



THE RACE DIRECTOR STARTER WORKBOOK

HOW TO PLAN, ORGANIZE & RUN A SUCCESSFUL ROAD RACE



5K SPORTS RACE MANAGEMENT CO



Welcome, Race Director

A practical working guide to help you organize the details before race morning arrives.

Planning a road race is rewarding — and far more detailed than most first-time organizers expect. This workbook helps you get organized early, ask the right questions and build a race-day plan you can actually use.

Use this workbook as your working file. Write in it, bring it to committee meetings, share pages with volunteers and keep it with your event records for next year.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- ☐ Identify one primary race director who owns the final decisions.
- ☐ Create one shared folder for permits, vendors, insurance, maps and communications.
- ☐ Choose a race-management/timing partner early.
- ☐ Confirm which decisions require town, police, property-owner or insurance approval.

YOUR RACE AT A GLANCE

Race Name: _____	Organization / Cause: _____
Proposed Date: _____	Race Distance: _____
Target Runners: _____	Fundraising Goal: _____
Primary Contact: _____	Timing Partner: _____

What would make this event a success?

PLANNING PRINCIPLE

A great race is not built on race morning. It is built through clear decisions made weeks and months in advance.



Start With the Purpose

Before choosing swag, awards or even a course, define why the race exists and who you want to serve.

CLARIFY THE GOAL

Why are we hosting this race?

Who is the primary audience?

Is fundraising, competition, community participation or awareness the main goal?

What should participants say about the event afterward?

RACE IDENTITY WORKSHEET

Working Race Name: _____ Benefiting Organization: _____

Race Distance: _____ Target Audience: _____

Target Participants: _____ Registration Goal: _____

Three words we want the race to feel like:

KEEP IT FOCUSED

Your purpose will guide pricing, course design, sponsorships, marketing, awards and even the tone of race-day announcements.

Build the Budget

Start with realistic costs, then work backward to registration fees, sponsorship goals and fundraising expectations.

INCOME PLAN

Revenue Source	Estimate	Actual
Registration fees	\$	\$
Sponsorships	\$	\$
Donations	\$	\$
Vendors / partners	\$	\$
Merchandise	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$

EXPENSE PLAN

Expense	Estimate	Actual
Race management / timing	\$	\$
Permits / insurance	\$	\$
Police / traffic control	\$	\$
Bibs / timing chips	\$	\$
Awards / shirts	\$	\$
Water / food	\$	\$
Restrooms / sanitation	\$	\$
Marketing / signage	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$

BUDGET CHECK

Do not assume donated items will appear. Confirm every sponsor commitment and every in-kind donation in writing.



Choose the Date & Course

The date and course can make or break registration, logistics and community support.

BEFORE ANNOUNCING THE DATE

- ☐ Check other local races and major community events.
- ☐ Review school calendars and holiday weekends.
- ☐ Confirm venue and property availability.
- ☐ Consider daylight, seasonal weather and traffic patterns.
- ☐ Confirm timing / race-management availability.

COURSE REVIEW

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Start and finish areas identified | ☐ Distance confirmed |
| ☐ Major intersections reviewed | ☐ Parking identified |
| ☐ Water-stop locations identified | ☐ Volunteer positions mapped |
| ☐ Emergency access considered | ☐ Restroom access identified |
| ☐ Course signage planned | |

Course Notes / Concerns

IMPORTANT

Always confirm applicable permits, road-use approvals, traffic control, safety requirements and property permissions with the appropriate local authorities.



Permits, Insurance & Safety

Requirements vary by municipality, venue, road use and event size. Build this conversation into your planning timeline early.

WHO NEEDS TO BE CONTACTED?

- ☐ Town / city officials
- ☐ Fire / EMS
- ☐ Parks department
- ☐ School administration
- ☐ Medical support
- ☐ Police / traffic control
- ☐ Public works
- ☐ Property owners
- ☐ Insurance provider

APPROVAL TRACKER

Item / Approval	Contact	Due Date	Status

Safety / Emergency Notes

Registration & Participant Data

A clean registration process creates a smoother race morning and more accurate timing and results.

