



Organizing an Atheopagan Gathering

A planning guide by Mark Green

Introduction

While Atheopagans enjoy a variety of online communities, there is nothing like an in-person gathering to build lasting relationships, moving memories, and forward momentum in our movement. This planning guide is intended as a subject-by-subject walkthrough of the various phases of event planning so you can have a successful gathering of your own.

1) Concept and Goal Setting

To begin with, your event needs a *concept*. What is its intention? How many people do you hope to have attend? What are the outcomes you hope to achieve by the end of the event?

Most Atheopagan gatherings will have goals like *ritual experiences* and *community building*. But there can be others: to recruit the core of a regular ritual working group, for example, or even simply to make some money over and above expenses to offset the cost in time and effort for you, as the organizer.

So ask yourself: what am I trying to achieve here? How many people would make a good size for my event?

2) Planning and Timeline

I recommend that you start planning an event a full year in advance of its date. This allows for six months of logistics and planning, followed by six months of marketing, ticket sales, registration and development of programming.

The best way to plan an event is to work backwards from the production date, counting the number of days you need to perform various tasks. This is best handled using a spreadsheet (*See Atheopagan Event Planning Timeline for an example you can use*).

3) Budgeting

In order for the event to succeed, it must at least pay for itself (unless you have outside underwriting).

An example budget spreadsheet is provided in the *Atheopagan Event Planning Sample Budget*. Enter your projected costs in the spreadsheet and your proposed ticket pricing to determine how many attendees will be required to cover costs. You may need to adjust ticket prices and/or the number of expected attendees until revenue meets your goal, but be conservative in estimating ticket sales so your event can succeed even if fewer tickets are purchased than you expected.

Many Pagan events include a *scholarship fund* to help less affluent attendees to be able to come to them. Surplus funds can be used for this purpose, so think about how much money you really need to clear on the event in order to be able to ensure that all the people you would like to attend are able to come.

The sample budget provided shows a *sponsorship drive* as a part of its revenue. In a sponsorship drive, you approach supporters who have the means to give larger amounts to support your event, and ask them to contribute in exchange for recognition in the program and in person onsite. The suggested sponsorship levels given are \$500 (which includes 4 tickets) and \$250 (which includes 2 tickets), but you can adjust these as you see fit and according to your circumstances. Just remember that sponsorship should always bring in more than the value of the tickets that come with it.

Finally, some events include *advertising* in the paper program distributed at the registration table onsite. The program contains essential information about the event, such as the schedule of workshops and presentations, mealtimes, major underwriters such as sponsors, and the event's *conduct standards* (See "Policies", below). Advertising by local occult shops or bookstores can be a great way to pull in some more revenue for your event.

4) Choosing a venue

Good locations for Atheopagan gatherings have particular characteristics, and the three most important are *nature*, *travel distance* and a *fire circle*.

Ours is an Earth religion. When we gather to celebrate and build community, the most amenable place is not in an urban setting, but in a forest, or a desert, or mountains, or at the beach on a river, lake or ocean. Consider the beauty of a prospective site when choosing where to hold your event.

Another consideration is sound. Atheopagan rituals often involve drumming and singing at night. Be sure to confirm that this will be okay with the owners of your prospective venue.

That said, it is also unreasonable to expect prospective attendees to travel a very long distance to reach your event, and the carbon emissions impact of such long travel is a downside. Unless your attendees are already coming from far flung distances and are converging from many locations to your event, try to make your event easily accessible to them.

A circle within which one can light a fire and conduct a ritual is another necessity. People have been gathering around fires for hundreds of thousands of years; it is our natural ritual setting. Unless your venue has some other incredible ritual setting (like a system of caves, for example), having a place to light a fire and gather around it is necessary.

These two factors considered, logistics are critically important. A venue that is easy to reach, accessible for those with physical impairments, and which includes needed facilities is important. Kitchen facilities (or a place where a camp kitchen can be set up) and bathrooms are required, of course, and other amenities such as showers, a pool or a hot tub can all add to the enjoyment of your event.

