

Alberta Arts Days

A Step-by-Step Guide to Planning Your Own Event



Starting Points

The Key Word is Fun

Alberta Arts Days is all about having fun. Don't try to plan an event that's beyond your resources or skills, or that will take you too far out of your comfort zone. Give yourself a challenge, not a headache.

Start Small, Start Simple

Small and simple are best, especially if you've never planned such an event before. An easy way to do this is to turn an existing event into an Alberta Arts Days event. You could invite an artist or musician to a regular meeting, or relocate a get-together to a cultural hot spot. You could reschedule a previously planned arts-themed event so that it occurs on the Alberta Arts Days weekend.

Concentrate on achieving a little and learning a lot, and you'll be sure to make the most of your Alberta Arts Days experience.

Talk to People

The sooner, the better. Are you planning to rent a community hall during Alberta Arts Days? Discuss your plans with the person in charge of rentals as soon as possible – don't wait until all the other details are in place. You may have to reserve the space well in advance.

Speak to your audience (people you hope will attend your event). If they're enthusiastic, it's a good sign.

Speak to the media (see [Working with the Media](#)).

Your greatest source of information is people who've planned and run similar events in the past. Talk to as many of them as you can.

Check out the [Culture Calendar](#) on the [Alberta Arts Days website](#) to see what other people have planned. You may even find that you want to be part of another event.

Share the Responsibilities

Depending on the size of your event, you may need help planning and presenting it. Consider partnering with other organizations (see [The Power of Partnerships](#)). Set up a planning group, and develop a plan that shows who is responsible for what, the steps involved and deadlines for completing those steps. Put the plan in writing, and make sure everyone agrees on it. Meet with your planning group regularly to keep things moving along.

Think Ahead

Develop a roll-out plan for the event, showing what happens, at what time, involving which people and resources. Be detailed about this — it lets you rehearse things mentally well in advance of the event, and uncover and prevent many problems.

Be Flexible

As you work, you may discover that some things you'd hoped to achieve won't be possible. While you learn the ropes of planning an event, you'll almost certainly have to change some deadlines. You may even find that another group has heard about your plans and would like to join in.

Look at these unexpected developments as opportunities and be prepared to go with the flow.

What to Do? Creating Your Event

Q & A

Answer the following questions: who, what, where, when, and how. (The “why”, of course, is to discover, experience and celebrate arts and culture in Alberta). Answering these fundamental questions will help you develop a good event plan.

Who?

- Who do you want to attend your event? What are their interests? Will they need special consideration for limited mobility, limited English or, in the case of young children, short attention spans?
- Who do you want to help create or present the event (e.g. performers, guest speakers)?
- Will you need volunteers?
- Who do you need to contact to ensure the event can occur? Do you need to get permits? Do you want to invite special guests, such as your MLA or MP, your mayor or reeve, municipal councillors, educators etc.?
- Will you need to contract performers or presenters?
- Do you need to set up a planning committee?

What?

You've made the decision to do something to celebrate Alberta Arts Days. Now the question is, what?

- What is your event's theme? A theme is a central idea around which the event can be shaped. For example:

- My community is full of talented writers;
- Anyone can learn to draw;
- The human voice makes the most beautiful music;
- Photography: Colour versus Black and White;
- A community that dances together is a healthier community.

A strong theme will help you stay focused as you develop the event, and keep it from getting too big, or becoming a catch-all artistic "happening." A clear theme will help set your event apart from others in your community, and prevent duplication of activities.

What else?

- What resources do you have? Do you have what you need to create the event, or do you need to secure resources from others?

- What will people who come to your event do, including participants and special guests?

Where?

- Will the event be inside or outside?

- Do you need to reserve the venue?

- Do you have a contingency plan — for bad weather, for example?

- Does your location pose problems for people who have difficulty moving or who use wheelchairs? Does it have suitable acoustics for those who have difficulty hearing?