DECIDE BEFORE REGISTRATION OPENS

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Online registration platform | ☐ Race-day registration policy |
| ☐ Registration fees and deadlines | ☐ Waiver / release process |
| ☐ Age divisions | ☐ T-shirt or merchandise options |
| ☐ Refund / transfer policy | ☐ Participant email schedule |

RACE-DAY REGISTRATION SETUP

- ☐ Registration forms
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Bib assignment system
- ☐ Bib pins
- ☐ Alphabetical pre-registration list
- ☐ Separate pre-registration and race-day lines, if needed
- ☐ Volunteers trained on the process

Registration Notes

TIMING TIP

Accurate participant data matters. Last-minute changes, duplicate bibs and incomplete lists can delay results and award reporting.

Timing & Results

Choose the timing method that matches your event size, finish-line flow and results expectations.

Manual Timing

Manual timing can be an effective, affordable option for smaller events with a manageable finish line and straightforward race structure.

Chip Timing

Chip timing is often better suited for larger events or races that need faster participant identification and more efficient results processing.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR TIMING PROVIDER

- ☐ What timing method is recommended for our expected field size?
- ☐ What participant data is required and when is it due?
- ☐ How will results be posted?
- ☐ How are age-group and overall awards handled?
- ☐ What finish-line equipment and staffing are included?

Timing / Results Notes

Volunteers & Course Support

Volunteers are one of your biggest race-day assets — if every person has a clear assignment.

POSSIBLE VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS

- ☐ Registration
- ☐ Course marshals
- ☐ Start line
- ☐ Food / refreshments
- ☐ Cleanup
- ☐ Parking
- ☐ Water stations
- ☐ Finish line
- ☐ Awards
- ☐ Runner direction

VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT SHEET

Name	Assignment	Arrival	Cell

VOLUNTEER RULE

Do not ask volunteers to simply “show up and help.” Give each person a location, arrival time, specific job and point of contact.

Finish Line & Runner Experience

The finish line is where timing, participants, spectators, volunteers, results and awards all converge.

FINISH-LINE PLAN

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Finish-line setup / flags | ☐ Timing area protected |
| ☐ Clock visible | ☐ Cones and runner flow |
| ☐ Water available | ☐ Results display area |
| ☐ Awards area | ☐ PA / sound system |
| ☐ Medical access | ☐ Trash and cleanup plan |

HYDRATION & POST-RACE SUPPORT

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Water-stop locations | ☐ Water jugs / bottles |
| ☐ Cups | ☐ Trash pickup |
| ☐ Post-race snacks | ☐ Weather conditions |
| ☐ Medical support | |

Finish-Line Layout / Notes

PROTECT THE TIMING AREA

Keep spectators and unnecessary volunteers away from timing equipment and the immediate finish zone.

Race-Day Timeline

Write the timeline before race week and give the key version to staff, volunteers and vendors.

SAMPLE TIMELINE

Time	Task
6:00 AM	Race management arrives
6:15 AM	Finish-line setup begins
6:30 AM	Registration opens
7:00 AM	Volunteers arrive
7:15 AM	Course positions staffed
7:45 AM	Registration closes
7:50 AM	Pre-race announcements
8:00 AM	RACE START
8:20 AM+	Finishers begin arriving
9:00 AM	Results preparation
9:15 AM	Awards
10:00 AM	Breakdown and cleanup

BUILD YOUR TIMELINE

Time	Task / Owner

Awards, Communication & Promotion

Decide award categories early and make sure runners know what to expect before they arrive.

AWARDS PLAN

- ☐ Overall male / female
- ☐ Age-group awards
- ☐ Youth divisions
- ☐ Masters
- ☐ Special event categories

Final Award Structure

PRE-RACE RUNNER EMAIL — INCLUDE

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Race date and start time | ☐ Address and parking |
| ☐ Registration / check-in details | ☐ Course information |
| ☐ Weather considerations | ☐ Awards |
| ☐ Post-race activities | ☐ Contact information |

PROMOTION CHANNELS

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Email marketing | ☐ Social media |
| ☐ Local race calendars | ☐ Community groups |
| ☐ Schools | ☐ Local businesses |
| ☐ Sponsors | ☐ Running clubs |
| ☐ Posters / flyers | ☐ Partner organizations |



Race Day: Expect the Unexpected

Good race management is not about eliminating every surprise. It is about staying organized and making calm decisions when something changes.

