

Starting a new parkrun event

Many thanks for getting in touch and enquiring about the possibility of starting a new parkrun event in your community. We know it can be daunting when you first start, and you may be wondering what you've let yourself in for.

This document provides a rough guide to getting your event off the ground. Not all of it will be applicable to every event, but it should provide a good overall roadmap. If at any stage you're not sure what you should be doing, or you want some help or guidance please get in contact with:

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Introduction

The remainder of this document provides a rough idea of the key tasks you will need to complete before we can get your event off the ground, and is arranged in rough chronological order.

Form an organising team

The first thing to do is to start building an organising team around you. We will be here to answer any questions you have, and will probably come and meet you from time to time (and we definitely look forward to running in your event); however, we really can't overstate how useful it is, to be able to bounce ideas off a team of local people who are equally passionate about getting your event off the ground. Every new event brings up unique and diverse challenges and the more people you involve in the start-up process the more effectively these challenges can be tackled.

Eventually, this core organising team might morph into a more formal organising committee with delegated responsibilities (such as PR or technical admin), but in the meantime, it's just useful to have a team of people to bounce ideas off, and who can take on the various tasks necessary to get your event off the ground. Friends, family and colleagues can all be encouraged to join you. If you are a member of a running club, then this will form a natural recruitment base. Many of our events are organised largely by members of one or two local running clubs; these clubs benefit from an improved local profile, and invariably see an increase in membership as a direct result of their involvement.

We also now have a large database of runners from around the country, and where appropriate can appeal either directly to our runners in your area by email, or through our weekly newsletter. We would be delighted to discuss team recruitment with you.

Select a Course

Presumably you have a rough idea of a suitable course already, but it is worth having a defined outline of the route before you approach the council or whoever manages the land on which you intend to run. The more prepared you are at this early stage, the more seriously you will be taken by people or organisations you meet with. You should have clearly considered the pros and cons of any particular route, and could have more than one route in mind.

So what does a parkrun course look like? There is no easy answer to that question; we have runs in parkland, formal parks, along riversides and through recreation grounds; some are hilly, some are flat; some are single lap, others multi lap and some are out and back on the same track. However, we do have some guidelines...

Accurately measured as 5km - We are often asked 'Why 5km?' - it's long enough to engage serious runners as part of their training regime, while short enough that non-runners are not too intimidated to try it. In terms of organisation, shorter runs leave you tight for time between the start and the first finisher, whereas longer runs require larger sites and more marshals. Five kilometres strikes the perfect balance!

During the early stages of your planning it is sufficient to roughly measure your route, Google Maps has a useful measuring tool that can help, for slightly greater accuracy a GPS watch is good. Our runners do appreciate knowing that their efforts really are over the distance we say they are so prior to your first event your course will need to be measured as accurately as possible. If you have access to a friendly, experienced course measurer you would be well advised to make use of their services. At the very least you should measure your course with a surveyor's wheel - your parkrun contact can help and advise you with regards getting this done.

Keep it simple - All our events are organised by small teams of volunteers, so it pays to keep the route as simple as possible, since this reduces the need for lots of marshals. Ideally you should be able to stand at the start of your run and explain the course to your runners in a simple, single sentence. For example, at Bushy Park (England) the description would be 'Running in a clockwise direction stay on the perimeter path, and never cross the road.' Obviously, this is not always possible, but it is worth thinking about keeping your route as simple as possible in the early stages.

On the most suitable paths possible - Bear in mind that you could have a couple of hundred runners pounding your route every week and that a nice stretch of grass in the summer can become a muddy bog in the winter, this issue is frequently raised by the people who manage the parks in which we operate. Having said that, not every location has the perfect park trails, and we need to work with what we have available at each unique location. Where possible stick to prepared tracks that won't erode away with the

first rain of the year, however we do have events on pretty much every type of surface you could imagine.

How many laps? - Most parkrun events have course records around the 15 minute mark and final finishers that cross the line after about 45 minutes. Multi-lap courses will therefore lead to faster runners lapping the back markers... even the mid-pack runners are vulnerable when the Kenyans turn up! Multi-lap courses do have their benefits however... they typically require less marshals, nervous and/or new runners have more company and spectators get more opportunities to shout their support. At parkrun we currently advocate a maximum of three laps, from experience at existing events these normally work well up to around 250-300 runners, and a minimum of just the one lap (obviously) which works brilliantly at the biggest and oldest event, Bushy parkrun.

