Organising an Annual Celebration

Activity

Prepared by: Transition Network 2016, updated by Vesna Ilievska 2025.

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Congratulations! It's the end of the year and you've done some amazing work together as a group. Why not celebrate this and remind everyone of your group's hard work and achievements? This will also be an opportunity to get together with people and have some social time, to relax and have some fun. You don't need to do this only once a year – many groups celebrate achievements whenever they happen.

This step-by-step guide prepares you to organise such a celebration and includes a general checklist you can customise and use for your event. Here are the main aspects to think about:

1. Programme

You can use your celebration as a moment to reflect on and showcase your group's achievements — both big and small. You can help visualise your achievements with a photo display, a timeline, or a short film that displays your work (see Producing a Timeline). You can also invite someone to talk about your achievements, as long as they keep it brief, energetic, and positive. Celebrate those who've contributed along the way, and acknowledge those who have moved on. At the same time, you can also create the space to look ahead. Invite guests to share ideas and hopes for the future in creative and fun ways, so they can help shape what comes next. You can also invite other local partners or organisations you've interacted with to be present, maybe by having stalls promoting their activities, or whatever they would like (see see Building Bridges, see How to Create Partnerships).

For example, at a Transition Town Lewes (TTL) event there was a choir, a couple of talks, some poetry, a raffle, more singing, bagpipes, dancing, the opportunity to interact with several TTL projects, a mention of the campaign for a community take-over of the site they were on, food, drinks, and so on.

2. Invitations

Invite everyone, both partners and friends (if it feels right). This can be a celebration for all! When inviting people to your celebration, make sure the invitation is clear and engaging. You want them to know it will be fun, what the event is about, and what you're celebrating. A personal invitation goes a long way, so reach out directly whenever possible. Try to make sure you have a good critical mass attending the event (see Ideas for Events to Help Promote Your Project).

3. Food and Drinks

Every celebration needs some refreshments. Get some good food locally and use this opportunity to celebrate that as well.

4. Documenting it

Assign someone to record the event, whether through photos, video, or another creative way of documenting it. You'll be grateful later to have those memories recorded, especially since having all those people together in one place is something that won't happen quite the same way again.

5. Entertainment

A good celebration really benefits from the opportunity to have good music and dance. It's the perfect way to wrap up a good celebration.

In short, this event should be about celebrating what you have achieved, appreciating what people have done, strengthening relationships, and most importantly having fun. This may seem like a simple thing to do – and simple things are often the most effective.

Annual Community Celebration – Planning and Logistics Checklist

1. Early Planning (2–3 months before)

☐ Set date, time, and duration of event
☐ Book venue (indoor/outdoor, accessibility, capacity, toilets)
☐ Choose event format (fair, presentations, performances, workshops, and so on)
☐ Create event theme or slogan
☐ Make a budget (venue, food, print, materials, entertainment, and so on)
☐ Identify team members and assign responsibilities (see Leaderfull Groups)
☐ Contact collaborators and partners to co-create or take part
☐ Decide if the event will be open to the public or invite-only
☐ Apply for permits (if needed – noise, road use, alcohol, and so on)
☐ Ensure insurance coverage (public liability, equipment, and so on).

2. Programme and Content

☐ Plan main programme (speeches, awards, performances)
☐ Invite speakers, performers, or facilitators
☐ Organise exhibitions or displays of past projects
☐ Include interactive elements (workshops, games, skill demos)
☐ Prepare volunteer or member recognition/thank-yous
☐ Include a reflection or storytelling area (timeline, testimonials, and so on)
☐ Build in time and space for informal networking (see How to Build Networks).

3. Outreach and Invitations

☐ Design event materials (poster, flyer, social media graphics)
☐ Send invitations to collaborators, schools, local institutions, supporters
☐ Create Facebook event, Eventbrite page, and so on
☐ Promote via email, social media, partners' channels
☐ Contact local media (press release, invite coverage)
☐ Post in community centers, libraries, schools
☐ Set RSVP deadline (if relevant) and manage guest list.

4. Logistics and Supplies

☐ Arrange tables, chairs, tents, sound system, projector, and so on
☐ Organise food and drinks (catering, community potluck, donated snacks)
☐ Set up welcome/registration/info table
☐ Print programs, signs, name tags, feedback forms if needed
☐ Gather decorations, banners, photo displays
☐ Prepare supplies for workshops or hands-on activities
☐ Rent or borrow extra equipment (heaters, lights, audio-visual).

5. Roles and Volunteers (see Leaderfull Groups)

☐ Assign a team lead for each area (logistics, outreach, program, and so on)
☐ Recruit volunteers for set-up, clean-up, greeters, floaters
☐ Hold a volunteer orientation meeting
☐ Make a schedule with shifts and contact info
☐ Prepare badges or identifiers for volunteers/staff.

6. Accessibility and Inclusion

☐ Ensure venue is physically accessible (ramps, restrooms)
☐ Provide printed materials in multiple languages (if needed)
☐ Include child-friendly or family activities
☐ Offer quiet spaces or sensory-friendly areas
☐ Make space for different cultural and community voices.
(see Respect for Diversity, see Enhancing Cultural Competence, see Language Justice Tips, see Color Communication Badges)

7. During the Event

☐ Set up welcome station with sign-in sheet and name tags
☐ Have printed schedule and maps available
☐ Take photos or video (assign someone or ask multiple people)
☐ Check on speakers/performers and keep program on time
☐ Collect feedback or testimonials (written, video, sticky notes)
☐ Collect contact information via a sheet or QR code to so people can stay connected
☐ Share social media updates or live coverage if possible.

8. After the Event

☐ Thank all collaborators, speakers, volunteers (email or card)
☐ Post photos and highlights online
☐ Share event outcomes with wider network
☐ Reflect with your team: what went well, what can improve? (see Action-Reflection Cycle)
☐ Archive materials and lessons for next year
☐ Hold a team celebration or debrief meeting.

Related Resources

Producing a Timeline
Building Bridges
How to Create Partnerships
Leaderfull Groups
Respect for Diversity
Enhancing Cultural Competence
Language Justice Tips
Color Communication Badges
Action-Reflection Cycle
Events to Help Promote Your Project

References

[Celebrating your non-profit's anniversary - DonorBox]

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