



Your Bucks Art Weeks artists and makers handbook

All the resources, hints and tips you need to have a great Bucks Art Weeks

Introduction

Bucks Art Weeks is the **largest visual arts event in Buckinghamshire** and one of the biggest in the country. It is popular, well-established, and vibrant and is a fantastic opportunity for you to promote yourself and your work to the local community. We've had upwards of **48,000 visits per year** made by the public and, with more and more people shunning the high street in favour of buying wonderful, hand-crafted pieces or works of art from local artists and makers, Bucks Art Weeks is an extraordinarily great way to get your name out there.

Whether you're a newcomer or need a refresher on good practice, we've put together this guide to help you have a great Bucks Art Weeks. We've collated the thoughts of experienced artists and makers and have incorporated their pearls of wisdom into the following methods, hints, and tips.

A word in advance

If there is only one piece of advice that you take away from this guide, then it's this: **The members who put the most in, in terms of additional publicity and enthusiasm, get the most out in terms of visitors and sales.** We also know that it's a ripple effect. The more years you do Bucks Art Weeks, the more people get to know you and will recommend you to others.

Even if we do say so ourselves, we have a great committee of exceptionally passionate and enthusiastic volunteers who live and breathe Bucks Art Weeks and work tirelessly to promote the event producing marketing material like the printed directory, the website, local PR, social media, signs, and flyers. BUT, with the very best will in the world, **we cannot individually promote hundreds of artists and makers and 200+ venues**. We have some great ideas to help you in this handbook, so please read on, roll up your sleeves and get stuck in!

What does a successful Art Weeks mean to you?

It's definitely worth spending a little time thinking about what success means to you before you start, as this can really help to shape your event. Do you want lots of visitors or maybe a small, but very well targeted number of people who are genuinely interested in your work and techniques? Are you aiming for sales, private commissions or just feedback and the opportunity to talk to visitors and other artists? Whatever it is, it's worth having **a goal to work towards**.

The Bucks Art Weeks logo and brand

Bucks Art Weeks is a strong brand: it's been going nearly 40 years, has over 3,000 people on the mailing list and around 25,000 people use the website each year. So it makes sense for you to **use the Bucks Art Weeks logo in all your publicity**.

You can download the logo from the website at <https://www.bucksartweeks.org.uk/artists/marketing-material>

If you're putting together a press release or just need some **brief information to explain Bucks Art Weeks** to people, here is some text you can use:

Bucks Art Weeks festival is Buckinghamshire's largest visual arts festival and open studios event. In June each year, this 16-day not-for-profit celebration of the county's artistic and creative talent encompasses the visual arts in their broadest sense. Around 250 artists, makers and designers open the doors to their homes and studios or take part in pop-up exhibitions and welcome the public to see their creations and watch them work – over 40,000 people visit each year, thousands of artworks change hands, and substantial amounts are generated for a whole host of charities. See more at www.bucksartweeks.org.uk

Your timeline to have a great Bucks Art Weeks

MARCH

- If you haven't already populated your **gallery page** on the Bucks Art Weeks website, do this now - visitors will be looking at it and deciding whether to come to you, so it needs to look inviting. See the February and March members newsletter about how to do this - if you don't have a copy, please contact our Coordinator Paola on admin@bucksartweeks.org.uk.
- **Follow @bucksartweeksofficial** on Instagram and Facebook

