**How to organise a meeting or event**

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# Feasibility

Before you even start to organise your meeting or event, it’s worthwhile checking that this is actually what you want to do and that it’s realistic for your budget. It’s also important to identify who can help you – ideally you’ll have a team of people with different strengths, e.g. publicity, artwork and displays, catering, iwi liaison. If you’re the sole organiser, use experienced people to check your initial ideas and make sure you’re on the right track.

Together with your organising team, discuss the following questions:

* What are our goals?
* Is an event/meeting the best option for what we want to achieve and for our audience?
* Is there sufficient time to organise and publicise it adequately?
* What resources can we muster for this event or meeting? Who else can help?
* What do we want those coming to know/do/experience?
* Will people attend? What ‘market research’ have we done for this event/meeting? Is it something that people have been calling for, or an idea someone came up with? If the latter, it may pay to ring around a few people you would expect to attend and check on their interest.
* Are there any possible legal aspects, including Health and Safety considerations?
* ­­Venue hire.
* Equipment hire.
* Speakers’ fees/travel/accommodation.
* Entertainment.
* Gifts/Koha – if you are being hosted on a marae, the koha should reflect the costs of normal venue hire as well as food if this is provided.
* Food and drinks.
* Artwork/displays/decoration.
* Childcare.
* Mail-out of invitations.
* Advertising.
* Transport (e.g. providing a bus etc.).
* Stationery and photocopying.
* Cleaning.

# Who to invite and how

For a public meeting, invite everyone who has shown an interest and publicise it widely so everyone has a chance to get involved. Use a range of publicity options, such as school newsletters, posters on notice boards and shop windows, free papers, local radio. Send a copy of the programme and a press release to the local papers. When advertising, keep in mind the objective and target audience – let the audience know what they will get out of attending.

# Organising a venue

Check out the venue in person or get someone you trust to do it. Consider:

* Size – enough room for everyone together, plus space for break-out groups if required.
* Suitability of furniture and facilities – number of chairs and tables, comfort, equipment availability, location of power points, parking, access for disabled.
* Location – travel times, transport to venue. Is it easy to find?
* Lighting/blackout for slides, heating and fresh air.
* Acoustics and background noise levels from the street or other meeting rooms.
* Space for childcare or children’s activities if a family-oriented event.
* Access to refreshment facilities and toilets.
* Space for displays and other information.
* Occupational, safety and health hazards – undertake a site inspection prior to the event.
* A back-up venue, especially if meeting is on a marae, as a tangi will take precedence.

# Setting a date and time

For a meeting or small event, try to give people two weeks’ advance notice. For more significant events you may want to give a month’s notice and request an RSVP. Follow this up 3–5 days before the event with a phone around or further general publicity.

Consider organising a ‘telephone tree’ to share the load or focus on people you think are critical to the success of your project. Sending out personally addressed invitations works well.

Hold the meeting or event at a convenient time for everyone. Consider school hours, and the time of the year (avoid lambing, calving, planting or harvest if working with farmers!) Avoid clashes with other events or major projects.

Consider how long you need to achieve your purpose and how far people might have to travel. If your audience includes dairy farmers, consider milking and travel times, and start evening events early.

# Organising equipment and materials

* Identify handouts for photocopying, such as copies of slides or speaker’s notes.
* Identify any background information you want to display.

Identify the equipment that you, the facilitator, presenter(s) and caterers may need. Make up a kit/bag to take to meetings and events with any materials you might need.

Get to the venue at least one hour before the event starts. Put out signs to direct people. For a meeting:

* Arrange chairs in a semi-circle or circle where practical.
* Organise refreshments so that they’re ready when you need them.
* Clear away any unnecessary rubbish, posters, chairs or tables but remember where things were so you can leave the room as you found it.
* Arrange paper, pens, sticky notes, whiteboards, and projectors so they’re in easy reach. Try out equipment to ensure it works.

# Refreshments

A meeting or event is usually only as good as its food – in fact you’ll often use this as a draw card to get people there, so make it the best you can!

* Consider dietary needs and have a range of teas, coffee and water.
* Organise equipment to keep and serve food - warmers/fridges/chilly bins, paper plates, tea towels, cutlery or finger food. Consider reusable plastic cups - avoid polystyrene.
* Where possible, organise a cup of tea and something to eat on arrival, especially if people have driven some distance. If you’re having a powhiri, refreshments can be served after this and generally in a separate area from the ‘working’ space.
* Offer the catering to a local group (such as a kindergarten or kōhanga reo) to give them a fundraising opportunity.

# Presenters, chairperson and/or facilitators

Consider who should facilitate or chair the meeting or event – ideally someone with experience in facilitation.

Make sure you brief everyone with a formal role. It’s important for them to understand the time they have available, the purpose of the meeting/event, how their role fits with this, and to be aware of any technical matters such as how to work equipment, location of lighting, etc. It’s also important that people understand the role of the facilitator.

# Agenda and process

Working out how your meeting or event will run is a critical step in your preparation.

# Purpose and results

When planning your meeting or event, be clear what you want to achieve by the end of it. This will help identify your key messages, meeting or event purpose and key topics for the agenda.

# Designing the experience

As well as the outcomes or issues you want to resolve, consider what type of experience you want people to have. Are you aiming for fun, joint decision making, cultural exchange, sharing knowledge on a topic, debate, learning skills, or a celebration of people’s contributions and achievements?

# Allowing for introductions

Welcomes and introductions are important to help people to get oriented and feel at ease. Sometimes it will be appropriate to begin your meeting or event with a pōwhiri, karakia or other ritual.

For public events, consider having:

* People at the entrance to welcome visitors and hand out information.
* A notice board with ‘Welcome’ and critical information posted underneath, such as the schedule, location of displays, toilets, refreshments, etc.

# Tempo and timing

To keep energy levels high, think about the order and length of activities:

* Allow sufficient time for breaks and social time/networking, particularly for long meetings.
* Don’t try to do too much or fit in too many speakers.
* For meetings, consider how long people are sitting down – the average concentration span is about 20 minutes for any one topic. Don’t sit for more than an hour at a time.

# Acknowledgements

* Acknowledge all contributions on the day with public and personal thanks, including participants as well as the people who made it possible, such as caterers.
* Send thank you notes to speakers, hosts, helpers etc.
* Koha can also be given to contributors, especially if they are unpaid.
* Petrol vouchers can be helpful for those who travel a long way.
* Consider a gift for participants, such as a native tree.
* If the venue is a marae, organise a koha to be presented at the pōwhiri and thank the hosts at the end of the hui, including the ringawera (kitchen hands).