

Planning a Road Race By Jim Stearns

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I have been actively involved in road racing for over 22 years. I have been involved in every aspect of racing from competing to directing, planning, promoting, set up, and now timing. The following "Plan" is from my experiences. Not to say there is not a better way to do some of these things. However, this plan has served me well over the years and is a great place to start.

Planning a road race is a great idea and potentially a great fundraiser for your charity or cause. However it is not without some planning and effort on your part to make a successful event. The following plan will give you some insight to the costs and what is involved and what you should be prepared to do in planning a road race.

You will need to assemble a good core group of 4-6 people that share your same vision. They do not have to have or necessarily need any race experience.

Before we go any further, look at the below cost breakdown of putting on a typical 5K. Most people don't realize how expensive it really is to put on a race. I always like people to see this break down before they go any further.

A typical 5k run and walk will cost you about **\$3500.00**

T-shirts the more you need the higher the cost. Usually around 250 x \$8.00. Will be more as participation increases.	\$2000.00
Trophies and awards.	\$500.00
Copies & office supplies	\$150.00
Refreshments	\$200.00
Timing Service	\$600.00
Total	\$3450.00

In addition to the above costs, if you plan to do a mail out to advertise your event, you need to figure that cost as well. Most local running clubs will rent you their database or mailing labels. I only promote my events through my website and electronic mail, however a mail out is still a good idea.

If you can get a better deal on any of the above you'll save money. Some times the t-shirt people will make you a better deal. Many times we get Pepsi or Coke to donate water and/or sport drink. Many times we can get one of the grocery stores to donate fruit and or cookies or some type of snacks. Sometimes you can even get all the above covered by a gracious sponsor! With some hard work and dedicated helpers, you can even time and compute your own results.

Potential Fundraising

In the Northeast Arkansas area, I would estimate on about 175 runners & walkers. I always hope for more and if you get more, great. At \$15.00 per runner you will generate \$2625.00 from the runners. At 175 runners you're still some \$800 short on breaking even.

Now the way to raise money for your group or organization is to have really good sponsorships. For events that I promote and direct my goal is to raise \$3000 in sponsorship money before we ever get any entrants. The sponsors usually get their name or logo on the back of the t-shirts and on the promotional items as well as some recognition during the event. The more you can give them, the easier it is to sell sponsorships.

Remember, the more sponsors you can get to commit and donate the greater your fundraiser will be.

I usually charge sponsors between \$250.00 and \$500.00 for sponsorship. Of course if someone wants to donate less, I always take their donation.

If you have a sponsor that want to be the exclusive sponsor; I charge \$3500.00. If the sponsor I usually give them naming rights for the event. For Example, "The Pepsi 5K Run"

You should have something in the way of a receipt for them with your organization's logo at the top for their records. It is just easier for their paperwork. Most all sponsors will want a receipt or invoice.

Don't consider them a sponsor until you have your money in hand!

One of the most important things to keep in mind about having a race as a fundraiser is: If your plan is to grow your event and have it annually, your event has to never lose site of the participants! You must provide the absolute best of your efforts towards having a quality event! Every aspect of your event needs to focus on the participants. If it is only about raising money, it will show!

With that stated and you have an idea about the cost and potential to raise money, the rest is about what it takes to put on a successful race.

Volunteers

If the participants feel taken care of you have done a great job. One of the most important aspects of any race is ample volunteers. If you have enough volunteers, you will not have to work as hard and it just makes for a better race. There are many needs in planning a race and on race day and no one person can or should do it alone.

When you assemble those 4-6 people that share your vision and enthusiasm, these are some coordinators you need. People may have more than one coordinator responsibility. Keep in mind these people should have the characteristics to work with minimal supervision. Not to say you won't have to coach them some, but they should be able to use this guide to help them succeed.

Coordinator's Job Descriptions

The Race Director – This is YOU!!!

- The RD is responsible for everything you have read up to this point. The RD has the final say on the event and all items related to the event. The RD is the person responsible on race day for making sure the event goes off as planned.

The Volunteer Coordinator

- The VC is vital to the success of your event. The VC will meet with all the other coordinators to see how many people they will need to complete their tasks. The VC will recruit people to work and assist every aspect of your race. Fraternities or sororities, civic organizations, church groups, boy scouts or girl scouts or your beneficiary, are some great places to start asking.

The Sponsorship Coordinator

- The SC is the key to making money for your cause. This person is the salesperson that secures as much sponsorship money as possible. I always set a goal of at least \$3000 in sponsorship money. This person makes sure receipts and invoices are available and that they put together a good package to sell.
- In all actuality, the sponsors usually don't really get much for their money. Mostly they are just trying to help out your cause.