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

What if the weather changes?

What if a volunteer does not show?

What if parking fills early?

What if a course sign is moved?

Who has final authority to make race-day decisions?

RACE-DAY COMMAND LIST

Race Director: _____

Timing Lead: _____

Volunteer Lead: _____

Police / Traffic: _____

Medical / EMS: _____

Venue Contact: _____

Last-Minute Notes



After the Last Runner Finishes

A strong post-race process protects relationships, improves next year's event and helps you capture what worked while it is still fresh.

POST-RACE CHECKLIST

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Results posted | ☐ Awards completed |
| ☐ Course equipment collected | ☐ Signs removed |
| ☐ Trash collected | ☐ Venue cleaned |
| ☐ Volunteers thanked | ☐ Sponsors thanked |
| ☐ Photos shared | ☐ Fundraising totals communicated |
| ☐ Participant feedback reviewed | ☐ Notes recorded for next year |

POST-RACE DEBRIEF

What worked especially well?

What needs to change next year?

What should we never forget?

Master Planning Checklist

Use this as your high-level working list from the first committee meeting through post-race cleanup.

3-6+ MONTHS BEFORE

- ☐ Define race purpose
- ☐ Establish budget
- ☐ Select date
- ☐ Identify course
- ☐ Contact local authorities
- ☐ Research permits
- ☐ Confirm insurance needs
- ☐ Select race-management/timing provider
- ☐ Establish registration
- ☐ Begin sponsorship outreach

1 WEEK BEFORE

- ☐ Final participant list
- ☐ Volunteer assignments
- ☐ Course review
- ☐ Equipment check
- ☐ Runner email
- ☐ Weather review
- ☐ Awards confirmed
- ☐ Registration supplies prepared

AFTER THE RACE

- ☐ Results posted
- ☐ Equipment collected
- ☐ Trash removed
- ☐ Volunteers thanked
- ☐ Sponsors thanked
- ☐ Event recap completed
- ☐ Notes saved for next year

1-3 MONTHS BEFORE

- ☐ Promote race
- ☐ Recruit volunteers
- ☐ Order race bibs
- ☐ Order awards
- ☐ Confirm timing
- ☐ Confirm course
- ☐ Confirm safety support
- ☐ Plan water stations
- ☐ Plan post-race refreshments
- ☐ Review parking

RACE DAY

- ☐ Registration setup
- ☐ Course signage
- ☐ Volunteers in position
- ☐ Finish line ready
- ☐ Timing system ready
- ☐ Water stations ready
- ☐ PA system checked
- ☐ Awards area ready
- ☐ Results area ready
- ☐ Cleanup crew assigned

TIP: Print a copy for each key lead and mark ownership next to every task.

When to Bring in Professional Race Management

Some organizations enjoy handling much of the planning internally. Others discover that timing, registration, finish-line logistics, equipment, results and volunteers quickly become a second job.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT MAY MAKE SENSE WHEN...

- ☐ You are organizing your first race
- ☐ Your event is growing
- ☐ You need professional manual or chip timing
- ☐ You want organized results and award reporting
- ☐ Your committee has limited race experience
- ☐ Your organization needs to focus on fundraising rather than logistics
- ☐ Your volunteers are spending too much time solving race-day details

5K SPORTS RACE MANAGEMENT

For more than 30 years, 5K Sports has helped nonprofits, schools, municipalities, charities and community organizations bring races to life throughout New England.

Ready to Talk About Your Race?

Explore race-management services and packages at FIVEKSPORTS.COM

For race registration, schedules, results and photos, visit RUNNING4FREE.COM

LET'S PLAN YOUR RACE

From Start to Finish. We've Got It Covered.

Notes & Next Steps

Use this space for committee decisions, vendor questions, race-day reminders and next-year ideas.

Working Notes

IMPORTANT NOTE

This workbook is a general planning resource. Race requirements vary by municipality, location, course, event size and other circumstances. Race directors are responsible for confirming applicable permits, insurance, traffic-control, emergency-services, safety, legal, accessibility and other local requirements with the appropriate authorities and professionals.