

Doors Open Days

get into buildings!

Organiser Handbook



Message from the Scottish Civic Trust,
National coordinating body for Doors Open Days

Firstly, thank you for agreeing to take part in Doors Open Days (DOD). The contribution that is made every year by communities throughout Scotland is simply amazing, and without the enormous good-will, enthusiasm and commitment of many thousands of volunteers and staff the event wouldn't happen.

Taking part in DODs can be enormously rewarding, brings great benefits and can also be fun. But, to make the most of the event, you will need to think about a number of issues. This Doors Open Days Organisers Handbook aims to highlight what these might be and suggest ways of tackling them so that both you and the public enjoy an enlightening, fun and safe day or event.

Sections 1 to 4 are essential reading, 5 is optional, but useful.

The Organisers Handbook will be revised each year so if you have suggestions for how to improve it, we'd love to hear from you.

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i. A Brief History

Doors Open Days began in 1990 after discussions with John Gerrard (former Technical Director at the Scottish Civic Trust), the Bridgate Trust (which became Glasgow Building Preservation Trust), the Council and the organisers of the Glasgow European City of Culture Festival.

John Gerrard and his wife had come across the 'Open Monument Day' in Netherlands while on a working holiday. The concept was to open up buildings that were normally closed to the public for free to help raise awareness of the area's history, culture and architecture.

Knowing that Glasgow was to host a range of events as part of the 1990 European City of Culture Festival, he promoted the idea to Glasgow City Council and Glasgow Building Preservation Trust. The Council agreed to fund the event and was joined by Kyle and Carrick Civic Society who showcased buildings in Ayr.

DOD 1990 was a great success which inspired John and the team at the Scottish Civic Trust to promote the idea more widely. In 1991 a group of new areas took part and since then the event has snowballed into a truly Scotland-wide celebration of the built environment.

ii. What are the aims of Doors Open Days?

The event aims to get the public interested in and excited by the built environment. Ultimately we hope that this interest will result in a lifetime enthusiasm for buildings and shared spaces and encourage people to get involved in planning the built environment of the future.

iii. How are Doors Open Days organised?

Area coordinators manage the programme of events locally and are the main point of contact for event organisers and building owners such as you. Coordinators work for a variety of organisations – local councils, civic societies and heritage trusts. A few coordinate DOD as volunteers and no area coordinators are paid to work on DOD full time.

The Scottish Civic Trust is the national coordinator, responsible for a several areas of activity:

- national media and marketing

- event enhancement and programme development
- supporting the work of area coordinators
- development and external liaison
- acting a single point of contact for the public.

DOD is part of the European Heritage Days network which sees similar events take place every September in all 49 European member states, coordinated by the Council of Europe.

iv. What are the conditions for taking part in Doors Open Days?

1. Access to your event or building must be free during Doors Open Days weekends.
There are no exceptions to this, although you can give visitors the opportunity to leave donations.

AND

2. Your building or site has architectural interest, historic importance or significant cultural connections. If you are organising an event, then it must relate to the history or architecture of the area, building or site.

AND (in order of preference)

3. The building or site is normally closed to the public OR; the *part* of the building you are opening during Doors Open Days is normally closed to the public OR; the building or attraction is normally open to the public, but you are putting on a special event or activity.

AND

4. You have agreed your participation with your local area coordinator.
Even if your proposed open day building or event satisfies the first three conditions, it is down to the local coordinating organisation to decide if you can take part in DOD. Reasons that you might be turned down are that the programme is focussing on one particular town or area; that the programme is ‘themed’ and your event doesn’t link to it; or that the number of buildings taking part has to be limited. They will advise you about when the local DOD date is.

v. Why take part in Doors Open Days?

Buildings and event organisers will have many different reasons for taking part. Do you want to 'reach out' to the local community? Publicise a project? Increase membership of your organisation? Do you want to celebrate a special anniversary or fulfil a condition of grant? Perhaps you just think it is the right thing to do because you own a great building and you think the public should have access to it.

Whatever your reasons, it is good to think about them from the start, so you can plan around them. For example, is there information about joining your organisation? Do you want to put up a display?

vi. What makes a successful event?

A successful event will be fun and interesting for the visitor, enjoyable for the organiser and safe for everyone. It should also satisfy your original reason for taking part.

Ultimately, the biggest factor in the success of your event will be your planning.