

Introduction

The Eastern Region Funders Forum was a network of Funders working in the Eastern Region which sought to:

- promote and develop good practice and foster co-operation between funders, and to
- provide the most effective support for voluntary and not-for-profit organisations working at local, district and national levels for the benefit of people in the East of England Region

Its members attended many Funding Fairs each year and were always happy to do so. In our view some funding fairs are much more successful than others. We offer this guidance in the hope of increasing the numbers of effective fairs in the region.

A good funding fair will provide an ideal opportunity for funders and their customers to come together and to discuss ideas for investing in new projects, it will be held in an appropriate venue and will provide a number of opportunities to attend presentations and workshops.

This guide is an attempt to capture the Forum's views about best practice for funding fairs and reflects our experience of fairs that have been an enormous success and some legendary funding fairs that were less successful.

We hope that you find the guide useful.

Planning

The view of the Forum is that a good funding fair takes a lot of planning and arranging. We suggest that you give yourself at least six months to plan your fair, and we would ask you to please give us as much notice as possible if you want us to attend. We don't like to disappoint you or potential customers in the region, however, just like you, we have busy diaries and competing demands. It is usually worth avoiding school holidays as both funders and their customers tend to have commitments in these periods.

Objectives

Why are you organising a funding fair? This might sound like a ridiculous question but our experience is that the best fairs have clear objectives. What are the particular funding issues in your town, city, district or county? What sort of groups are looking for funding? What types of funding are you finding it hardest to attract? What are the particular strengths and weaknesses of organisations looking for funding locally?

If you are clear about what you want to achieve we think you will find it easier to invite the right funders and the right groups looking for funding. You will also be clearer about the types of presentations and workshops you want to run on the day.

Timing

We think that many funding fairs go on for too long. Some of the best fairs we attend are half a day long and are packed with activities and opportunities. Some fairs do last too long for the activities on offer and the numbers expected. A fair that drags on too long with only one or two people popping in an hour is frustrating for the funders and often intimidating for the attendees who find themselves the only customer in the building.

We have attended plenty of good day-long fairs too, it will depend on the numbers of contributors, attendees and on some local factors.

In our view it is rarely worth running a fair beyond 4.00pm. We find that very few people attend funding fairs after this time and evening fairs are poorly attended.

Arrangements

The very best funding fairs have well publicised agendas that attendees receive in advance. Attendees should know who will be at the fair, what presentations and workshops will happen where and at what time. It can be very frustrating for people who arrive in the afternoon to find that the presentation they were particularly interested in took place in the morning. Equally it can be frustrating for a funder to run a workshop at 3.30pm and find that everyone has left.

It is very helpful to us if you can indicate to us some idea of the numbers of visitors you expect, it helps us to gauge the numbers of staff and the resources that we need to bring along.

Name Badges

Both funders and the public attending your fair will appreciate name badges showing their name and organisation.

Venue

A good or bad venue can make or break a funding fair. A cavernous hall containing five or six exhibitors can take the sting out of the day, the back room of a pub with insufficient floor space can be equally counterproductive. We would recommend that you consider the following.

Size

If you know in advance how many exhibitors you are expecting and roughly how many customers you expect you can plan accordingly. Think about the workshops and presentations you are planning to run, how many extra rooms will you need for these? We strongly recommend that you visit your preferred venue in advance to ensure that it is suitable for the event that you are organising.

Access

We don't want to attend funding fairs without appropriate disabled access. Please ensure that hearing loops are provided in rooms hosting presentations and workshops. Please use your invite forms to find out whether or not any of your customers have special needs.

Parking

We would prefer a venue with parking directly outside. If this isn't possible please ensure that there are sufficient facilities for us to be able to load and unload our stalls and presentations with other parking nearby.

Breakout Rooms

If your fair involves workshops and presentations please do make sure that your venue has sufficient suitable rooms to accommodate them. It is very difficult to deliver a good presentation in a room hosting a busy funding fair. Rooms need to be appropriate for the numbers of people attending the presentation. We also recommend that you provide clear signage inside your venue indicating where the various presentations and workshops might take place.

Directions

Please ensure that everyone attending your fair has clear directions to the venue. Remember, many of the funders work across the whole region, they won't necessarily share your local knowledge.

Lunch

If your funding fair is organised to last for the full day we would really appreciate having lunch provided. We would also prefer the day to be organised so that we could take a break at lunch time. Talking non-stop at a stall all day can be very tiring indeed, a break would help make sure that we remain effective throughout the fair. A break also means that we don't have to talk with our mouths full and spit crumbs on our customers. A vegetarian option is usually appreciated.

Comfort

Please ensure that there is sufficient heating and/or ventilation available at your chosen venue, for funders funding fairs can involve an awful lot of standing around and talking. Cold or hot and stuffy venues can really spoil the experience for all parties.

Presentations

Most successful funding fairs involve presentations and or workshops from funders and other appropriate organisations. These too need to be organised carefully to avoid frustration and confusion.

Rooms

Please ensure that there are rooms available for workshops and presentations separate from the main fair. That they are appropriate to the size of the audience.

Acoustics

If the room is large please ensure that some amplification is provided. It is not uncommon for us to find ourselves with a large audience in a large room and to learn early on that we cannot be heard by everyone.

Arrangements

We would much prefer to run presentations and workshops that are largely pre-booked so that we have an idea of the size of audience to expect and the amount of materials to bring along.

It is useful if advance publicity material carries a strap line from the funder explaining what they do and don't fund, this helps to avoid people attending the wrong presentations and workshops, which is irritating for them and often disruptive for everyone else.

We would also prefer to agree the title and any strap line for our workshop or presentation in advance, particularly useful is some indication of the types of organisations and project that might find the presentation useful. It is not uncommon for funders to find that their audience is expecting a slightly different presentation than the one they've prepared.

Similarly it would be helpful to agree the timing and duration of workshops and presentations in advance. It's not easy to cut an hours presentation down to five or ten minutes. On occasion some of our members might prefer not to give very short presentations.

Please confirm with us in advance the equipment that will be available and needed for the presentation. Most of us can bring lap tops and data-projectors if required, screens can be more of a problem. If you are providing the equipment it would be helpful if we can agree this in advance, in particular it would be useful to agree the format in which we should bring our presentations, for example will you require the presentation on floppy disc or CD?

Evaluation

We recommend providing evaluation forms for the customers who attend your event. We would be grateful if you could use these forms to evaluate our presentations and provide us with some feedback.

Document History

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