

Governance Works’ Top 10 Steps for the Successful ‘Away Day’

The Board ‘Away Day’ has become a common event in the board calendar of meetings. The ‘Away Day’ is often designed to include a focus on either training for the board, a time to review performance of the organisation over the past year or a time to plan for the future – or all three.

The success of the ‘Away Day’ depends upon on:

- thinking it through
- planning it thoroughly
- managing it well
- following it up

In order to help you through the planning and delivery we have set out the 10 steps to a successful ‘Away Day’.

Step 1 Get the Purpose Clear

What are you really trying to achieve

Step 2 Don’t try and do too much at once

If there are several objectives is it possible to do all of them at one event? There is always a risk that by trying to do too much at once, you might not really achieve anything.

Step 3 Planning is everything

Planning for the away day is essential and it is so important to make sure that you have a very clear plan based on what you are trying to achieve, who needs to be there, when will it happen, where will it happen, what you will do on the day, what tasks need to be done and who will do what and finally how much will it all cost and where is the money coming from?

Step 4 Get the right venue and location

Getting the right venue and location can impact upon the success of the away day. In choosing the location you need to think about how people will travel, the distances and cost of travel and whether any of the participants have particular needs. Finally think about what help the organisation can provide if any?

The venue must be able to accommodate all of the participants comfortably and offer room for working that is comfortable, light and offers all the facilities you might need such as visual aid equipment. Venues must also be fully accessible for all of the participants.

The golden rule is always - visit the venue and check it out before hand!

Step 5 Get everyone there

The success of 'Away Days' depends on people turning up, staying for the duration of the event and taking part throughout. Money and time is wasted if people do not commit to being their and playing their part.

Step 6 Manage the programme

Once you have the programme you need to manage it so that the board gets through the work planned and achieved the objectives that were set for the day. Don't get lost – keep focussed and keep on track.

Step 7 Make it interesting

There is nothing as bad as a boring Away Day. Stop people snoring in the back seats by making sure the programme is interesting and engaging for everyone. Keeping people involved is part of the skill of a good facilitator so whether you use external facilitators or do it yourself you must think about how to keep everyone engaged while working through the programme.

Step 8 Have fun

The away day is an opportunity for people to spend time together, get to know each other and build working relationships. Having fun and working together is a great way of building bonds.

The facilitator or speakers should be instructed to build a bit of fun into the talks, presentations and exercises. Participants also want to do just that – participate, they don't want to be talked at, so plan the day to involve everyone.

Step 9 Don't just talk – commit

The Away day is not just about talking. The discussions should lead to decisions and plans for the way forward that everyone can commit to.

Step 10 Record the decisions and actions

It's so easy to come away from the 'Away Day' and slip back into the daily routine and all the good intentions are then lost. Don't let it happen. Record the decisions and make sure you follow through on the agreed actions without long delays. Build on the enthusiasm generated by the day and this will help you to achieve the objectives.