



Race Director How-To's and Collective Wisdom

We want to see hundreds of successful events in the Willamette Valley. Everybody wins when races are fun, safe, and worth every penny. Our **Gallagher Fitness Resources + ActiveSalem Race Directors Toolkit** is aimed at making your job a little easier. We've participated in races for decades. We talk with a lot of race directors. We talk to a lot of customers. They are not shy about sharing their feedback. Good, bad, or indifferent, runners and walkers like to talk about events. We have a lot to offer you. Count on us. We are committed to keeping the Willamette Valley On Its Feet! We are committed to helping you!

Goals, Commitment and the Reward

Before you start planning for this year's event, ask yourself, "Why would someone sign up for my race when there are so many other choices?" Keep that question in mind throughout your pre-race planning, race day accomplishments, and post-race wrap-up. The race biz has changed dramatically over the last decade. You have a lot of competition out there and your participants have a lot of other places they could go. Identify who your particular audience is and remain committed to them. Set achievable goals on how you will reach them and stay committed to those goals. Do your absolute best to satisfy each participant, each volunteer, every sponsor, each charity, and especially all the members of your race committee that you are counting on to help you. That's a lot of people to keep happy. Stay committed to keeping them happy. After your event, the reward will be everyone saying (and posting, and tweeting, and whatevering), "That was the best! Why would I ever choose any other event besides this one?"



Pre Race

Your Dedicated Team of Coordinators

Organize a team of coordinators and divide responsibilities. It is crucial! Make sure your coordinators are committed or you will end up doing everything yourself. You are in charge. Identify individual strengths and delegate responsibilities depending on those abilities. How big your team is will depend on the size of your event. Coordinator duties could easily include the following: *sponsorship, race applications, T-shirts, course set up and measuring, volunteers, food, finish line, awards, communication and marketing, music/entertainment, post-race cleanup.*

Your Budget

Fixed Costs

- Insurance
- Permits: varies per event - city, county, state, or park permits
- Barricades and cones/signs and markings
- Registration forms, printing (1- or 2-sided, folding, distribution)
- Advertising/Marketing
- Mailing - labels and postage
- Awards, prizes, finisher medals, plaques, merchandise
- Website construction and fees
- Tents and tables rental
- T-shirts, including artwork and design costs
 - Tech shirts, cotton, 50/50, long-sleeve, or short sleeve?
- Police, emergency services and/or ambulance
- Banners, posters, event signage



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Variable Costs

- Portable restrooms (1 per 75-100 participants)
- Volunteer T-shirts, or extra blank shirts and printing
- Post-Race refreshments
- Finish line costs/Computerized results
- Mailing entries and results
- Music/Entertainment
- Race Bib #'s, safety pins, cups
- Course measurement, setup and/or certification fees

Sponsorship and Your Budget

Races have become serious advertising tools for large corporations as well as small, locally owned businesses. Approach a potential sponsor understanding exactly what you have to offer and be able to explain what a sponsor's return on investment (ROI) could be. Always ask yourself what you can provide for the sponsor. Put yourself in their shoes. To many businesses, you are just one more person looking for advertising. The days are long gone for small businesses "just looking for a tax write-off." The more you can do for a sponsor, the more you will be able to receive in return. Without sponsorship, many races would not exist. You need to cover the rising costs of permits and fees as well as the expectations of runners wanting to be entertained. Very few races can break even on entry fees alone. Ultimately, a sponsor wants great exposure and association with a safe, organized, and successful event. Set up a way of recognizing sponsors depending on the level of their contribution.

Don't put off looking for sponsorship. Make it an early stage in your planning. Most businesses operate on an annual budget and most of the money is called for long before you ask. Always be aware that an in-kind sponsor can help you reduce your costs. They may not write you a check, but they can save you from spending money on something you need for a successful event. Remember the importance of a media sponsor. They can help to publicize your event. In addition, they can make your event more appealing to other sponsors. In this new world of social media, be aware that someone with a lot of followers can actually help you quite a bit!

Location

Your race needs to be where people want to go. It's all in the location.

- Plenty of convenient parking
- Easy to get to for everyone
- A remote, but a desirable destination can work – if they can get there!
- Always plenty of room for start, finish, registration, and refreshments
- Clean, appealing area – restrooms are a must!
- A place that feels safe!