- Is the location large enough for the number of people you expect? Does it have adequate services and facilities, such as washrooms or kitchen space?

- Are there special considerations — the need for a stage, a kitchen, Internet access, for example — that affect where you will hold the event?

When?

- What is the best date and time for the activity? Think about who is going to be coming, the availability of special guests or performers, as well as what you plan to do.

How?

- How will you organize the activities for the day?
- How will you ensure things get done?
- How will you publicize and promote the event?

The Power of Partnerships

You can multiply your resources and share the fun and the work of holding an event by partnering with another community or group. Partners can be found in your community or in nearby communities, and can include:

- Cultural groups;
- Arts, sports or recreation associations;
- Libraries or literary groups;
- Organizations with similar interests or who work with similar people;
- Educational and public institutions, such as schools or health care facilities;
- Associations such as Scouts, Guides or groups representing people with disabilities;
- Businesses and employers;
- Service clubs;
- Religious groups.

Besides formal partnerships, there are other ways to bring in other communities, organizations or individuals. Here are some ideas:

- Encourage local businesses to become involved. Ask them to sponsor part of the event, provide give-away items, or help promote your event to their customers.
- Identify and contact businesses or associations that match your event theme or idea. For example, if you decide to organize a one-act play competition, you may want to contact a local playwrights' group, a costume rental firm, or a bookstore with a good selection of play scripts.
- Create a role for local youth. Is there something in your event that could help a child or youth earn a scout or guide badge or complete a school requirement?
- Offer promotional opportunities to businesses or associations in return for support. For example, if a delicatessen provides refreshments for your event, you can promise that their name will appear on all advertising for, and signs at the event.

Get the Word Out: Promoting Your Event

Once you've decided on an event or an activity, you'll want to get the word out to those people you'd like to attend or participate.

First of all, share your brilliant ideas with the rest of the province by posting details on the [Culture Calendar](#). Even if people can't attend your event, sharing your ideas can help them kick-start their creative engines – and you'll get ideas from them.

Developing a Campaign

Developing a campaign for promoting your event can help you make the best use of the resources you have and the opportunities for promotion in your community. It will also help keep your activities organized and on time. Some simple steps will give you a campaign plan:

- Organize a sub-committee responsible for publicity and promotion.
- Set your objectives: what do you want your publicity and promotion to achieve for you?
- Identify your audiences. Ask yourself, “Who needs to know about this event in order to make it a success?” Your target audiences can include the media, arts and cultural organizations, local businesses, industry volunteers, school or youth groups, and the public. The type of event you plan will determine your audiences.
- Decide what you would like each audience to know about your event.
- Ask “What is the best way to reach each audience?” Develop a plan that includes the kind of promotions you are going to use to reach your audiences, how you are going to distribute information, who should receive the information and when things need to be done. The plan should identify people's roles, deadlines and budget. (See the section on [Tools and Tactics](#) for some publicity and promotion ideas).
- Determine your resources. If your plan will require more resources than you have, you will need to either look for sponsors or partners or adapt the plan. In addition, when you look at your resources, you may get more ideas for promotion.
- If you plan to use the media as part of your promotion, assign one person to be the media contact. (See the section on [Working with the Media](#))

Promotion Tools and Tactics

Once you have identified your objectives and key audiences, you need to think about how to most effectively communicate with those audiences. There are many tools and tactics you can use. Choose ones that work for your budget, the resources (including people) you have, your partnerships and your time frame. Remember, there are ways of promoting activities without paying for advertising; the following list provides some good ideas.

