



AIB Guide to Planning a Celebration Event



Recipients of CN EcoConnexions *From the Ground Up* grants are required to host a celebration event

This is a quick-reference guide to planning your celebration event. These events are informative, enjoyable, and also provide important benefits to the community.

Events are important because they:

- encourage a sense of community pride and cohesiveness.
- are an opportunity to recognize project organizers, sponsors, and volunteers
- can be a way to recruit more sponsors and volunteers.
- may have educational value. For instance, they can be a way to showcase your organization and its project(s) to a wide audience.
- stimulate travel to a community and the surrounding region. This encourages the community to grow and prosper by attracting dollars in the form of tourism, and in some cases, new industry.

The CN Grant Brochure states:

“Celebration and Recognition Successful projects will celebrate the contributions of volunteers, partners, and donors with a community event. Events may kick-off the project, get the work done, and/or celebrate successful completion. CN EcoConnexions *From the Ground Up* and America in Bloom will participate in the community event.”

Your Award Letter states:

“You should also begin planning your community event to celebrate your project. This event will be attended by CN and America in Bloom representatives. A member of the CN Public & Government Affairs staff will contact you to discuss the event.”

Your Grant Agreement requires:

“Hold a celebratory event to recognize community partners, project accomplishments and CN’s financial support and AIB’s technical assistance. Coordinate planning with CN and AIB representatives.”

“Acknowledge “CN EcoConnexions *From the Ground Up*” as the source of funds in all outreach and press material. Acknowledge America in Bloom as a program partner in all outreach and press material.”

Planning

The key to successful event is to identify goals and objectives. Event organizers should specifically clarify the event’s measurable objective(s).

As you plan your event, a timeline is very helpful. A written plan keeps everyone on the same page. If you want everything to be on schedule and on budget, you need to plan carefully and also plan for contingencies. Be sure to include names and contact information for everyone who is playing a part in the event. Include organizers, vendors, etc. Planning includes creating a realistic budget.

Give the event a unique theme/name/concept. This will make promotion easier and prevent it from being a copy of other events. A clever theme makes publicity easier.

Develop a timeline.

What is a celebration event?

Your celebration of the CN grant should be a standalone event; i.e. not part of a city-wide event or festival. The event can honor the project organizers, volunteers, and of course, the funders. This event can take the form of a press conference, barbecue or other meal, or any type of activity that provides visibility for the project and its participants.

Who should come?

Invite everyone who has had a part in making the project happen. Be sure to include volunteers, neighbors, city council, mayor, and even your state and federal representatives (they like good news!). Be sure to let your America in Bloom project coordinator know the date at least six weeks in advance.

Be sure to invite the local media including newspaper, TV, radio, and even bloggers. AIB has sent you a custom media list with all the contact info you need, but feel free to contact any other media sources you know.

Where

Ideally the celebration should be held at the project site.

When to celebrate

A celebration event can be held at the start of a project, at a work event, or to celebrate completion. Be sure your event does not conflict with any other big events being held at the same time.

Timeline

Upon receipt of grant award:

- Start planning the celebration event. Is it a ground breaking, planting day, or ribbon cutting?
- Set the date and location. Be sure the location is large enough to handle all the people invited.
- Think about weather-related contingencies. Is there a place to move the event indoors? Will you need a tent?
- Determine a budget.
- Research need for event permit.
- Start working on the invitation list.
- Choose a spokesperson for your event.
- Send a press release to local media announcing the grant award.
- Post relevant information on social media/website(s).
- **IMPORTANT:** Let America in Bloom know of your plans to celebrate. Follow this link to provide details to America in Bloom. <http://sgiz.mobi/s3/12f8a1970ed8>

Six weeks prior:

- Inform your AIB contact of the event date, time, and location.
- Finalize the invitation list, design invitations if necessary.
- Make arrangements for food, tables, chairs, microphones, sound systems, porta-potties, etc. as required.
- Update info on social media/website(s).
- Order signage, banners, commemorative/promotional items such as t-shirts, etc. as needed.
- Arrange for any permits if needed.
- Confirm who will clean up after event. (Hint: try to make it Zero Waste.)
- Order directional signs if necessary.
- Confirm volunteers to help with event and assign jobs.
- Create map of celebration setup.
- Determine special requirements. For example, you might invite musicians.
- Design printed material for handouts (optional).

Three weeks prior:

- Send invitation to local media to attend your event. (Hint: they tend to show up if there's food.)
- Send invitations to volunteers, local officials, etc. Send email blast.
- Confirm signage is available and correct.
- If printed material will be available, coordinate with printer.

