



SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE... FOR A SMALL FEE

By Jennifer Baker

Growing up, my parents always taught me to share. I remember my mom saying, "It's always nice to share, so share with your brother and sister. You know how nice it feels when they share with you." Now my brother's and sister's idea of sharing was more like taking, but when they finally did genuinely share their toys or snacks, or include me in their plot to sneak a peek at Santa, Christmas Eve night - I do remember how gratifying it was.

As we get older and begin working in the "real world," we sometimes find that sharing is not one of the easiest things to do and people are not always so open to others' ideas or expertise. Things like competition, turf wars, and jealousy often get in the way of coming together to learn from each other and make progress in the projects that we are developing.

However, in the events industry and the organization that I work for, this is not the case. At the Mayor's Office Of Special Events (MOOSE), our mission is to host, create and market special events for the City of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In addition, we are also charged with being a resource to those who wish to host events in the City of Lancaster's public spaces - to share with others our expertise in event planning and marketing so that other individuals and organizations create great events that will benefit the residents, workers, visitors and business owners of the City.

We are currently working with IFEA on a new strategic plan for MOOSE; a plan that will give us direction on how we market our organization, enhance our events and become less reliant on financial support from the City. Thirty-five percent of MOOSE's revenue comes from the City to cover operating expenses in-

cluding salaries, benefits, office space and supplies. All of MOOSE's programming expenses (event production and marketing) are funded by local sponsors, grants and non-sponsorship revenue. While it is essential that MOOSE maintains a strong partnership with the City, it is also critical that we become a self sustaining, financially stable organization. With the political climate ever changing, it's important that we engrain our organization into the fabric of the community so that we hopefully withstand the changes and continue to enhance the quality of life for our residents through special events.

After conducting surveys and interviews with board members, city officials, and community partners, five strategic goal areas were developed to lead MOOSE to financial stability. A primary tactic to becoming financial stable outside of the City's budget is for MOOSE to enhance its role as an event planning resource to not only City residents, but to also expand its services to the general public.

As we prepare to implement our new strategic plan, we must take a look at the following questions:

- How do we take that role to the next level?
- How do we expand our role?
- What are the benefits?
- What are the next steps to expanding our resource role?
- What is the timeline to put the program into action?

If you find yourself or organization in a similar situation of wanting to grow your services beyond your current landscape, hopefully our work in progress in evaluating taking this next big step will give you some insights on how to proceed.

There are some true benefits of sharing your ideas and expertise with others. Not only will they learn from your experiences and skills, but you too can add value to your organization. You will be able to form new partnerships or strengthen current relationships - benefitting you by the co-marketing of events, sharing of resources, and strategic alliances that will help to promote the missions of each organization.

Like many others in the industry, MOOSE is currently looking for alternative funding streams for our events and operating costs. No longer can we rely on government and businesses headquartered in our towns to write the big check. As we expand our role as a resource, we can potentially add an additional funding stream. We currently provide technical assistance to local individuals and organizations at no charge. Additional revenue may include registration fees for workshops or seminars, paid advertising opportunities on our website, collateral materials and event planning tool kits and sales of planning tool kits. Another option could be meeting with an organization initially at no cost and then charge them for subsequent meetings and assistance.

Other benefits we also see include helping to enhance the quality of life for our residents and enhancing the City as an events destination for visitors. Special events are part of what makes our City vital. We've seen the economic development benefits of special events -- and we've seen that events in the City help build a sense of community pride. Block parties and neighborhood festivals are a great way for neighbors to interact and connect. The core purpose of MOOSE is to help create excitement and enthusiasm for the City of Lancaster - to develop

events that will instill a sense of pride in our residents, encourage people to visit, spend money and maybe ultimately live here.

To take that next big step in expanding our services to those in our community, we need to determine the feasibility of it all. In the coming months we'll be evaluating the following areas to see if this is the right next step.

Scope of Services

With only a staff of two people at MOOSE, we need to ensure that our human resources aren't stretched thinner than they already are. Aligning specific event planning skills – such as marketing, logistics, sponsorship – with the needs of our customers is critical in evaluating the staff time involved with each event.

Geography

Along with determining the scope of services, we will also need to see how far reaching our services should be. Our limited resource services now serve the residents and organizations of the City of Lancaster. What are the possibilities to expand to the greater Lancaster County area?

Costs

What costs are involved in promoting this role? What are the costs in developing the tangible resources? A feasibility study will be needed to see if organizations are willing to pay for these services. If they are willing, what should we charge others for our time and expertise? Determining the return on investment will be a key deciding factor in developing and expanding our services.

Our goal is to grow these services and put MOOSE on the right track to becoming financially self-sustaining and in turn help to enhance others' events by sharing our knowledge, expertise and time with them. And who knows, maybe down the road we will actually be at a point to be able to service as a grant awarding organization to city organizations to allow them to create their own neighborhood events – enabling us to truly make a definite impact on the quality of events that are produced here and build the City as an events destination.

"Our Best Thoughts Come From Others." Ralpho Waldo Emerson

At the IFEA's 55th Annual Convention & Expo this past September in Saint Louis, Missouri, I realized that I'm not the only one who likes to share – special events experts from around the world came together to learn from one another and share their expertise with their peers. It was an incredible experience to join with others who were so willing to freely tell of their best practices and encourage you to take their ideas and run with them.

So remember, share with others, as you know how nice it feels when someone shares with you.

How MOOSE Currently Shares Its Expertise With Others

- Serves on a variety of local organizations' event committees – assisting them with the planning and execution of their events
- Works with other non-profit organizations in promoting events through a shared, online events calendar and through cooperative advertising
- Assists event planners and neighborhood block party organizers in completing applications for the use of public space or street closures.

Potential Ways to Expand Our Role

- Expand the Audience
 - Lend expertise to those doing events outside of the City limits
 - Consulting for other cities who are looking to start or grow a special events department
- Proactively Market Our Role as a Resource
 - Promote MOOSE resources to local residents and organizations
 - Create a "MOOSE Supported" logo – a seal of approval.
 - Strengthen partnerships with both City and County-wide organizations
- Create Tangible Resources for Others
 - Block Party Planning Tool Kit
 - Preferred vendors lists
 - Toolkit for those hosting events in the City, including guidelines and applications for use of City parks and facilities.

Proposed Timeline for Implementation

- Late 2011
 - Conduct brainstorming meetings and focus groups with residents, community partners and industry professionals
 - Determine the feasibility of the resource role
- Mid-late 2
 - Formulate strategy and fee structure if so determined
- 2013 and beyond
 - Launch programs
 - Evaluate programs on an on-going basis.

Jennifer Baker has been part of the meeting and event planning industry for 15 years. She is currently the Director of the Mayor's Office of Special Events for the City of Lancaster, PA. Jennifer oversees the planning and promotion of seven annual events, as well as numerous community-based events and activities throughout the year. She is also responsible for developing and implementing marketing initiatives for the City and its special events, fundraising for MOOSE, and outreach aimed at engaging volunteers and residents in City-sponsored events and promotions.