Safety - At parkrun we take safety extremely seriously and, particularly due to the open and inclusive nature of our events, insist on every event team completing a risk assessment (see next paragraph). We do not under any circumstances allow events to follow or cross open public roads, cross country style obstacles are also not permitted and neither is running down steps. Please do get in touch if you have any concerns at all about the safety of your planned course.

Risk Assessment - Having identified a suitable route, and before approaching the park management, a risk assessment should be drawn up. If you haven't done one of these before, it can sound daunting; don't worry, those who have done one, will know it's pretty straightforward and we have a template we get all events to use. The risk assessment is just a list of hazards to the participants in your event (runners, volunteers, spectators and members of the public) along with a list of actions to be taken to remove the risk completely, to reduce its likelihood or to reduce its effect. Many of the items on this list are common to every event, and we will help you when it comes to this stage.

Seek permission

This is probably the most daunting hurdle that new events have to face and every event will need to gain permission from the landowner or the management team for the park in which they want to hold their event.

It costs us around \$10,000 to set up a new parkrun event and a further \$5,000 a year to keep it going. Our national sponsor will help cover half of this, therefore we MUST obtain additional local funding (e.g. local council grants, support from local businesses) of \$4,000 in year 1 and \$3,000 in each subsequent year. This is often a challenge however the good news is that we have never not launched an even due to lack of funding. ☺ We have a dedicated team member who can help assist you through this process, Caitlin - Caitlin@parkrun.com - so please get in touch with Caitlin when you are up to this step.

Once again, please don't hesitate to ask if you have any concerns regarding gaining permission for your event. We are here to help and now have some experience in overcoming the many challenges faced by a new event team.

Equipment

As part of the start-up package we will provide all of the basic equipment required to get your new parkrun event off the ground. This will include...

Software - Immediately following each of your events you will need to process the results and upload them to the internet. The UK parkrun team have written the parkrun field management software (FMS) themselves and we will provide the software on a USB stick to install.

Barcode scanner - As each runner crosses the finish line of your parkrun they will be handed a token (we provide these as well) which has on it a finish position and associated barcode. They will also have their own personal barcode which will identify them as a unique parkrunner. Your barcode scanner will allow you to know who finished where and import that information to the FMS.

Timing device - In order to merge the finish positions and times we use a specific timing device which, like the barcode scanner, will create a computer file that can be imported to the FMS once all your runners have finished.

Cones and signs - It is important to keep your parkrun event as simple as possible so that you can deliver the event to a consistently high standard on just a few volunteers. Depending on the course you may need some direction arrows or other basic equipment, we can normally help with the provision of these on a specific event by event basis.

Promoting your event

Once you've confirmed the start date for your first parkrun event with parkrun HQ you'll no doubt feel the need to advertise and promote it as much as possible. At parkrun we actively discourage our event teams from marketing their event, we believe that slow & sustained growth is the best model for long term success. As a new event director the last thing you need is 500 people to appear on the start line of your very first parkrun. Take a look back at the early results from some of our biggest events and you'll see that they all started out small. If you deliver a great first event to just 20 people, they'll be sure to tell their friends and before you know it you'll have created your very own local community of loyal parkrunners!

Social Media plays a very important role in parkrun and the parkrun branding is a key factor in making parkrun so successful. Using the parkrun logo or branding is prohibited unless it has been approved by the County Manager or the Banding Manager. Please note: No social Media pages are to be created until the parkrun risk assessment has been approved, all Facebook pages are created by the NZ Branding Manager only and must remain as admin indefinitely. All parkrun social media pages are owned by parkrun.

We do pride ourselves on excellent communication both between and within events however, we will be delighted to help you utilise the various tools available to you such as Facebook, Twitter and email. There are also parkrun branding guidelines and social media do's and don'ts that we do adhere to that will be sent to you once the parkrun is confirmed.

Pilot event & training

Prior to your first event we recommend all new event teams to organise a pilot 'invitation only' run to a small number of friends and club mates (no more than 30) who will give you honest opinions and provide valuable feedback prior to the big day. Before you hold that pilot event we will deliver a training session to the core individuals who will be involved over the first few months of the event's life. This training session can be delivered at a time to suit the event team, normally takes around 3-4 hours and should only involve four or five of the event team who can then provide the relevant information to other volunteers as the event develops.

One last thing...

We look forward to welcoming you into the parkrun family, please do get in touch if you have any questions, thoughts or concerns that we might be able to help with.