



Mildura Events

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Mildura has always been a centre for regional events, but it wasn't until the late 1990s that the community - through its council - recognised that events could become the lifeblood of its tourism and hospitality industry.

When Julie Jewell was appointed to coordinate Mildura Rural City Council's Events Unit, she was able to count about 13 ad hoc events on the annual calendar. There are now more than 320 events happening each year in the oasis city.

Quite apart from the huge economic injection to the region, the publicity created by many of the events has earned Mildura the status as one of Australia's leading regional event destinations and has helped to re-image it as a vibrant, fun-loving community.

Julie says that while there is no magic wand to build such a reputation, Mildura's ability to increasingly work in partnerships during the past decade has been the critical factor. However, it was not always so. In 1998 she called an initial meeting and found that many local groups didn't talk to each other and only three of them could provide dates for the following year's event to help Council promote them.

The Unit now operates according to a Strategic Events Plan. Its initial \$20,000 budget has grown to about \$400,000, of which about 60% is devoted to providing financial incentive to groups for marketing. About \$50,000 is used to seed-fund new opportunities, many of which arise at short notice and Council needs to act swiftly to secure them.

Workshops on relevant topics are held twice a year for event organisers and a regular newsletter keeps them in touch with what everyone is doing, as well as provides useful tips. The Events Unit has produced planning guidelines for event managers and a comprehensive booklet of local suppliers. The calendar of events is produced in hard copy, but is also constantly updated on the website (www.milduraevents.com.au).

Events receiving more than \$8,000 in funding are required to complete the Event Evaluation Kit, which provides Council with essential feedback to evaluate its success and its impact on the municipal economy.

"The evaluation process also allows them to reflect on how they could do it better, plus lets Council know how it could better assist the organisers for the following year."

"They also need to be able show partnerships and strategic allegiances, but we understand that some of the smaller groups may have trouble doing this, so we sit down and work through the process."

"The whole focus is on partnerships. For instance, we are able to fill the beds of local motels and caravan parks for most weeks of the year, but we also rely on them to provide us with complimentary accommodation for performers and guest artists."

Julie points to the Easter Power Sports event as a great example of groups coming together to make the 'whole' greater than the 'sum of the parts'.



The various components of the weekend event existed previously, but at different times of the year and in isolation. Bringing them together not only increased the marketing exposure of the weekend, using television, posters and flyers, but also created a huge focus for the city during the Easter holiday break. One year the event embraced an arts element, using a travelling exhibition of automotive art at the Mildura Arts Centre to launch the program. It was the first time many of the motor sports fans had been inside an arts venue.

Julie is quick to point out that the Events Unit does not run the events, but acts as a 'facilitator', particularly to ensure that those elements Council's operation operates seamlessly and as user-friendly for the event organiser.

" We have what we call our 'e-team', comprising local laws, traffic management, parks and gardens and events staff. They love to feel part of it and share in the pride of success."

" As opposed to ten years ago, we are now provided with dates from event organisers more than two years in advance and the coordinated marketing of almost everything from the ladies bowls tournament to the showpiece Mildura Country Music Festival gets the Mildura message out to hundreds of thousands of people around the country."

" The message from Mildura to the marketplace is that there is always something happening in this city", she says.

The Events Unit has now also embraced the region's conferencing function. Using the same formula of strategic partnerships and Council facilitation, by 2010 they aim to lift the number of conferences from 20 to 50 per year, delegates from 3,000 to 7,000, bed nights from 1.6 to 3.6 per conference and economic value from \$700,000 to \$6.7million per year.

www.milduraevents.com.au

Key findings:

- Strategic partnerships are the key to success for regional events.
- Funding is used to enable the organisers to market their event more widely.
- Council acts as a facilitator, rather than event organiser; the one-stop-shop approach for event organisers.
- Get dates from organisers as early as possible, to facilitate advance planning and publicity.
- Use a formal evaluation process to improve the event for next time.