APRIL

- **Plan how you're going to promote yourself** during Bucks Art Weeks. Most people will start visiting locally and that is where you can have most impact to drive your visitor numbers and sales. Think about what channels you can use. And consider how much of your work to show online in advance as publicity and how much to hold back for when people visit in real life (you can use this afterwards online).
- Collect your Bucks Art Weeks **directories and posters** (an email notice goes out from VIG to indicate where to collect them from) and distribute. It's never too early to start getting the word out in your local community. Where should you put them? Here are some ideas but you will think of more...
 - Your car window
 - Shops and shop windows
 - Libraries
 - Cafes and bars
 - Gyms
 - Doctors, dentists, opticians, hairdressers waiting rooms
 - Yoga and dance studios
 - Staffrooms at local places of work
 - Galleries
 - Hotel reception areas
 - Churches
 - Schools, scouts/guides groups etc
 - Dogs' training classes
 - Day or evening classes
 - Craft fairs and fetes
 - Open gardens events (find your local ones at <https://findagarden.ngs.org.uk/>)
 - Tourist information centres – you can see if they will let you do a display with you or your group's work
- If you would like to, create a personalised **flyer for your own event**. Make sure you use the Bucks Art Weeks logo (see above) as it will drive visitors to your event. You can distribute it to the places listed above plus:
 - Through neighbours' doors (you may want to divide your area up between you if you are in a group show)
- Take some **good quality photographs** for publicity purposes. A lovely shot of you working in your studio, a shot of you with some visitors and high-quality shots of your wonderful works of art. And please make them high resolution (not grainy photos of photos with the washing up in the background!).

- Write a press release and issue to **Parish newsletters/websites**. Local parish and village magazines are a brilliant way of publicising your own individual event. Bear in mind though that some magazines will work at least one month (or more) in advance of publication. You can see handy hints about how to write a press release at <https://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2014/jul/14/how-to-write-press-release>
- Add the Bucks Art Weeks logo, with details of your event, to your **email signature**.
- Are you taking part in a **local art trail**? These are great ways to boost your visitor numbers. Check the website <https://www.bucksartweeks.org.uk/open-studios/trails> or contact Paola Aldus, our VIG Coordinator, to see if there's already an Art Trail in your area. If there is, ask how you can be put on. If not, why not set up your own? You can use the website to contact the artists closest to you, maybe meet up for a coffee and put your trail together. If you do create an art trail, please email it as a PDF to Paola at admin@bucksartweeks.org.uk and it will be added to the main website and to all the other art trail entries.
- Consider organising a **Private View party** (official opening) for invited guests. This will ensure you get good word of mouth promotion if it's at the start of the event. Invite people 4 weeks in advance... invite everyone you know and ask them to bring a friend! Consider inviting the local community and perhaps local MPs and Councillors too. It should be for 2 hours maximum, with small glasses of wine and simple nibbles to keep the budget down.
- Start using the **#bucksartweeksofficial hashtag** on social media. Many visitors follow this so you will show up on their feeds automatically.

MAY / EARLY JUNE

- We will be sending **press releases to local newspapers, magazines, and radio stations** but there's nothing stopping you contacting them directly, too. You can see handy hints about how to write a press release at <https://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2014/jul/14/how-to-write-press-release>
- Post a **'save the date'** 4 weeks before on social media and **send personal invitations** by email to interested people. Collecting names, addresses and emails of visitors each year, and anywhere else you exhibit, and then sending personal invitations to them works particularly well and is a great way for them to spread the word with their family and friends. Many of our successful participants highly recommend this as a key way of getting more visitors and sales.
- Publicise your event on **local online sites** e.g. Facebook village and town groups, Nextdoor, MumsNet, Eventbrite.
- Put up **posters** if you haven't already (see above).
- Get in touch with your inner Del Boy and see if you can get a temporary **market stall** for early June. You can ask as many artists and makers in your area as you can to help and attend. Market stalls are a fantastic way of talking to local people, handing out directories and flyers as well as details of Art Trails. Make sure you do a good display with posters and banners.
- Decide on **what work you will display** and the prices for each item. Have new material to show and demonstrate – this is particularly important for repeat visitors. If appropriate have sketchbooks, source material and work in progress. Measure the space available and, if in someone else's space, check what is allowed to hang on the walls - can you use nails? Consider having different price points for different

types of visitors e.g. smaller items/prints, greetings cards/bookmarks as well as substantial pieces.

