



# **A guide for host clubs organising a BDA race event**

Version 1

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# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Roles and responsibilities</b> .....	<b>3</b>
BDA responsibilities.....	3
Club responsibilities .....	3
<b>3. Planning timeline</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Venue selection</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>5. Equipment and facilities</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Required equipment and facilities.....	5
Recommended or preferred facilities .....	5
<b>6. Safety and risk management</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>7. Insurance and legal requirements</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>8. Course setup</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>9. Event day operations</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>10. Finance and reimbursement</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>11. Communication</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>12. After the event</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>13. Event planning checklist</b> .....	<b>9</b>

# 1. Introduction

This guide is designed to take you through each stage of preparing and delivering a successful BDA-sanctioned local or regional race event.

The BDA will usually handle club registration, race entries and the provision of officials to run the competition on the day. Officials cover all core racing functions, including boat marshalling, start and finish operations, timekeeping and secretariat. Your club is responsible for arranging everything else required to make the event run smoothly – from venue setup, facilities and safety cover to volunteers, refreshments and logistics.

The following sections set out what to consider, who to involve, and when to do it. They include checklists and practical advice to help you stay organised, meet BDA requirements and provide an enjoyable day for everyone involved.

Throughout the planning and organising process, your main point of contact at the BDA should be the BDA operations coordinator who can be contacted by emailing [ops@thebda.org.uk](mailto:ops@thebda.org.uk).

## 2. Roles and responsibilities

The successful running of a BDA event depends on clear understanding of what the BDA provides and what you as the host club are responsible for arranging. This section outlines the division of responsibilities between both parties.

### BDA responsibilities

The BDA will provide qualified race officials to deliver the competition on the day. The officials will cover:

- Race control/secretariat – managing crew lists, updating the race programme with progressions, and recording results
- Boat marshalling – coordinating boats and crews to and from the embarkation area
- Start line – lining up boats, managing starts, and ensuring fair races
- Finish line and timekeeping – recording finish order and times accurately

The BDA can also manage all race registrations and crew entries from participating clubs via the JustGo membership platform. There is a small cost associated with this. If you prefer to coordinate the entries directly yourselves, you can choose to do so.

### Club responsibilities

The host club is responsible for all other aspects of organising and hosting the event. This includes:

- Arranging venue facilities such as toilets or portaloos, parking stewards, safety boats, lane markings, first aid cover and trophies
- Providing tables and chairs for the finish and secretariat areas, and where possible, additional gazebos for the start and finish teams (the BDA will provide one gazebo for race control/secretariat)
- Providing lunch for all officials (the BDA will reimburse these costs)
- Providing and coordinating volunteers for car park monitoring, site setup, and general event support
- Keeping full records and receipts for all event-related expenditure to support reimbursement after the event

### **3. Planning timeline**

The first step is to let the BDA know that you are interested in hosting an event and liaise with the venue about possible dates.

The BDA operations coordinator will coordinate dates, venues and clubs and link with the BDA Exec to confirm the race calendar. You should then lock in the date with the venue.

The exact timeline for this can vary. As a guide, most of the dates and venues for the 2026 league were confirmed in October 2025.

Once the date and venue are confirmed, the focus should be on securing essential services and confirming bookings for toilets, safety boats and first aid cover.

It is also helpful to nominate a single event lead who will act as the main contact between your club and the BDA.

As the event date approaches, attention can shift to practical details such as confirming final arrangements with suppliers, preparing the site layout, arranging trophies and ensuring that the necessary equipment and signage are available.

In the final weeks before the event, confirm arrival times with all suppliers, volunteers and officials, and share any last-minute updates with the BDA.

A detailed task checklist is included at the end of this guide to help you plan and track progress.

### **4. Venue selection**

Most BDA races are held at established dragon boat sites where clubs already train or compete, but it is also possible to use new or less familiar venues if they meet the necessary requirements for safety and race delivery.

The water should be calm, sheltered and deep enough for racing, ideally two to three metres deep throughout the course. Take into account how weather conditions such as wind direction might affect racing.

The course should be wide enough to accommodate four boats with lanes approximately ten metres wide, plus additional space for manoeuvring and safety. Check that the venue allows for the use of buoys or lane markers on the water.

The venue must have a suitable embarking and mooring area that allows safe and efficient crew changeovers. There should also be room for the boats to be securely tied up between races.

On land, look for space to position race control and start and finish officials. Adequate space should also be available for spectators, boat storage, team gazebos and any refreshment facilities.

