

Rough Draft #2

Organizing a Community Outdoor Workday Event

(From your experiences, if you have corrections or additions to this document please send them to Bob@StewartFarm.org by April 6 for inclusion in our final draft. Thank you for your participation)

This document is intended to be used as a guide or outline for organizing a community outdoor workday event. There is nothing set in stone saying this is 'the way' to do it. Every event has its own needs. If you have little previous experience with organizing an event don't let the extent of issues covered in this document scare you. We just want to help you avoid overlooking simple items, making any major mistakes or taking some action which might sabotage your event. Use what works for you, forget the rest and move on. Remember, all the planning in the world is fine, but, what really counts is what you get done outside on the day of the event.

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When thinking of organizing an outdoor workday event such as an invasives removal, a native planting, a rain garden installation, a park clean up or a trail construction, here are some initial questions to ask yourself.

What are our long term goals?

What do we want to get accomplished on the event day?

What really needs to be completed?

What could be done if we had more help than expected?

What is the proposed time frame for the event?

Half day? Single day? Multi day?

How many people are needed to organize it?

Just me? Me and a couple of friends? A large committee?

Where will our volunteers come from?

Are there any expenses involved?

How might those expenses be paid?

Setting Goals

This can be very quick and simple for a small limited project or can be complicated and lengthy for a large site where there are years of work to do. If your event is part of a long term project of another group, it's important to make sure that the work you are proposing fits into the long term goals of the overall project. If you are the large project committee you should consider establishing a set of **general broad goals**, followed by **specific meaningful objectives**, followed by **task oriented actions**. Large complex multi-year projects may have another level breaking down the actions into **subactions** or may have a **master goal**. Your events will be centered on those specific actions or subactions but your publicity should include your goals and objectives. It's important for

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volunteers and the community which is being affected to know that the event activities are part of a well thought out project with specific goals.

Example:

Goal - Encourage biodiversity of plant and animal species.

- A. Remove invasive plants
 - 1. Remove the buckthorn.
 - 2. Remove the garlic mustard.
 - 3. Remove the purple loosestrife.
- B. Add native plants
 - 1. Plant 5 native shrub species not currently on the site.
 - 2. Plant 5 native wildflower species not currently on the site.

The master goal may be creating an outdoor educational space. A subaction may be removing the buckthorn between the creek and the parking lot.

Committee Jobs

- Leader or co-leaders
- Publicity and PR
- Finance
- Event day schedule
- Event day tasks list and numbers of volunteers needed for each
- Materials, supplies and tools list and sources
- Permits and approvals
- Consultants
- Refreshments

Responsibilities of the Leader or co-leaders

Responsibilities of the leader or co-leaders include organizing the event committee, finding additional committee members, doing or delegating responsibilities for which no one else volunteers and running committee meetings.

Keep the meetings as short and efficient as possible. Remember, most committee members would rather be outside working on the project than sitting around talking about it. Set a specific start time and stick to it. Set a specific ending time and stay on schedule. Have refreshments. Dinner meetings can be enjoyable, but restaurants can be awkward. It is difficult to get work done while people are eating, and the table is usually not conducive to taking notes and spreading out materials while food is on the table.

Publicity & PR

Publicity can include word-of-mouth, flyers, community or club newsletters, emails and media write ups or media ads. This will depend on the size and scope of the event, the community being served and perhaps finances. Understanding the possible motivations of your volunteer pool can help you promote the event efficiently. If you are promoting

your event to a specific group, think about the possible motivations the people have for volunteering and appeal to those in your publicity.

Why do people volunteer to help?

- To be useful and make a difference
- To have a tangible outcome
- To be helpful to others
- To be outdoors
- To be spiritual
- To just get away from their normal routine
- To relax and restore
- To improve health and fitness
- To spend time with family or friends
- To not be alone
- To be by themselves
- To do something with their hands
- To learn and try new things
- To earn volunteer hours for gardening or stewardship classes
- To fill time

If volunteers are from a limited group of individuals, such a neighborhood, church or school, plan way ahead. Six months ahead ask people in person if they can spare three or four hours to help out with the project. If they say they are really busy now, tell them when you are thinking of having the event and ask if they could spare a few hours at that time of the year. Don't forget to keep track of who said they could help out. Then, give them a couple of months notice so they can save the date and follow up with regular updates, not just reminders, but additional information about the event, so they feel they are part of the project and that they are important. The updates can also be educational to help them understand why this work is important. Finally, ask them to spread the word. The more people you get to help out the less work for everyone to do at the event.

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Public relations for the event might entail educating the community on the purpose of the event or perhaps preparing them for the aesthetic changes they can expect following the event. In some cases the removal of large amounts of shrubs like buckthorn can reduce foliage to the point that it shocks community members. To minimize this impact for public relations purposes, sometimes it is better to thin out the shrubs at one event and finish the eradication at another. This gives people a chance to get used to the reduction of green a little at a time.