- Post your event on the [Culture Calendar](#) and the [Arts Days Facebook page](#).
- Talk it up: talk to artists, organizations and people who can make your Alberta Arts Days event a reality as potential sponsors, volunteers or participants. Word of mouth is still one of the best ways to publicize an activity.
- Use the [Alberta Arts Days word mark](#), available on the Alberta Arts Days website, on all your promotional material.
- Use the [customizable posters](#) available on the Alberta Arts Days website, and display them at local businesses or on the bulletin boards of local organizations or facilities. Remember to get permission from the business, organization or facility before hanging your poster.
- Submit a brief article for the upcoming events column in your local newspaper and for public service announcements by local radio and television stations. Many media outlets have community calendars for local events and activities.
- Send a news release on the event to local media. Follow up with calls to their news editors.
- Arrange for a guest appearance on a local television or radio program.
- Enter a float in a local parade, promoting your event as part of Alberta Arts Days. Don't forget to prominently display the dates of Alberta Arts Days and your event.
- String a banner across a street, or on an overpass or building. Once again, remember to get permission first.
- Create your own website, Facebook or Twitter site.
- Have local businesses include information about Alberta Arts Days and your event on their websites.
- Make buttons, t-shirts, or temporary tattoos. Alberta Culture and Community Spirit has created an [Alberta Arts Days word mark](#) that you can use.
- Draft notices for arts publications and gallery newsletters.

- Have Alberta Arts Days proclaimed by the mayor of your community.
- If it fits your event, issue a challenge to other groups — arts and cultural organizations, community groups, even the media — to participate.

Working with the Media

Newsrooms are extremely busy places. In many communities, newspapers or radio stations may have only one or two reporters, and, in some cases, those reporters must cover a number of communities. There is no guarantee that media can attend your event. But, to increase your chances, here are some things you can do:

- Find out what the deadlines are for the media you want to use. If you want to use a weekly newspaper, for example, their deadlines can be well in advance of the publication date. While you are at it, find out which reporter would be most likely to cover the event.
- Write a media notice (see [Writing a Media Notice](#)) about your event and send it to the media at least two weeks before the event. Follow this up with a call to the news editor or reporter. This is especially important if you are looking for advance coverage of the event as part of promoting it to the community.
- Discuss your story idea with the editor or reporter in advance. The reporter may be able to work with you on story ideas, photo opportunities and time lines. See if they have any needs that you can help them with, such as setting up interviews.
- Talk to the editor or reporter about doing a feature story connected to the event in advance, to which you can add information about your event. For example, an article could profile the history of an artistic practice, profile a local arts group involved in your event, or your guest speaker.
- Two or three days before your event, follow up with the reporter about the main attraction of your event, update the list of special guests planning to attend or note any information changes, such as to the time of the event. It is very important to have one person who is the main contact for the media, and who the media can easily reach. Make sure this is someone who is comfortable talking to the media and knowledgeable about the event, as often reporters will start or conduct their interviews on the phone.

Writing a Media Notice

Media notices are like invitations to the media, and should be just as short and to-the-point as invitations usually are.

- Start the media notice with a catchy headline and first sentence.
- Use point form to provide the who, what, where, when, why and how of the event or activity.
- Provide a contact name and phone number. Choose someone who is knowledgeable about the event and comfortable talking about it. Make sure they are available and easy to reach.
- If you are serving refreshments, it doesn't hurt to say so!

AlbertaArtsDays.ca has a [media notice template](#) that you can work from.

Writing a News Release

A news release should be ready on the day of your event. It serves several purposes:

- You can hand out paper copies to the media who attend your event; it will help them decide which aspects they would like to cover, and give them a quick reference for the basic details to help them recount the event later.
- You can send it by fax or e-mail to media who are not able to attend your event, so they can still produce a piece on it.

Here are some tips for producing a good news release:

- Be brief and to-the-point. The ideal length is one page, including the contact information.
- News releases must contain information about something new and something interesting.
- Make sure the most important information — the who, what, where, when, why and how of the event or activity — is captured in the first paragraph or two of the release. In a busy newsroom, that may be all the reporter has time to read.
- Think of an interesting angle to your idea to attract the editor's attention. Local and personal interest stories work well, as do contrasts of old and new, firsts and record-breaking attempts, and stories of exotic or "forgotten" artistic techniques, to name a few.
- Start the news release with a catchy headline: "Alberta Arts Days dance event at local community centre," is not as interesting as "Square dancers and Hip Hop group went toe-to-toe on Alberta Arts Days." The first sentence of the release should also grab the reader.