One week before:

- Double-check all arrangements.
- Contact your AIB representative to confirm details.

- Write agenda.
- Prepare and rehearse remarks.
- Install signage.

Day of event:

- Welcome guests and sponsors.
- Introduce media representatives to AIB and CN representatives and to local project coordinators.
- Send press release to local media. Send a copy to the AIB office at aib@AmericaInBloom.org. Post on relevant social media/website(s).
- Take lots of photos, post on social media and website(s). Send pictures to the AIB office (aib@americainbloom.org.)

Public Relations

“Advertising is what you pay for. PR is what you pray for.” — Anonymous

Public Relations for most events encompasses promotions and press relations. It is best if Public Relations is handled by one person or volunteer so that a consistent message is sent. Don’t be shy. Remember that every day, a newspaper editor is faced with tons of blank newsprint. Similarly, TV and radio producers face silent air time. Bloggers have empty web pages. They NEED and WELCOME your news.

Free Press Coverage

You can get free coverage for your event if you have a great “hook”. This means that covering your event will result in a story that is interesting, possibly entertaining, and definitely newsworthy.

Whether you’re dealing with a large metropolitan newspaper, a neighborhood or an ethnic paper with a much smaller subscriber base, it’s hard to go wrong with good art. Photographs of an interesting event of people engaged in interesting activities are more likely to attract attention than head shots of board members and speakers.

Press Releases, News Releases and Listings can be an important feature of your PR strategy. Typically, you should create a one or two page Press Release as well as a one-page Listing you can send to the appropriate Calendar Editors at local newspapers, radio and TV stations.

Remember that everyone has a deadline. Find out what they are and honor them.

The Press (Media) Release

The Press Release should include the following: MEDIA RELEASE typed at the top of the page so that the editor or writer will know what it is. Indicate if the information is for immediate release or for release at a later time. Date your releases and type the name of your organization followed by your address, phone / fax numbers, your e-mail address and the name of a contact person on the top left side of your release. The body of your release should begin with a catchy or provocative headline that describes the event in a way that will make a newspaper journalist want to read further.

The headline should be followed by text that tells the reader Where, When, Who, How and Why the event is happening. Everything should be double-spaced, typo-free, and as clear and as concise as you can make it. No one is ever turned down for keeping the message too simple. The same advice applies to Calendar Listings although in the case of Listings, brevity is appreciated

Please see the template example that follows.

(Your Logo)

MEDIA RELEASE

date

FOR IMMEDIATE (or specify release date) RELEASE

For more information, contact YOUR NAME

Your email address

Your phone number

Catchy title

(Your town):

Who, what, when, why, where, how.

Supporting details.

Quotes from event organizers, AIB and CN representatives.

Info about your organization and its mission.

Required text follows:

For more details on the grant program, please check www.AmericaInBloom.org/CN.

About CN

CN (TSX: CNR)(NYSE: CNI) is a true backbone of the economy, transporting approximately C\$250 billion worth of goods annually for a wide range of business sectors, ranging from resource products

to manufactured products to consumer goods, across a rail network spanning Canada and mid-America. CN – Canadian National Railway Company, along with its operating railway subsidiaries -- serves the cities and ports of Vancouver, Prince Rupert, B.C., Montreal, Halifax, New Orleans, and Mobile, Ala., and the metropolitan areas of Toronto, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Calgary, Chicago, Memphis, Detroit, Duluth, Minn./Superior, Wis., and Jackson, Miss., with connections to all points in North America.

www.cnfromthegroundup.ca.

About America in Bloom

America in Bloom envisions communities across the country as welcoming and vibrant places to live, work, and play - benefitting from colorful plants and trees; enjoying clean environments; celebrating heritage; and planting pride through volunteerism. America in Bloom promotes nationwide beautification through education and community involvement by encouraging the use of flowers, plants, trees, and other environmental and lifestyle enhancements. America in Bloom is an independent, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization and contributions to AIB are tax deductible. www.americaninbloom.org.

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Community Relations and Government

Mayors and city council members view events as important ways to connect with their constituents. Be sure to invite them. The same is true for your state and federal elected officials. Your project is great news and they want to be part of it.

Leaders of your organization also want a starring role. Be sure to reach out to other sponsors and stakeholders who also want to be included.

Be sure that your AIB and CN representatives have a prominent role in the event.

Sources and Suggested References

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