Parking arrangements are an important consideration. The site should have enough capacity for competitors' cars and boat trailers, with clear access routes and space for turning. It should also be accessible for emergency services and first aid and have suitable areas to launch safety boats.

Basic facilities such as toilets or portaloos and access to electricity and water should be either permanently available or capable of being brought in temporarily.

### **5. Equipment and facilities**

As the host club, you are responsible for providing or arranging all the physical facilities and equipment needed to deliver a safe and efficient event. The BDA will provide race officials and one gazebo, but the remainder of the setup must be managed locally.

## Required equipment and facilities

The following items are essential for running a BDA event safely and effectively:

- Race control and secretariat area – a sheltered space with tables and chairs for officials to manage race results and crew lists. If possible, a large board that the race programme can be attached to is also useful. (The BDA will provide the gazebo for race control.)
- Power supply at race control – access to mains electricity or a suitable portable power source (e.g. generator or battery pack) to allow officials to charge devices such as laptops and tablets used for race management.
- Start area – a gazebo or other form of shelter and a chair. A small table is useful if one is available, but this is not essential.
- Finish area – a gazebo, tent or other form of cover, plus a table and 2 chairs.
- Marker buoys – ideally at 50-metre intervals indicating the lanes all the way down the course; a minimum of two at the start and two at the finish.
- Safety boats – suitable powered craft with experienced operators, in line with BDA safety requirements.
- First aid cover – a qualified first aid provider on site with appropriate equipment and vehicle access.
- Boat mooring and marshalling areas should have poles, rings, or other fixed structures that boats can be tied to. There must be clear access for crews to embark and disembark.
- Toilets or portaloos – enough for the expected number of competitors, volunteers and spectators.
- Car and trailer parking areas. These should be clearly signposted and marshals should be on hand to direct vehicles to suitable spaces on arrival.
- Rubbish and waste disposal – bins or skips to keep the site clean throughout the event. Ideally, you should provide each crew with a black bin bag.
- Lunch/refreshments for officials. Officials are usually not able to leave their positions while racing is underway. Someone should be nominated to bring lunch and refreshments to race control, start, finish and boat marshalling during the day. The cost will be reimbursed by the BDA.

## Recommended or preferred facilities

Although not mandatory, the following help improve the smooth running and enjoyment of the day:

- Public address (PA) system for announcements and commentary – the BDA officials team will usually bring a PA system and microphone, but you should confirm this in advance
- Access to clean drinking water (e.g. a tap where competitors can refill water bottles)
- Refreshment facilities
- Signage for parking, toilets, registration and safety information
- Noticeboard for displaying race programme and results

## 6. Safety and risk management

As the host club, you are responsible for safety at the event and this must be a central part of event planning. Every club organising a BDA race must follow the BDA's safety guidance and take all reasonable steps to create a safe environment for competitors, volunteers and spectators.

Each event should have a named safety officer who is responsible for overseeing all aspects of safety before and during the event. The safety officer should be involved in the early planning stages and work closely with the event lead to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place.

You should complete a written risk assessment for each event and keep it on file. This should identify any hazards associated with the venue, course, equipment and weather, and outline the measures taken to reduce those risks. It should also consider access for emergency services, first aid provision, water safety and site management. The risk assessment should be reviewed immediately before the event and updated if any conditions have changed.

Adequate first aid cover must be provided on site, with qualified personnel and suitable equipment. The first aid provider should have a vehicle or safe route for access to all areas of the course. Safety boats must also be available and crewed by experienced operators who can respond quickly to any incident on the water.

On the day, it is the chief official's responsibility to delay, modify or cancel racing if weather or water conditions are poor and continuing would present an unacceptable risk.

Clear safety information should be shared with all crews before racing begins. This may include details of the safety boat, first aid point, and the location of emergency exits or assembly areas.

## **7. Insurance and legal requirements**

All BDA-sanctioned races are covered under the Association's insurance policy. This includes public liability cover for the event and participant cover for registered competitors.

Although the BDA's insurance provides general cover, you are responsible for confirming that the chosen venue also has appropriate public liability insurance in place.

Any contractors or third-party providers engaged for the event, such as safety boat operators, first aid providers, caterers or equipment suppliers, must hold their own valid insurance and be able to provide proof of this on request. The event lead or safety officer should check that these insurances are current and appropriate for the activities being carried out.

You are also responsible for ensuring compliance with any local regulations that apply to the venue such as permissions or licences from local councils or site owners or temporary event notices for catering or trading.

## **8. Course setup**

A well-planned and clearly marked course is essential for fair and safe racing. You are responsible for setting out and checking the course layout before race day to make sure it meets the required standards and is suitable for the conditions at the venue.

