

## **WHY A FESTIVAL?**

Why should any self-respecting community group even consider a festival? Any number of things can go wrong – things like the loudspeaker system going on the blink, entertainment canceling at the last minute, or programs being delivered a day late. Then, of course, there is the weather – a matter that can wreak havoc on the most carefully organized festivities. In other words, these special events can be lots of trouble.

But festivals have their strong points, too. One is that they encourage a sense of community pride and cohesiveness. It is not often that everyone in town gets invited to the same party. Festivals provide one of these rare occasions for community-wide fun and relaxation.

They also can have certain educational values. For instance, important historical events can be taken out of the classroom and brought to life through skits, costume contests, reenactments, and other commemorative events. Festivals are ideal occasions for artists and craftsmen to demonstrate their skills in addition to exhibiting their products.

Finally, these special events have the potential to raise funds for community projects. Here in Mississippi, festivals generate thousands of dollars each year for numerous worthy causes: local park improvements, art programs, medical research, Scout troops, community theater, and scholarships – just to name a few.

While festivals can have their problems, they can certainly offer some very big rewards. The purpose of this discussion is to help ensure that the good experiences outweigh the bad.

## **ORGANIZING A FESTIVAL**

### **BRAINSTORMING**

Brainstorming is a good exercise for a festival committee or any other group trying to get things done. The word refers to an idea generation technique where any and all possible suggestions are flushed out, and the wilder the better. Participants meet in a face-to-face setting and offer solutions for an identified need (e.g. event name and/or theme). Everyone is urged to be creative and to expand upon the ideas of others. None of the suggestions are discarded or dismissed at this stage. ALL of these thoughts are promptly recorded and displayed on flip charts during the brainstorming session, thus encouraging even more ideas. Later, each suggestion is evaluated. Some – maybe most – will be discarded, but a surprising number will offer fresh insights for solving problems.

### **Getting Organized**

Getting all the right ingredients together to put on a successful festival is no easy task. It takes preparation – months and months of careful planning and organization. Some groups even get started a full year in advance. Why? The reason is simple: There is really no such thing as a festival that is too organized.

Just as a festival cannot be put together in a few weeks, it cannot be produced by a couple of people. It takes a group of dedicated workers to make one of these special events a successful venture. This group or committee can vary in size but its members must share some key characteristics: a genuine interest in the event, the ability to get things done, a healthy respect for deadlines, and actual time to spend on their assignments.

That is not all, though. Some of the committee members (and the more the better) need to have strong connections within the community. These are people who can go out and quickly round up all kinds of donations – lumber, sign space, printing, advertising copy, food and drinks for volunteers, staging supplies, sound equipment, and the many other necessities for a first-rate event.

Once the committee is established, it needs to meet and get preparations under way. At this first gathering, several matters must be settled: the festival's purpose or objective, its theme, and a chairman. This is also an excellent time to tentatively identify – or better yet, firm up – a location for the event and a date.

### What About a Theme?

It is not good enough to hold a plain old generic festival anymore. The event must have a theme – a main idea or concept that provides a solid base for a variety of interesting and promotable activities. A good example can be found down in Mize. Several years ago the town's residents discovered that watermelons are a fine festival theme, particularly when the melons are very large (up to 200 pounds), very cold, and served on a hot summer weekend. Adding to the fun are appropriate activities like watermelon eating contests, watermelon seed-spitting contests, watermelon decorating contests, and of course, the original – largest watermelon contest.

Watermelons are not the only local product that Mississippi festivals are based upon. There are strawberries, catfish, sweet potatoes, crawfish, shrimp, pumpkins, blueberries, and even kudzu. In other cases, local creatures – like mules, pigs, chickens, horses, and oysters – supply the necessary centers of attention.

Seasons and heritage form the foundation for many of Mississippi's festivals, such as Mardi Gras, Spring Pilgrimages, Irish Heritage Week, Renaissance Festival, Delta Blues Festival, and Octoberfests (German origin), to name a few.

In short, no one is excluded from the festival business. Each and every community in Mississippi possesses at least one distinctive resource that could be nurtured into a successful special event.

### **What About a Name?**

A festival's name should be one of its best selling points. It needs to be catchy, memorable, and somehow tied in with the festival's theme or purpose. A good example is "Jubilee! Jam", the Jackson event that stimulates your imagination. As the copy reads, "It is a celebration of Mississippi art, music, food, and fun." The festival provides funding for local art associations.

Some other examples are the Vicksburg Riverfest, Amory Railroad Festival, Delta Blues Festival, Old Biloxi Fall Festival, and the Choctaw Indian Fair, to name a few. The ones mentioned above have been recognized by the Southeast Tourism Society as winners of the Top 20 Events award.

There is something to be said for choosing an unusual or even bizarre name: people certainly seem to notice it – The "Chunky Rhythm & Blues Festival", the "Steamboat Jubilee", "Gum Tree Festival" and the "Red Hills Festival". The press is also interested in the unusual. National publications frequently contact the Tourism Division for Leads on unconventional special events.

