands of organisers use Eventbrite to drive ticket sales*, promote and manage events, handle on-site operations, and analyse results across multiple sales channels.

[Talk to an event expert](#)

[View on-demand demo](#)



Grow your event

Drive additional sales through Eventbrite's marketplace.



Simplify your planning

Promote, manage, and analyse your event from any device.



Impress your attendees

Delight with ease of purchase, convenient ticket access, and speedier entry.

*Based on more than 700,000 event creators in 2017