



# How to run a forum.



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## 1. Designing your meeting

This guide is aimed at community groups and Local Drug Action Teams (LDATs) that are running prevention activities in their local areas.

Running a meeting or event will depend on your needs and the individual needs of the attendees. This will also vary depending on the size and nature of your engagement with your community. It might be a formal 'roundtable' event, or a much smaller, informal group meeting.

Each community will have different needs – so think this through in advance.

Here are some elements to consider when thinking through the design of your meeting:

### Purpose/Outcomes

What are you trying to solve? Are you hoping to broker partnerships, bring together a potential working group or simply provide your community with an introduction to your LDAT's activities? What will be different after your session? What will be delivered?

### Format

What's the best way to meet these outcomes? A forum with a series of speakers might be best. Other times it is necessary to have a meeting with more time for collaboration and conversation to build a common understanding of the challenges a particular community is facing.

### Content

What will you include in presentations? Do you need to introduce your LDAT or the concepts of risk and protective factors, for instance? This will depend on who you have in the room. Think about how you can achieve your outcomes and ensure it's a positive and engaging experience for everyone.

### People

Who are the organisations you need represented in the room? Who are the influencers and decision makers at the local level? Can you identify a shared concern?

### Experience

What sort of venue would best meet your outcomes and format needs? Is catering required? Think about what will improve the experience for your attendees.

## 2. Local support

Who you invite to the meeting should be driven by the outcome you're hoping to achieve. When you begin the local engagement process, consider the following:

1. Identify key influencers and decision makers in the community or region you are working with. Build on your understanding of what is happening locally – reading local media stories or online social pages will help give you some background for conversations. You can also research other organisations, programs and services in the area that align with your purpose.
2. Get in touch with the council/Local Government Area (LGA). Many councils are interested in strengthening community initiatives and all want to reduce the harms from AOD. A council may be able to support with venues and promotion. The mayor and/or councillor(s) may be interested in hosting the event and officially opening the meeting or forum with a welcome. State and federal members may also be interested. Contact the local Aboriginal cooperative if you would like a Welcome to Country, and consider asking them to be involved or contribute, if they aren't already.
3. Schools (parents and teachers) can be a great way to identify community minded people who will be interested in ADF's mission of working together to strengthen communities and prevent harm. See if you can identify key contacts that want to get involved.
4. Community sporting clubs are another strong avenue of support. Identify local **Good Sports clubs** – as well as clubs that are not yet part of the program. This is a great opportunity to reach out, encourage their participation and bring new clubs into the conversation so they can contribute.

5. Reach out to local police to seek their support and involvement. Police tend to be strong supporters of LDAT's work.
6. Identify local networks (online) as well as other channels (media/radio) and community noticeboards that will help promote the event.

### 3. Venues

There are several important factors to consider when planning the venue for your event.

1. Ensure the venue has adequate and accessible seating that will accommodate all guests, including those with access needs (e.g. is there a ramp or lift access to the building? Does the event require Auslan interpretation or audio description?).
2. Is the venue close to public transport? Does it have enough free parking?
3. Ensure the venue has these technical facilities if required:
  - data projector and screen to play your PowerPoint presentation
  - sound system and relevant cables to be able to play videos off your laptop
  - laptop you can use or check that you are able to bring your own
  - microphones for speakers/panel members and the audience
  - Wi-Fi if you need it.
4. Does the venue have an area where you can set up a registration desk?
5. Is there an in-house or preferred caterer (if you are providing catering)?

Note: Local council buildings can often be useful and neutral locations, and in some cases the council will even provide free venues/catering.

#### Additional tips

- Keep an eye on your attendee numbers and ensure you have adequate seating available.
- Keep in mind that as a general rule that there may be 20% no-shows and 10% walk-ins.
- Speak to the venue about accessing additional seating if required.
- Provide accessible seating and ensure you have appropriate access to the stage if required by a speaker.
- If you are providing catering, remember to allow for special dietary requirements (estimate 10% vegetarian and 10% gluten-free of your total audience number).