One last thing to remember about names is this: Try to pick one that can be used year after year. It is one way of helping the festival become something of a local tradition. Who in Mississippi has not heard of the Canton Flea Market? Also, by sticking with the same name, many of the festival's signs, banners, and other promotional devices can be stored and used again the following year. With budget problems being what they are, money-saving strategies cannot be overlooked.

## **LOCATION:**

Choose a site that is conveniently situated, that is fairly level and well drained, and that can accommodate visitors and their cars. Town squares, city parks, and fairgrounds frequently meet these basic requirements. Other physical aspects to consider will be addressed later in this publication (see Physical Aspects tab).

Another critical decision is the date for the festival. Among the things to consider are: climate (temperature, rainy seasons, etc); conflicting events; and especially in Mississippi, football schedules.

The purpose, theme, location and date are crucial items for any festival, but the committee's work is just getting started once these matters are settled. Someone will need to draft a budget, someone will need to plan for entertainment, and publicity must be coordinated. The same goes for security, food and beverage sales, and sanitation facilities. These topics and others need to be assigned to committee members so that appropriate subcommittees can be established. In fact, when the first meeting adjourns, everyone should leave with a clearly defined assignment on one or more subcommittees.

Two other items also need to emerge from this initial meeting. One is a confirmed date for the next meeting. The other is a schedule, or timeline, to keep everything on track. An example is shown below:

## **SAMPLE FESTIVAL TIMELINE**

- January 15**..... **First meeting.**  
**Appoint chairman.**  
**Set date/time/location.**  
**Establish subcommittees.**
- February 9** ..... **Subcommittee reports and updates.**
- March 13** ..... **Begin advertising/publicity campaign.**  
**Order resale items.**
- April 8** ..... **Food and beverage vendors finalized.**  
**Craftsmen selected**  
**Entertainment booked.**
- April 15** ..... **Volunteers secured to man the event.**
- May 15**..... **Order outdoor equipment.**
- May 23**..... **Subcommittee reports.**
- May 25**..... **Set up booths.**  
**Complete final preparations**
- May 26**..... **FESTIVAL !**
- May 27**..... **Clean up.**
- June 1** ..... **Final subcommittee reports due.**
- June 8** ..... **Financial report due.**

A problem with most festivals is passing on lessons and experiences from one year to the next. The Jubilee! Jam Festival people in Jackson may have it solved, though. Their co-chairman assists the chairman one year, then moves up to chair the following year's event. It is a great method for making each festival better than its predecessor.

Another suggestion: Festival promoters may want to consider getting their organization recognized as a tax-exempt body, particularly if the event is to be an annual undertaking. There are several reasons for seeking such a designation. One of the biggest is to encourage donations – money or property – from local businesses. If the festival organization carries tax-exempt status, contributions can be deducted from a firm's federal taxes, and that is an attractive incentive.

The IRS has prepared a handy booklet (Publication 557: "Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization") that will answer most questions about filing requirements. Copies can be obtained by writing.

Internal Revenue Service  
Forms Distribution Center  
Post Office Box 2924  
Austin, Texas 78769

Liability insurance is also a matter that organizers may want to seriously examine. Policies are not free, but a minor investment in one could prevent big problems later on.

## Publicity

Organizers of even the most successful events cannot afford to sit back and hope that the crowds will continue to show up year after year. The people might not come. This disaster is avoided by appointing a publicity subcommittee and making certain that its members develop a good promotional strategy early in the planning process.

This strategy will be similar to many corporate marketing campaigns. The goal is to get people to sample the produce – in this case, a festival. One difference will be in budgets; Festival promoters generally do not have a Madison Avenue war chest for reaching potential customers. And while that is a problem, it is not insurmountable. A surprising amount of publicity can be obtained by tapping into community resources.

Here are examples of methods used by festival organizers to stretch their limited advertising appropriations:

1. **Billboards:** Local outdoor advertising companies will frequently donate sign space for worthy causes like community festivals. There is certainly no harm in asking for a contribution. Another possibility is convincing an existing billboard advertiser – say, a soft drink company – to share its space. With this situation, a promotional banner complete with the event's name, date, and location can be “tagged” onto the top, bottom, or even middle of the current billboard.
2. **Marquees:** A surprising number of business establishments have marquees that can be used for festival publicity. Many owners will be glad to display a promotional message during the week prior to the event.
3. **Posters/brochures/bumper stickers:** These three items are generally pretty expensive; printing is not cheap. But they are also the kind of things that local firms might be willing to provide, particularly if the donors are given

credit for their contributions. Banks and insurance companies are all potential sponsors.

