

Syllabus for Planning and Hosting a Weekend Geocaching Event

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Before you Begin

Ideas to Reality

Planning an event whether it's a competition or a social gathering, you must visualize it in the mind's eye. Walking through the event in your head will help you communicate your intentions. You will need to make notes as you go. Your original idea might change midstream or you might discover that while planning the event, you can actually redefine the original thought into something much more spectacular.

This syllabus is designed to help you plan a well organized event that spans over a weekend. Many considerations have to go into the planning. That is why I have put together this syllabus. By now, you should have a good idea of what you want to do. In this syllabus the examples are based upon the Midwest Invitational Geocaching Competition or Midwest Open Geocaching Adventure (MOGA) I helped plan. By no means is this written for anything specific but the examples relate to that event.

The most important thing about coming up with a weekend event is keeping the participants busy while making some of the activities optional. You don't want a program that starts at seven in the morning and goes until eleven at night both days of the weekend. Instead, you want them to participate during the day and then have leisure and social activities at night that are entirely optional. Don't plan things at night that would exclude your participants from the mainstream activity. Keep them busy by offering more than they will want to do. If you pack your schedule, they won't become bored because of lack of activity. They will choose the optional things because it is fun and exciting or they may elect to pass knowing they won't be penalized if they do. Some, as in the case of MOGA, were just too tired to do anything at night.

Write your ideas on paper. As I said earlier, you will forget details if they are not written down and you may even forget the idea. When you have it on paper, you can start to add to it until you have a great outline for establishing all the activities. Once you have the idea on paper, you are ready for the next step.

Example: In creating an idea for MOGA/MIGC, I had written down on paper the following information..

Have an event that covers a full weekend. It combines the sport of Orienteering with the fun of Geocaching. Since the Texas Extravaganza last year was so much fun, model it after that only it incorporates an easy course and a harder course. Have a team course too so states and localities can challenge each other. Use one of Missouri's nicest parks and see if the Orienteering club is having a meet anytime next spring.

This was what started the MOGA idea. I just built upon it taking recommendations from my staff until we had a final outline of what we wanted to accomplish at the event itself.

You don't have to use an original idea to have people want to come. You can improve on someone else's idea. In the geocaching world, we always want to hide a cache in an original manor or do something that has never been done before. This is great for those who want the unusual, but, when it comes to an event that has hundreds coming, you might want to consider middle of the road vs. outrageously unique.

The most important thing you can do is get a group of core staffers together and bounce ideas off of them. Too many staffers and you have chaos. I got 4 others besides myself and we ironed out details until we created the outline. Just remember, people volunteer and they all have different ideas so you need to make sure you allow them to communicate their ideas and thank them for their suggestions. Offer criticism with solutions and be specific.

Once you have your outline, send it to all staff members so that you can start the planning. Details will change but your core idea and outline should remain the same.

Legal Considerations

In almost every event the term "legal" will come up. You have to consider safety as your number one priority. I have a saying, "If it appears to be dangerous, don't do it!" You will need insurance for your event. At the first MOGA, we were required to carry a two million dollar policy that covered one million per incident. We were lucky because we were able to pay the Orienteering club to use their coverage. I got a quote from Allstate and they wanted 2300.00 for the weekend for such a policy and did not want anyone competing in any events. That was just to cover the social part of the event. If I told them people would be running along high bluffs, they would have not given us a policy.

Before you get discouraged, there are alternatives. Sometimes the facilities have a policy where you will be holding the event. You can get cosponsors such as State parks, Corps of Engineering and County parks. You can approach the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts and they will allow an event on their property and cover

non registered adults and youth at one dollar per person. The Texas Extravaganza uses Sid Richardson Scout Camp and a dollar from each registration goes to cover insurance. Other cosponsors such as sporting goods stores and outdoor recreational suppliers will sometimes pay for the policy if you allow them to setup a display there. Ask, all anyone can tell you is NO! Also, a lot of places will let you get by with waivers. Have a lawyer draw up the waiver or find one online. This is our preferred route.

If you have to purchase a policy, DO IT! It is much better to be covered in case rather than be “cased” because you didn’t cover. Ask the insurance company for a waiver that releases liability in the case of an accident. This will protect you from lawsuits but not from a claim.

Other legal considerations are facilities and parking. You must make sure that your event doesn’t break any laws or violate any policies. You cannot tell people to speed nor expect them to race on public roads if you have an event that allows driving from waypoint to waypoint. Know your facilities rules and regulations before you begin. If in doubt, ask the authority!

Outline the Event

When you have obtained the necessary documentation for insurance and have the basic outline laid out, the real work begins.

You must outline the event as if you are going through it yourself. Think of 6 months prior to the event and 2 months after the event. What will you expect as a participant to go step by step through the event? Consider publicizing the event, marketing, registration, execution, collaborating, feedback, cleanup, etc..

Here is a good list to build upon..

1. Staff Details / Members – Know your staff and recruit!
2. Finalize plans for the event. – Know what you are going to tell participants.
3. **Market your Event** – Make sure you get the word out. Details will change; just make sure you have the overview out there.
4. Registration / Budget – You have to know what your break even point is going to be. Then you can start the registration process
5. Execution of the event – You will have to detail who will be doing what at what time. This ensures it runs smooth.
6. Feedback – This is a gift! Make sure you get it back from everyone.
7. Cleanup – This will allow for the final meetings, feedback review, improvements and closing the event.