Course

Design a course that runners will enjoy. Safety rules! If runners and walkers don't feel safe while they are on the course, they won't return. Cars, bikes, poorly marked turns, or too much congestion with other runners or people who are not in the race will discourage participants from doing your race again. Consider scenery, traffic, and turns. Volunteers need to get to their location easily. Travel to other events and observe their courses. Take notes on what you like and avoid repeating things you don't like.

Consider faster runners completing a 5k in 15-17 minutes versus slower walkers finishing in one hour or more in your course design. Will there be bottlenecks in your course where too many participants going different paces are likely to collide? Will volunteers be left out at the furthest part of the course for too long? If the course loops back on itself, be sure to have a plan and lots of volunteers for traffic control.



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Will your course involve street closures? Plan on a much longer lead time to coordinate with local police, fire and emergency services. Also, be aware that the costs increase dramatically when streets are closed or normal traffic patterns need to be altered.

Race Distance

These are the standard distances that most runners and walkers are accustomed to doing: 5k, 8k (5 miles), 10k, Half-Marathon, Marathon, and Ultra-Marathon (over 26.2 miles). Over the last decade there has been an increase of non-standard distances, trail runs, mud runs, foam, bubbles, and lots of color. In a sense, anything goes, but accuracy still rules. If you promote that your race is a certain distance, the participant will expect it to be that distance. Most participants have some kind of GPS device. Many use their cell phones or other device that may not accurately report the correct distance. Be prepared for post-race challenges to the distance by accurately measuring your course. It's worth the extra work!

Longer distance races require many more services and volunteers. Plan accordingly! Always make calculations of when the fastest, the slowest, and the most runners at one time will hit certain points of the course. Your water stations need to be manned appropriately.

Registration

Early registration deadlines, financial rewards for signing up early, and registration caps (limited to 500 runners) are always great ideas. The more participants you have earlier in the process, the easier your planning will go closer to "crunch time." Please avoid last minute discounting to fill your event. We've seen races try Groupon and other online "deals" to bolster their last minute numbers. This is a dangerous trend. Do you want your participants waiting until the last minute when you put the race "on sale?" It cheats everyone who signed up early and makes your work harder next year.

Entry Fees

Look at what other events are charging and giving in return. The price you charge should reflect the value received by your participants. The more value you give, the greater you can expect your future return to be. The price breaks for early registration should be substantial enough to highly encourage early registrants, but not so high as to discourage late registration.

Marketing

Decide what you can afford to spend and how best to promote given your budget. Be creative and know your target market. It is very helpful to have your application or other promotional material out as soon as possible. Take these materials to as many events and locations as possible. It is very helpful to have an experienced marketing person on your race committee that knows the ropes. As we mentioned before, do not underestimate the power of social marketing. Use our services with RunSignUp and get those "shares" to assist in marketing your race!

T-shirts

Most runners have more than enough t-shirts, so they probably do not need another mediocre T-shirt. Be creative and put a lot of effort into doing a great T-shirt. This can be a big part of bringing participants and sponsors back to your event. A great T-shirt can be a great advertisement for your event. You need to find a balance on design in which you recognize sponsors, but do it in a tasteful manner and not one that looks like another billboard.

Awards

Decide how much you can spend and try to be creative. You may be able to get a sponsor to donate some awards. Weigh out carefully how important awards are to your event and commit your budget accordingly. Finisher medals are essentially a requirement for half marathons and definitely for marathons. You will need to budget for them! We've seen a decrease recently in age group awards and an increase in participant mementos.



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Race Day

Pre Race

Meet with your race committee 2-3 hours prior to the race or the evening before. Have maps and lists of assignments for volunteers. Be very specific about where they should stand, when they need to be in place and exactly what their duties will be. They need to be paying attention to the runners and walkers, not their smartphones!

Set Up: Put up tents, tables, any banners, and refreshment areas. Prepare parking areas and bathrooms the day before, if possible. (Make sure to have plenty of toilet paper – then buy more and hide it.)

Mark the course: Mark all turns and set up mile markers. Make sure your markings have been approved by the entity granting your permit. This should be done before runners even begin to arrive. Never assume runners will know where to turn. If one person goes the wrong way, they will be followed by others.