The racing course should be set in calm water, ideally two to three metres deep throughout. The preferred configuration is a four-lane course, with each lane approximately ten metres wide. If the available water space does not allow for four lanes, a three-lane course may be used as long as it provides sufficient width for safe racing and space for manoeuvring between races.

Marker buoys should ideally be placed at 50-metre intervals indicating the lanes all the way down the course. At a minimum, there should be two buoys at the start and two at the finish to mark the outer edges of the course. Boats should line up between the start buoys and pass between the finish buoys at the end of each race. These four buoys effectively mark the corners of the racing area.

Where possible, additional buoys should be placed along the start and finish lines at intervals of about nine to ten metres to divide the lanes.

It is helpful to have sighting markers, such as poles or flags, on both banks at the start and finish to give a clear line of sight across the course. This is particularly important for the finish line, where accurate judging depends on being able to see the line precisely.

The embarking and marshalling areas should be positioned to allow safe and efficient crew changes. There should be enough space for several boats to moor alongside without obstructing one another, and a clear route for crews moving between the marshalling area and the boats.

Make sure you identify a specific mooring point that can be used by paddlers with accessibility needs. This should be as stable, level and accessible as the venue allows, with enough space for people to embark and disembark safely and with support if needed.

Before racing begins, the safety officer or event lead should inspect the course and surrounding area to confirm that all buoys and markers are correctly positioned and that safety boats can operate freely. Any hazards such as shallow areas, underwater obstructions or strong currents should be identified and avoided when positioning the course.

The course layout and any key features should be mentioned at the crew managers' meeting at the start of the race day so that everyone is aware of the setup and any specific local considerations.

## 9. Event day operations

On the day, your main responsibility is to manage the site and provide practical support to enable the BDA officials to run the racing efficiently.

Club representatives should be on site early to unlock or open access points, set things up and check that all essential services such as toilets, first aid and safety boats are in place. The safety officer should confirm that conditions remain suitable for racing and that all safety measures identified in the risk assessment have been implemented.

Car park monitors should be in position before the first competitors arrive to make sure trailers, cars and spectators are directed to appropriate areas. Monitors should be briefed on where different vehicles need to go and who to contact if any issues arise.

The BDA officials will manage all aspects of racing, including marshalling, start and finish operations, and timekeeping. They will also handle any necessary changes to the race programme if delays occur during the day.

Weather conditions can change quickly, and in the days leading up to the event it is the host club's responsibility to decide whether racing can safely proceed. You should monitor weather conditions closely and stay in regular contact with the BDA if strong winds, lightning or other hazards are forecast.

On the day, if conditions deteriorate the chief official will make the final decision on whether to delay, modify or cancel the event.

Throughout the day, club representatives should monitor facilities such as toilets, waste bins and parking areas and address any issues promptly.

## 10. Finance and reimbursement

As the host club, you are responsible for paying all costs associated with running the event upfront. The BDA will reimburse agreed expenses once the event has taken place and all receipts have been submitted.

After the event, you should prepare a summary of expenditure and send it, together with supporting receipts, to [treasurer@thebda.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@thebda.org.uk). The summary should clearly list each item of expenditure and its cost. It is good practice to retain copies of all receipts and financial records for at least one year in case of any queries.

The BDA reimburses reasonable and necessary costs for running the event. These typically include venue hire, toilets or portaloos, first aid cover, safety boats, trophies and officials' lunches. Any other proposed expenditure should be discussed with the BDA before being incurred.

If the event generates a surplus after all costs have been reimbursed, that surplus will be shared equally between the host club and the BDA. The surplus is calculated as total event income (race entry fees) minus total eligible expenditure.

## 11. Communication

Before the event, your club representative should work closely with the BDA to confirm race details such as the distances and formats. Once these details are agreed, you should prepare a short event guide, which the BDA can send out to participating teams. This should include practical information such as:

- Parking arrangements, clearly showing where cars and boat trailers should go
- The locations for loading and unloading boats
- Details of on-site facilities such as toilets and refreshments
- Brief notes about the distances and formats of racing planned (e.g., slalom, figure-of-eight or pursuit races)

The guide should be clear and easy to follow, with a simple site map if possible. It can be sent to the BDA for distribution to competing clubs or shared directly with teams if you are coordinating entries for the event yourself.

On the day of the event, your main contact should be available to liaise with the chief official and respond quickly to any site-related queries or problems.