- 4. Public Service Announcements (PSA):** Local radio and television stations usually will broadcast public service announcements about festivals if the event serves some civic purpose. These PSA's – as they are called – are broadcast without charge. Not only that, a stations' staff will often assist in writing the announcements. And, for the televised PSA's, it is a good idea to furnish attractive color slides from last year's festival, if any are available.
- 5. Newspapers:** While equally intent in promoting civic events, newspapers have different requirements than radio and television stations. Most editors will need more detailed information: who is the Chairman, what is on the program, and that sort of thing. An interview may be the best way of providing all the answers. Also, most editors cannot use color slides; they will need black-and-white prints, preferably 5 x 7 inches in size. Another possibility to check on is a newspaper advertisement; a local businessman might be persuaded to sponsor a quarter or half-page promotional ad.
- 6. Calendar of events:** Twice a year the Tourism Division of the Mississippi Development Authority publishes the "Mississippi Calendar of Events" – a month-by-month listing of the many special activities taking place all over the State. Visitors to Mississippi make good use of the "Calendar", and so do publications like SOUTHERN LIVING, MISSISSIPPI MAGAZINE, and the local newspapers. For information on how to get an event listed, write:

Calendar of Events  
Mississippi Development Authority/Tourism Division  
Post Office Box 849  
Jackson, Mississippi 39205

7. **Inserts:** Nearly every household receives a monthly utility statement, and that fact has not been overlooked by some festival organizers. They have successfully asked the local gas, water, electric company, or telephone company to insert promotional messages in their mailings. Others have had equally good cooperation with banks.
8. **Parades:** Just about everybody in town turns out to watch a parade. There is no question that these spectacles – with all their pomp and pageantry – provide a great deal of opening day publicity. Children and adults alike enjoy the bands, admire the floats, and wave at the folks in convertibles. But one sobering thought cannot be forgotten: the parade may require as much planning and organization as the festival itself!

In summary, an effective publicity campaign does not necessarily require a big budget. A great deal of promotion can be done at little or not cost to the festival organization. What is required are some things that money can not always but – creativity and imagination.

Finally, each and every publicity subcommittee member must recognize these facts:

1. Much of what is to be promoted – entertainment, for example – will be arranged by other subcommittees. Therefore, it is imperative that the publicity people develop a good working relationship with everybody helping with the festival.
2. The subcommittee has a lot to do, and timing will be critical in many instances. The publicity group may want to establish its own schedule or timeline.

3. Media representatives are serious about deadlines. Make certain that press releases and other informational materials are in the reporters' hands in plenty of time.
4. Since local businessmen do not always have the means to help with every civic project they may have to say "no" to your request. By accepting these rejections graciously, you may be lining up supporters for next year's event.

### **Some Do Nots When Preparing Releases For The Media:**

- 1. Do not be cute.** Editors generally hate cute more than anything. An attention-getting lead is never cute; it may be clever and it must be clear, but if it smacks of “cute” it will never see the light of day.
- 2. Do not produce a release in color.** Purple ink is just as offensive as purple writing to an editor. Make your release as simple and as straightforward as possible. Do not type all capitals and do not single-space. Allow adequate margins at the sides, top, and bottom of the paper. Do not use superlatives; they threaten the credibility of the entire release.
- 3. Do not expect others to know as much about your subject as you do.** Do not simply say that there will be craftspeople demonstrating at your crafts fair. Spell out the type of crafts that will be exhibited; focus on one or two outstanding craftspeople and use their story as the lead-in to a general description of the fair. Do give complete details (everything anyone could possibly want to know about your event) and conclude by giving the name, address, and telephone number of a knowledgeable contact person.
- 4. Do not become annoyed with the media if they change your material.** It is an argument you will not win. Just be thankful for the attention...and do not forget to thank the editor or broadcaster after he carries your event. He or she will be that much more willing next year to give space to your efforts.
- 5. Don't worry that fancy writing is necessary to get your release noticed.** Facts – pertinent facts – the more the better – are what are called for.
- 6. Do not fail to date your release.** Do not allow it to run over three pages.
- 7. Do not fail to say thank you.** When an editor or a writer sends you a tearsheet of a story, it is best to acknowledge receiving it and to thank him or her for taking the time to inform you that the story has run. Otherwise, future tearsheets may not be forthcoming – not to mention future stories.

## Entertainment

Festivals are supposed to be fun, and for many people that means simply one thing – entertainment. But entertainment subcommittees often find their jobs to be anything but simple.

Fortunately, there are several general principles for keeping matters from getting entirely out of hand:

1. **Be sure to have some really good workers on this subcommittee.** People who just want to pad their resumes should look for other assignments. This is a **working** committee.
2. **Begin planning early for entertainment.** Many performers are booked months in advance and will be unavailable on short notice.
3. **Know your audience and plan accordingly.** A belly dancer is probably not the best choice for a group made up primarily of children, just as a clown would be inappropriate for most adult gatherings.
4. **Put variety in the program.** Nearly every community, and certainly every region, has enough talent to provide a wide range of entertainment. Barber shop quartets, aerobic dancers, martial arts groups, ballet classes, gospel acts, Blues artists, and square dancers are some that come to mind quickly. Other performances – like hot air balloons and magic shows – can be brought in from nearby locales.
5. **Do not overlook sponsors.** Many groups looking for exposure will perform without charge, but others require a fee. If the subcommittee decides on a paid performance but does not have the necessary funds, one answer might be to seek a sponsor. In many Mississippi towns, local businesses frequently underwrite the cost of the “featured” entertainment.