- Consider printing **business cards** or something that visitors can take away to keep in touch.
- Make sure you have **public liability insurance** in place. You can purchase this cheaply by joining the Artists Network (<https://www.a-n.co.uk/>) or the SAA (<https://www.saa.co.uk/>), or through the British Insurance Brokers Association (BIBA) (<https://www.biba.org.uk/>) which is a not-for-profit Trade Association for insurance brokers.
- Borrow any **display boards or stands** you might need and make sure you know what you're allowed to do to them (nails, tape etc).
- Plan **how you'll take payments**: a card reader, cash, cheques, bank transfer etc. How will you record what's been sold and how much money was taken and how? You will need a cash box and a float. In case systems fail, have bank details on hand so that people can make a transfer - you don't want to lose a sale!
- Contact or visit your artist neighbours in advance. Then you'll be able to send visitors on to them confidently and improve the visitor experience. A rising tide lifts all ships so pay it forward and **recommend your neighbouring artists** to your visitors!
- Make sure you know about food and drink options and other **amenities in the area** e.g. petrol stations and shops, so that you can answer any queries from your visitors.

1 WEEK TO GO

- **Good signage is everything!** You need to make it as easy as possible for visitors to find you. We cannot stress enough that well placed and sufficient road signs make a huge difference to the success of your event. Here are some pointers (excuse the pun!):
 - Put up signs and arrows from all the closest main routes.
 - The large yellow boards should be in position a week before Bucks Art Weeks starts to create awareness and interest (even if you are only open the second week). The arrows should then be fixed in place early on the day of opening.
 - Don't forget to put your directory number on the sticker provided and affix it to your yellow boards.
 - Fix yellow boards to metal or wooden posts (from DIY stores).
 - Hammer into the ground (before a road junction, rather than at the junction).
 - Place sensibly and be aware that the council or neighbours may mow a grass verge and remove your signage.
 - Do not fix to street furniture e.g. road signs or lampposts.
 - Follow all the signs yourself to make sure that, if you were a visitor in a car, you would be able to see all the signs and reach your venue.
 - Road safety is paramount – make sure your signs do not obscure other road signs or limit visibility for road users.
- Top up local libraries, shops, waiting rooms etc. with **directories/flyers** and put up any remaining posters.
- Put together a brief **information sheet about you and your work**, to display or for people to take away with them. You can use the material you've put on your Bucks Art Weeks gallery page on the website.
- **Plan parking** at your venue if necessary. Warn your neighbours that you will have visitors parking nearby - and invite them! If you don't want to take up a valuable

parking space with your own car, park it nearby if you can do so safely and put a notice in the window to direct visitors if it's useful.

- Get together all the **practical things** you might need during the event: paper and pens, a receipt book, red dots, scissors, sellotape, blu tack, packing materials, screwdriver, hammer, hooks, wire, string, pins, bags, price labels, a change float, marker pen, business cards, lights, extension lead, phone charger, tape measure, gaffer tape,...
- A word about **packaging**: if someone has paid a substantial amount for a work of art, don't give them a supermarket carrier bag to take it home in! Use paper/eco wrap and string, and make it waterproof if it might rain. Include a label or your business card. Consider offering a gift wrapping service too.
- **Practice laying out your space**: try it out on the right sized wall/floor at home, decide on what goes where and take a photo so that you can replicate it at the venue.
- Plan **how you will welcome visitors**. If in a group, will you have name badges? Will music be playing? Will you let people browse or chat straight away? Make sure you smile! Remember that visitors are all different so you need to act appropriately. Don't lead people through the show talking at them!
- Make sure you have a **visitors book** or some way of collecting comments and contact details. Some venues have a prize draw for visitors who are happy to leave their email address. If collecting personal details, make sure you have a privacy notice/GDPR statement to hand (see <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/advice-for-small-organisations/make-your-own-privacy-notice/>)
- Post on **social media** that you're taking part and plan the posts you will make during the event. These can include:
 - That you're taking part
 - Sharing BucksArtWeeksOfficial and other artists' posts
 - Sharing the BucksArtWeeks website, your gallery page on the website and the directory link
 - A picture of your own work every day
 - Asking people to share the event with their friends
 - A video of your work in situ at your venue
 - Happy customers with their purchases (if they consent!)