This is just a basic outline. Yours should be much more detailed but this will help the flow. I will get into every aspect of this later in this document.

Recruiting Staff

Staff recruitment can be time consuming and frustrating. You will have several who will jump right in line and want to help anyway they can. You will have others who will volunteer and then make excuses as to why they can't do anything. Not to worry! We have all types of volunteers we can use. Remember, this will not be a priority to some and others will have other obligations that will come up. You need a large staff so when it comes time to execute, you are not alone.

Team building can only be accomplished by remembering the steps of putting together a successful team. Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing. As your team comes together, you can expect a high level of excitement and anticipation. Very soon reality sets in and people start to argue about little things. Conflicts arise and soon you realize personality differences. You have to work through this process and after you do, your team starts to normalize and become productive. Any management course or book will take you through these steps. It is not the intent of this document to do that.

You will need to decide how many staffers it will take to have a great event. Then add 10 – 20 percent more. You will need extra as you go through a planning cycle. People will drop because of work or family. It is going to happen regardless of commitment. You will need to identify talents. You might have someone who is an accountant be your main registration and finance person. You might have your top athlete become the course or activities director. You will need to know your staff. Know their spouses and hobbies outside of the event. Obviously they are involved because they have an interest in what you are doing but they might also be an excellent photographer or artist. Engage their spouses when you can. They can work at the event or help behind the scenes. Without my wife always on my heels with large events, I would lose it. She keeps me in the right direction.

After you have your staff, make assignments and areas of responsibilities. Some will take off like a rocket and others will stall waiting for direction. Know when to delegate and when to coach. **Keep your hands out of the tasks you assign someone else.** The worst thing anyone can do is to assign a task to someone and then do it for them. I am so guilty of doing that. It becomes necessary if you see failure on the horizon but try and coach them to success.

Once tasks are delegated, you must train them in what they need to do. It will do no one any good to have a task that they do not understand what you want. You have to have a goal setting session and set milestones. If there is one thing I wish I would have done for MOGA planning, it would have been to set

milestones. Training on what they need to do is important. You must clearly communicate what is expected and what the end results should be. Do not assume anything. Repeat and have them repeat exactly what it is you want them to do.

After staff has been trained, you can orchestrate the planning. Have meetings as often as necessary. Use email and face to face meetings. Planning an event can take a lot of time and energy and you don't want it wasted on distractions. Keep your meetings on course by publishing an agenda. Allow for 30 minutes of socializing before the meeting and start on time. After the meeting is over, be sure to round robin the table for any feedback or concerns. Always listen to what your staff is telling you. **A good leader speaks but a great leader listens.** Make notes of their comments and review them in a quiet setting. This allows you to think through, without distractions, what they are telling you. Follow up with an email and perhaps put it on the next meeting's agenda.

Planning Positions

Knowing who is doing what can sometimes be the hardest part of the event. No one wants to be the cleanup person and everyone else, the cooks. You have to make sure that people will want to cover all areas. It makes it hard when you have a couple of jobs that are really fun and the rest are repetitious or mundane. You end up with resentment and often times people feeling left out. You have to make it clear that every duty is as important as the next. Make a rotation schedule and use phrases like, "You would be perfect for this position!" or "I created this position just for you!" This will sometimes work and other times they will just give you the "Whatever" look. I made a mistake with finishers at the MOGA event in that I left them at the finish all day on Saturday. They did not get to see the park and were stuck. I had them listed as finishers on Sunday as well but we made changes so they could get out on the course.

You will have to define each position and write a job description. Remember a detailed outline should indicate how many people you will need. If you have parking monitors or registration people, you need to make sure they are taken care of while they perform. You need backups in critical positions and you need to make sure you train them as mentioned above. Once positions are set, ask for volunteers and assign the rest. If they complain, see the next section.

The "C" Word

The "C" word is Commitment! **You need to make it very clear before you assign a single position that they will be expected to commit to the dates and work to make the event a success.** You will have cancellations and last minute drops even though they commit. Remember, they are volunteers.

However, it is important that you come up with the dates using your core staff for all meetings and work weekends prior to the event. At that time, you ask a commitment from each and every one of the staffers to make all the meetings and all the work weekends. Some tasks don't need the entire staff to show up. So if some can and others cannot, it is no big deal. When you ask them to commit, you are asking them to put all dates on the calendar and make sure they inform family and friends that they will have to plan other activities around those dates.

Empowering Staff

At this point the staff has volunteered and committed to the assignment. You have trained them on what they need to do and what the expected results will be. Now, it is time for you to empower them to do their job. Your staff is capable of performing the tasks you assigned. Otherwise, you would have never given them the task. Staff meetings should be a checkpoint into the tasks you assigned. I felt that MIGC, I did a lot of unnecessary work I didn't need to do because I didn't follow this simple rule. I assigned tasks and then did some of the work myself. It was uncalled for. It's really hard sometimes.

Your job should be to make resources available to your staff. Give them what they need to do the job effectively. Every meeting should be done keeping this in mind. Always ask what they need.

Planning the Event

Application of the Outline

You have your staff and they have tasks, your outline is complete and now comes the application of the outline. Application is as every bit important as planning. You want things to roll out on a daily basis. You must keep track of every aspect of the event. You will need to note when things complete and what needs to happen next. Your staff meetings should be based upon application and adjustment.

You may choose to cover the application by having each person report where they are in the process of executing the outline. For instance, you can have your registration person show the registration form and what they will be gathering from the participants. Make sure you completely understand what they are telling the group. Make sure it is on task and what everyone agreed to.