6. **Let festival-goers participate in their own entertainment.** Get them involved in events like tugs-of-war, pet shows, kite-flying contests, father/daughter sack races, tricycle riding derbies, and countless others.
7. **Be Creative.** People seem to be especially attracted to unusual performances, often the zanier the better.

The items listed are some of the more general things that should not be neglected when developing an entertainment program. There is more to it than that, though.

Lots of details must be nailed down, too.

1. **Staging:** Make certain that entertainers know what kind of accommodations to expect. Will they be performing on a pre-fabricated wooden stage, flatbed trailer, the lawn, or under a tent?
2. **Lighting:** Evening performances may require artificial lighting. Will entertainers bring their own systems, or will lights be provided?
3. **Sound:** Musical groups usually furnish their own sound equipment, but other entertainers may well expect it to be supplied. And remember, a system consists of more than microphones, amplifiers, speakers, and the wires tying it all together; a dependable operator/trouble-shooter makes the sound system complete.
4. **Dressing rooms:** Some performers entertain in their street clothes, and others change into the appropriate dress before reaching the festival grounds. Will there be a designated area for costume changes?
5. **Performance contracts:** As noted earlier, some entertainers will perform for free, and others will insist upon payment. Contracts need to be signed with those in the latter category specifying what services will be performed,

when, and at what cost. It is not a bad idea to sign a similar agreement with the “free” entertainers; that way the deal is spelled out and fully documented.

6. **Scheduling:** Determine early on how much time will be allotted to entertainment and how much is to be reserved for each performance. Make certain that each act is fully aware of the schedule, and sticks to it.
7. **Emcees:** Somebody needs to be the designated emcee – or master of ceremonies. Local disc jockeys, television personalities, or legislators may be able to help out. If the entertainment program runs a full day, consider spreading out the work among several emcees. Above all, give them complete information about the performers they will be introducing.
8. **Publicity:** In many instances, entertainment will be the major draw for the festival. Work closely with the publicity subcommittee to ensure that promotional efforts fully reflect the entertainment program that is on tap.

And finally, have some solid contingency plans. Build in a bit of flexibility.

**Things seldom go exactly as scheduled.**

## **Making Money**

The themes for Mississippi's festivals cover a wide range, but most of these special events have an underlying purpose: to make money. While this commercial aspect may bother some purists, there is not getting around the fact that festivals are excellent fund-raisers. All kinds of good causes can be helped. Not only that, but some of the money generated can be set aside to put on next year's event. For many groups, the question is simply this: What is the best way to raise money? There is no quick answer.

What might help is to quickly look at some of the fund-raising techniques that other festival promoters have used:

- 1. Sale of booth space:** This is undoubtedly one of the most popular (and effective) fund-raising ideas, particularly with arts and crafts shows. However, no two groups seem to do everything the same. Many just sell a designated space, and let the exhibitor provide everything else – display tables, backdrops, and chairs. Some groups supply things, and still others include electricity or even a tent over the booth. These different factors (along with projected attendance) influenced the booth fees along with the size and location of the spaces. In short, booth fees vary greatly from place to place. Most groups collect these fees well in advance, usually at the time an exhibitor applies for space. They have also found that a strict refund policy is a good idea. It is one way of ensuring that exhibitors reconsider before canceling at the last minute.
- 2. Percentage of sales:** Several organizations do not stop with the rental of booth space; their contracts with exhibitors stipulate that a certain percentage

of sales – frequently 10 to 20 percent – be returned to the festival organization. If the “cut” is kept reasonable and the crowds show up, exhibitors do not seem to mind sharing their proceeds. **This approach is not without its problems.** Bookkeeping headaches can be expected along with occasional doubts about the accuracy of sales reports. Its success, though, is beyond question.

- 3. Food and Beverage Sales:** Public gatherings somehow seem to encourage the consumption of vast quantities of popcorn, hot dogs, funnel cakes, and drinks to wash them down. Most festival organizers will not need to be reminded of this phenomenon. Their job will be to figure out how to make the most of this demand.

Promoters can handle the food/beverage matter in one of two ways:

(a) selling the refreshments themselves, or (b) allowing someone else to sell food and drinks on a concession basis. Many groups will lean toward the former, but unless they have the necessary equipment and a good crew of tireless volunteers, they may be better off to work with an experienced concessionaire. Organizers also need to realize that the food and beverage business is closely regulated by the Mississippi Department of Health.

- 4. Souvenir Sales:** In addition to their interest in buying food, festival-goers are frequently on the lookout for souvenir items. This, of course, is not place to review human psychology, but it is apparent that a good many people have a need to remind themselves (and friends) of their participation in certain festivities. They do this by purchasing ball caps, T-shirts, plastic cups, souvenir programs, or other mementos. If festival organizers are to take advantage of this element of human nature, they will need to keep in mind the target audience. A key thing to remember is that different groups have different tastes. What may sell exceedingly well at a typical “funfest” may not move at all during an arts and crafts fair.