Public relations can also include an educational component for the volunteers that day. A small display board could be made, showing the goals of the overall project and listing the tasks for the day. Volunteers appreciate knowing that their work is part of a bigger project. The display could include a planting, vegetation or habitat plan with photos of the site. If the display board is made up in advance, it can be used at other local gardening and conservation activities or at a local farmers market or library to promote the event. A flyer for people to take home outlining the goals of the project, ecological

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reasons for the work and specific upcoming workdays could generate additional volunteers.

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For your event invite local garden or conservation groups to set up their displays about other eco-friendly issues such as healthy lawn care, using native plants, removing invasives or providing buffers between lawns and water courses. This creates an interesting mini-expo for your workers to enjoy, is good PR with other local groups and might just generate additional volunteers from within those other groups in the future.

Finances

If there will be expenses involved in producing this event, how will they be covered? Costs may include organizational expenses such as publicity and gas money or event day expenses such as plants, compost, tools, herbicides, daubers, refreshments. How will those expenses be paid?

Here are some possible sources:

- The local or parent organization for whom you are providing services.

- Donations or grants from another local, regional or national service organization.

- Individual donors or a plant-a-thon fundraiser.

- Charge a fee for some aspect of the activity.

- A plant or compost sale.

Event Day Schedule

An event day schedule should be roughed out as soon as possible. What day and time should tools, supplies and plants arrive? What time are committee members to arrive? What time do you need to start setting up volunteer check-in or refreshments? What time should volunteers show up for coffee and training? What time will cutting or planting start? What time will it end? If it is an all day event, what time will you break for lunch? About what time will there be other breaks? How long will clean up take? What time is sunrise and sunset that day?

Event day tasks list and numbers of volunteers needed for each

Once you know what you want to accomplish on event day, you can make a list of all the individual tasks that need to be accomplished. These are separated into two groups, a list of tasks for the committee members and their families and a list of tasks for the other volunteers. Do not do any burning at volunteer work days. This involves inherent safety and health hazards and would usually require a permit.

The tasks for either group might include:

- Purchasing and picking up plants, tools or supplies

- Getting refreshments

- Setting up refreshment area

- Setting up check-in area

- Serving refreshments

- Taking photos

- Greeting volunteers

- Training volunteers

Digging, cutting, planting, applying herbicide
Unloading, moving or loading compost, soil, plants, cuttings
Break down and clean up
Returning or removing tools, supplies, materials and plants

Materials, supplies and tools list and sources

Here's a short list of things you might need for your event. What do you need? How many of each? Where will you get them? Who will get them?

Plants (flowers, shrubs, trees), compost, mulch, soil, rocks, gravel, newspapers
Shovels, picks, rakes, gloves, saws, loppers, prunners
Power Auger, Chain saw, safety gear, gas, chain oil, and wrench
Support stakes, staking wire, hammer, caution tape, labeling stakes, markers
Herbicide, water, rubber gloves, funnel, daubers, hoses
Wood chipper, brush hog, lawn mower, edger, weed whip
Wheelbarrow, tarps, orange safety cones
Refreshments, plastic ware, cups, napkins
First Aid Kit, insect repellent, sun block, waiver forms
Tables, name tags, markers
Garbage bags, trash cans, recycling bins, compost container
Camera, spare batteries

Permits and approvals

Most local and neighborhood events do not require any permits, however, if you will be making major disturbances to the soil, working near water or having a large group of people, the following are a few of the permits and approvals which may be needed for your event:

Permit to work near water courses such as lakes, streams, ponds, wetlands, etc.
Burning permit for burning brush or doing a prescribed burn for prairie restoration.
Soil erosion permit when disturbing soil
Tent or assembly permit for large attendance events.

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In addition to permits remember to call MISS DIG a week ahead if you will be using any power equipment to dig holes. Hitting a gas main can really spoil a fun event.

Consultants

You may need a professional consultant to advise on certain aspects of your event. If invasive removal is involved, you may need to find a consultant to advise the group on plant identification, proper and safe cutting or removal or the use of herbicides.

Here are some ideas for sources:

Local community forester
Conservation District Consultant
Local, regional or state extension service
Local volunteer community member who happens to be an arborist, horticulturist,
Master Gardener, master naturalist or conservation steward.
Professional consultant

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Refreshments

Refreshments can range anywhere from just water to a full-blown catered lunch. That will depend on the length of your event, the number of volunteers expected and your budget. Be sure to use eco-friendly supplies such as paper cups instead of Styrofoam. If a committee member is willing to bring silverware and wash it following the event, it would be a great example for attendees. Recycle all recyclables and have a compost container for attendee use. This event can be an educational opportunity by including the day's recycling and composting instructions in the welcome presentation.

