

3. MANAGING VISITORS

3.1. Visitor numbers

One of the greatest concerns for event organisers can be the possibility that they will get too many visitors. However, there are a number of strategies which will help you control this.

Limit numbers

When you are planning your event think about how many people you'd ideally like to visit. If you are organising a tour and feel that 20 people is your limit, then consider making it a booking-only event. Remember that your area coordinator is unlikely to be able to take bookings on your behalf so think about who could take on this role. Providing an email address and a telephone number with an answer phone facility is a good idea and if the telephone is only in use at certain times, make sure this is reflected in the text you send about your event.

If you have a small space, think about whether a steward could manage a queuing system where only a set number of people would be allowed in. As people left, new visitors could be allowed in. Is there a display you could put up to entertain visitors while they wait?

Opening times

If your coordinator allows it, might shorter opening hours help? Or might you get 100 people in one hour rather than 100 over four?

Visitor experience

Consider the type of experience you want to give visitors. If visitors are going to walk around by themselves, you might be able to accept more visitors than if say, you wanted to tightly control access and give a presentation.

High visitor numbers

Work out what you would do if more visitors than expected turned up. If it is a booking event, what would you do if people just turned up anyway? If the site or event is open to all, is there someone you could call on the day to lend a hand? Think about what impact high visitors number might have. Is there somewhere for them to wait if a room or space is full? Could car parking become a problem? Or would you simply have a tiring day!

3.2. Signage and route planning

A great way to work out how visitors might go around your site or building is to put yourself in their shoes. Imagine arriving on the street – is it obvious where the entrance is? Remember you have banners and balloons to help (discussed in section 5.10). When visitors come in the door, which way would you like them to go?

If at all possible, a circular route, going in one direction is the simplest format. How will visitors know which way to go? Are you going to lead groups round, or have stewards pointing the way, or would signs help?

If the site is large, could you produce a simple map to help people navigate?

3.3. Cars and car parking

We try to encourage visitor to travel to DOD venues by public transport. However, you may find that because of your location or personal preference, visitors will arrive by car. Your area coordinator will want to know if you can offer visitors parking or whether there is parking nearby. Make sure this information is accurate and stick to the commitment once it is made.

Think about how many visitors you may get any one time and where they will be able to park. If you anticipate high numbers, think about having stewards on hand to guide drivers. Do you need to mark the carpark entrance and exit?

Also think about the route to your carparking area.

- Can cars pass easily on the road to your building?
- Is there somewhere for cars to turn around?

3.4. Accessibility

Visitors may have a wide range of different needs. Some might find rough ground a problem; others might have poor eyesight or find steps difficult. By definition, many DOD venues will be in old or unusual locations so making the space open to all will be an extra challenge.

Simple changes might be all that is needed – some matting over a rough area, some bright tape to warn of a low beam or a step. If you have an area that can only be reached by steps, consider having an exhibition on the ground level.

If you plan to create a leaflet about your site, make the print large and make sure the text and its background contrast well. White on a colour will be harder to read than black text on a plain background.

For more ideas about making your event accessible read the Education sections.

3.5. Dogs

Think about whether dogs are going to be allowed at your site. If not it is important that this is made clear to visitors. Think about:

- Is there somewhere visitors can leave them safely?
- Is the carpark area shaded?
- If you are leading a walking tour and you are permitting dogs, do you want them to be on a leash?

3.6. Photography

Many visitors will want a record of their visit – especially if it is to a place they wouldn't normally get into.

- What is your policy on visitors taking photographs?
- Might you want to restrict photographs in some areas of your building?
- Would you mind if a photograph was published or someone made money from it?

Remember that if you are planning on taking photographs at the event, you must have the permission of the parents/guardians of children under 18 who feature in a shot. A sample photographic release form is attached at the end of this document.

3.7. Bad weather

Scottish weather in September can be a joy or a misery, so make sure you plan for both!

- Is there somewhere that visitors can put their umbrellas?
- Is there a mat for people to wipe their muddy feet?
- If you're planning a walk, could it still go ahead if was raining? Is there a wet-weather alternative? A venue perhaps where you could give a talk instead?
- If bad weather would affect the running of your event, make sure this is mentioned in the text you supply your area coordinator.

3.8. Children

We hope that children and young people will be encouraged to visit DOD venues. When planning for your event, think about what activities you might be able to put on. A separate document with educational ideas will be produced by SCT. You should also think about the height of exhibitions, whether hazards exist for children and how you want parents to supervise their kids.

3.9. Difficult customers

Occasionally, you might come across a visitor who is hard to handle. They might have a million questions, find fault in everything or have erratic behaviour that affects other people's visit. Firstly, remember that you are in control. You have opened your doors or organised an event so it is up to you to set the ground rules for how people behave.

A few tactics may help, depending on the situation:

- Be firm but fair, friendly but assertive. If you are getting lots of questions from someone and this is holding up a tour, explain that you have to move on but you can take questions at the end of the tour.
- If a visitor has a complaint, listen to them. Most people with a concern just want to know they have been heard and that their points will be acted on. If they are fair complaints then apologise and see if there is a way to fix them. Don't interrupt them and don't respond aggressively yourself.
- Mostly visitors will do what you tell them if they understand why. For example, a visitor might be unhappy that you've asked them to hold the hand of their child that is running about. But when you explain that there is a steep staircase around the corner, they'll understand and should respond positively.
- If a visitor really is causing problems – by shouting, acting aggressively, endangering themselves or other people – calmly but firmly ask them to leave. If they refuse, explain that your only option is to contact the police and do so.