Accessibility for the differently abled is an important consideration. If the venue is not easy to navigate for those in wheelchairs or using assistance to move around, you will have to have a plan for how to help such folk to get around to where they need to go.

5) Food

If possible, the easiest route is for attendees to bring their own food and do their own cooking, but in areas where there is fire danger or at some venues which require that attendees eat meals provided by the facility (easy, but expensive), this may not be possible.

Cooking for the group can be something that attendees do together (see “Community Service”, below), or which can be taken on by a group of event staff who are either paid or comped for their admission. It can be fun and cohesion-building to cook together and clean up after each meal.

Sustainability tip: Have attendees bring their own plates, cups and utensils, and set up washing stations after each meal so they can wash their own. Usage of disposables really has no place in our religion.

Simple menu items that can still make for enjoyable meals must take into consideration that some people have dietary restrictions, so the best options are select-your-own buffets. Examples include:

BREAKFAST: Breakfast buffet with fruit, yogurt (serve from large container, not individual servings), bagels with toppings, hard boiled eggs, pastries or muffins, juices, coffee and tea. If possible, hot items can be added to these, such as scrambled eggs, bacon or sausages, pancakes or waffles.

LUNCH: Sandwich bar with many options, both vegetarian and omnivorous. Provide lettuce so lettuce wraps can be made by those avoiding gluten. Include sides such as green and potato salads and hummus.

DINNER: Taco bar with vegan taco “meat”, vegetarian refried or black beans, sharp grated cheese, salsa, shredded lettuce, diced onions, sour cream, hot sauce and cilantro.

Another dinner option if a grill is available is a barbecue night with side dishes. There are many vegan/vegetarian options which can be grilled on their own section of the barbecue away from meats. Even organic chicken is quite affordable for the meat-eaters.

These are low-cost options which are tasty and filling and enable people to customize their food to their tastes. If more money is available, more expensive options can of course be offered.

6) Programming

Programming is—besides the socializing, of course!—what attendees are coming for. It includes workshops, rituals, performances, and whatever else is on the formal schedule of your event.

Here are some examples of programming that has been on the program of events I have organized or attended:

- Opening circle
- Bardic circle (where participants share songs, poems, stories and other creative works)
- Workshops, such as on drumming, singing, dancing, and ritual design
- Discussion panels
- Musical performances
- Ritual planning circle (to plan a ritual later in the event)
- Main ritual
- Closing circle.

So...how do you get programming?

You invite proposals.

When you announce your event, make sure that you contact those whose content you would like to feature. Let them know that you welcome submissions for presenting at your event, how long the presentation slots will be, and any other pertinent information about the event and what you're looking for in programming.

Give applicants a month or more to perfect and submit their proposals. Then you can review them and select those you want to invite. Be sure to notify selectees as soon as possible so they have plenty of time for preparing their presentations.

If you can afford to, it is appropriate and helpful to cover the entrance fee for presenters, so they're more likely to come.

7) Registration

These days, you need to provide at least two means of payment for an event: by check, or online.

By check is self-explanatory: provide an address and the payee to whom to write the check, and you're done. Older attendees may still wish to pay by check.

For an online payment service, I prefer *SignUpGenius.com*. Their fees are reasonable, attendees can register and pay by credit card or PayPal, and you can set up automatic thank-you messages with details about your event. It is a simple, self-explanatory system that allows you to set various ticket prices (as, for example, an "Early Bird" rate for early registrants, or a cut-rate price for children).

It is important to shut down registration a week or so in advance of your event so you can pull together a master list of attendees, notify the food provider of how many attendees there will be, etc.

On the day of your event when your attendees arrive, perform check-in for them at a registration table set up at the entrance to the venue. This is the place where they sign up for a community service shift (if you're expecting that), get oriented to the site, are given a name tag and some kind of marker that shows they belong at your event (colored yarn tied around the wrist works fine), and fill out a liability waiver. (You can find a standard event liability form for the State of California at the end of this document--if this is not pertinent to you, do an Internet search to find an appropriate event liability waiver for your jurisdiction)

Community service shifts not only provide you with more labor to do the work of the event, they are a powerful way to build a sense of ownership of the event on the part of participants; a feeling that “we are all doing this together.” Tasks can include meal preparation or clean-up, help with parking or registration, site clean-up at the end of the event, collecting the recycling and garbage for transport, or any other easy tasks that need to be done.