5. **Races:** Many groups are cashing in on the jogging/running craze by sponsoring 5, 8 or 10K races. For a modest entry fee (\$5 or \$10), runners are allowed to participate in these events. They expect two things in return: (1) a well-organized race, and (b) a commemorative T-shirt or ball cap. The former can be accomplished with volunteers; the latter will cost \$2.50 to \$3.00 per racer.
6. **Admission fee:** This method can work provided two requirements are met: (a) the grounds are enclosed so that admission can be effectively controlled; and (b) the festival's attractions are clearly worth the price to get in. If these conditions cannot be met, it is probably unwise to consider an admission charge. For the record, most Mississippi festivals do not bother with these entrance fees.
7. **Parking charges:** The same rules apply here that govern admission charges. Again, few promoters find this method worth their time.

In summary, festivals are good places to raise money. But for one of these events to be financially successful, it cannot smack of commercialism. Above all, the festival must be what the name implies – festive!

**NOTE:** For years, games of chance have been popular fund-raising activities for many of Mississippi's civic and charitable organizations. Lotteries, raffles, and bingo have helped many a worth cause. The truth is, though, that these games – whatever they may be called – are ILLEGAL. While some prosecuting attorneys have been inclined to look the other way, promoters need to remember that there are statutes in the Mississippi Criminal Code expressly prohibiting these activities.

Although most festivals are looking for publicity, they do not really need it in the form of a police raid. And that could happen. The sale of lottery tickets is considered a misdemeanor, while the operation of a lottery itself is a felony.

Another item for consideration is SEED MONEY. As the saying goes, “it takes money to make money”, and this holds true for festivals, too. Seed money is a must. Start-up funds are needed to purchase resale items, to have brochures printed, or maybe even to rent concession stands or tents. Unless these front-end costs can be handled, the prospects for a moneymaking venture are poor.

### **Ordering the Souvenirs**

Unless a silkscreen machine is in their possession, most groups will have to order their commemorative souvenirs from another organization. Many of the firms handling this sort of merchandise can be found under “advertising specialties” in the “yellow pages” of a large city’s telephone directory. While they can supply a wide range of items, these companies are governed by certain practices:

- 1. Minimum orders:** Minimum orders are a necessary part of business. They may range from two dozen for T-shirts to 250 for sun visors.
- 2. Camera-ready art:** Camera –ready art is strongly recommended. If the specialty firm has to prepare the artwork, costs go up and so do the time requirements.

**3. Production:** Production takes time. An order of T-shirts may be ready 10 days after it is placed, but frisbees may take a full six weeks for delivery.

### **Paying for Merchandise**

Even though the group may be able to sell dozens and dozens of shirts at a 100 percent markup, paying for them can be a problem. Here is why. The wholesaler will very likely require an organization that is a first-time customer to pay 50 percent of the cost at the time of the order, with the remainder due within ten days of delivery. Established customers may be able to work out better deals.

## **Food and Beverages**

Festival-goers are difficult to categorize. Some are retired; others still in their strollers. Some come to watch the people; others are more interested in the arts and crafts. The list of differences goes on and on. But there is one thing that seems to hold true for nearly everyone in the crowd; an inordinate desire for food and beverages.

If there are any doubts about this, all one has to do is ask the Mississippi Catfish Producers Association, the Mississippi Poultry Association, or the Jubilee! Jam organizers about their food and soft drink sales. In other words, people love to eat at festivals. Not only that, they **expect** food and beverages to be available at these events. If such refreshments are not on the premises, an early departure by those in attendance can be anticipated.

Like the other subcommittees, the one handling food arrangements need to get to work promptly. An early order of business should be to become thoroughly familiar with requirements issued by the Mississippi Department of Health. A manual especially relevant to this is “Rules and Regulations Pertaining to Food Service Establishments”. This festival booklet cannot possibly address all the points covered by the manual, but it can quickly summarize food service operations. Given particular attention are “potentially hazardous foods”, especially salads or sandwiches containing meat, poultry, eggs, or fish.

The food regulations do not end with what can and cannot be served. They also cover such things as hand washing facilities, wastewater disposal, and permissible tableware. In addition, there are specific requirements concerning the construction of concession stands. Floors must be of certain “cleanable” materials, walls and ceilings must keep out bugs and the weather; doors must be self-closing; and counter-service areas must be designed “to restrict the entrance of flying insects”. There is even a minimum standard for screening materials; at least 16 mesh to the inch. To be sure their food service arrangements are in order, many festival organizers make a point of involving the county health department office in their planning from the outset.

Beverage sales also are governed by state regulations. In addition to those of the Health Department, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board has certain rules that must be followed adult beverages are to be sold. Nonprofit organizations, for example, can obtain an “on premises retail beer ‘picnic’ permit” if certain requirements are met. Since the permit application takes several weeks for processing, the astute organizer will submit all the paperwork (and a rather sizable fee) well in advance of the festival date. And, of course, organizations in “dry” counties need not apply.