- Use plain, clear language. Sometimes, a newspaper or website will use your news release as the story, so make sure it is clearly written and easy to read.
- To better the chances that your news release will be used as the basis of an article, include a quote or two from people involved in your event. Remember to identify them by full name and position.
- Provide a contact name and phone number. Choose someone who is knowledgeable about the event and comfortable talking about it. Make sure they are available and easy to reach.
- If you can provide photos from the event or a video, let the media know how to obtain those, for example by calling one of the contacts or visiting a website.

AlbertaArtsDays.ca has a [news release template](#) that you can work from.

Visual-ize

Television, print and on-line media people are always looking for “good visuals.” Knowing what your event will offer in the way of photo and video opportunities can help you describe the event to the media, and help you attract their attention (and their cameras!). Radio reporters tend to want things that will evoke images in the mind of the listener.

Good Alberta Arts Days visuals will include art demonstrations and performances of course, but also audience participation, the meeting of peoples of different ages, backgrounds and cultures, and moments of discovery. Special guests can also make for good visuals.

The Event Day at Last

Be Prepared to Have Fun

It may not sound very spontaneous, but your event is more likely to be fun when you have a game plan for the basic details. Prepare a to-do list of everything you need to make sure the event runs smoothly — including how you see the activities you've planned unfolding. For example, if you're encouraging people to do a craft, how much time will you need to do the project together? Make sure you leave lots of time for your participants to have fun together! Also, make sure you have plenty of supplies on hand.

No matter what size of event you're planning, having a basic first aid kit will ensure you are prepared for any accidents that might happen. If yours is a larger event, you may want to consider talking to [St. John Ambulance](#) and having some of their volunteers come out to your event as a precaution. Make sure you also have snacks and refreshments available if it's a longer event.

Have fun with things like decorations - find new and interesting ways of celebrating how you see the arts.

Take Your Own Photos and Video...

Your own photos and video can provide a personal record of your events and can help the media to do stories on your event, and can give you material to promote future events.

...With Permission

Under provincial privacy laws, you must get written, signed permission from every person who appears in your event photos or video to use their image. You must also specify conditions – how you will use the image (for example, to publicize the event or your organization), or to whom you might release the image (for example, to local media). You can use a standard form that people sign and date on the spot. You should have extra copies of the conditions for people to keep.

For any person under age 18, you must have written, signed permission from their parent or guardian.

It is not necessary to get signed permission from every person in the crowd at a large public event. To be on the safe side, go by the rule that if a person is depicted clearly enough to be recognized, you must get their permission to use their image.

Tips for a Good Photo

Action is the key to a good photo. Try to avoid taking photos of people posing and smiling for the camera. Instead, give a visual taste of what your event offers. Show people at work, doing things, having fun. Show interaction with the audience, and their reaction to activities.

Tips for Shooting Good Video

Good light and good sound are crucial to shooting a good video. Basic video cameras are adequate for small family gatherings, but may not give good results in a larger public environment, particularly where there are numerous sources of sound. Adding a few pieces of basic equipment, such as an external microphone to focus sound recording, a tripod to keep the camera steady, and a small light, can make an enormous difference in the quality of the final product.

Talk to an audio visual professional about your needs. Equipment can usually be rented for a reasonable price. Why not ask them to sponsor your event and provide the equipment free of charge?

If possible, shoot some brief test footage in the venue before the event. This will show you where problems might arise.

During the event, don't just put the camera in one place and record from start to finish. It's far better to have only a partial record of the event but one with lots of visual interest and variety.

Move around and take footage from different angles. Interview people: ask them what they are enjoying most, what they are learning, what they have discovered. Shoot footage before, during and after the event. Show details: even ordinary things like someone washing out paint brushes, or tuning up an instrument, can make a nice contrast with larger event shots.