### 4. Who will facilitate or MC your event?

Having a good facilitator or MC is crucial to the success of your event. The MC will take care of introductions, set the agenda and pace of the meeting or forum, handle the audience and keep things running on time. They will also create the mood of the event in terms of language used, humour and tone.

Some sessions will require strong facilitation to ensure that conversations stay on track. Talking about AOD issues can generate some strong emotional responses – so be prepared that this could happen, particularly if you have a broad audience.

Ensure that your facilitator/MC has plenty of experience working with a range of audiences and can lead groups towards your planned outcomes.

## Troubleshooting difficult situations that could arise

Just as we encounter different personalities in life, we can expect to meet them at a community event. Here is some advice for the MC on how to handle such people.

1. If you have a person who is dominating discussion, be polite and respectful but firm. Acknowledge and thank them for their contribution and state that time is running short and we need to hear from everyone. You might also suggest that they come and talk to organisers and/or panel members when the meeting concludes.
2. Within any type of meeting or group there is the potential for people to become emotional, and sometimes this can be confronting for the MC and members of the audience. Where possible, try to defuse the situation by speaking calmly and quietly – acknowledge the person's concerns and assist where possible. Local support organisations could be approached in advance and invited to be present to help audience members.

## 5. Promote the event and ensure you have attendees

It's important to identify local networks and promotional opportunities if you require broad attendance.

Local media (covered in the next section) and social media are both good avenues to explore for promotion of your event.

## 6. Working with the media

Each event has the potential for great media coverage, which can raise awareness, increase the impact of your event and further strengthen communities.

However, as each meeting and community will be different, it's best to plan your approach before reaching out to journalists. Take a look at the [Engaging media guide on the Community Hub](#).

It's important to note that if any media does attend your meeting and will be taking photographs and/or filming, your MC will need to ask the media to respect the privacy of the audience and advise the audience so they have the option to move to a seating location out of shot if they desire.

## 7. Was your event a success?

An important step in assessing the effectiveness of your event is to find out what people thought of it. This information will be valuable to you when you go to conduct another meeting or community event. Please use the template provided as appendix 4.

### Key considerations

- Feedback forms are best placed on seats on the night. It can be difficult to get people to complete online surveys.
- If you can, provide pens for filling in the forms.
- The MC needs to specifically mention how important it is for audience members to fill out an evaluation form at the end of the event and to ask them to leave it on their seat when they depart the premises.
- Make sure the contact details of all willing attendees are collected at the event or through registration (such as full name, organisation, email address) so that you can follow up after the meeting and provide information about other community events.

## 8. Tips for a successful event

Ensure the event starts and finishes on time. Arrive in time to set up the venue and ensure the technical equipment is working, including checking whether the computer is a PC or a Mac, any possible compatibility issues, and that the sound system and microphones are working well.

1. Make sure people can find the venue (use signage if you need to) and that they can find the registration desk (where applicable) to sign in and be welcomed.
2. Test any PowerPoint slides prior to commencing the event and ensure you have a back-up copy of the slides on a memory (USB) stick in case the original copy does not work. Do not rely on speakers bringing their own slides on the day.
3. Make sure your speakers and panel members are aligned with the key aims and messages of the meeting.
4. Confirm the attendance of your host, MC, speakers and panel members on the day of (or in some instances the day before) the meeting.
5. Ask your speakers to arrive at least 30 minutes prior to commencement of the meeting so they can be introduced to the MC, host, etc. and to ensure there are no last-minute changes or cancellations. If your meeting is more informal, asking people to arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the meeting or meeting time will help ensure you get off to a good start and your event runs smoothly from the outset.
6. Have a back-up plan in case one of your speakers doesn't arrive.
7. Check that your speakers' presentations are the same as the ones earlier supplied and that they are loaded successfully onto the laptop to be used during the meeting.
8. Double-check the MC's script for speaker names and/or names of panel members, titles, etc. Make sure the MC knows who to thank on your behalf if you are not doing this.
9. Remind/encourage attendees to hand in their evaluation forms or leave them on their seat when they depart.
10. Keep a record of any audience questions that are raised during the Q&A session, and who on the panel responds, to include in your event report.
11. Ensure the venue is left in the same state as when you arrived and that you check in with your venue contact regarding security procedures prior to departure (where applicable).