THE DAY BEFORE

- **Set up your display**, including prices. Make sure you allow enough time for this!
- Make sure everything is **clean and tidy**, and that there are no trip/slip hazards, including the garden/entrance area - first impressions count!
- Either the evening before, or on the morning of your first day (before you are open but not too far in advance or you might have people turning up when you've got your PJs on...) **put up the arrows and the road sign boards** to direct visitors to your studio or exhibition.
- Think about **what you want to say** about yourself and your work to your visitors. They have probably come because they want to know how and why you make your art - meeting the maker is part of what they are buying if they decide to make a purchase. Try to use everyday language, not jargon, to explain your process. Talk about what inspires you. Be upbeat, positive and welcoming. Ask them questions. Most importantly, take cues from how they react to you and your work, don't talk at

them or give them the hard sell, and reflect afterwards what you can learn from their visit.

DURING THE EVENT

- Regularly **check that the arrows and signs** are still in place and secure.
- **Make a note of the visitors who come** - we will ask for this in our exhibitors' survey after the event but more importantly, the more you know about your customers the better! A basic tally is all you need: for each day, how many people come in the morning/afternoon/evening; their gender/age and relevant demographic info e.g. how local they are; and what pieces they show interest in. This will really help you plan for next year and your sales in general.
- **Encourage feedback** from all your visitors - if they take part in our visitors survey they could win £100. Please point them to the survey by a poster/flyer or in the directory.
- Make it as easy as possible for visitors by making them welcome, with clear signage, details of where to park and how to find the entrance to your venue - and a **friendly greeting** when they come in!
- If possible and it's safe to do so, leave any doors open with clear arrows showing people where to go to.
- Have everything **clearly priced**.
- Always have a book for **making notes**.
- Keep any enthusiastic **pets and/or children** under control!
- Please **stay open** during the times you have stated in the directory! Venues that are closed when they have said they will be open, create a bad impression for the whole event. If there is an emergency and you have to shut unexpectedly, put a notice on the door apologising and directing people to a couple of other local venues.
- **Refreshments**: cold drinks on hot days are very welcome. Bear in mind that if you are busy with catering, you are leaving your work unattended. Please be aware that unless you are selling catering for a charitable donation you will need to be licensed. And any cakes or treats should not contain nuts.
- Take a **walk-through video** - you can post it on social media and/or your Bucks Art Week gallery page.
- **Send every visitor on to another venue nearby** when they have finished their visit with you - this is a way for all of us to get more visitors! Make sure visitors know about the **prize draw for visiting 5 or more venues** and offer to sign their loyalty visiting card. If you are taking part in a local art trail, make sure you have flyers to hand and tell them how to get to the next venue they're interested in.

DAY AFTER THE EVENT

- **Take down all signs, posters and arrows** and store for next year. Please take care of signs, they are expensive to produce and can be reused year after year.
- If you are not participating next year, please return signs and arrows to the VIG Co-ordinator.

THE WEEK AFTER THE EVENT

- Please complete your **participant Evaluation Form** which you will receive by email! This feedback and your visitor tally information helps us to improve Bucks Art Weeks next year. Completing this feedback is useful to monitor your experience while it's still fresh in your mind. For example, how visitor numbers vary on different days and

times. This may help you decide if you want to change your opening days or times next year. It can go by in a blur, so it helps to log your impressions while they're still fresh.

Words of warning

Personal safety

Please **think about your own health and safety**, as well as that of your visitors, during the event. If you will be on your own at a venue, always make sure someone knows where you are, what time you are expected back and make sure you have a (charged) phone to hand.

The vast majority of our visitors are genuine but **do not leave cash or expensive pieces of work unattended** and empty cash boxes regularly so that you do not have large amounts on site.

Be cautious of “paid for” advertising

As a rule, we have found **spending money on print advertising to be less effective** than other forms of marketing as it is hard to measure its effectiveness. If you choose to advertise in local magazines and newsletters then please check exactly who the publication goes to, how many and what types of people and when it will be distributed. In the members area, please download and use the Bucks Art Weeks logo in any advertisements.

Please be super cautious of the publications that flatter you by saying they've selected you to take part in one of their features and then ask for payment. This is usually a huge waste of time and money which could be better spent on other marketing activities. As a general rule, if they ask for payment to include you in an editorial feature, just say no. If you need any advice on advertising, please contact admin@bucksartweeks.org.uk or 07950 732 117.

Remember, please ask if you have queries, and good luck!