



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

How to plan an event



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Introduction

Holding an event on Canal & River Trust waterways offers a unique and memorable experience. As an event organiser, you have a legal responsibility to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of everyone involved, including staff, volunteers, contractors, participants, and members of the public. This guide will help you plan and execute a successful event on our waterways while minimising environmental impact and respecting the heritage of these special places.

Getting started – Defining your event

- **Purpose** - Clearly identify the goals and objectives of your event and consider the activities your participants will enjoy.
- **Location** - Choose a suitable venue along the Canal & River Trust waterways, considering factors such as accessibility, parking, facilities, and potential hazards.
- **Timing** - Consider the time of year, day of the week, and time of day for your event, and ensure your plan accounts for potential weather challenges and ground conditions.
- **Audience** - Define your target audience, estimate the number of participants and spectators, and consider their specific needs and requirements.

Securing permissions and licenses

- **Canal & River Trust application** - Submit your event application to the Canal & River Trust ([click here](#)) at least 12 weeks in advance, allowing time for review and consultation.
- **Application fee** - A non-refundable administration fee is required for event applications, with an exemption for small, free community events under 25 people. This fee applies across commercial, charitable, and not-for-profit events, contributing towards the administrative costs of processing applications on Trust land. For more details, please refer to the Canal & River Trust's [here](#).
- **Event fee** – Event fees vary depending on the event and are designed to cover additional costs incurred by fundraising / commercial and large-scale events on the canal network. These include per-head charges for all sporting participation type events (inc. walking) and site hire fees for large events, amongst others. Specific fees are determined by factors such as event size, location, and disruption level. For detailed fee structure, visit [here](#).
- **Permissions for large temporary structures and infrastructure** - For events involving substantial temporary structures or infrastructure, submit your application at least 12 weeks in advance. [The Canal & River Trust's Third Party Works team](#), responsible for assessing major infrastructure on our sites, may need to be consulted, potentially incurring further fees, and extending the processing time, even if permission is not granted.
- **Additional permissions** - Determine if your event requires any special permissions or licenses, such as public entertainment licenses, temporary event licence or permissions from local authorities or other landowners.

Developing your event plan

- **Event Management Plan** - Create a comprehensive plan that outlines all aspects of your event, including health and safety, site layout, welfare facilities, security, marshalling, safeguarding, emergency procedures, and traffic management. This plan should be created at the beginning of the planning process and continuously updated to reflect the latest changes.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** - Liaise with local authorities, safety advisory groups, and Canalside stakeholders (such as angling clubs, pubs and cafes, marinas) to address concerns, mitigate potential impacts, and foster positive relationships.
- **Insurance and Risk Management** - Secure appropriate public liability insurance for your event (we require £10 million public liability insurance) and ensure that all contractors and performers have their own coverage. Conduct thorough risk assessments and implement necessary control measures.
- **Welfare and Accessibility** - Plan for adequate welfare facilities, including toilets, first aid, lost children's points, and refreshments. Ensure your event is accessible to people with disabilities and provides suitable facilities and access routes.
- **Safeguarding** - Develop and implement a robust safeguarding policy to protect the welfare of children and vulnerable adults attending your event. [Click here](#) for our minimum safeguarding standards.

Designing your event site

- **Site plan** - Create a detailed site plan that identifies the location of attractions, facilities, access points, circulation routes, and emergency paths.
- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** - For events within SSSI's, the Canal & River Trust must obtain permission from Natural England on the organiser's behalf before issuing a license. Check if your location is an SSSI using the [SSSI dataset](#). Consult with the Trust well in advance, as this may increase processing time and incur additional costs. If this is the case your application needs to be submitted 6 months in advance.
- **Infrastructure and facilities** - Source temporary structures, such as staging, marquees, and stalls, from reputable suppliers who provide necessary documentation and insurance.
- **Crowd management** - Develop a crowd management plan that considers the event type, expected attendance, and site layout. Determine appropriate staffing levels, communication protocols, and provisions for special needs.
- **Traffic and transport** - Establish a traffic management plan that separates pedestrian and vehicle access, provides clear signage and directions, and ensures emergency vehicle access. Encourage the use of public transport and sustainable travel options.

- **Utilities and services** - Ensure the safe use of electricity, gas, water, and other services on site, with proper testing, certification, and backup plans in place.

