

Mersey Basin Week



Date:

1992 - 2009

Background:

The Mersey Basin Campaign (MBC) wanted to hold an event to encourage and increase volunteering opportunities in and around the waterways of the Mersey and Ribble catchments. It was decided that a coordinated programme of events would be organised to promote environmental volunteering within the region. Initially held as a long weekend, the event grew from strength to strength and became a long week (9 days) in early October – known as Mersey Basin Week.

Mersey Basin Week became one of the largest events of its kind in the Northwest and was a fundamental part of MBC's annual programme. It was central to delivery of the Campaign's objective of increasing awareness and participation as it helped stimulate involvement of communities and businesses in the work of the Campaign.

Sponsorship from MWH (and later Viridor) allowed MBC to provide small grants of up to £100 to help support projects held as part of Mersey Basin Week. This greatly enhanced the number of projects organised as it allowed groups to deliver projects that would otherwise be held back due to lack of funds.

The project:

Mersey Basin Week was organised as a long week in early October, with events happening all over the Campaign's four sub-regions. An event registration form and grant application form was produced each year and sent out to all Action Partnership coordinators, voluntary groups and partners (forms could also be downloaded from the MBC website). Forms were sent back and grant applications were assessed according to each project's merit and use of funds.

A calendar of events was produced and distributed widely to help promote the projects taking place as well as to rally volunteers and encourage them to take part.

Useful resources for projects were included on a dedicated page of the Campaign website. Resources for clean-up events, a photograph consent form and advice on securing publicity for

events were all made available for download as well as a link to a website providing health and safety guidance.



A wide variety of events featured in the programme, which included clean-up events, environmental improvement projects and fun activities such as canal walks and canoeing taster days, all focussed around the region's waterways. Some projects were organised by MBC staff but the majority were organised by partners and community groups and badged as Mersey Basin Week projects.

Alongside activities delivered by local authorities and voluntary groups, 'Partners' Days' were a regular feature across the sub-regions, allowing MBC and its key partners to get out of the office and join forces in practical environmental activities. Events held during Mersey Basin Week were heavily publicised and, from 2006 onwards, stories about projects were included on the MBC blog.

Post-event, MBC requested information on activities and volunteer numbers to be included in their annual report. Project organisers were also asked to fill out and return a grant claim form and event organiser questionnaire, along with copies of any invoices or receipts for materials bought for the event. Cheques for grants were then distributed to project organisers.

MBC produced an annual report about Mersey Basin Week detailing the number of projects held, the number of volunteers involved, the value of their time and the amount and value of publicity secured. It also featured details of particularly exciting projects and Partners' Days that were held in each sub-region.

How we did it:

- Date set and sponsorship secured.
- Event registration form and grant application sent out to Action Partnership co-ordinators, voluntary groups and partners.
- Useful resources for holding events were uploaded onto a dedicated page of the MBC website.
- Grant applications assessed and project organisers informed if their claim had been successful.
- Calendar of events produced and distributed.
- Mersey Basin Week held.
- Projects publicised and promoted through the press and Campaign blog.
- Event organiser questionnaires and grant claim forms sent out.
- After receiving grant claim forms and any receipts and invoices, grant cheques were sent to event organisers.
- Annual report produced by MBC and distributed to sponsors.

Publicity:

Mersey Basin Week was promoted on the MBC website and in the Campaign's magazine SourceNW. From 2006, stories about projects and photographs from events were also uploaded onto the Campaign blog. There was usually a prize for the Action Partnership coordinator who contributed the best blog content. Projects were publicised in both local and regional press and were featured on the radio and television. MBC encouraged event organisers to write press releases and get their projects featured in the local media.

Project value and funding sources:

Funding for Mersey Basin Week totalled £14,000.
£10,000 was provided by MWH
£2,000 from the Environment Agency
£2,000 from MBC

For Mersey Basin Week 2009, funding from MWH was unavailable and £2,000 was provided from Viridor. The majority of funding was used for providing small grants for projects but the money was also used to cover admin, photography and publicity costs.

Who was involved:

Countless voluntary groups – put on events and helped promote and publicise Mersey Basin Week.

Community Support Co-ordinator – sent out event registration forms and grant applications, allocated small grants to projects, led and attended events, ensured grant money was paid and produced the annual Mersey Basin Week report.

Action Partnership Co-ordinators – helped encourage groups to put on events in their area and led a lot of events themselves.

Communications Manager – wrote press releases for events and wrote stories about projects on the MBC website.

New Media Manager – managed the Mersey Basin Week blog, writing and adding stories about events.

Sponsors – provided funding.

Partners – helped put on and support events

Lessons learned:

Grants good! – funding is often the biggest barrier to project delivery, particularly for voluntary groups. By providing small grants you greatly increase the feasibility and success of projects and increase the likelihood of events being held in future.

You don't have to run all the events – co-ordinating and supporting events can have just as much value as organising them yourself. By helping to fund and promote projects you are giving people the opportunity to take the lead and gain confidence in organising events themselves. Helps build your organisation's credibility and greatly increases the number of projects that can be held.

Keep the same date each year – by holding an event at the same time each year, people know that your event is coming and will start thinking about project ideas well in advance – helps to establish your event as part of the regional calendar.

Give people help – if you have good resources that would be useful to people, share them. The more help and advice you can give to people, the more likely they are to hold an event, and the more likely it is to be a success.

Partners' Days – are a valuable method for fostering partnerships and helping with team building between your organisation and its partners.

Hidden cost of staff time – staff input into organising, promoting and publicising events such as Mersey Basin Week is huge. This must be considered when trying to organise a similar programme of events.