

Finding Your Base



CHOOSING A VENUE THAT FITS AN UNPROVEN FIRST EVENT, NOT JUST A NICE ROOM.

First Signal left you with a rough date and a rough headcount. This is where they meet a real room. The aim is a venue that suits an event nobody has seen yet, and a relationship with the people who run it, rather than somewhere that just looks nice. Once you have a room, telling people about it is Guide 03's job. There's a venue checklist at the end to take with you on the visit.

01 PLAN FOR THE ROOM YOU'LL FILL

Everyone who says yes in a group chat means it when they say it. Then life happens. Moff's rule of thumb is that if twenty say they're coming and ten turn up, that's a happy outcome. The ten who come really want to be there, so make them welcome and they become your advert for the next one.

First events are always the hardest sell. Nobody knows the room, the atmosphere or who else is coming, so plenty of people wait to see how it goes. That's normal. Don't read it as a verdict.

So pick a venue for the number that turns up, with room to stretch to the number you hoped for. Ask what happens if you get more than expected, and choose a spot that can soak up some overspill without causing anyone a problem.

Example: the planning estimate for the first Glasgow gathering was twenty. The organisers talked overspill through with the venue in advance and picked a spot that could flex. Turnout came in a little over, at around thirty, which is why an estimate is a planning tool and not a number to chase.

02 FIND A CORNER, NOT JUST A ROOM

You rarely need the whole venue. You need a corner where people can gather, rather than tables scattered across a room where a nervous first-timer can't tell who's with you. Some venues will let you open up or shut off a section, which means the space can feel full at ten people and still stretch to thirty.

Go and look at it at the time you'd be there. A pub that's calm midweek can be loud on a Saturday afternoon, and if the noise makes conversation a struggle, the point of the day goes with it. Ask whether they serve food all day, too. People stay longer when they can eat. And while you're there, find out the venue's own rules, including any policy on age or times, so you know what you can promise when you advertise.

Example: the first Glasgow Gathering started right at the pub's opening time, so there was no chance to set up beforehand. If that's your situation, arrive as early as the venue allows, claim your area straight away, and be ready to guide people in rather than assuming a tidy reserved space will be waiting.

03 MAKE IT EASY TO REACH, AND EASY TO SAY YES TO

Accessibility varies a lot between venues. Look into step-free access, lifts and toilets before you book, and make an informed decision about what you can offer. Then say so clearly when you advertise, so nobody turns up expecting step-free access and finds a walk-up to the third floor.

Think about how people will get there. A venue close to a station or bus route removes a barrier for anyone who doesn't know the area, and a realistic answer on parking matters for anyone driving. You'll pass these details on once you start spreading the word, so it helps to have the answers now.

Drink prices matter more than they sound. If the bar is expensive, people feel it all afternoon. Fair prices keep them relaxed and keep them coming back.

04 TREAT THE VENUE AS A PARTNER, NOT A BOOKING

Guide 00 touched on asking whether it's fine if only ten turn up. Here's the fuller conversation. Ask about a minimum spend, a deposit and a hire fee, because for a first event the best answer to all three is none. Ask what happens if thirty arrive. Ask whether they'd be glad to see you again.

Be upfront about what you're building, not just what you're booking this once. A venue that knows your ambitions might be willing to grow with you, and one that can support you up to community meet scale could become a long-term home. It works the other way too. Staff who know you and your group make the day smoother for everyone, and you become a customer they want to keep.

If it goes well, use the same venue for your second and third events. Regulars relax when the room is familiar, and you stop solving the same problems from scratch each time.

Example: the Glasgow gathering worked partly because the organisers already knew and liked the pub, which gave them confidence it would have a good atmosphere. The second summer gathering went back to it, so regulars were walking into somewhere familiar.

// CLOSING NOTE

Next up is Guide 03, Spreading the Word, where a locked-in room and date become something people can find.

And remember, if you'd like support, Moff is happy to mentor and support anyone, just shoot him an email at moff@iacon.uk.

// APPENDIX

Venue Checklist

Things to ask, or check for yourself, before you commit to a venue:

- ☐ Is there a corner or section you can claim, and can it open up or shut off if numbers change?
- ☐ Is there a minimum spend, a deposit or a hire fee? Aim for none.
- ☐ What happens if thirty turn up instead of twenty?
- ☐ What happens if only ten do?
- ☐ How loud does it get at the time you'd be there?
- ☐ Is food served all day?
- ☐ Is there step-free access throughout, including toilets?
- ☐ Is it close to a station or bus stop, and is parking realistic?
- ☐ What are drink prices like?
- ☐ Will the space be ready before your start time, or do you need to arrive early and claim it?
- ☐ Does the venue have its own policy on age or times?
- ☐ Can you bring your own decorations or music, or are there restrictions?
- ☐ Would they be glad to have you back for a second and third event?