

# The Importance of Professional Development for Festivals and Events - The Pennsylvania Model

By Ira L. Rosen, CFEE

One of the greatest changes in our industry in the past fifteen to twenty years has been the increasing importance of professional development and education for festival and event organizers. This applies to those who are paid staff, but is also just as important for volunteer leadership. For the first 40 years of the IFEA's existence, education was something done once a year – at the annual convention. Of course, for most of those 40 years, computers did not exist, and no one had heard of Facebook, Google, Twitter, etc. Marketing consisted of print and radio ads, posters and flyers and our biggest risk management concern was that someone was sneaking beer into our festival in their backpack. In response to the growing need for educational development, IFEA continues to develop our CFEE program and other educational opportunities and we continue to be ahead of the curve by developing and presenting the finest training and educational programs in the world.

Five years ago, when Mr. Lenwood Sloan, the then Director of Cultural and Heritage Tourism for the Pennsylvania Department of Tourism/Department of Community and Economic Development, was interested in developing a formalized training program for the various Festival and Events throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, he turned first to the IFEA. He wanted to do more than just provide training for these festivals; he wanted to build them into a coalition partnership where they could share information, experience and marketing resources. The first part of this coalition was the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, who was in a position at that point to provide some funding, as well as resources for travel to meetings.

The Pennsylvania Department of Tourism and the IFEA entered in to a multi-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which outlined some of the program goals and expectations and the outgrowth of this relationship continues today. Throughout this multi-year journey, other partners have been added to the mix, including most recently, the Pennsylvania Downtown Center. Due to Commonwealth requirements, the ongoing program is currently directed by Temple University's School of Tourism and Hospitality Management's IFEA Pinnacle award-winning Event Leadership Executive certificate program. As a direct result of this partnership, close to 50 festivals, events, arts organizations and Downtown Partnership groups from throughout Pennsylvania have received training seminars, marketing grants and in some cases, IFEA memberships. The positive benefits have been felt by the thousands of people who attend these events.

IFEA member, The Gettysburg Festival, has received marketing grants as part of this initiative and continues to participate in the training sessions. Ms. Karen Hendricks, their Public Relations Director shared that: *"Pennsylvania boasts more festivals than any other state in the nation, and what a joy it is to meet representatives of these amazing, diverse and dynamic celebrations. That alone is an invaluable networking opportunity, but adding an additional layer of practical training seminars tuned to the latest trends in the event industry is simply the icing on the cake. The relationship between IFEA, the Pennsylvania Department of Tourism and Pennsylvania's rich treasure trove of festivals has resulted in strong festival partnerships, more finely tuned festival manage-*

*ment, and ultimately, higher quality festival experiences for all our attendees."*

The 2011 Pennsylvania Festival Marketing Training and Grant Program is a continuation of the training program originally developed by IFEA and the Pennsylvania Tourism Department. This year's program includes three, four-hour training sessions facilitated by national experts in the field of marketing and revenue enhancement and a culminating seminar and behind-the-scenes experience at the Gettysburg Festival, which takes place in mid-June. This program enables the selected festivals to expand their marketing impact through cooperative marketing efforts and training.

The goals of this training initiative are to:

- Enhance the marketing resources of destinations throughout the state
- Increase inbound tourism and overnight hotel stays in Pennsylvania by providing marketing grants to Pennsylvania arts, cultural and heritage festivals
- Advance festival and event managers through professional development.

I have been fortunate enough to have been a part of the program since the beginning. Clearly, in these days of increased competition for discretionary spending, the grants that have been awarded and the training programs offered, will enable these festivals to market to visitors who might ordinarily not travel to their events, thereby driving the continued economic impact that these festivals have in their communities. As the economy continues to change, festivals and events need to change their business plans and become more entrepreneurial in their approach. We must show our local communities, legislatures, and governments that we are not groups standing in line with our hands out for grants, but are rather economic engines that bring people to our communities where they spend money. These economic challenges extend well beyond the borders of the United States and our international community will experience similar challenges in the future.

Mr. Sloan, who was recently promoted to the position of Pennsylvania's Film Commissioner & Cultural Heritage Director said, *"As we come to the end of our first phase MOU between IFEA and its commonwealth partners, department of community and economic development and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, we are excited about a renewed effort and expanded collaboration. Development and growth*

*of the initial partnership has led to a collaboration with Pennsylvania Downtown and Temple University to combine the resources of festivals and their Main Street and Elm Street partners to leverage resources and expand audience development and outreach. The core of this is training and certification that insures best practices and the highest quality of delivery of front line experiences for the commonwealth's citizens and their visitors."*

Another participant in the training and grant initiative has been the Mayor's Office of Special Events in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. IFEA member and Director of the office, Jennifer Baker, says, *"The training seminars that I have attended through IFEA and the Pennsylvania Department of Tourism have been exceptional. The education I receive allows me to keep current with industry trends and learn best practices from our industry's experts. I'm able to take away so many ideas that I can incorporate into our events at the City of Lancaster and also meet fantastic people who will be a continual resource for me for years to come."*

Clearly, training and development have an important role in the growth and sustainability of our industry. In challenging economic times, our first reaction is to eliminate or downsize the programs. The Pennsylvania model has taken a very different approach, one which other states and international governmental agencies can learn from. As times get tougher, we need to learn how to work smarter, how to develop new coalitions and partnerships, how to maximize our strengths and how to prove to others our economic impact. I encourage you to explore the many educational options that are available to you, whether this means pursuing a CFEE certification, developing an economic impact study, bringing an IFEA seminar to your city, attending the IFEA International Convention, participating in a webinar, or taking advantage of any of the training opportunities that the IFEA has to offer. Now is not the time to bury our heads in the sand because of the economy; now is the time to change our standard operating procedure and become more aggressive in building our skills. If you're not growing – you're wilting!

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