Parking: Have a key group that has met prior to race day to make sure that parking goes smoothly, or you can have major problems. A parking crew with experience is priceless! Most participants will show up 30-45 minutes before the start of the race. Be prepared to avoid a traffic jam.

Registration and packet pick-up: Find key people that are organized and able to handle a crowd. Experienced people can be a big help. Registration has the potential to be a major problem if not well planned out. See above. Plan for the biggest crowds 30-45 minutes before race time.

Volunteer Coordinator

Great volunteers are essential to a great event. Make sure to take care of them. One person should be stationed to direct and answer any volunteer questions. Make sure that all volunteers know who this person is and where they will be. Volunteer shirts, bright hats, or some other identifying feature is very helpful. It makes them easy to find and gives them a sense of being on a very important team!

Food and Post-Race Refreshments

Set up food so that it is contained so that people don't hoard food, yet make sure that the area does not jam up. Keep the food fresh and present it well. Make sure to save some food for those at the back of the pack, or you will be neglecting some deserving people. When considering food selection and set up remember to consider ease of consumption and clean up, as well taste appeal.

Do your homework on any food handlers permits, alcohol permits, or any other regulations if you are using city parks. You may have requirements you weren't aware of that could cost you a fine after the event.

Bathrooms

Plan about 1 bathroom for every 100 participants. Make sure to have plenty of toilet paper. See note above. It bears repeating: Buy extra and hide it.

Photographer and Pictures

Someone should be present to take pictures. Give photographers ideas of where they might get the best pictures. With Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media, you will have plenty of pictures being snapped, but you may not have any access to them after the race. If you create a Facebook page for your race, encourage your participants to share their pics (yes, even the "selfies.") They are priceless when marketing your event for next year. Think about a "photo booth" with your logo, your sponsors logos and race signage as background.



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Water

Make sure to have plenty of water and cups on the course and at the finish. Set this up before the race. It can ruin a race and create a major health risk if there is not enough water available. Make sure water station volunteers know how to hand water to faster runners. Put trashcans down course from the water station to make clean up easier.

Split Timers

Have a person in charge of getting timers to mile stations once the race has started. Make sure timers are enthusiastic and loud when they yell out times. It is not a requirement, but it adds to a race's credibility to have a timer at the first mile mark.

Music

Test music and sound system prior to the race. A good sound system and music can really enhance an event. In addition, it makes it easier to provide announcements to your participants. Be aware of any noise permits. Play music that will appeal to the majority of your audience, but not so loud that people have to scream at one another.

Lead Vehicle or Lead Bike

Make sure the lead driver or lead bike is positive of the course. A wrong turn has major consequences.

Race Start

Make sure that you have communicated with coordinators and everything is set to go. It is always advisable to have someone drive (or bike) the course just beforehand to make sure that everything and everyone is ready. Use your sound system to give regular announcements leading up to start time: 20 minutes, 10 minutes, 5 minutes, 2 minutes until the start. Mention water and aid stations, weather and traffic precautions, finish procedures, etc. Confirm that timers and lead vehicle are ready, and then proceed with the start. If there is a walk event, decide whether to start simultaneously or a few minutes later.

Banners, Signs, and Clock

It is nice to have a large clock at the finish, as well as nice looking banners at the start and finish. It is helpful, too, to have signs labeling your mile splits. These things help to make the event look professional, as well as aid runners in finding the different areas of your course.

Traffic Control

Have a map of your traffic control assignments and make sure that all of your volunteers understand their responsibilities. Always err on the side of extra volunteers for traffic control. Try to anticipate any area where cars and runners could meet. On most city streets certified flaggers may be required. Safety vests must be worn at all times! Make sure everyone has a way out to their post and a way to get back.

Maps and Volunteer Lists

It is always helpful to have course maps, parking maps, finish line layouts and a list of volunteers and their positions. Posting the course online so people can look it up on their smartphones is easy with RunSignUp.com!

Finish Line

This is probably the easiest place to really ruin a race. It is critical to map out your finish line plan carefully and have experienced people working at the finish. You may want to hire a professional finish line company. If you do hire someone, make sure to find out whether he or she will staff the finish, or whether you will need to. Video of each finisher can be uploaded to a website or provide a backup if timing fails. Your finish line set up will depend on how many participants you have as well as the event distance.