

The voice of the Voluntary Arts

Displays and exhibitions for voluntary arts organisations

Promotion is an important part of any organisation's activities, and for voluntary arts organisations, a display can be a great promotional tool. Displays, or exhibits, give the chance to really promote your services and activities, and to show yourselves in your best light, do a demonstration, raise awareness, fundraise or sell your work – all while being with the general public.

But, it's not as difficult as it may sound. There is a trick to it, and the trick is to show yourself and your organisation in the right way to the right people at the right time. This briefing will show you how to do this through examining the different purposes for a display, the types of displays you may want to consider, venues you might exhibit in and a range of spaces you will need to think about.

I. Planning

a. Purpose

The aim of the display must be clear in order for it to be successful e.g. you may have been invited to set up a display at an event or venue, or you yourself may be looking for somewhere to promote your organisation. In either case, you will need to consider your main *purpose* before you decide on other factors such as venue, materials, etc.

Some purposes might be:

- to promote your organisation and raise its profile;
- to market classes, workshops or special events;
- to celebrate success;
- to support a local/national event;
- to fundraise;
- to sell.

Whatever your aim, ensure that you keep it in mind throughout the planning process. This will help bring everything together and keep you focussed.

b. Location and related issues

1. If you are looking to promote yourself bear in mind that some venues need to be booked well in advance (up to three years). Also, if a venue is slow to respond to you, it may be wise to look for more efficient places, especially if you think you might need them in the future. Don't be put off approaching prestigious venues if you think they are in the right place. They can only say "no" – but they might just as well say "yes!"
2. Bear in mind that, if you want, or are invited to, take part in a big show, space is usually allocated on a first come first served basis.

When planning your display and looking around venues, take a checklist with you. Here are some helpful things to keep in mind:

- Display location – will it be in a central area or tucked out of the way? Some venues will charge more for a better location, but you might think this is worth it, depending on your purpose.
- Opening hours – what time does it open to the public? Workout how much time you will need to set up and dismantle.
- Expected visitors – who is your audience? Will they be the general public with no previous interest, children, specialists in the subject, etc? This will help determine the content of your display.
- Is there an entry charge for visitors? Will this affect your expected audience numbers?



- Public transport – is the venue easy to access for your expected visitors? Is there disabled access?
- Room space – is there enough space for visitors to past your display easily? Is it likely to be ten people a day or one thousand a day? How many will be able to view your display at once?
- Parking – if parking is not available you may have to bring your display equipment via public transport, which could be a nightmare!
- Do you need a parking permit or security pass? If so, it's helpful to arrange these in advance if possible.
- Lighting – good lighting can be crucial to a display. If an electricity supply is not available, portable battery operated units can be acquired when necessary.
- Security – this is extremely important, especially if your display has any valuable items (jewellery, museum pieces, etc).
- Climate control – this can be an issue with some materials e.g. textiles. Check with the venue if you are worried about the humidity and make sure that it can be controlled internally.
- Are tables, chairs, table clothes being provided? Is there a charge?
- Cost – with large exhibitions and craft fairs, you will have to pay a set fee for an area, but not all displays will incur a fee. For example, if a local museum has approached your organisation for a weeklong display, you will probably not have to pay.

Make sure to confirm all arrangements with the venue, your organisation, and anyone else a week or so before the event.

Note: get everything that is on offer in writing **before** the exhibition. Then you will be clear about what you are missing and what you are paying for.

c. The look and feel

1. **Design.** Think carefully about how you will get other people to come to your display i.e. how will you make it look appealing and interesting? One of the most effective ways of doing this is to have a 'story' or theme which works with your

aim. What will get your audience interested? Remember to include design, whether you do it yourself or you enlist the help of a graphic or exhibition designer to help you, in your timing and budget.

2. **Size.** The content of your display will affect its size and length. Both of these factors will impact on which display boards and other materials e.g. boxes, table stands, etc. you choose.

Types of Display boards

Pop-up stands, displays boards and canopies come in a variety of shapes and sizes and you will be able to find one to suit your requirements and your budget. You might even consider having something made that suits your specific requirements. Here are a few things to consider when deciding what you need:

- Ease and speed in which it can be put in place and taken down again. You may be doing this on your own and frequently!
- Versatility – can it be adjusted to fit different show sites and space sizes.
- Weight and transportability – display boards and canopies have to be transported from exhibition space to the car or train so consider of weight and how are they transported i.e. do they have wheels, handles? Do they fold up? How many will you be transporting?
- Design – Is the display printed (some pop-ups are) and if so is printing included in the cost? Will you have to find your own designer to design and/or print it? Will you have to create special display material to pin on the boards?

d. Insurance and Health & Safety

Insurance is a tricky issue and one that many organisations and individuals struggle with on a regular basis. Before doing a display anywhere, here are a few insurance tips:

- Check the venue's insurance cover.
- Make sure the venue's security measures are adequate for your insurance cover (if you will be responsible).