This is also the time you might want to tweak the process. Make adjustments that make sense. Managing each process with result is a flawless event.

Staff Meetings

When you start to plan and execute, these meetings as mentioned above are crucial to the success of the event. If you think of it as steps, it can be categorized as *Plan, Build, Execute and Maintain*. Your staff meetings will allow you to manage each step or phase as the event unfolds.

The Planning stage meetings should not be done as a group think session. Remember the “core” staff we mentioned earlier? That should be where most of the planning is done. Have meetings with your core staff to get the outline started. Fill in the blanks as you continue to pull in new staff members. This allows planning to go much faster because you have less people to bring up to speed on the outline and objectives.

The Build stage should have all your staff in place. Each person is critical in the process. Here is where delegation and empowerment begin. This is where you will start the process of building the event into something tangible. Most of your meetings will lead you to the execute phase where it will become apparent that the event just evolved into reality.

The Execute stage is where all the planning and building pay off. This is where everyone knows their tasks and the event unfolds. You might need to gather your staff several times during the event to make adjustments and fix what is broken. You will have flaws. It is in our nature to overlook some things. Playing out the event in your head, time and time again, will help you to make quick decisions and fix minor problems.

The Maintain stage is when the event is done and you can finally rest. In this stage it is important to write down what worked and what didn't. You will gather feedback from your staff and participants and write it all down to discuss at your last staff meeting. Do not wait more than a week after the event to have this meeting. You want it fresh in the minds of your staff so you can make the necessary corrections and adjustments for the next event. This stage is crucial to anyone who decides to take your place next year. You will also use this meeting to finish all loose ends and clean up anything that was overlooked.

All your staff meetings should include these phases. Have an agenda and stick to it. It is easy to get distracted in a meeting. Remember to allow your staff time to socialize before the meeting. If you want to get started at 8PM, have your staff get there at 7 or 7:30. Keep everyone on track and offer lots of praise for participation.

End all your staff meetings by reviewing deliverables and asking for feedback and/or a status of each person's tasks.

Milestones

Set your milestones in the beginning. Set the date of completion so that everyone is very clear on what needs to be done and by what time. Remember when I said I wished I would have set milestones? We would have had less confusion, with the first MOGA, if I would have set milestones for course layout and our electronic registration. Course layout went a couple of extra weekends and the electronic registration never became a reality. The person doing the electronic registration got distracted doing something else and without a due date, it just slipped into the cracks. Set milestones and make sure your entire staff is aware of them.

Finances and Budget

Where does it all come from and where does it all go?

Creating a Budget

I have attached our budget. You will see how we had to make sure we had enough registrations to break even. There will be a sweat period doing events like this because someone has to put up the money to do this. It helps to have sponsors with an event like this.

Creating a budget is not that bad. I would recommend you enlist an accountant or finance person on your staff to handle all the finances. It saves headaches because they know the reasons and logistics behind the budget. I am not a finance person at all. This was a hard task for me to try and keep a budget within my spending capabilities and hope we would get enough participation so we could break even.

In creating a budget you will need to know 2 things, expenses and revenue. Again, we play out the event in our head to see what all we will need. Registration supplies, Facilities, Meals, Portable Potties, etc.. Now is the time to start a list of everything you will need. Do you want to give out T-Shirts and Lanyards? Do you want to give door prizes? As you make the list, estimate the costs. When you are done, you will have to decide on a fee that will allow you to have enough revenue to cover those items.

The hardest part about doing a budget is planning an event, such as MOGA, and not knowing how many to expect, because we have nothing to measure against. We knew what supplies and costs were going to be in order to execute our plan but, we didn't know if 5 people would show up or if 1000 would show up. We had to take a risk. I could have literally had to mortgage my house to support this event if we didn't have a showing. At the time I ordered some of the prizes and trophies, we were over 800.00 from breaking even. This is the biggest risk and the more you can do financially to eliminate this, the better you will be.

At the first MOGA, I was shooting for 80 people registered for the event, to break even. It was much lower in the beginning but as we added supplies and courses, our cost increased as did our breakeven point. It is important to know what the breakeven point is for your event. I estimated 15.00 per person and if you multiply that times 80 it will give you 1200.00 as our breakeven. When you look at our budget, you will see that we had higher costs because of last minute supplies. We broke even and at the end of the event, we were able to buy many door prizes to give away.

You might want to get an idea of how many will attend by polling people. This might help but I have found the best way to breakeven for an event is to market it like a madman!

Marketing Tools

One important feature for this modern era is Facebook and Twitter. When we did the first MOGA, we only had Geocaching.com to market with. In 2004, most the general public had no clue as to what Geocaching was. We jumped into the forums on Geocaching.com and proceeded to talk up the event. We also added a signature with event information to all of our logs when we found caches. We encouraged many more to do the same thing. As a result, we have 6 states represented at the first event.

Facebook and Twitter are powerful tools that allow social sharing. Sure a website is necessary but you can't beat free advertisement and social propagation to help your event. Update often! Letting anything sit becomes uninteresting and boring. Post daily to your Facebook, website and Twitter. You can link Facebook to Twitter so you only have to update in one location.

Enlist your vendors to tweet for you. They will benefit by the numbers at the event. This is a simple request and they would be happy to do it. Most likely, they have a different following base than your event so more people will see your updates.