8) Policies

Every event needs policies in place to protect the organizers from liability and to ensure that participants understand their responsibilities. Here are some examples of policies you should develop; those in **blue** should be included *in writing* in the printed event program. ***Do not skip this step.*** If problems arise, you will be both protected and empowered by having published policies in place.

Refunds; provide the date (typically, about a week before the event) up to which you will provide a full or partial refund to ticket purchasers who are unable to attend. This information should be provided in your registration system (See “Registration”, above)

Policies relating to children: Parents are expected to keep track of their children and are responsible for their safety. Children under the age of 12 must be accompanied by an adult at all times.

Photography policies: Photography of attendees is permissible only with the prior approval of the subject of the photograph. Some of us are not “out” as Atheopagans in our daily lives and do not wish to become so through accidental display of a photograph taken at EVENT.

Conduct standards: It is the intent of the producers that EVENT will be a safe, responsible and egalitarian event. Accordingly, we have established the following code of conduct:

The Principles

Atheopaganism seeks to create safe, inclusive, and sacred space. Atheopagan events, online spaces, and gatherings are intended to be guided by the¹³ Atheopagan Principles, including most specifically Inlusiveness, Social Responsibility, and Kindness and Compassion. We embrace as an ethic that we treat one another well, that we respect and embrace difference, and that we mean well for our fellow humans and the world generally. We welcome people of all races, all colors, all gender identifications, all ages and sexual orientations, and we welcome those who through differences of life situation, background, and physical or mental ability, shape or condition increase our diversity.

As a part of the expression of these Principles, we make reasonable accommodations for those who need them, such as inclusion of image descriptions in our posts to social media, ensuring access for those in wheelchairs, and providing space for those with physical limitations to sit or otherwise be comfortable.

When confronted with unkindness—or, worse, with bigotry—we point this out, but with an eye to the education of the person who expressed it. Maybe they double down, in which case they may need to be removed for the safety of the group. But maybe they learn, and better themselves and our community.

This is not to say that oppressed peoples are responsible for educating those who oppress them. For oppressed people to become angry in such cases is natural and appropriate, and it is a part of the work of people of the dominant culture to sit with this anger, to seek to understand and learn from it. That said, expressions of anger need not and should not cross over into abuse. Expressing anger or any other “negative” emotions is not inherently disrespectful. But it can be done without attacking, strawmanning, name calling, using extreme sarcasm or other intentionally hurtful way of treating the other person.

Consent

Atheopaganism supports consent culture. Affirmative consent to any physical contact or sexually intimate communication must be secured prior to such contact. This includes hugging.

Affirmative consent is a knowing, voluntary, and mutual decision among all participants to engage in physical contact or sexual activity (which can include online sexual activity). Consent can be given by words or actions, as long as those words or actions create clear permission regarding willingness to engage in the activity. Silence or lack of resistance, in and of itself, does not demonstrate consent. The definition of consent does not vary based upon a participant’s sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

- Consent to any act or prior consensual activity between or with any party does not necessarily constitute consent to any other act.
- Consent given once does not necessarily constitute consent to perform the same act again.
- Consent is required regardless of whether the person initiating the act is under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.
- Consent may be initially given but withdrawn at any time.
- Consent cannot be given when a person is incapacitated, which occurs when an individual lacks the ability to knowingly choose to participate in activity. Incapacitation may be caused by the lack of consciousness or being asleep, being involuntarily restrained, or if an individual otherwise cannot consent. Depending on the degree of intoxication, someone who is under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or other intoxicants may be incapacitated and therefore unable to consent.
- Consent cannot be given as a result of coercion, intimidation, force, or threat of harm.
- When consent is withdrawn or can no longer be given, activity must stop.