Important as they are, government regulations are but one part of the food/beverage picture. There are several other things to consider. One concerns

variety. Just as the entertainment program is improved with a mixture of performances, refreshments will serve a wider and more appreciative audience if the selections exhibit some diversity. In fact, several very successful events – like the Jubilee! Jam or Biloxi Heritage Festival – owe a great deal of their popularity to the tempting dishes made available to a hungry public.

As mentioned earlier, the food and beverage business can be handled either by the festival organizers themselves or by concessionaires. The decision on which way to go will be influenced by the availability of start-up funds food service equipment, and volunteers. One piece of advice, however, applies to both alternatives - ask for bids. If the festival promoters will be selling the food, bids provide a means for getting the best prices on buns, wieners, soft drinks, and other foodstuffs. If concessionaires are to be used, solicit bids to find one offering the best return (percentage of gross) to the organizations. And, make sure to get everything – menu, hours of operation, location, and the financial arrangements – clearly spelled out in any contracts with vendors.

## **Arts and Crafts**

Almost any festival can be greatly enhanced by making arts and crafts a part of it. In these days of getting back to basics and learning about our roots, many people are keenly interested in buying handmade items and seeing them created. This interest is not confined to one age group either. Young and old alike enjoy everything from cornhusk dolls to watercolors.

However, the very popularity of these talents can create problems. The demand for accomplished arts and craftsmen is strong – strong enough that the festival organizer who waits until the last minute to extend invitations may be without any takers. In short, it is essential that these people be lined up early. Many of the artist/craftsmen make their plans a year in advance, and it is not a bad idea for an arts and crafts subcommittee to do the same.

The committee may also want to contact the Mississippi Arts Commission at (601) 359-6030. The commission can be a great source of contacts within the arts community. Trying to contact the artists is occasionally a problem, because few are listed in the “yellow pages”. Another solution may be to visit with other festival promoters. Most are usually willing to share their lists – provided your event offers no competition. In addition, the county agent of the Cooperative Extension Service probably knows local people who might be interested in displaying their skills.

Another matter the subcommittee needs to keep in mind is variety. It is generally considered unwise, for example, to feature half a dozen woodcarvers while failing to include other artists like glass blowers, candle makers, and basketweavers. Some festivals, particularly those with limited display areas, have a policy of inviting only one exhibitor representing each type of art and craft.

If more than one exhibitor of a craft is interested in coming to your festival but the space is limited, how do you decide whom to invite? One method is to ask around and choose whomever most people think is best, but this can cause problems. What you might want to consider is a juried show. The craftspeople send in samples of their work (or photographs) and the jury, or judging committee, then makes the selection on what artists to invite. Restrictions – who may enter, quantity, sizes, media, etc. – should be established from the outset.

Giving some type of award or recognition is one way of encouraging participation by the better artists. Monetary prizes are great inducements, but make certain that the judging is done by a qualified person or team. Local businesses will frequently underwrite the costs of such contests.

Artists and craftsmen should not be the only ones to profit financially from a showing. The festival group itself should be able to raise funds from one of more of these methods:

- 1. Admission fee:** If the entrance to an arts and crafts area can be effectively controlled, a modest admission fee is a possibility.
- 2. Booth spaces:** The sale (or more accurately, the rental) of designated display spaces for artists/craftsmen is a frequent practice.
- 3. Percentage of gross sales:** Many festivals have established a policy of collecting a certain percentage of gross sales (commonly 10 to 20 percent) from each exhibitor at the end of the day.

Whichever method you choose, check out all the angles. For example, the sponsoring group may be exempt from taxes, but the craftspeople and other sales outlets may not be. Find out what local and state laws dictate and notify everyone involved.

Another good idea is to provide a “check-in area” for the exhibitors. Give them some type of badge or nameplate so they are easily identifiable both to festival officials and the general public. This location can also be a place for them to go to air problems, ask questions, and get a breather from the crowds. And, as a matter of courtesy, supply them with coffee and doughnuts or other refreshments. They will remember your festival and may be more inclined to come back in the following years.

Finally, the arts and crafts subcommittee cannot overlook the physical requirements of an exhibition. Exactly what will be offered the exhibitors! Will it be merely a designated space with tables and electricity? Will the “booths” be out in the open or under a tent? Walk through the proposed arts and crafts area well before the final plans are drawn. Try to visualize that might happen, what problems might develop, and what can be done to reduce them. Try to imagine crowd flow, particularly where bottlenecks might occur. Also, look at the layout from an exhibitor’s perspective. Is everything in order? Once these questions are answered, invitations (complete with a fee schedule) can be distributed to the arts and crafts community.

## **Children's Area**

Many festival-goers are families, and that means children. Most festivals are literally swarming with kids of all shapes, sizes and ages. These children usually share one characteristic: the need to be entertained. As long as kids are happy and having a good time, families will stick around. But if the youngsters get bored and fidgety, parents and offspring quickly start heading for the exits. In other words, the wise festival organizer does not forget about the younger set.