Other issues

Advantages of a Multi-day Event

Of course, you more days give you more hours to get work done. However, a couple of other advantages are that if weather is bad on one day, hopefully you can still get work done on the other. If you plan the workdays a week apart, you might avoid having a major storm ruin both of your workdays. Also, when you have two workdays, people who did not attend the first day have the opportunity to see the progress being made and may be more likely to help out the second day. Some people who didn't even know about the project may take notice when they see people working and volunteer for the next workday. Expect more volunteers on the second workday.

Volunteers

What should volunteers expect?

The event should be on time and well organized so their time is used wisely.

Tools and supplies are available if they don't or can't bring any.

They will be safe and comfortable.

They will enjoy the work they are doing.

They will be appreciated.

If an all day event, volunteers will be able to eat, drink water and use facilities.

Efficient Cutting

If you are doing invasives removal and the plants have trunks over an inch and a half, you should definitely consider recruiting someone with a chain saw to help out. A person who is knowledgeable in the use of the saw, its safety features and proper procedures and has the proper safety gear can get the work done efficiently and safely. If there is any concern over the safety of the other volunteers due to the use of the chain saw or perhaps herbicide being put on the cut stumps, you could have the chain saw volunteer come the day before the event to do all the cutting, with perhaps one helper to treat the stumps. Then on event day the volunteers could do all the hauling of the cuttings.

Safety

You should have on site a complete first aid kit including poison ivy wipes. If you are at all concerned about liability from anyone getting hurt you may want to consider having a "waiver of liability" form for participants to sign at the event. Your "welcome to volunteers" on event day should include a reminder to complete a waiver form and

instructions on health and safety including the importance of hydration, avoiding heat stroke, sun protection, the location of the first aid kit, possible site hazards, the safe use of tools and herbicides, weather conditions, insect bites, allergies and poison ivy and poison sumac ID and treatment. Ask if any participants have received Epi pen prescriptions and if so make sure they have their pens with them and that someone is working with them that knows how to use it. Also, announce what the plan is if someone has a problem that needs medical attention. Let them know where to go at the site or who to look for or call. If your volunteers will be working remote from roads or vehicle accessible areas make sure you have an evacuation plan.

If any power equipment is being used your “welcome to volunteers” should include instructions to everyone regarding who will be using the equipment and that others are stay specific distances from the areas where that equipment is being used. Only those with proper training and experience should be using power equipment, especially chain saws. A person using power equipment should never be left alone to work by themselves.

Herbicide should only be used as directed on the container. Never mix two or more herbicides or chemicals unless by specific directions of the manufacturer. Many herbicide laws prohibit the mixing of herbicides by anyone except those who are state certified applicators.

Some insects which could become a problem include bees, wasps, hornets, yellow jackets, mosquitoes, ticks and spiders. Snakes could be of concern and even domestic animals in the area. Event organizers should consider these possible hazards and if needed inspect the work areas before volunteers arrive to avoid surprises later in the day.

Cold or hot weather or working on rough or wet terrain can be of concern if volunteers are not properly attired or not in proper physical condition. The day of the event watch for conditions which might bring thunderstorms, lightning or tornados.

If there will be a lot of cars arriving for your event or if you will be working in or around a busy parking lot you may need someone in charge of parking lot safety.

On-site Training of Volunteers

If you need to train volunteers in specific tasks at the event, such as proper planting techniques, invasive plant identification or the proper use of tools, publicize a very specific time for that training and make sure you have jobs for those who miss the training which does not involve special knowledge, such as hauling plant materials or compost, moving cut brush, etc. Reward those who came on time for the training by putting them in charge of a specific task or area or make them a group leader and have those who come late assigned to those group leaders to assign them jobs as needed.

Kids

It is important to share our love for nature with children and for them to learn through hands-on activities. Activities with this goal in mind should be scheduled separately

from events where manual labor work needs to get done. Children at events are great for planting and moving things, but if the work being done is hazardous, of course they should not be present. Also, if the day's activities involve real manual labor such as cutting or digging, adults may be hindered by children's involvement. Be sure to specify in publicity if children are welcome or specify the age range of volunteers needed, such as "high school students and adults needed" or "all ages welcome to participate." Sawing or digging look like fun to the kids, but they usually don't have the arm strength to do the work efficiently. The parents let their kids try sawing or digging, the tools are tied up and progress slows down. In addition, young children, even teenagers tire of manual labor quicker than adults; they don't feel the same responsibility as adults to meet their commitment for the day, and their boredom may result in the whole family leaving early, thereby removing even the productive members who came to work. Even if you specify in your publicity the age range for volunteers, expect that some people may bring kids. They may have heard about the event by word of mouth or thought that the adults would do the work and the kids would just "hang out." Be prepared to have some alternative jobs for these families to do as a unit. It may be preparing refreshments, greeting latecomers, taking photos, whatever. In any case, do not let the parents separate from the kids; make it clear that parents are responsible for their own children. If you are brave, you can plan separate activities for the kids at your event, however, the adults who bring them usually end up in the kids' activities.

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