Shopping for Value

It is just as important to cut costs wherever you can. Shop around. Tell vendors about your event and see if they can donate something. When you need supplies, see if you can get them donated from someone's work. I had my company donate the Tyvek envelopes that we used for the registration packets. It doesn't seem like much but once you cut costs here and there, it really helps!

Record Keeping and Documentation

Keep all receipts and document all expenses. It is just that simple. The last thing you want to do is not get paid for something. Keeping accurate records and

documenting all transactions is important for planning future events. One person should be responsible for the record keeping and documentation. Every penny spent should be accounted for and every registration page should be kept as well.

I took a binder and placed all registration forms that came in regardless if they were electronic, faxed or mailed, into the binder. Any problems at registration with amounts, I just referred to the actual registrations in the book. Did I have errors? I did! However, I verified everything and it was taken care of.

Using this documentation will help you to plan better next year.

Suppliers and Donations

This is one area I do not like. Find someone within your staff who is good with asking for donations. Ask suppliers to come to your event and showcase their products. They might even let you have some stuff for door prizes. Remember to document everything someone donates. You can use this info next year but more importantly, you can mail them a note of thanks.

Scheduling Facilities and Resources

Location, Location, Location

It has been said that location can make or break an event and I couldn't agree more! The location you choose has to fit into your session. You must find a park or area big enough, with proper facilities to handle even the largest crowd. This is especially true for huge events in which you don't know how many will attend.

The location not only has to be right for the event, but it has to be an attraction as well. There should be something there that even non participants would like to see. You also have to consider where people are coming from. They might not want to spend hours on the road to get somewhere that is a total letdown.

Build the excitement about the location. Post pictures highlighting some really great features. Build up the location as if it was the best place on the planet.

You must also make sure it has the proper facilities. You will need to think about parking, restrooms, dining, sleeping or camping, access. Etc..

Working with State and Local Agencies

Think about your local and state parks. Most times they have everything you need. Meet with them and keep them involved in everything you do. Once you obtain their blessing for the event, it makes your life easier because they will help you in ways you never thought of. They also will lay out the ground rules. If you cannot live within these guidelines, look for another place. Maintain an open and honest relation with the land manager. You will need to ask permission for many different things you do and keeping them informed will only help.

Thank them publicly as well as with a letter of appreciation. This goes a long way. If you have T-Shirts made, be sure to include them. This goes even farther! Remember, they want you there and are willing to help you out as much as they can.

Facilities and Accommodations

It is important to remember that if your event is to span a weekend you must have overnight accommodations convenient for everyone. Not all people are campers so you will need to make sure local towns have hotels and motels. You can easily contact a hotel and get a block of rooms and a good room rate. Just make sure you make your arrangements far enough in advance to allow for accommodations of the participants.

Make sure you can talk to the economic impact the event will have on the area. This is detailed in the section, "Setup and Preparation" below. When planning your event, look for dates in the area where there isn't anything planned. You really don't want to schedule an event during their "Harvest Festival", for example, as the competition of the event may leave you wondering why no one showed up. Choosing dates that are open allow for local businesses to see the impact your event can have! Filling hotels and restaurants for a weekend is welcomed in any town and they are more willing to work in discounts when they know they will not be full on those dates.

Your facilities need to fit your program. You will need to make sure you have plenty of restrooms, shelters, drinking water, tables, chairs, etc.. You should appoint a couple of facilities people to your staff and make sure they can acquire the necessary equipment to make your event go smoothly. Work with the park's people to help supply some of the equipment you will need. You only need to ask.

Bringing in Other Resources

At times you might want to bring in other resources to complement your program. You might bring in local or state people, software developers, motivational speakers or comedians for nightly entertainment. As around and see if you can acquire the talent from your local caching group. I would not suggest paying anyone unless you want to give them free registration or free meals. I usually give a T-Shirt to someone who comes and talks. This of course is up to you.

The purpose of adding additional resources to your program is just entertainment and information time killing. It allows your participants time to relax and unwind. It also gives them an opportunity, in the case of a land manager, to ask questions about caching.

Most times, you will find that the land manager who is allowing you to have the event on their grounds would be more than happy to talk. Other times, you might have them refer you to someone who would be willing to speak. Just ask!

Assigning Duties and Responsibilities

Who Does What?

Now comes the time prior to the event and during the first couple of meetings you will need to assign positions. We covered recruiting the staff, committing the staff, empowering the staff and meeting with the staff. We will now cover more specific information regarding duties. While I will still use MIGC as an example, please keep in mind that the event you put on will require different positions in some cases.

Assigning positions to staff will require understanding their talents. It is important to interface people who have great personalities and patience to the participants. At the same time, you don't want someone who talks all the time becoming a distraction to the event agenda. While this seems like a no-brainer, it can make the difference of how well the event is perceived. Personality conflicts will surely ruin the event. As the director of the event you have a direct responsibility to your participants. You must manage the staff and make calls as to where people should be assigned.

You will need certain people to handle certain areas. Here is an example of positions we filled for one of the largest MOGA event.

- € Pre-Registration / Finance – 1 person to do both.
- € On Site Registration – 12 people
- € Parking – 8 people
- € Starters – 12 people (Have shifts for afternoon and morning.)
- € Course Monitors – 12-15 people
- € Finishers – 12 people (Have shifts for afternoon and morning.)
- € First Aid – 1 person trained

- € Facilities – 10 people
- € Administration – 8 people
- € Public Relations – 2 people
- € Marketing – 2 people
- € Clean up – Entire Staff!