T-Shirt coordinator

- The TSC will decide on the shirt color and style and is responsible for the t-shirt design.
- The TSC will place the shirt order and pick up the shirts.
- The TSC will also coordinate the pre-registered participant's bag stuffing event.

Door Prizes & Awards Coordinator

- The DPAC is responsible for ordering, picking up, and setting up the awards.
- The DPAC also solicits and secures donated door prizes to give away during the awards ceremony.

Refreshments Coordinator

- The RC is responsible for making sure there are enough water and cups at the water stations on the race course. Always include trash bags.
- The RC is also responsible to get food and drinks for the finish area. Most of this can be done through donations. Always plan on two to three drinks per participant and volunteers as well as snacks for everyone.
- Many times you can get your local soda company to donate drinks, and usually you can get your local grocery store to donate snacks. But you have to get out there and ask.

Registration Coordinator

- This person will set up online registration. I use racesonline.com out of Memphis and they are great (EASY) to work with. This usually will not cost you anything!
- The Registration Coordinator agrees to receive the mail in entry forms.
- The RC is responsible to complete all the data entry into a database.
- They will also supervise the registration process on race day. They will supervise the packet pickup for the pre-registered participants and they will supervise the day of race registration.
- They will also make sure there are enough dependable volunteers to help them on race day.
- They will also work closely with the scoring persons to make sure all day of registration participants get entered into which ever system is needed for results.

Race Course Coordinator

- The race course coordinator is responsible for one of the most important aspects of a successful road race, an accurate course. The RCC will measure and mark the course in advance of race day. Or will assist a course certifier in marking your course.
- The RCC will mark the mile splits and determine where the water stations will be.
- The RCC will tally how many volunteers are needed to ensure the safety of the participants.
- The RCC will identify any areas that may need police assistance and arrange for it.
- The RCC will coordinate with the volunteer coordinator on how many people are needed on race day.
- On race day, the RCC will be the person to set out and pick up the caution and mile marker signs.
- The RCC will be the one to direct the course volunteers to their posts and instruct them on their duties.

Finish Line Coordinator

- The FLC is responsible for setting up the finish area.
- The FLC is responsible for securing all the volunteers that will be assisting with the timing and scoring of the race.
- They will be responsible for having all the supplies to score the race. (Index cards, tic sheets, awards sheets, clip boards, pens and an area used for the scoring.)

Planning Your Race

Have your committee meet at least 8 to 12 weeks before the event to make plans.

The first order of business is to determine who is going to be the Race Director!

Discuss and assign the following:

- Decide on a date, race name, start time and distance of the event.
- Budget
- Sponsorships
- Participant's cost for a 5k usually \$15.00 if they pre-register and \$20.00 if they register late or on the day of the event.
- Entry forms & all the info you want to include and plans for mailing out.
- Where you plan to start & finish and the race course. (GET PERMISSION!)
- Refreshments (donated or paid for)
- Volunteers (Registration, course setup and course directions, results, finish line)
- T-shirts - Begin working on a t-shirt design 6-8 weeks from your event date with t-shirt company. Remember to include all your sponsor logos or information on the back of the shirts. You will need to give the shirt company a shirt count usually one to two weeks before your event.
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- Race Goody Bags
- Trophies & Door Prizes - Contact an awards or trophy company at least 4 to 5 weeks before the race. Price and decide on your awards and place your order.

Advertise and Promote

Arrange to be on the community TV and Radio programs to advertise.

Make sure people know where to go to on the web for more information.

Many participants will download entry forms from the web. It is still a good idea to do a mail out 5 to 6 weeks before date of event.

List your event on all the race calendar web sites you can think of.

- Racesonline.com
- Road Runners Club of America rrca.org
- Cool Running Race Promotion coolrunning.com
- Running Journal running.net
- arkansasrunner.com
- runnertriathletenews.com
- active.com
- runningnetwork.com
- runnersworld.com
- Jonesboro Sun

Put out posters and/or flyers to advertise and promote your event in the community.

- **in Jonesboro make sure to include the following**
- ASU Physical Education & Sports Science Complex
- ASU Physical Therapy Department
- ASU Student fitness Center
- Curves
- Earl Bell Community Center
- Gearhead Outfitters
- Joey Perry 24 hour fitness
- NEA Clinic Wellness Center
- Personal Training Plus
- St Bernards Fitness Center
- Sue's High Energy
- The Trim Gym
- Weight Watchers
- YMCA

I recommend you have your committee to meet on a regular basis at least weekly or through email weekly. Everyone should plan on meeting the Wednesday or Thursday before a Saturday race and have dinner, fold the shirts and pack the race goody bags for all the pre-registered participants. I put labels on the race bags and separate them into walkers and runners then alphabetize and place them in boxes to help registration and packet pickup on race day.