Consent policies apply to online communications as well. Unwelcome and uninvited sexual advances constitute harassment. Harassment can include:

- Attempts to initiate or solicit unwelcome sexually explicit conversation or personal details
- Sending unsolicited explicit images
- Abusive language, insults, slurs, or attempts at coercion

Standards of Conduct and Grievances

As Atheopagans, we endeavor to create an environment which is safe, responsible, and egalitarian. We celebrate inclusion, diversity, love, and mutual respect. We do not accept:

- Physical or verbal threats, or violence of any kind
- Harassment, bullying, coercion in any way or unwelcome sexual or physical attention
- Hostile and disrespectful speech or actions

If you are feeling harassed, ask the harasser to stop, if you are willing. If you are unwilling or unable to ask or the harassment does not stop, approach a group or event organizer and ask for help. Organizers will investigate and intervene in what they see as an appropriate manner. If you wish, organizers will contact authorities, nonprofit resources such as a sexual assault crisis center, and/or the Atheopagan Council for you.

If you are asked to stop any harassing behavior, you are expected to stop immediately. If a participant engages in harassing behavior, Atheopagan events and affinity groups retain the right to take any action to keep our spaces a welcoming environment for all participants. These actions can include warning the participant(s) or expulsion from the group, event or future events. Any admission fee to the group or event will not necessarily be refunded if this occurs.

Atheopagan event and group organizers are not, however, arbiters of interpersonal conflict. We expect participants in all Atheopagan events and activities to maintain the standards of conduct outlined above at all times and to resolve their differences in a civil manner if no harassment has taken place.

Grievance Procedure

If the complaint is very serious or you do not feel safe going to event or group organizers to notify them of abuse or harassment, you may contact the Secretary of the Atheopagan Society Council at APGrievance@comcast.net. Please specify the events as you experienced them, with details. The Council will investigate and take appropriate action. *This can take a few days. If you are in immediate danger, get to a safe place and/or contact police immediately.*

Children

Children under 13 must be under the direct supervision of a guardian (or other arranged responsible supervision) at all times. Children aged 13 through 17 may participate

independently in the activities of the group or event with the permission and availability of a guardian.

Media Policy

There is no photography or recording during rituals. Outside of ritual, photography is only allowed with the advance permission of the subject(s). Please be considerate that not all Atheopagans are “out” in their communities, and they may wish not to be photographed. *This includes taking screenshots in online forums.* What is discussed in online forums is to be kept private to the participants therein.

Ritual Etiquette

The ritual circle provides a space for creative exploration. It is a place where we come together to empower one another.

Group activities such as rituals also require consent. Participants should know what to expect in a ritual or other activity, and must affirmatively consent to it, particularly if the ritual or activity may contain elements which could cause them to be uncomfortable. Examples of such elements could include nudity, presence of drugs or alcohol, or expectation of disclosure of personal information.

Within the consenting context of group ritual, you have an opportunity to explore creatively, test your boundaries, and challenge your limitations. We all have a role in making this circle safe. Making a personal commitment to your own safety is a powerful way to support your creative process. You are empowered to be the guardian of your own experience. You choose when and how you wish to interact with other members of the circle. If you are uncomfortable, challenged, or overwhelmed, ask yourself how you can respond constructively to the situation. Do you need transformational support? To talk directly with someone? To set an explicit boundary with someone? To take a break from the circle? To stick with your process? Do what you need to do, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

If you feel drawn to interact with someone in the circle, please be conscious of whether that person is inviting you in. Don't take it personally if someone declines to interact with you. Respect that request. They are doing their own work. If someone approaches you looking for help, please take the time to listen and take their concerns seriously. If you are not in a place to help, find someone who can. We support each other with our attention and understanding.

Being part of this community carries an agreement to treat each other with respect and to honor each other's boundaries.

Atheopagan events are intended to be places where we can bring our whole selves – not just what's wonderful but also the imperfections, the parts that feel broken, the parts we may be ashamed of. We may not agree with everything that each person does or says, but we hold space for each other to come together in our imperfection and our humanity and to be transformed.