As you can see, it looks like a lot of people to put on the event. We had a lot of people on staff. This was just enough to have the event. Some people had double duties. The registration people were done by the time the event started so they were redeployed to other duties.

Ask people what they want to do. Without their input, you might miss their talents. Get to know them!

Training Sessions

Training is a must! You have the ideas of how you want things to unfold and the best way to communicate to your staff is through training. Each staff meeting should have some training for a position. If you want your starters to be efficient, you must train them.

Training is best done by making trips out to the location and doing mock run-throughs. It is best to set your areas up and work right where the event will take place. If you have people working the parking, for instance, you can go to the parking area and while the parking attendants are practicing, other staff members can use their cars for a real run-through.

Make up sheets that have the duties of each position and use this as your training material. It is best when people can follow a job description.

Remember, you want to empower your staff to do their job. This only comes through training them. Always let them have some input on how they would feel comfortable executing the job. Listen and make suggestions. You will find that they will respond better if you let them do it with your coaching.

Know your Staff

This is such an important step. Often it is overlooked because we assume we know our staff. You need to know them better than you think. Whatever you think you know about someone is completely different when you actually work with someone. People respond in different ways. Knowing someone and their needs will help you determine the best course of action when it comes to training.

You must know their desires for the event, their family needs, their physical capabilities, their mental capabilities. You must know their level of competence with the event. Everyone learns at a different pace. Unfortunately, you will be limited most times by the slowest learner.

Setup and Preparation

Facilities and Logistics

It never hurts to draw out your desired setup. If using a state park, get maps of the park, trail guides, topos, etc... Plan your areas that would be best suited for your event. Work with the land manager to establish location. If the park supervisor has a great area he/she would like highlighted, work with them. Often times, you can get shelters free of charge. They will donate these because they know they will make it up on camping fees or park entrance fees. Negotiate the best you can to get as much as you can. MOGA 2007 was held in a facility where everything is donated. We have 2 pavilions, 1 amphitheater, free group camping areas and half price premium camping with full hookups. It just takes time and energy but, they will usually accommodate your requests.

MOGAs since 2007 have been at Army Corps of Engineering Facilities. MOGA 2014 was at a major university with the competitions at a State Park. The Army Corps of Engineers have donated great facilities in the past. State Parks have now gotten on board. We actually had an indoor dining hall one year which was the first time MOGA had anything indoors. Since then, the event has used some extraordinary facilities.

Working with facilities is one of the most important steps in completing your planning process. In the case with the Corps of Engineers, they pumped money into the event to help the local economy. It is estimated that we brought in over \$150,000 to the local economy for MOGA 2009. With a large economic impact, land managers are more willing to work with you. Sometimes to acquire the

facilities, you will have to show this impact outside of their managed area. It makes it easy to get hotel and resort discounts during their off season than it would be during their peak season.

Utilize local Tourism and Visitor Bureaus. They have great connections and when you start talking about money infused economy, they listen. Use them to your advantage to secure facilities.

Planning Backwards?

Planning Backwards simply means that you start with the cleanup of the event and work your way backwards. We have discussed planning the event step by step in your head going forward. Now look at it backwards. Make sure that they meet in the middle. Many times people will overlook important steps to complete a process because they didn't think it backwards.

Have your staff do the same thing. In the case of the competitions, thinking about how the finish area needs to be setup will drive how the starting area will be laid out. This is a very basic step but is often overlooked.

Engaging Facility Help

One of the best things you can do as a leader is to engage facility help. Work them into the schedule and assign tasks. They are willing to help as much as their schedule will allow. Sit down with the facilities people and see what they can offer. In the case of MOGA, we have several Corp people assigned to the weekend of our event. They pitch tents, mow grass if needed, open gates, place water stations, monitor courses, provide first aid and search and rescue service. Ask what they can do, how many will be on staff for your event, what they can do after the event, etc...

Having help from the facilities people can lighten your load on preparation for the event. They might be too busy to lend a hand in the planning but might be fully engaged in the execution.

Agendas and Schedules

Remember that having a schedule for the event and having agendas at each meeting is mandatory. You must do this if you want to have a successful event. Setting your schedule is as simple as taking your program plan and laying it out into sections then, assigning dates. Here is an example of what was compiled for MOGA 2009.

9 months prior

Choose dates for the event.
Update website.
Develop core staff (Directors)
Start marketing
Contact facilities or land manager for location
Decide Theme (was done at the end of MOGA 2007)
Contact facilities for lodging and camping rates

6 months prior

Hold Directors Meeting!
Recruit staff – allow directors to recruit their own staff
Create cache page
Advertise using cards, banner ads, etc..
Review facilities
Plan courses
Hire caterer
Develop budget
Open registration online
Contact sponsors for donations
Order Materials (things that take longer such as coins and pins)

3 months prior

Hide all caches and punches (use full staff)
Make sure facilities and ready
Advertise again
Order the rest of the supplies (Lanyards, Trophies, Name Tags, etc..)
Have at least one full staff meeting (everyone)
Hold directors meeting
Review event changes
Contact Sponsors for donations

2 months prior

Create agenda of event activities
Hold another director meeting
Have directors meet with their staff
Publish cache and punch info internally
Meet with land managers
Email blast everyone
Start Weekly Updates about the event

1 month prior

Create course maps
Contact land managers and facilities
Contact caterer
Staff meeting