We Want to Know

We would love to know more about how Albertans are celebrating Arts Days, and your ideas could be included in next year's Alberta Arts Days idea file. Even sharing a brief note about what you did, and how it worked out, would be very helpful. Send us a note at ArtsDays@gov.ab.ca

Imagining an Alberta Arts Days Event, From Start to Finish

The following is an imaginary account of an Alberta Arts Days event. It is meant to apply the event planning tips to a realistic scenario, to help you imagine challenges you might have in planning your own event.

Linda and Dave decided to present a guided art walk in their community for Alberta Arts Days, for the general public.

First of all, they planned the route. It allowed them to visit numerous examples of public art (murals, outdoor sculpture, etc.) several art galleries, the heritage home of a local artist, and finally the art faculty of the local college. Linda and Dave thought of a theme that summed up the sites they wanted to visit: Art in our Community – Past, Present and Future.

They walked the route with their audience in mind. They made sure the walk was the right length for a group that might include all ages. They also thought about their audience's needs during the walk. Were there places for people to sit down if need be? What about washroom facilities? What if the weather was not ideal?

Dave noticed there was a coffee shop next to one of the outdoor sculptures. He and Linda reworked the tour route so the group would reach that site at a good break time. They noted there would be public washrooms there, at the heritage home and at the college.

Linda spoke to someone at each site, explained the walk, and left a fact sheet about Alberta Arts Days and the event, with contact information. People were intrigued by the idea, and began thinking about how they could welcome the tour. One gallery specializing in crafts requested that Linda give the tour a few minutes to spend in their

gift shop. The owner of the coffee shop was pleased to know about the extra business the tour might bring. In each location, Linda was asked if she had a poster to publicize the walk.

As soon as Linda and Dave were committed to making their event happen, they posted their event information on the [Culture Calendar](#).

As the event took shape, Linda and Dave found other people getting involved. Each gallery wanted to give a short talk on their exhibits, and the heritage home staff wanted to give a quick tour. Accommodating these requests meant that Linda and Dave would have to trim the rest of the tour time, but they felt it was a good trade-off for the variety and expertise each site would bring. The coffee shop owner arranged to have a local artist display works in his restaurant on the day of the walk, to be more involved in the festivities. He also began promoting the event to his customers.

As the event grew in scope and detail, Linda and Dave were honest about how much they felt they could do on their own. They weren't afraid to ask for help from the other people involved. When a new idea came up, they made sure someone was willing to "sign on" to make it a reality. They formed this corps of responsible people into a planning group. They wrote down an event plan, which everyone agreed to. The group met regularly to keep things rolling along.

Early in the planning process, Linda and Dave contacted their local weekly paper, and the local radio and TV stations. The media liked the theme of the walk, and were impressed by the number of participating organizations and people. They advised Linda and Dave on what they could do to attract media coverage.

Linda and Dave also posted information on their Facebook page, and used Twitter to keep people up-to-date.

Dave printed customized posters from the Alberta Arts Days website. He and Linda distributed them around town. They gave them to restaurants and cafés, arts and leisure facilities, libraries, places of worship, and supermarkets. Whenever they asked permission to hang a poster, they had a conversation that increased interest. They encouraged the gallery owners, the college staff and students, the members of their planning group and their family and friends to talk up the walk in the weeks before Alberta Arts Days.

When the day of the walk came, it seemed to Linda and Dave that the event had a life of its own: everyone knew what was due to happen at each appointed time, and everyone knew their responsibilities. A good crowd showed up. Media started looking for information, and Linda happily answered questions and gave interviews. Dave helped take photos and video.

All told, the event was a great success, and brought a real sense of vitality to the whole community. Afterwards, Dave and Linda posted their video on YouTube, and sent a message to Artsdays@gov.ab.ca with an account of their event.