



OUTSIDE THE FOUR WALLS

Developing Valuable Campus-Community Partnerships

By Annie Frisoli

Packing up six students into a van every September to travel nine hours from Athens, Ohio to the St. Louis Art Fair (SLAF) is electrifying! I know in the upcoming days the opportunity Executive Director, Laura Miller, and her team will provide for the students within the Recreation Studies program at Ohio University (OHIO) will be life changing. The partnership between SLAF and OHIO began at International Festivals and Events Association Annual Event Management School (EMS) in Oglebay, West Virginia. Having originally met Cindy Lerick, former St. Louis Art Fair Executive Director and faculty at EMS, she invited six students and one faculty from the Recreation Studies program to the St. Louis Art Fair to gain hands on experience in event management, and hands on it is!

Packing up six students into a van every September to travel nine hours from Athens, Ohio to the St. Louis Art Fair (SLAF) is electrifying! I know in the upcoming days the opportunity Executive Director, Laura Miller, and her team will provide for the students within the Recreation Studies program at Ohio University (OHIO) will be life changing. The partnership between SLAF and OHIO began at International Festivals and Events Association Annual Event Management School (EMS) in Oglebay, West Virginia. Having originally met Cindy Lerick, former St. Louis Art Fair Executive Director and faculty at EMS, she invited six students and one faculty from the Recreation Studies program to the St. Louis Art Fair to gain hands on experience in event management, and hands on it is!

The experience begins with the Ohio University crew arriving for the SLAF kick off meeting on Wednesday evening prior to the weekend event to meet the core members of Laura Miller's Event Management Team (EMT). All are excited to meet and greet and gain an overall synopsis of the weekend ahead including schedule, procedures, safety, logistics, radios, weather, event highlights, risk and liability concerns, and any other pertinent information. The OHIO seven then return Thursday morning, bright and early with the rest of the SLAF staff, to begin their journey of experiential education with one of the top art fairs in the United States and prepare to host approximately 130,000 people between Friday and Sunday of the upcoming weekend. Throughout their four days, the students are exposed to operations and logistics, marketing and PR, food and beverage, signage, city partners, music and entertainment, artist relations, and all the glamorous and not so glamorous aspects of event management.

The success of this partnership does not happen without any effort. The success of the partnership occurs due

to both partners working together to express their needs and have open conversations around the experience and one another's expectations.

Making the Partnership Work:

- **Open Communication** - Both parties discuss their needs prior to the shared experience to create a win-win partnership. Strategies include pre-event discussions (months in advance) around expectations from both partners, logistical assistance regarding accommodations, names of students/sizes for uniforms well in advance, expectations of students and community partner, and any other needs of each of the groups.
- **Not Just the Grunts** - Indeed it is important for students to understand ALL that encompasses producing an event. However, once the work of ensuring chairs are set up, banners are hung, beverage tents are stocked, tablecloths are counted, etc., the SLAF staff takes time to provide students with the "why" behind the table set up, the banner location, the color choice of tablecloths, stage locations, vendor and sponsor choices, beverage location, and much more. SLAF includes the students in all event team meetings throughout the weekend to provide depth to the learning experience and to make them feel part of the team. Many of the staff also offer side conversations throughout the weekend in their areas of expertise and share some of their individual perspectives of the event and of the event world, along with past experiences and how the event has grown over the years. In addition, Laura provides some sort of memorabilia from the event as a thank you gift to all the students.
- **Costs** - The trip to SLAF is not free and this too takes a collaborative effort. The Recreation Studies program at Ohio University provides the transportation

from Athens, Ohio to SLAF. In return, SLAF houses the students for five nights and provides all meals. The return on investment for SLAF is concentrated, reliable volunteers for the weekend and the ROI for the University is the experiential learning for their students.

- **Time** - Each partner needs to be willing to give some time to this partnership. The faculty member needs to be selective in their process of identifying students with a clear application process and the event staff must be available to answer, not only pre-arrival questions/logistics, but also interested in sharing their event with the students during implementation. This partnership is a unique and special opportunity for both SLAF and OHIO, however there are other numerous ways for Universities and Community Organizations to partner outside of this organized effort.

Additional Campus-Community Partnership Ideas:

- **Graduate Student Projects** - Most graduate students complete their Master's Degree by fulfilling a capstone experience. At OHIO University, students have one of four ways to fulfill their degree requirement: thesis, mentored writing, professional project, or comprehensive exams. Professional projects could make for a great partnership in the event world, as students could host an event on behalf of your organization as a project, conduct a needs assessment, complete a marketing analysis, conduct an economic impact study, or many other potential great ideas.
- **Independent Studies** - A less intensive opportunity compared to a capstone project, is an Independent Study. If enrolled in this type of opportunity, students could assist with gathering information to write a grant, assist in developing reports regarding your event, develop your events story for marketing purposes, etc. In addition, Independent Study opportunities are also guided by a faculty member to ensure quality.
- **Classroom Projects** - Many majors (not just Recreation programs) are looking for experiential education projects. Your agency could be used to develop a marketing plan, conduct a facilities assessment, develop a social media strategy, review policies and procedures, etc. The possibilities are endless and many faculty would be interested in having a conversation around your ideas. Currently, the event management course within Recreation Studies hosts fundraising events for

local area non-profits and last year alone raised over \$10,000 and impacted over 3,000 community members with their classroom event projects.

