



# Atheopaganism

## **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 sometimes 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.

For an online payment service, I prefer *Brown Paper Tickets* (brownpapertickets.com). Their fees are reasonable, attendees can pay either by credit card or into a PayPal account, 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 about a week 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 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. At no time shall anyone attending EVENT engage in any of the following behaviors:

- Physical or verbal threats of any kind
- Harassment, bullying or coercion of any person in any way
- Racial, religious, gender-based, sexual preference-based or ethnic slurs
- Possession of firearms, knives or any other instrument used as a weapon
- Defacing, damaging or destroying property
- Fighting, annoying others through noisy or boisterous activities, or in any other way creating a disturbance which is disruptive or dangerous to others or the programmatic activities of EVENT.

Harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Verbal comments that reinforce social structures of domination [related to gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, age, religion, [YOUR SPECIFIC CONCERN HERE]].
- Deliberate intimidation, stalking, or following
- Harassing photography or recording
- Sustained disruption of talks or other events
- Inappropriate physical contact
- Unwelcome sexual attention
- Advocating for, or encouraging, any of the above behaviour

Participants asked to stop any harassing behavior are expected to comply immediately.

If a participant engages in harassing behaviour, event organisers retain the right to take any actions to keep the event a welcoming environment for all participants. This includes warning the offender or expulsion from EVENT[with no refund].

Event organisers may take action to redress anything designed to, or with the clear impact of, disrupting EVENT or making the environment hostile for any participants.

We expect participants to follow these rules at all event venues and event-related social activities. We think people should follow these rules outside event activities too!

## Reporting

If someone makes you or anyone else feel unsafe or unwelcome, please report it as soon as possible to EVENT staff. Harassment and other code of conduct violations reduce the value of our event for everyone. We want you to be happy at our event. People like you make our event a better place.

When taking a report, EVENT organizers will ensure you are safe and cannot be overheard. They may involve other organizers to ensure your report is managed properly. Once safe, we'll ask you to tell us about what happened. This can be upsetting, but we'll handle it as respectfully as possible, and you can bring someone to support you. You won't be asked to confront anyone and we won't tell anyone who you are.

Our team will be happy to help you contact hotel/venue security, local law enforcement, local support services, provide escorts, or otherwise assist you to feel safe for the duration of the event. We value your attendance.

## 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, Twitter, Instagram and SnapChat accounts to promote your event to your like-minded friends. You can also post about your event to the Atheopaganism Facebook group (or the new Atheopagans UK 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: \_\_\_\_\_