

THE BOARD

So Much More Than a Party



Let me start this article by thanking the IFEA Board Members for their trust and support in allowing me to act as the Chair of our beloved organization for 2016. I will do my very best over the coming year to assist in growing our international membership and in demonstrating the economic and social importance of our industry.

I have had the pleasure, since May 2014, to act as the Executive Director of Ottawa 2017, a not-for-profit organization established for the planning and implementation of an ambitious program to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary of confederation in our nation's Capital. Mayor Jim Watson had the vision, 5 years ago, to recognize this historical opportunity to grow the economy of Ottawa and to reposition our city on the national scene.

Whenever I'm invited to present our plans, I will encounter people saying how lucky I am to be in charge of Ottawa's biggest party ever! Such reactions are so typical of the erroneous perception too often associated to our industry. We are eternal teenagers having fun, frivolous jobs to organize big, humongous parties. Such perception explains the challenges we often face in securing funding and logistical support from authorities.

In order to address such perceptions, we made a point to assess the economic impact of our program and in demonstrating, with the use of recognized financial impact evaluation tools, that our initiative will generate

over \$320M CAD in direct consumer spending and over 3000 new jobs in our region. After demonstrating our financial relevance we defined quantitative objectives to be monitored by third party agencies about the tourism impact of our program, its impact on the level of pride of our residents and its contribution to re-brand our City. Adopting a robust business approach to demonstrate our relevance was a first step in moving beyond the "party animals" perception.

We then consulted with City social workers and public health experts in order to set valid social goals. The power of festivals and events to act as social harmonization vectors is too often overlooked. Creating meeting places to get residents to know each other; creating programs to expose citizens to the cultural richness of your region and allowing ethnic groups to share their culture and lifestyle; and engaging "marginalized" segments of the population to show their skills and talent, can be very efficient ways of reducing social tension and favoring social cohesion. As a result of our consultation, we were able to increase our public offerings by developing programs involving youth at risk and the homeless. We were able to engage a variety of new immigrant associations to allow them to showcase their cultures through activities such as Muslim slam poetry competitions, an ethnic food discovery program, and exposure of new citizens to local rural traditions. Additionally extensive consultation was conducted

with aboriginal people, allowing them to further the dialogue with the rest of the population and to share their pride in their traditional culture.

Beyond financial and social factors, events can also be contributors to your city's happiness index. Increasing the level of joy, quality of life and personal satisfaction of your population can have huge benefits in reducing health costs, social issues and increasing the productivity of your work force. The festive nature of events can heal the soul of your people and create an environment favorable to innovation and creativity, factors that are so critical to any knowledge-based economy.

Bottom line, events are way more than parties. They are ways to improve an economy, to serve as a catalyst to "redynamize" the development of a district, to improve the productivity of a workforce and to increase social cohesion. We are much more than party planners; we are the alchemists of modern social economy.

I look forward to serving you over the coming year and contributing to the growth of our IFEA.

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