It may be that the venue will be responsible for the



duration of the exhibit. If this is the case, find out:

- Whether you need public liability insurance.
- If you are part of an organisation, whether you need insurance through a specialist firm.
- Whether your National Umbrella Body can help. Some National Umbrella Bodies offer special insurance packages for member organisations.

It is a good idea to be extra careful when it comes to Health & Safety while both setting up a display and throughout its duration. Depending on the type of display and what you will be doing, take into consideration:

- The safety of any electricity supply and cables.
- Potential hazards caused by tripping over exposed cables.
- Exposed metal objects i.e. bolts.
- Fire and emergency procedures, including location of fire extinguishers, emergency exits and gathering points.

For more information on Health & Safety, please see *Further information and resources*.

2. On the day

a. Tools

Getting set up may not be the most fun part of the event, but it's important to start on the right note. It's a good idea to bring a box of the following along:

- Cloths, paper towels.
- Glass cleaner, other all purpose cleaner.
- Table cloths (if needed).
- Sticky tape, blue tack, Velcro pads.
- Scissors, staple gun, staples.
- Needle and thread.
- Safety pins, drawing pins.
- String.
- Pens and notebook.
- Hammer, nails, drill (if necessary).
- Anything required if doing demonstration.

And of course all the content of your display, and any supplementary literature and leaflets and business cards.

b. Looking good

Consider how to display your materials carefully. Use the space you have to your best advantage and remember that you are continually representing your organisation and its products while at the display. Also:

- Only put your most attractive products on your displays to exhibit or sell.
- Do not just lay your products on the exhibition table. Make an eye-catching and attractive arrangement (see 'design' on previous page). If you cannot afford expensive display cases, use cardboard or wooden blocks and cover them in fabric or beautiful paper to achieve a similar effect.
- Smile! Smile! Smile! Whoever is the face of the exhibit needs to be friendly and inviting. Nothing will kill a display or exhibit quicker than people who sit and read all day without showing an interest in the people who come up to the exhibit!
- Leave space around items so that people can comfortably see your products/exhibits. This will help prevent people from feeling visually overwhelmed and thus losing sight of who you are and what your aim is (be it selling, fundraising, raising awareness, or simply showcasing your work).
- Beautiful and unusual craft products can be highlighted with good and purposeful lighting. When electricity to the booth or stand is not available, or limited, battery operated units can do the trick.
- If you have a catalogue, it's a good idea to bring it with you. Check if selling is allowed in the venue and if a commission is charged.
- Avoid eating and drinking while at your display.

c. Demonstrations

A demonstration is a great way to draw people to you and your display. If you are going to do a demonstration, there are a few things to consider:

- If you can, have at least one other person with you, so they can answer questions and help at the stand while you are doing the demonstration.



- Always make sure the venue knows that you are having a demonstration. This will make sure there will be no restrictions and there may even be some publicity benefits.
- Check Health & Safety requirements if necessary.
- Make sure you lay out your space well so that you can have the maximum number of people watching at once.
- Check that any supplies you may need – water, electricity, etc. – are available and working before the demonstration starts.

Remember to try and get names of people that come to the demonstration for your mailing list. Make sure though that you get their consent to be on the list (see VAN briefing no. 46 *Data Protection Act 1998*). If they want to be on it, it's a great way of keeping them in touch with what you and your organisation are doing!

Note:

- Always make sure that someone is manning your stand. Not only is this important for security reasons, but this is also important for public relations should anyone have questions, wish to purchase, etc.
- Always check the position of bathrooms, refreshments and first aid.
- Wear comfortable shoes! Chances are you will be standing for long periods of time and while you want to look nice, be comfortable.

3. On and up – anticipating the next one

- Promote yourself! Send flyers and promotional material out telling people where you will be exhibiting. Take out adverts in free newspapers and spread the word. Marketing is important and even if your budget is limited it can pay to send out a mailing before an exhibition.
- Make sure all your newsletters and mailings have any future dates and shows you or any members will be at (include times, dates, addresses) you never know who will turn up.
- Take time after the event to make notes of what worked and what can be improved.
- Ensure all items that need to be returned are done so promptly and in good condition.
- Write thank you letters as appropriate.

Further information & resources

Publications

- Field, Edwin. *'Promoting and Marketing Your Crafts'*, Macmillan, 1993, ISBN 0-02-537742-6.
- Coplan, Kate. *'Effective Library Exhibits: How to prepare and promote good displays'*, Oceana, 1958.
- VAN briefing no. 61: *'Just how safe are you? Health & Safety for voluntary arts organisations'*.
- VAN briefing no. 68: *'Organising a Weekend Event'* Health & Safety at Outdoor Community Events, Voluntary Arts Network, ISBN.

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Disclaimer: We have taken reasonable precautions to ensure that the information contained in this Briefing is accurate. However, the document is not intended to be legally comprehensive. We recommend you take legal advice before taking action on any of the matters covered herein.

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