You may also wish to use social media to promote the event and share updates on the day. Where possible, coordinate with the BDA on messaging and tagging so that posts can be shared more widely.

## 12. After the event

It should go without saying, but at the end of the event, make sure the venue and surrounding area are left clean and tidy and remove all litter, signage and temporary facilities.

In the next few days after the event, collect all receipts and financial records and then send them, together with the expenditure summary, to the BDA Treasurer for reimbursement (see 'Finance and reimbursement'). If any equipment that was borrowed or hired for the event was damaged or lost, it should be reported to the BDA.

If the event generated a surplus, the BDA will confirm the final figures and arrange the profit share with the club once all financial details have been reconciled.

It is usually useful to carry out a short internal debrief soon after the event. Make a note of anything that went particularly well or could be improved next time.

## 13. Event planning checklist

	Complete?
<b>3-6 months before</b>	
Liaise with the venue to discuss possible dates	
Tell the BDA you are interested in hosting an event and which dates you can offer (email <a href="mailto:ops@thebda.org.uk">ops@thebda.org.uk</a> )	
When the BDA confirms the date, book the venue and confirm the booking in writing	
Nominate a single event lead who will act as the main contact between the club and the BDA	
Nominate a safety officer for the event	
Confirm the racing format and distances with the BDA (e.g. 200m, 500m, 2km, figure-of-eight etc)	
Review the BDA safety guidance and familiarise yourself with the current requirements	
Begin the risk assessment for the event	
Check the venue's public liability insurance covers organised water sports	
Identify essential services and suppliers, including toilets, first aid, and safety boats	
Obtain quotations for toilets, first aid cover and safety boats	
Confirm that safety boat and first aid providers hold valid insurance and have experienced staff	
If required, apply for any permissions or licences from local councils, landowners or navigation authorities	
Identify available power and water facilities or make arrangements to bring them in temporarily	
Arrange or confirm trophy supply (purchasing, engraving or sponsorship)	
Double-check with the BDA what equipment they will provide and what needs to be supplied locally (gazebos, tables, chairs, buoys, signage)	
Prepare an outline site layout plan	

<b>1-2 months before</b>	
Finalise bookings for toilets, first aid, safety boats and any catering or refreshments	
Confirm details of delivery, arrival and setup times for each supplier	
Confirm volunteer cover for car park marshalling	
Complete and review the event risk assessment and keep it on file	
Confirm access and parking arrangements with the venue	
Order or prepare any required signage (parking, toilets, refreshments etc)	
Check that sufficient marker buoys, ropes, fenders and other essential items are available	
Confirm that tables, chairs and gazebos are available for the start, finish and race control areas	
Prepare a list of any items that need to be borrowed, repaired or purchased	
Plan the layout of the embarking, marshalling and mooring areas	
Review the emergency action plan and confirm that first aid and safety boat teams understand their roles	
Begin drafting the short event guide for teams, including site map, parking, and facilities information	
<b>The week before</b>	
Finalise and distribute the event guide to the BDA for circulation to participating clubs	
Reconfirm all bookings and delivery times with toilets, first aid, and safety boats	
Check that trophies are ready and labelled correctly	
Reconfirm volunteer availability for car park marshalling	
Review the weather forecast and stay in contact with the BDA if conditions look uncertain	
Prepare bin bags for waste collection and assign responsibility for litter management	
Gather all ropes, fenders and safety equipment required for course setup	

<b>The day before</b>	
Put up directional signage for cars and trailers	
Check toilets, first aid and safety boat arrangements are ready for the following day	
Walk the site with the safety officer to confirm there are no new hazards	
<b>On the day</b>	
Arrive early to open access points and confirm all services are in place	
Check toilets, water and first aid areas are operational	
Set up gazebos, tables and chairs for start, finish and race control areas	
Set up any other equipment such as PA system and ensure the site is ready before competitors arrive	
Ensure safety boats are launched and staffed	
Confirm risk assessment and safety plan are up to date	
Position car park monitors before the first arrivals	
Ensure a nominated runner is available to take drinks and lunch to officials during racing (costs will be reimbursed)	
Support BDA officials with any site-related needs or adjustments	
Respond promptly to any safety or operational issues	
Keep the site tidy and clear of litter	
<b>After the event</b>	
Clear the site and remove all litter, signage and temporary facilities	
Return any borrowed or hired equipment	
Collect and organise all receipts and financial records	
Prepare and send the expenditure summary and receipts to the BDA Treasurer	
Report any damaged or lost equipment to the BDA	
Conduct a short debrief with the event team to note learning points or improvements for next time	