## 9. Planning checklist

It takes time to plan a well-run event.

When setting the date for a larger forum or event, we recommend you allow 10 weeks preparation time prior to your event. Make sure you have a team working with you and identify responsibilities to share workload.

### 10 weeks out

Go through the meeting design process (page 3) and contact identified organisations to find out how they can support event.

Identify key influencers and encourage participation.

Check dates for clashes with holidays, other events, etc.

Find and book a suitable venue. Consider things like size, location, accessibility.

### 6 weeks out

6 weeks is an ideal length of time for promoting the event and ensuring you have attendees.

Develop run sheet and lock in suitable speakers/panel members.

Develop key messages, background brief and promotional materials.

Ensure speakers/panel members are clear on purpose/outcomes of meeting.

Send out invites. For meetings of more than 10, use Eventbrite or a similar platform to track registrations.

## 2 weeks out

- Finalise your running order and include with background brief and key messages.
- Circulate this overview document to the relevant stakeholders.
- Track confirmed attendees and send out a reminder if necessary.
- Organise banners and print resources if required.
- Review presentations.
- Contact media and other supporters and ask them to promote the event.
- Book in catering if required.
- Check venue set up for audiovisual (AV) needs, etc.

## 1 week out

- If catering is being provided, confirm final numbers with the caterer.
- Check with your speakers to see if their presentations are ready so you can load them on to a USB stick and take it along on the day, in case they forget theirs.

## 2 days out

- Print all documentation required (including evaluation forms).
- Have any resources and stationery on hand and packed.
- Contact all suppliers (AV, catering, venue, etc.) to ensure everything is in hand.
- Ensure event registration (Eventbrite or similar) is closed prior to the event day.
- Check in and confirm final details of the event with your MC, speakers and panel members.
- Prepare thank-you gifts.

## Event day

- Print final registrations to make a sign-in sheet so you know who is in the room.
- Have name tags – even just hand-written ones. This helps conversation and connection.
- Do a final check of all event documentation (running order, speaker notes, panel member contact details, etc.).
- Pack your vehicle and ensure you arrive at the venue in time for set-up with your helper(s).
- Check all technical elements once at the venue (PowerPoint, laptop, speakers, microphones, etc.) and ensure everything is in working order.
- Set up seating. Place any documents/evaluation forms/brochures, etc. on seats or have them available at the registration desk.
- Ensure set-up is completed at least 30 minutes prior to scheduled guest arrival.
- Keep an eye out for any media and introduce yourself.
- Make sure attendees know if media is present and ensure that, if you are filming/taking photos, the audience is notified so they can choose to sit out of camera/lens view if they so desire.
- Follow your running sheet and make sure the event runs to schedule and finishes on time. Encourage attendees who have further questions to stay on and ask their questions of speakers but let them know it is important to finish on time.
- Collect evaluation forms as attendees are leaving.
- Pack up and account for all your supplies prior to departing.
- Touch base with your venue contact prior to your departure.

## After the event

Add any attendees who did not register but signed in at the event to the Excel spreadsheet that you exported from the registration system (e.g. Eventbrite) so you have a full list of attendees.

Send thank-you letters to key stakeholders, panel members, speakers, etc.

Send a thank-you email to attendees (as required and where you have email addresses).

Ensure invoices are paid in a timely manner.

## 10. Resources and templates

Here are templates that you can adapt and use for your own event.

[Invitation template](#)

[Running order](#)

[Speaking notes](#)

[Sample feedback form](#)

[Sample event report](#)

[Sample event day list](#)