One solution may be a specially designated "Children's Area" featuring a variety of things to do. A key point to remember is that interests will vary by age group; what appeals to a four-year-old may well bore an older child. Another matter to keep in mind is safety. What is easy for a twelve-year-old may be too risky for a younger sibling.

Keeping these younger visitors entertained does not require elaborate and expensive productions. In fact, some of the best activities are traditional favorites.

Here are some suggestions:

Bubblegum Blowing Contests	Turtle Races
Greased Watermelon Contests	Sack Races
Watermelon Eating Contests	Tug of War
Watermelon seed Spitting	Cake Walks
Water Balloon Toss	Musical Chairs
Face Painting Contest	Coloring Contests
Frisbee Throwing Contests	Egg Toss
Balloon Relay Races	Horseshoe Pitching
Three-legged Races	

Winners of these events can be given small prizes donated by local merchants. Better yet, give a prize to all contestants. That way everybody is rewarded for taking part.

Kids do not have to be active all the time, either. Make sure the forms of passive entertainment – things like puppet shows, animal acts, or magicians – are also on the agenda. With a little imagination, even movies can be shown. One festival, for example, parks a tractor-trailer rig at the bottom of a hill, with the trailer end facing the slope. The trailer's doors are opened, a white sheet is suspended well inside the cargo area, and movies are shown all day long to an audience perched along the hillside.

Children's' areas are also excellent locations for such roving entertainment as jugglers, mimes, and clowns. Other costume characters – Smokey the Bear, Miss Piggy, Barney and Mr. Catfish – attract a fascinated following. Another favorite is the Face Painter, a tempera artist who can quickly transform a child's face into that of a clown, monster, or alien being. (Note: a few children may change their minds halfway through the operation and insist upon the return of their original faces; be sure cold cream is handy at all times).

Decorating kids is a good idea, and so is decorating the children's area itself. Youngsters seem especially attracted to bright balloons and colorful streamers.

Playing appropriate music is another way of letting kids know that an area has been set up for their enjoyment.

A last piece of advice about children's areas concerns supervision:

**SOMEBODY NEEDS TO BE IN CHARGE.**

Performers must be cued; contests must be staged; prizes must be awarded; and lost children must be reunited with their parents. Each of these is a big assignment, and it may take several people to get them done. But the reward – smiling children – is even greater.

## **Physical Aspects**

It takes more than a catchy name, quality entertainment, lots of publicity, and good weather to make a festival a success. Lumped together in this chapter are many other matters that must be attended to.

One of the first things to realize is that festivals are not all that different from cities. Both encourage concentrations of people, and that can lead to all kinds of problems – problems with traffic, water supplies, sewage disposal, energy networks, medical care, and crime.

Because of the threat of health-related problems like contamination and disease at large public gatherings, local and state governments have developed certain rules that must be followed.

While the Health Department regulations will not pertain to all festivals, they furnish some useful standards for a public event:

1. One water hydrant for every 1,000 persons in attendance.
2. Separate toilet facilities for each sex for each 500 persons and clearly marked “Men” or “Women”.
3. An area of at least 50 square feet per person, exclusive of parking (example: a crowd of 10,000 would need 500,000 square feet, or about 11.5 acres).
4. At least one emergency aid station.

5. An ambulance with driver for crowds up to 10,000; two units for crowds in the 10,00 – 50,000 range; and another unit for 2,000 additional persons.

Help with some of these items is often available through other organizations. The American Red Cross, for instance, may be able to provide an emergency medical station. Local National Guard units or law enforcement agencies can occasionally supply ambulances and drivers.

Restrooms however are an entirely different matter. The best bet is usually to contact firms that specialize in renting portable toilets, and get bids from each. And organizers invariably agree that it is far better to have one or two too many than not enough. Note: Please be sure to place the portable toilets in an obscure, shaded area, which will not be too obvious, yet, easily accessible. (Please do not place beside the entrance gate or in the hot sun).

Mosquitoes have recently become a community health problem in addition to being an aggravating nuisance in some locales at certain times of the year. The good news is that their number can be significantly reduced through careful application of selected insecticides. Like most things to do with festivals, a pest control program cannot be accomplished at the very last minute. Experts recommend that spraying efforts begin a week or two before the actual event. For detailed advice on mosquito control procedures, contact the local county extension agent.

One item that cannot be controlled is the weather, but there is some good news here, too – sort of. It is called rain insurance, but a policy is not for everybody. The coverage is expensive. Rates, of course, will depend upon several factors such as the time of year or hours of coverage during a dry season. Most policies offer protection for loss of sales and gate receipts, not property damage due to flooding or high winds. Again, this is one of the matters that should not be postponed. If you are interested in rain insurance, check with an agent several weeks before the festival.

Insurance is not the only way to deal with bad weather. Some organizers make a point of identifying and publicizing an alternate date should the event be rained out. Others have a “rain location”, while others have an announced (and optimistic) policy of getting on with the festivities one hour after the showers cease. In other words, there is no best or worst way to deal with uncooperative weather. One of the worst things that can be done, however, is to assume that the sun will shine and not make any contingency plans.