Directors meeting
Schedule of arrival for staff and directors
Create labels and packets
Wait anxiously for stuff to come in

1 week prior

Arrive at the event and start setup (Can be 4 or 5 days prior)
Supervise anyone that shows up to make sure program is on track

Your Milestones

Your milestones can be set using a schedule as above. You probably want to have solid dates next to everything. Get detailed! The above list is only a quick timeline of what occurs before the event. Assign dates and resources to your milestones. Follow up, follow up, and follow up! Not hearing back from your coin vendor or land manager is a sign of something is not right! If a date slips, make sure you have padded it so that you can allow that. Don't expect to order coins 6 weeks prior to the event and expect them to be there just because the coin vendor says they will. Call them, get commitments and call them again each week for a status. Get a firm delivery date. Whoever you assign to the task, follow up with them.

Registration and Processing Payment

One absolute thing that must go flawlessly is the registration and payment process. It is obvious that you want to have people preregister for the event and if you charge anything, you want to be able to collect. In the past, MOGA has used a website, registration software called, Registration Event Pro, and Paypal as our online registration tool. This process allows us to collect up front and purchase the materials, software, tools, swag, facilities, etc. to put the event together.

The MOGA registration site and software will remain in place for anyone hosting MOGA. If you are going to do another event, we strongly suggest you look at all possible ways to do this including 3rd party event sites that may save you money over Paypal. The main goal is to get someone who can put together a great site that is informative, allows people to purchase items such as extra swag or T-Shirts, and allows some type of reporting so you know at all times who is registered and what they ordered.

Groundspeak mandates that event registration must have a free option. While you can offer packages with swag such as coins, pins, pathtags, etc... you

MUST have a free registration option. You will need to have a mail in payment as well. Not everyone trusts Paypal but, I find it amazing they trust the postal service. In any case, have a PO Box or Physical address payments can be sent to. For MOGA, we have everything set up.

The last thing you should do for your preregistration process is to send reminders out to everyone and letting them know a few weeks in advance of what they ordered. Do this before the deadline. By doing this prior to the deadline you will get those who thought they ordered something, back to your site to order more product or swag. This is more of a friendly reminder but the outcome is increased revenue. I can't tell you how many people forgot to order meals and then when they got the reminder, flocked to the site before the deadline and ordered.

Knowing How to Collect

Since most of the collection will occur prior to the event, there isn't really much to discuss here. However, there are always a few who went to Paypal and then for whatever reason cancelled out and you end up with a pending status on their registration. You will have to send an email to these participants and make sure they get paid up. Prior to the deadline, it would be good to go and compare your registration list with your Paypal list to make sure they sync up. Many times, you will have someone completely different from the person who registered actually pay using Paypal. These are harder to match up but eventually by process of elimination, you will see where to apply the payment. Remember, when in doubt, contact the participant.

Bank vs. Mattress

OK this is really a non issue. You would have to be crazy not to link your Paypal account to a bank account. Even if you do 3rd party registration, once you receive your check, you need to deposit into the bank. Don't collect a massive amount of checks before depositing! Your treasurer will go nuts!

Signup Methods

In the past, we have utilized online registration as well as mail in registrations. In the past 2 years, we went strictly to online registrations. This is the 21st century! Everyone can follow a simple online registration process. Eliminate the mail in headaches as much as possible by ONLY accepting online registrations.

The other part of this is the amount of procrastinators and last minute walk ups you will have at the event. If doing waivers, this can be overwhelming for one or two people to handle. Whether you charge for walk ups or not, you will have them at the event. I would suggest a simple registration form and waiver

attached. Have them move away from the area, fill everything out and then come back when they are ready. Perhaps you can have the walkup forms on the website AFTER your online registration closes.

Pay as you Go

You will have several expenses along the way, when you have enough money, pay the expense right away. Make sure you keep some operating capital in the bank for needed items. Just because you have 6000.00 in the bank doesn't mean you can pay 6000.00 worth of bills. Be mindful and follow your BUDGET!