Health, safety, security and emergency planning

- **Event management plan** – For large events, the event management plan should be a central reference point for all stakeholders, helping to minimise risks, optimise resources, and deliver a safe and successful experience. It should include an event overview, organisational structure, timeline and schedule, site plan, risk management, emergency procedures, welfare and accessibility, transport and logistics, environmental management, and post-event actions *.
- **Event safety plan (part of the event management plan)** - Develop a comprehensive event safety plan that addresses all health and safety aspects of your event. Ensure it contains the new terrorism act 2025 ensuring it details evacuation plans if above the attendance thresholds. Ensure that adequate controls are in place to mitigate risks and respond to emergencies effectively (including terror attack).
- **Risk assessments** - Identify potential hazards associated with your event, assess their likelihood and potential consequences, and develop appropriate control measures. Regularly review and update risk assessments throughout the planning process and during the event.
- **Emergency procedures** - Establish a clear emergency response plan that outlines procedures to follow in the event of an incident or emergency. Define roles and responsibilities, establish communication protocols, and develop evacuation procedures for the event site.
- **Safety team and equipment** - Appoint a dedicated safety team, ensure necessary safety equipment is readily available, and provide appropriate training to all staff and volunteers on health and safety procedures, emergency response, and crowd management.
- **Security and crime prevention** - Assess security risks (including terror attack) and develop a comprehensive plan based on event factors. Engage SIA-licensed security staff, implement theft prevention measures, and coordinate with local authorities. The Canal & River Trust is not responsible for damage, theft, or loss of property; ensure appropriate insurance and security measures are in place.
- **Code of practice** - It is advised that all organisers refer to the [safety guide](#) produced by the HSE. It is commonly referred to as the 'purple guide' and provides guidance for all aspects of event organising.

Managing your event

- **Event management team** - Establish a clear event management structure, with defined roles and responsibilities for key team members. Ensure everyone is familiar with the event plan, safety procedures, and communication protocols.

- **Communication** - Maintain clear and efficient communication channels throughout the event, using radios, mobile phones, or other appropriate means. Ensure all team members, contractors, and volunteers are connected and informed.
- **Site management** - Continuously monitor and maintain the event site, ensuring all facilities, attractions, and services are operating safely and effectively. Address any issues or concerns promptly.
- **Crowd management** - Implement your crowd management plan, monitoring crowd flows, densities, and behaviours. Consider additional control measure close to the waters edge. Ensure your stewards and volunteers are actively engaged in guiding, assisting, and supervising event attendees.
- **Safety and security** - Maintain a strong focus on health, safety, and security throughout the event. Regularly review and update your risk assessments (dynamic risk assessment), and ensure all staff and volunteers are vigilant and prepared to respond to any incidents or emergencies.
- **Welfare and accessibility** - Ensure all welfare facilities are clean, well-stocked, and accessible throughout the event. Monitor and address any accessibility issues, aiding and support as needed.
- **Environmental management** - Manage the environmental impact of your event, monitoring waste, recycling, and energy consumption. Ensure all event participants and attendees are aware of and comply with your environmental policies and follow any environmental controls as advised by the Trust.
- **Incident response** - Be prepared to respond quickly and effectively to any incidents or emergencies that may arise during the event. Follow your established emergency procedures, communicate clearly with your team and attendees, and coordinate with external agencies, as necessary.

Sustainable event practices

- **Environmental responsibility** - Implement sustainable practices throughout your event, such as reducing waste, promoting recycling, and minimising energy consumption.
- **Heritage preservation** - Respect and protect the heritage and environment of the Canal & River Trust waterways, ensuring your event does not cause damage or disruption to these valuable assets. Never break ground without prior permission from the Trust.
- **Community engagement** - Foster positive relationships with the local community and Canalside stakeholders, considering their needs and concerns in your event planning and execution.

Post-event considerations

- **Site reinstatement** - Ensure the event site is cleaned, dismantled, and restored to its original condition promptly after the event. Conduct a final inspection to identify any damage or issues.
- **Incident reporting** - Document and report any accidents, incidents, or near-misses that occurred during the event to the appropriate authorities, your insurance provider and to the Canal & River Trust.
- **Evaluation and feedback** - Conduct a thorough evaluation of your event, gathering feedback from participants, staff, volunteers, and stakeholders. Use these insights to inform future event planning and improvements.

*Smaller events (<250 people) need to refer to the [safety guide](#) produced by the HSE but may not need to have complex plans depending on risk and type of event.