- **Internships** – Most Recreation Studies programs mandate a *minimum* 400-hour (paid or unpaid) internship for credit in which students work with agencies 40 hours a week for 10 weeks. However, one piece of advice for an agency is to ensure the student is receiving credit for their internship. Typically, if an internship is credit based, it will be connected to an internship supervisor from the University to support not only the student, but you the agency through the experience if any issues were to arise.
- **Practicums** – Practicums are a less intensive, smaller commitment to have a student join the staff of an organization. Practicums have fewer goals than what an internship would require and are seen more as mere exposure to the event world.
- **Classroom Presentations** – Offer to share your expertise in a college classroom to future professionals. This is also a great first step in connecting to all the ideas listed above.

Understanding that developing these opportunities involves a time commitment for both partners, it is important to review positive outcomes of the partnership for both parties.

OUTCOMES for Community Partner:

- **Additional Staffing for Your Event** – Fear of volunteers not showing up? Difficult to hand over major tasks to someone only volunteering a total of three hours at your event? With an organized partnership, you gain reliable volunteer staff for your event. For example, the partnership between OHIO and SLAF provides SLAF with seven, full-time volunteers from set up to break down, from dawn until dark. The students truly become part of the event management team and take on significant staffing roles.
- **Mentoring Opportunities for Your Staff** – SLAF Event Director Laura Miller shares, *"I feel it's important for our organization to support up-and-coming leaders in our industry. We hope to create a lasting relationship with the students that may lead to internships and employment, but most importantly mentorship as they enter the event management field."*
- **Possible Funding Support** – Partnering with a University could lead to grant or research work together and/or possibly fulfill event functions you would normally hire/spend funds to complete.
- **Information Gathering** – Needs assessments, evaluation,

information gathering, etc. These are all project ideas to partner with a local University course.

- **Collaboration** - Once again, stated best by community partner, Laura Miller of SLAF, *"Our Event Management Team and staff take away just as much from the partnership. The student's inquisitiveness about process and procedures keeps us on our toes and it goes without saying we gain skilled volunteers for the week."*

OUTCOMES for University Partner:

- **Experiential Learning for Students:** Most academics preparing students for their profession need partnerships to create authentic, practical experiences. Partnering with a festival or event creates these opportunities. Laura Miller shares, *"The week the students spend with us at SLAF is like a crash course on event management. The students serve on our Operations Event Management Team and we also provide them the opportunity to immerse themselves in a specific area of interest."*
- **Unique Program Offering to Recruit Students:** For educators, this is a wonderful highlight of your program to recruit incoming students.
- **Domestic Study Abroad Program:** Depending on the level of engagement with the event experience (especially those events spanning over five days of travel or longer), an academic program could provide a credit-based experience for students. However, as the faculty member hosting the experience, be sure students are not interested in "just" the credit and/or the trip location. I would encourage a personal statement, references, and an interview prior to accepting students into the program. At Ohio University the trip to SLAF is NOT credit-based, as a faculty member I am only interested in providing this experience to those intrinsically motivated to gain event experience. There is still an application process and the entire Recreation Studies program faculty assist in determining which students are chosen to fulfill the six positions at SLAF. As I only want to bring students that have displayed excellence in character and motivation in all Recreation classes. Understanding that approaching a University can be confusing with all the layers and available offices to contact, here are a few suggestions that may lead community partners in the right direction.

Contacts within University Settings:

- **Faculty** – Faculty within programs offering classes around event management, facility operations,

marketing, communication, social media, sports management/administration, etc. Depending on your event needs, your needs will drive you towards the proper academic department. Not all faculty are open and willing to travel with students, thus do not let one faculty represent all faculty at a University if your offer is declined. There are many departments on campus that have students interested in event management.

- **Center for Service Learning** – Many universities have dedicated offices on campus to develop service learning/hands-on experiences for students to work with local organizations. See these offices to assist in finding dedicated faculty to partner with on your event.
- **Career and Leadership Centers** – Almost all colleges and universities have a Career Center located on their campus. If you are interested in attending job fairs, posting jobs or internships, hosting panel discussions on event management, or other numerous opportunities, contact the Career Center on any campus.
- **Campus Involvement Center (Student Clubs)** – Student clubs can range in how they could assist. Fraternities and sororities are well known for hosting fundraising events on their own. However, if you are looking for groups of volunteers, often student clubs are required to maintain a certain amount of service hours to local area non-profits. Thus, this could be another, possibly more casual, relationship. In closing, the time and effort needed to create a relationship between a campus and a community partner does not measure in comparison to the return the relationship can have on an event and the students involved. There is great value in both parties breaking down the walls of their separate worlds to continue to grow the profession of event management!

Annie Frisoli is a Lecturer in Recreation Studies at Ohio University where she thoroughly enjoys teaching the topic of event management to her students. Each year in her event management course, the students plan, implement, and develop five fundraising events for local non-profits and raise approximately \$10,000 for the identified partners. Annie encourages experiential education within all her classrooms to assist in preparing students for their future careers! She can be reached at: Phone: 614.421.8074 or Email: frisoli@ohio.edu.