Registration Tips

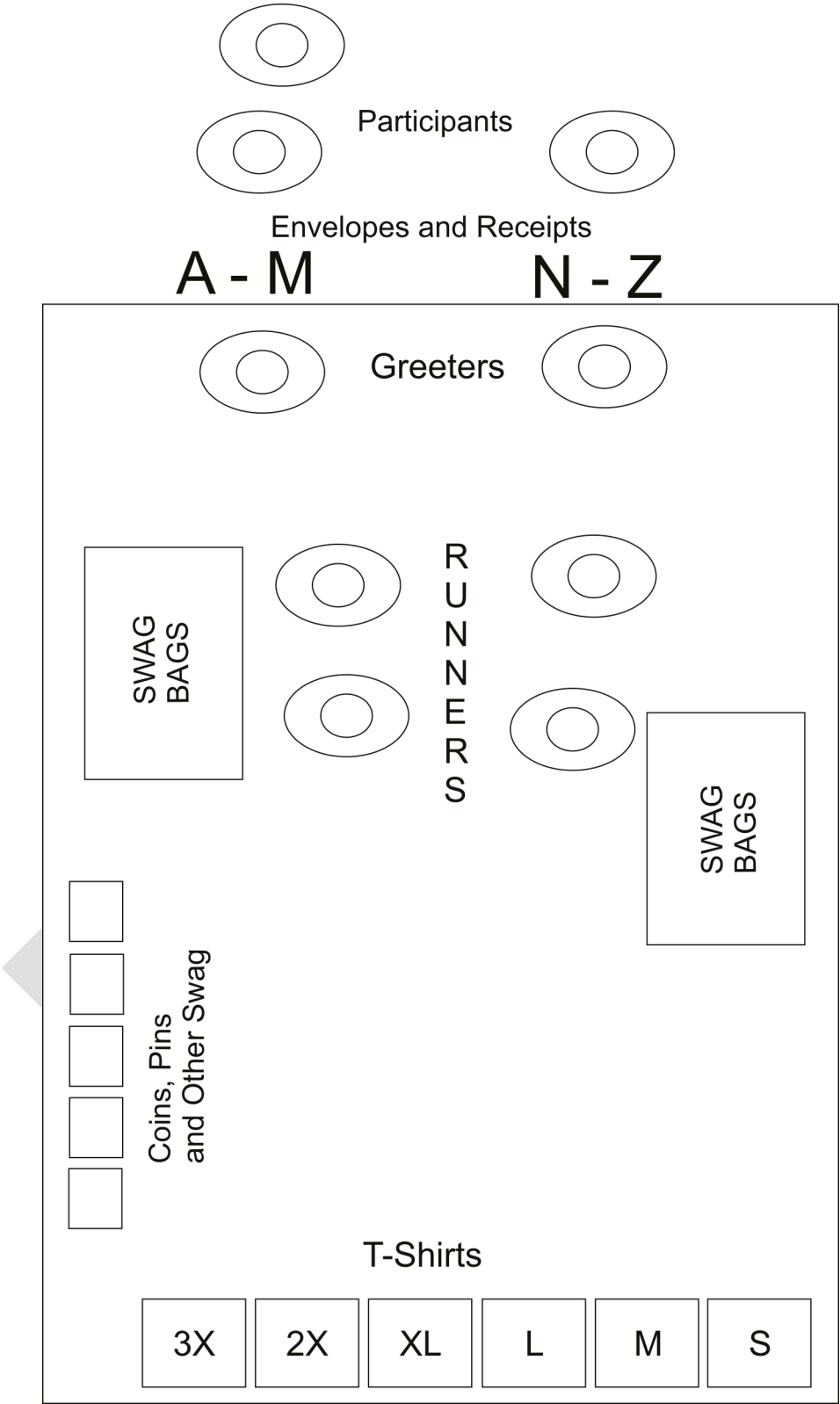
Simply put, the onsite registration sets the mood for the day. If your check in and registration process is slow and boggled, your participants will not be happy. You need to make sure you maximize the process by having a well trained staff and a plan of execution that everyone follows. We have used many different methods from a checklist where they go from station to station to one area contains everything. I think the event in 2010 was the best. Below is the format we used and how we executed it.

The execution was simple.

- When someone comes to check in, they get in the line with the beginning letter of their last name.
- Once they get to the greeter they will give their last name.
- An envelope is then pulled from the alphabetized box that has their receipt stapled to the front. The envelope will contain their maps, coupons, meal tickets, drawing tickets, Name tags, etc...
- A runner then takes their receipt and has them follow them on the outside of the tables around the side to remove them from in front of the check in.
- The runner gathers the required items such as a generic swag back, same for all those who have a paid registration, then fills the T-Shirt order and swag order.
- Once all items are received, the participant signs the receipt and we keep it. However, this year, we just gave the signed receipt right back to them.
- The runner gets back in line for the next person.
- Problems are resolved through your registration director on the backside of the registration area.
- Another good thing to do is to have a table out front of registration with waivers on them.

See the diagram on the next page for the layout.

Registration Layout



Executing the Event

The execution of the event is primarily the main goal. Now you have gotten everyone through the Check In and Registration process, you can start the program. Actually, the program can start at any time.

One thing to make sure you do is FOLLOW YOUR EVENT AGENDA! Start on time and end on time. You don't want participants mad because a session or activity they were involved in went over and they missed the beginning of another.

As a director of the event, it is important that you visit with the participants and try and see as much of the event as possible. I call it shaking hands and kissing babies! You have to get out there and make sure things are going smooth. Be friendly and ask for feedback.

Make sure you delegate to your staff. Don't try and do everything alone. This will wear you out and eventually reflect on the event itself.

Deal with the important issues and let the minor ones wait until after the day completes. Someone with a lost GPS in the woods or a question about a missing game piece can be deferred until later. A missing child cannot.

Staff Uniforms

A staff uniform, whether a T-shirt or a hat, is something to let participants know that they can ask for help or directions. It is important that your staff stands out! This is helpful and also recognizes the efforts of volunteers.

Positions

In the past, we have had many different positions. What we have done to maximize the staff is we went to a management system. This is not your typical management system. Here is how it breaks down..

- Main Director
- Committee Directors
- Staff
- Volunteers

Main Director – This person is head of the staff and the person overseeing all operations and planning of the event. They are the project manager of the event.

Committee Directors – Appointed by the director to oversee certain tasks or areas. This included for MOGA the following CD's:

- Registration Director
- Public Relations Director
- Competitions Director
- Facilities Director
- Website and Technical Director
- Waypoint Station Director
- Poker Run Director
- Cache and Punch Placement Director
- Kids Games and Caches Director
- Store and Merchandise Director
- Hospitality Director
- Course Monitoring Director

Each director was responsible for getting their staff to cover the event. This included the recruiting and training.

