



# HOW TO ORGANIZE A 5K RACE

TIPS & ADVICE FOR RACE DIRECTORS



There are two ways to run a race: one with your running shoes and the other with your race director cap and clipboard. If you're reading this article, you've probably already participated in some races and are thinking about putting on your own event someday. Treat this as your guide on how to organize a 5K, from the first thought all the way to your 10th annual event.

1. Start with the details, budget and goals
2. Receive your permits
3. Get the word out
4. Add sponsors
5. Nail the registration process
6. Initiate race day management
7. Zero in on what worked & what didn't
8. Engage for next year's race



## 1. Start with the details, budget and goals

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**Try to pick a date about six months from now to give yourself and your team enough time to get everything in order.** Make sure to check event directories like [ACTIVE.com](https://www.active.com) for other local events on the weekend you are planning to hold your event. The less competition for your first 5K, the better. You should also consider the season – unless you have an intense group of athletes who thrive on running in a snowstorm or downpour, pick a time of year with mild weather conditions.

**Secondly, you'll want to choose a location.** Let's say you're planning on hosting the race in your hometown – having people run through the warehouse district as opposed to the beachfront could really impact your numbers. A beautiful course is easy to promote and attractive to participants. Another option is to find a route that has already been used by a similar race so you won't have to reinvent the wheel by marking off distances. Also, make sure there are parking lots and public transportation options so participants can easily access your event.

As for your budget, there are many different reasons to put on a 5K and one of your goals could be to raise money for a charity. The bottom line is that you can't afford to lose money, so you need to **budget everything from the porta-potties and T-shirts to police and permits.** Once you outline all of your costs, you'll be able to back into a price for attending your 5K. If you really want to do your homework, take a look at other successful 5Ks to get an idea of what you should be budgeting for and the average price for an entry.

And that is where your goals come in! **It's important to be realistic.** It'll be very disappointing if you set a goal of 1,000 attendees and you get 100, so be careful with your goals and make sure that they tie into how much you've budgeted. Dave Camire, senior editor at [CoolRunning.com](https://www.coolrunning.com), puts it in perspective by saying, "All you really need is two people to compete. Two people and it's a race. You're up and running."

## 2. Receive your permits

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Getting permits is a time-consuming process and one of the reasons we recommend giving yourself six months to organize your 5K race. Once you have the details sorted out, **contact city officials to ask about what approvals you need.** Most likely, you'll need approval from the city for everything from road closures to noise permits. You'll need support and approvals from law enforcement as well. It's crucial to start applying for permits as early in the process as possible because a delay in approval could affect the intended date of your race.



### 3. Get the word out

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Once you have sorted out the details and have permission to put on the race, it is time to spread the word. For some, this next statement may sound scary so brace for impact: the internet will be your number one promotional tool. [Here is a list of outlets that you can use to promote your event:](#)

- [Create a race website](#) – having a race website makes it easy for people to find you online and provides one easily accessed place for information
- Set up [online race registration](#) – offering online registration is convenient for your participants and drastically reduces admin work for you
- Use social media – creating a Facebook page and event as well as tweeting about your event will exponentially increase reach and exposure
- [Post the event](#) on ACTIVE.com – getting a free listing on ACTIVE.com exposes your event to the millions of monthly visitors who search the site for races and events
- [Send out emails](#) – sending out custom emails to your network of friends and co-workers will help spread the word
- Go grassroots – telling people about your race or simply distributing flyers at local gyms and events are off-line marketing tools that always give registration numbers a little boost
- Advertise in local newspapers and running magazines – buying advertisements or negotiating trade deals (e.g. a free race entry for a free ad) in these two types of periodicals will help increase your reach in your area and in your market

### 4. Add sponsors

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[There are two ways to approach potential sponsors – you can ask for money or for giveaways.](#) If you are learning how to organize your first 5K, it might be unrealistic to go after huge sponsors and ask for big wads of cash. Start by asking sponsors to chip in for race supplies. For example, a local business could fund the race t-shirts and get logo placement on the shirts. Or, a grocery store could donate finish line refreshments like sports drinks and power bars and get their banners hung along the fencing. If you do ask for cash, make sure it's small to begin with unless you are confident you have a generous benefactor. Here are some tips for finding sponsors:

- If you see teams signing up, ask if they have a company that would like to sponsor the event
- Post a sponsorship page on your website with details for companies
- Attend networking events to make connections
- Send out emails to your contact list
- Visit local businesses



## 5. Nail the registration process

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The registration process can make or break a 5K. Think about all of the emails and messages you get for endurance events already – if something catches your eye but is too hard to register for, you'll put it on the back burner and eventually forget about it. **From the first email you send out about your 5K to race day, registration should be easy for your participants.** Here are two types of registration that you will have to tackle before promoting your event:

**ONLINE RACE REGISTRATION** - In today's world, you definitely need to offer a user-friendly way to sign up online. Whatever software provider you choose, make sure they can deliver on three things. First, your users should be able to access the registration directly from your event's website with the click of a button. Secondly, you should be able to customize the form to collect exactly the information you need. Finally, the information and payments should be automatically processed and guaranteed to make it safely to you and your bank account.

**RACE DAY REGISTRATION** - No matter how much marketing and enticing you do, some people will still show up the morning of your race looking to register. You need a good system in place for this, be it a simple one-pager or a laptop connected to online registration. The more self-service you can make this, the better; you don't want to waste manpower helping people register when you should be worried about start line logistics.



## 6. Initiate race day management

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Dave McGillivray is the race director for the Boston Marathon. [When asked about race day](#) he says, “Be the first one to show up. I don’t want people to park or set up things where they’re not supposed to.”

Before you leave the house bright and early the day of the race, make sure you have everything you need. Here is a good [race day checklist](#) for your 5K. With your checklist in hand, you need to think about race day in three simple sections:

**PRE-RACE** - This is the part where you welcome everyone, get the latecomers registered, sort out any issues with bibs or timing chips, set up signage, and ensure the course is safely coned off (or closed).

**MAIN EVENT** - For the race itself, make sure that water stations are ready, volunteers are in the right place, and your course is plotted and marked well. Preparation is key because as McGillivray says, “Once the gun fires, it has a life of its own.”

**POST-EVENT** - Make the finish line a party. You should have music and refreshments for your participants, volunteers, and fans. People want to enjoy the event and celebrate their accomplishment – if you entertain them, they will be more likely to return next year! Also, make sure you staff enough volunteers to help you break down and clean up. Here’s what McGillivray recommends: “If you haven’t planned for breakdown, it can be a nightmare,” said McGillivray. “Everybody wants to leave, but you’ve got a lot of work to do. You may want to consider bringing in a separate team. Instead of having everyone come in at 4am, bring in a fresh team to show up at the finish line.”

## 7. Zero in on what worked & what didn’t

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After the race, you’ll probably be exhausted. Still, though, your duties as a 5K race director are not over. [If you have any plans to pursue the “second annual” version of your event, you need to know what worked well and what didn’t for your race.](#) Make notes the day after the event on what was successful and what needed improvement while it’s fresh in your mind. Email surveys or feedback forms to your participants and volunteers as soon as possible to collect their input. (Some online registration systems have this functionality built in. Otherwise, you can find free survey tools online.) If your registration system is able, run registration reports: what age group/gender was most represented at your event? What was the distribution of early bird, regular or late comer entries? With all this information, you’ll be able to better plan and promote next year’s event.



## 8. Engage for next year's race

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Bart Yasso, known as the Chief Running Officer for Runner's World, discussed engagement in an ACTIVE webinar by saying, "Reward participants when they come back to your event with incentives, and keep them coming back again and again."

The first part of engaging with your newly-built running community is to say thank you. Send thank you emails and after that, make sure to post results and photos as quickly as you promised. This will create some buzz around your race, encouraging people to interact with your event and remember how much fun it was. Then, make sure to keep your Facebook page and website active. You're shooting for the second annual at this point – so keep in touch with your attendees!

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### GET STARTED

organizing your race

[ACTIVEendurance.com/moreinfohere](http://ACTIVEendurance.com/moreinfohere)