9) Marketing

Marketing is promotion of your event so it will be well-attended.

Atheopagans are a pretty narrow market niche, so most of your marketing will be online. Use your Facebook, Instagram and other accounts to promote your event to your like-minded friends. You can also post about your event to the Atheopaganism Facebook group (and/or an affinity group), and submit a guest post about it to the Atheopaganism blog. There are multiple Pagan groups on Facebook—post to them, too. Also Atheist groups.

You can also print flyers for posting or distribution at your local occult bookstore or esoteric store. See if the owner would like to present!

Marketing is a numbers game; you have to *keep promoting* in order for your message to get out. Encourage your friends to share to their friends.

Messaging matters! “Come celebrate Nature around the fire! Enjoy a weekend in the woods creating, singing, dancing and drumming! Meet new friends and learn about Atheopaganism, a science-based way of celebrating life!”

10) Other Considerations

Medical support. Things happen. People fall, they twist their ankles, they get poison oak or ivy, and sometimes worse. If possible—and certainly if you have a larger gathering of 100 people or more—it is advisable to have a nurse or doctor onsite. Be sure that you also have a plan thought out in advance for evacuating someone who needs to go to the hospital.

Weather. Nature is magnificent, but it *just doesn't care!* Sometimes the weather simply won't cooperate with plans, whether that means 100 degree temperatures or pouring rain or snow. Be prepared; to as great a degree possible, be able to restructure your event to adapt to the changed conditions. If truly dangerous conditions are forecast, be willing to cancel and reschedule your event: it's not worth taking risks with people's lives.

Insurance. I *strongly recommend* that you take out a liability insurance policy for your event. They're cheap—typically, \$100 or less for a weekend—and they will give you peace of mind about those longshot possibilities that someone gets hurt. Do not assume that having attendees sign a liability waiver alone will protect you from liability; it won't.

RELEASE OF LIABILITY, PROMISE NOT TO SUE, ASSUMPTION OF RISK AND AGREEMENT TO PAY CLAIMS

Event: [TYPE NAME OF YOUR EVENT HERE]

In consideration for being allowed to participate in this Event, on behalf of myself and my next of kin, heirs and representatives, I release from all liability and promise not to sue the organizers of this Event, their employees, officers, directors, volunteers and agents (collectively "Organizers") from any and all claims, including claims of the Organizers' negligence, resulting in any physical or psychological injury (including paralysis and death), illness, damages, or economic or emotional loss I may suffer because of my participation in this Event, including travel to, from and during the Event. I am voluntarily participating in this Event. I am aware of the risks associated with traveling to/from and participating in this Event, which include but are not limited to physical or psychological injury, pain, suffering, illness, disfigurement, temporary or permanent disability (including paralysis), economic or emotional loss, and/or death. I understand that these injuries or outcomes may arise from my own or other's actions, inaction, or negligence; conditions related to travel; or the condition of the Event location(s).

Nonetheless, I assume all related risks, both known or unknown to me, of my participation in this Event, including travel to, from and during the Event. I agree to hold the Organizers harmless from any and all claims, including attorney's fees or damage to my personal property, that may occur as a result of my participation in this Event, including travel to, from and during the Event. If the Organizers incurs any of these types of expenses, I agree to reimburse the Organizers. If I need medical treatment, I agree to be financially responsible for any costs incurred as a result of such treatment. I am aware and understand that I should carry my own health insurance. I am 18 years or older. I understand the legal consequences of signing this document, including (a) releasing the Organizers from all liability, (b) promising not to sue the Organizers, (c) and assuming all risks of participating in this Event, including travel to, from and during the Event. I understand that this document is written to be as broad and inclusive as legally permitted by the State of California. I agree that if any portion is held invalid or unenforceable, I will continue to be bound by the remaining terms. I have read this document, and I am signing it freely. No other representations concerning the legal effect of this document have been made to me.

Participant Signature: _____

Participant Name (print): _____ Date: _____