The Start & Finish

You will need to have a good place to start and finish from. The bulleted items are recommended and very important.

- Make sure you have permission from who ever owns the property or manages the property that you plan to use. Make sure you have contacted them well in advance with your intentions and needs. Make them a deal as a sponsor if they really help you out.
- You will need electricity for registration and clock management.
- You will need ample bathroom facilities. (It is VERY important to have bathroom access).
- It is good if you have an area out of the weather if you end up getting bad weather on race day.
- It is good if you have some place the finish line timers can go to be away from the crowds to compute the race results.
- You must have ample trash bags and trash cans for the participants to dispose of their trash.

The following are just suggestion from my experience that simply make managing your race easier.

- There should be a separate area for the participants to pick up their stuff if they have pre-registered. This area should be covered from the weather and needs a minimum of two tables and chairs for your volunteers.
- There should be a separate area if the participant is registering the morning of the race. This area should be covered from the weather and needs a minimum of two tables and chairs for your volunteers as well. They will need some sort of cash box pens blank applications safety pins etc.
- There also needs to be an area where you'll have the awards presentation. I always like to set up the trophies early that morning to make sure they are all there and ready to be handed out. Trophies are routinely set up by division and age group (overall top 5 male/female runners and walkers, then male/female age groups).
- There needs to be a separate area for the refreshments. It is a good idea to have some tents or other covered areas for refreshments as well.

The reason you want to have all the above separate areas is to reduce the congestion of all the participants and make it easier on your volunteers.

The Race Course

In my opinion, one of the most important aspects of any quality road race is an accurate course. All runners and walkers regardless of ability deserve an accurate course. A lot can go wrong with just about everything, and if the course was accurate most all the participants will be happy. And come back next year!

The course doesn't necessarily have to be flat or easy to follow. As a race director, good to me is challenging yet safe and easy to manage.

Once you have determined where you will start from, you can use www.mapmyrun.com or go to www.usatf.org to estimate the course. Then walk the course with a measuring wheel. At that time mark your mile marks and start & finish line. You can also hire a person to certify your course to USATF standards. This is a very good investment as it will absolutely make sure your course is the advertised distance. Stearns Race Timing will measure your course for you to USATF standards for \$20.00 per K

What ever distance you advertise, your course should be perfect. I always walk the course with a measuring wheel, then certify it with a Jones meter. (A 5K is 3.1 miles from start to finish.)

As the Race Director and for your Race Course coordinator, the course must be easy to manage. There needs to be volunteers at every turn on the course. There needs to be a person directing the participants. The last thing you ever want is for a participant to get lost and off your course. Any time you cross a road that may have potential traffic; you need to have enough volunteers or the police to make it a safe crossing.

It must be safe from traffic or at least for you to have great traffic control. It is a good idea if you can have the participants going against the traffic. Of course if you can close off the entire course that would be the best. (Not usually possible!!)

I personally like to see a water station with volunteers at every mile on the course. This is a great place to put volunteers with kids to hand out the water.

It also brings quality to your event if you have timers at the mile marks calling out the split times.

The Results

The absolute most important aspect of any race is for you as the race director to provide accurate and efficient results.

I recommend you contract with someone that has timing experience and use their services. Of course this is an added expense. But if they have scoring experience and provide very accurate and efficient results it is worth the cost. Stearns Race Timing provides this for a very affordable fee.

If you plan on scoring the race yourself I recommend you secure as many door prizes as possible to give away while you compute the race results. This will usually buy you some time before the participants start to get edgy.

If you are planning on scoring the race yourself I recommend you use the index card and tic sheet system for results. It is simple and works very well for events that have less than 200 participants. You'll need to have at least 8 people working the finish to help with results and scoring.

The Card system works as follows, you pre number index cards 1 through 200 or as many registered participants you have.

You assign 2 volunteers working together to hand each finisher a numbered card in order as they cross the finish line. Instruct the participants to write their name age and category (walker or runner) on the card and turn it in to the designated person.

You assign four people to record the finish times. One set of two is your primary timers and the other set is your back up timers. They write down the place of each finisher as they cross your finish line next to the finish time on pre printed Time Sheets (called tic sheets). One person calls out the time the other records the place.

You assign two volunteers to man the area where they turn in their cards and have them order the cards by sex and age group.

You assign the last two volunteers to match the tic sheet times up with the correct numbered cards and transfer to the awards sheet.

Trust me, Hire a timing company!

Job Descriptions Volunteers

There are many people that do not want to be coordinators, but they will volunteer to help your event. I will try to describe their jobs in detail as well.

