

## The Exceptional Away Event Checklist

### Consider your POO

Make sure you're really clear about the Purpose, Objectives and Outcomes.

- What's the purpose of the session? Produce a clear statement of why you're running the event.
- What are the objectives? Define the main steps you'll take and the specific result for each step.
- What are the outcomes? Identify the changes and differences you want to see after the event.

### Think about your hygiene factors

These are the things that people will focus on about the event if they're not right.

- Venue. Choose somewhere that's different and memorable. Support a small, local provider.
- Accessibility. Make sure the venue is accessible to all your participants for all their needs.
- Food. Cater for your participants' allergies and dietary requirements.
- Timings. Consider the start and finish times and whether it involves an overnight stay.

### Decide who needs to be involved

There's a significant time and cost impact if you get this wrong. Who really needs to attend?

- Relevant. Make sure the event is relevant to the people you invite.
- Contribution. Make sure the participants will have contributions to make.
- Influencers. Consider inviting people who have influence with their colleagues.

### Have a solid structure

Design a well-constructed event agenda. Don't make it up as you go along.

- Content. Take the participants on a journey through the event to deliver the outputs you need.
- Breaks. Make sure you build in plenty of breaks for people to re-energise.

### **Mix it up a bit**

People have different preferred ways of working and learning. One size doesn't fit all. Vary the type and style of content throughout the event.

- Activities. Build in individual, pairs, small groups and full group activities.
- Reflection time. Allow time for participants to reflect on what they've done.
- Application. Provide opportunities to consider how to apply and embed the ideas generated.
- Fun stuff. Make sure the activities are engaging and fun.
- Social stuff. Build in time for participants to socialise together. This can be during breaks, lunch or in the evening if the event lasts longer than a day.

### **Make it a positive experience**

Ensure participants leave the session with a positive feeling.

- Set groundrules. Ask the participants "what would make this an effective event for you?"
- Encourage participation, involvement and engagement. But don't embarrass anyone.
- Avoid 'rabbit holes' as this causes distraction and frustration. Have a 'parking lot' flipchart for issues that need to be addressed outside the event.

### **Be flexible with the agenda**

Things don't always go as planned. Be prepared to make changes as the event progresses.

- Don't publish agenda timings. You raise participants' expectations and can cause concerns if you don't follow it – particularly if breaks and lunch don't happen when they expect. Publish a broad outline.
- Have contingency activities. You can pick these up if you have spare time. Make sure they add value so they enhance the session.
- Have sessions you can shorten or drop. If things take longer than you expect but you want to allow to overrun as they are adding value, then have break points where you can stop or reduce other sessions.

### **Capture the outputs and actions**

Make sure the value of the event is captured in the output and follow up actions to embed the outcomes.

- Actions. Capture specific action points.
- Owners. Identify an owner to lead on each action.
- Dates. Set agreed dates by which each action has to be completed.
- Outputs. Capture the key outputs and circulate them to people who need to know.

### **Don't make it a one off event**

Keep up the momentum and build on the positive mood created by a successful session.

- Review outputs, outcomes and progress against actions regularly as part of normal team meetings.
- Hold a series of follow up events to embed outcomes and generate further ideas and progress.

### **Use an external, independent facilitator**

It's difficult to be the facilitator of an away event and to contribute as the leader or member of the team involved.

An external, professional facilitator can

- Design and structure the session to deliver your requirements.
- Organise the logistics including venue, catering, accommodation, etc.
- Use best practice tools and techniques to help to make the event as successful as possible – before, during and after.
- Ask the dumb questions during the session to provoke discussion as they have less to lose than the participants.
- Keep the session on track so you can concentrate on participating.
- Capture and share the outputs and actions.