Another mistake is to overlook security plans. Chances are police protection will not be needed. But if some incident should arise and law enforcement officials are miles away, a situation could get out of hand very quickly. Because of this possibility, local governments frequently have regulations addressing police patrols at public events.

Security is important, and so is communication. Festival officials need to keep in touch; mostly to make certain that everything is going smoothly (and to see that problems are being solved). Some organizers have equipped themselves with walkie-talkies; others have established centrally located “command posts.” Many festival directors also believe there is an advantage in having all workers identified by badges, ball caps, or T-shirts; the public can then bring any problem to the attention of the right people.

Festivals require these “right people” and plenty of them. In fact, several experienced promoters state that insufficient manpower is the thing they fear most. When volunteers are stretched too thin, a few minor difficulties can easily mushroom into major problems. Another thing they recommend is that the festival workers be organized into shifts; that way the chores are spread more evenly around.

Finally, a few words about the site itself: It needs to be large enough to accommodate the crowd, but not so big that there are vast distances between the various areas of activity. City parks are commonly used and so are county fairgrounds. Some groups have had success with downtown areas, particularly around courthouse squares.

Size is not the only consideration when it comes to the selection. Location is another. Not only should festivals take place fairly near their prospective

attendees; these events need to be easy to get to. Areas with potential bottlenecks – narrow roads, one-lane bridges, and the like – along the route should be avoided. Likewise, property subject to flooding is not the best choice for a festival. And, of course, there is no getting around the fact that festival-goers arrive in vehicles – vehicles which somehow must be temporarily stored. If 10,000 people show up and they average three to the car, a little over 3,000 vehicles will need to be parked. It is no wonder that the sole responsibility of some festival workers is making parking arrangements. Among other things their plans should include is space designated for the handicapped.

Once the site is chosen, it is a good idea to sketch it out on a big sheet of paper. Draw the property to scale, if possible, and include roads, trees, sidewalks, drainages, fire hydrants, power lines, and any other important characteristics. When the “base map” is completed, it is time to begin identifying tentative locations for restrooms, a first aid station, concession stands, exhibit and entertainment areas, and whatever other features the festival will include.

Some rules of thumb are:

1. Keep the restrooms in pairs. It is confusing if the men’s facility is at one end of the festival and the women’s is at the other.
2. Locate restrooms so they are convenient for the crowd, not just where they can be conveniently set up.

3. Remember electrical needs while pinpointing stage locations and arts and crafts areas.
4. Establish distance between entertainment and the exhibits. Otherwise a watercolorist may be unable to explain her techniques because of loud music.
5. Provide benches and a picnic table in some shady spots for those visitors who may need to sit and rest awhile.
6. Consider establishing an information booth. It is a great place to answer questions, distribute programs, and handle lost-and-found items.
7. Put some serious thought into the physical arrangement of booths, stands, and stages. Traffic – human traffic – must somehow flow between these attractions. Point of resistance need to be minimized.
8. Finally, after everything is down on the map, take the plan out to the actual site. Visualize what is going to go where. Be certain that the property can accommodate each item that has been mapped.

## **LOST PEOPLE**

Knowing that few things are more terrifying for a child than being lost in a crowd, the Riverfest organizers in Arkansas devised a clever way to quickly reunite families. It is the “Lost People Tree” – a small tree decked with clear Christmas tree-type lighting – where counselors are stationed. Children who have become separated from their parents are taken here, and so are adults who have lost their offspring. It is a great success.

## FINAL NOTES

Even after that last visitor leaves the grounds, the festival is not over – at least not for its sponsors. Some late details must be handled.

One concern is a traditional festival by-product – litter. It is the wise organizer who recruits a clean-up team days in advance of the event. Several promoters have discovered that a free meal – usually a picnic-type of affair donated by a local eating establishment – is a great inducement in lining up a post-festival litter patrol.

Another matter that must be taken care of promptly is one of common courtesy; extending thanks to individuals, firms, and organizations that helped with the event. A personal note mentioning specific contributions is strongly recommended, the mass produced “thank you” does not really carry much sincerity.

Many organizers also make a point of preparing a festival notebook including a complete report from every subcommittee. By featuring all kinds of information - budgets, telephone numbers outlines, news releases, contracts, and even a list of mistakes to avoid – these notebooks can pave the way for next year’s festival crew. In addition, several organizations prepare a scrapbook highlighting their events; it is a great way to preserve festival histories and traditions.

Finally, there is something to be said for scheduling an after-the-event part to reward everyone who helped with the festival. People will have a chance to get off their feet, relax, and share the experience of a long and interesting day.

This guide is produced by the Mississippi Development Authority/Tourism Division, Post Office Box 849, Jackson, Mississippi 39205.

#### Acknowledgment

The department expresses sincere appreciation to Gale R. Trussell, Tourism Coordinator, Tennessee Valley Authority, Knoxville, Tennessee, for providing information to go in this publication.