Course Marshal

- These are the volunteers you will assign to work on the actual race course. They have three main responsibilities.
- One - they are on the course at major turns and intersections to direct the participants on the correct course. There should be at least one course marshal at EVERY turn and intersection.
- Two – they are on the course to ensure the safety of all the participants. They should direct the participants to obey traffic rules.
- Three – they should also be encouraging to the participants. Remember these participants are paying to participate in your event. A little cheering goes a long way.

Split Timers

- These are the volunteers you will assign to work on the actual race course as well. Most runners expect to have split timers at key locations on the race course, usually at the mile markers. Make sure they know exactly where their assigned mile mark is.
- Their job is to call out split times for runners at the various mile locations along the course.
- These volunteers will have stop watches and will start their watches with the start of the race and then go to their assigned mile.
- Or you can have them go to their assigned mile and assign someone to call them on walkie talkies or cell phone and have them start their stop watches with the beginning of the race over the phone.
- They should be advised to announce times loudly and clearly. They should call out a time every 5 seconds. The proper way to announce times is to say the minute at least every 5 seconds. For example:"SEVEN MINUTES!, 7:02, :03, :04, SEVEN-OH FIVE, :07, :08, :09, SEVEN-TEN.....7:12,

Water Station

- This will be fun! I promise! If you have kids volunteering at the race this is great place to put them. The Water station volunteers should be on the course preparing their stations 30 minutes before the race starts.
- Water station workers are responsible to give water to the race participants and to pick up all trash related to the race.
- First runners will be at the water station approximately as follows
 - Mile 1 – 6 minutes after race starts
 - Mile 2 – 12 minutes
 - Mile 3 – 18 minutes
 - And so on.
- Equipment for Water Station
 - One or two tables
 - Two to four water kegs with water
 - 300 – 500 paper cups
 - Trash bags
 - 2 Caution signs
- Have the tables & water ready for the runners & walkers.
- As soon as you get to your station, begin filling up the paper cups. (NO ICE) Have the cups HALF filled with water on the table before the race starts. Put as many water cups on the table as possible.
- As the participants begin to come by your station, have one or two people continue to fill cups and set them on the table.
- Do not let the runners grab the cups off the table, they will knock everything over.
- Have enough people to hand off the water to the participants.
- The best way is to hold the cup by the top and let the participants take them out of your hand.
- Make sure that tables and volunteers do not obstruct the path of the runner. It is easy for volunteers to get caught up in the excitement and step right in front of an unsuspecting runner.
- Pick up all race related trash during the race and before you close your station.

Set up help

- Approximately 2 hours before your race starts, there needs to be four or five people at the start/registration area to help the coordinators set up their areas. They generally help set up tables & chairs, tents, equipment etc,
- These volunteers should be willing and ready to work. There are always a lot of things that just need two or more people.

Race Day The Actual Run & Walk

The Race Director and various coordinators should be at the race site at a minimum of 2 hours before the actual race start.

The race director should be ready to coordinate all the race day set up and assignments. Remember the coordinators will be responsible for their individual jobs. There is a great deal of trust involved here.

Have a volunteer check in area. Make sure you get their names to thank them later.

The following is a list of task that need completed in no particular order, it all needs be taken care of.

- Make sure you have electricity and bathroom access.
- Set up the course. Mile markers, caution signs as well as water stations.
- Set up the finish line area.
- Set up the packet pick up area for the pre-registered participants.
- Set up the day of registration area.
- Set up the refreshment area.
- Set up the awards.

Have someone announcing the time to start about every 10 minutes. About 10 minutes before start time, have the participants begin to line up behind the start line. Announce for runners to line up in front and walkers to line up in the back.

Announcements

5 minutes before start time, the race director should go over any pertinent announcements..

Thanks to all of you for coming out to support the My 5K Run & Walk.

Thanks to all our sponsors for this years event. (Announce all of them)

Thanks to all the volunteers that came out to help. As you pass them on the course give them a thumbs up and let them know you appreciate them.

The course is NOT closed to traffic be careful out there. Watch out for friendly Vehicles. We do have volunteers helping with directions; do not turn onto any street that a volunteer is not directing at.

The start will go and DESCRIBE YOUR COURSE

The Finish will be HERE under the clock.

At the finish, we are using the card system, make sure you fill out your card correctly and turn it in back in to the packet pickup area.

Awards will be immediately after the last person crosses the finish.

Be careful out there and have a great race!

START THE RACE ON TIME!!! (Very Important)

Work the finish line as the participants begin to finish!

After the last person crosses the finish line, begin to give away the door prizes.

Have the Awards Ceremony as soon as the results are ready!

Clean up and Pick up! Your race site should look as you were never there when you leave!