Staff – The staff was made up of people who had previous MOGA experience. No matter what event you run, you will need to have staff available for the planning and execution of the event. These should be reliable people that you can meet with regularly and train to know their position at the event.

Volunteers – You will need extra hands at the event. Volunteers are those who have not attended any meetings but are willing to help the day of the event. For MOGA, this included punch and cache hidiers as well as small positions such as parking attendant, course monitoring and photography.

Each one of these positions should have a small appreciation gift provided from the event director. We gave T-Shirts, Coins, pins and pathtags to the CD's, Coins, Pins and pathtags to the Staff, and all Volunteers got a special pathtag and a pin for helping out.

Equipment Needs

You will have to make a list of needed equipment based upon your program. It is best to get with your CD's and have them submit a list of needed equipment. You will soon see that there will be many items requested that are duplicate. From these lists, you can plan a master list. Use your resources and be creative. The goal is to save money!!

Document!

Make sure you document your event and know what worked and what can be improved. Make notes as you go and DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE END OF THE DAY. As director, you should carry a small notebook and when people have suggestions, jot it down. You can always review these at the end of the day for what makes sense and what doesn't.

Follow Up and Feedback

It is so important to gather feedback. I have found that doing it anonymously after the event is over is the best way to get real, true feedback. People are excited at the event and you will not get a true reflection of how they honestly viewed the event. You need to wait a week when they have absorbed it all in and are willing to share their true feelings with you. Do not skip this part of the event!!

After the Event

Once you receive feedback, share it with your CDs. You should plan a meeting after the event to get their feedback as quickly as possible but the real meeting should be after the participation feedback. The first meeting should focus on what you can do to improve your processes and the next meeting should be what you can do to make the event better for the participants.

Pay the Bills

Goes without saying! Pay the last remaining bills so you can see what is left for next year's event. If this is just a onetime thing, make sure you have a plan on what to do with the left over money. MOGA generates several thousands of dollars. I cannot stress enough that if you intend on having anything leftover, you better have a plan for it. We recycle everything after the bills are paid and place it right back into the next year's event.

If you do not receive a bill or invoice from a vendor, ask for one. Pay your bills quickly and those vendors might cut you some slack on next year's event!

Attachments and Forms

Attached are the waivers we have used along with any other forms we have. Although they are specific to our event, you might find them useful. \

Waiver

I the undersigned, being a participant involved in the Midwest Open Geocaching Adventure (hereinafter referred to as MOGA) or being the parent or legal guardian of such a participant in MOGA, in consideration of my or another's participation in MOGA, I hereby, for myself and any participant for whom I am a parent or legal guardian release, discharge, hold harmless, and forever acquit the US Army Corps of Engineers, Missouri State Parks, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, MOGA, City of Monroe City, Mark Twain Lake, the MOGA staff or other local sponsors, and their officers, agents, representatives and employees from any and all actions, causes of action, claims or any liabilities whatsoever, known or unknown now existing or which may arise in the future, on account of or in any way related to or arising out of my participation in MOGA. Further, I assume all liability of any non-participants who accompany me.

I understand that I am a participant for all purposes, and am not an employee of the State, Local or Regional entities, The US Army Corps or Engineers, the MOGA staff or other local sponsors, and their officers, agents, representatives and employees, and as such they are not responsible for injury or death of myself and any participant for whom I am a parent or legal guardian which may occur while acting as a participant.

Participant's name (please print): _____

Geocaching Name: _____

Participant's signature: X _____

Participant's age: _____

Signature of participant's parent or legal guardian (if under 18):

X _____

Date: _____

Please mail or fax registration. Registration can be done online at <http://www.mogageo.com>
Waiver MUST be sent in two weeks prior to the event. If you even think you are going to attend, send in the waiver just to be safe.

Mail to:
MOGA 2009
Registration
1220 Crooked Creek Dr.
St. Charles, MO 63304

Waivers can be faxed to: 636-246-0091. You must bring the original to the event!

Staff Forms

If you have staff forms that you want separate, such as duty rosters, contact lists, etc., create a binder and keep them in there.

Participant Forms

All registrations, in a spreadsheet, should also be kept in a binder. The waiver listed above should be placed in a binder too once it is filled out. Keep these in a central location. Quick reference is key to a disgruntled guest.

Other Forms

Insurance policies, land use permits, tax license, etc.. All should be kept in your binder.

Useful Resources, Links and Vendors

Links

Coin and Pin Vendors

www.coinsandpins.com
www.personalgeocoins.com
www.oakcoins.com
www.thecachingplace.com
www.geocoinstore.com
www.chqualitycoins.com
www.landsharkz.ca
www.k2coins.nl
www.geocoinshop.de
www.hogwildstuff.org
www.geocachingshop.de
www.geocachingshop.com
www.cachezone.de
www.3geeks.ca
www.dorkfishcoins.com
www.cacheaddict.com
www.tsunrisebey.com
www.usageocoins.com
www.geocoinshop.com
www.dwprods.com
www.ukgeocachers.co.uk

www.geocachingshop.cz
www.worldcaching.com
www.geocoin.se
www.montereycompany.com
www.geocoins.net
www.mygeocoin.de
www.lillysue.com
www.geocoin.no
www.geoswag.com
www.crakeproductions.com
www.geocoins.biz
www.SoCalGeocoins.com
www.Shop4Swag.com
www.directmint.com
www.geocoindesign.com
www.spacecoastgeocachers.com
www.phdcoins.ca

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