



By Alexa Beasley

ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY IN EVENT PARTNERSHIPS

Introduction

Events are an integral part of a community's life and identity. Given the rapid growth in popularity of community events, recognizing the value and importance of cultivating community partnerships is easy. While it will vary in size and type, you'll find that many cities, organizations and communities will partner to share information, services and other resources. An event community partnership can be very lucrative for both parties as it creates a unique way to collaborate and improve event experiences by bringing together the best of what both partners have to offer.

Understanding how to build partnerships is critical to the overall success of an event. Partnerships take time and effort, but if you select and manage those relationships well, they will provide your community with the events it desires while meeting the high standards of event management and production many event patrons have become accustomed to.

Defining a Partnership

A partnership, as relates to this topic, can be defined as a two or more entities with a common interest working together towards a common goal. Some partnerships are short-term with the focus being a single or one-time event, while others are long-term, spanning multiple events for multiple years. Partnerships are meant to be mutually beneficial relationships with shared responsibilities, privileges or power.

Evaluating Your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

Before creating a partnership, you must evaluate what your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This is commonly referred to as SWOT. A SWOT analysis can look at human, physical or financial resources, activities or programs, and past experiences or expertise.

Strengths

Determine the existing resources available to your city, organization or event. Some examples are: a reputation for a well-coordinated, family friendly event that collaborates with multiple city departments is a strength; your team's extensive experience and camaraderie; attention-grabbing performers or attractions; and a good public relations person.

Weakness

It is often difficult, but it is also crucial, to be honest and pinpoint where your

weaknesses lie along the event planning timeline. Some of the most common weaknesses are a tight event budget, an inexperienced team, and lack of publicity or media placement.

Opportunities

Consistently evaluate your strengths to recognize any untapped potential.

Threats

Some variables are beyond your control. Identifying these threats may not prevent them from occurring, but it will enable you to do advance preparation that will enable you to manage or minimize the impact if, and when, the need arises.

It is only with a clear understanding of your SWOT that you can create a list of potential partnerships that would be most beneficial. Seeking partnerships that improve the areas you have targeted as a weakness, while keeping in mind the strengths you offer. A partnership, after all, is a two-way street and you have valuable resources you can offer potential event partners as well.

Potential Partners

Determining the best partner for a specific event is a crucial to the success of your event. The first question to ask is, do their goals align with yours? Shared goals may be community outreach, brand awareness, or fundraising. The more alignment there is within the goals, the more likely it is that both parties will benefit from the partnership.

Next, consider your potential partners target audience and network reach. You will want a partner who shares a similar target audience but has a reach that varies from your own. Your partnership will allow you to reach their audience while they in turn can reach yours.

Determine if the potential partner can offer the types of resources you need while ensuring that the partner needs what you offer. Resources can be time, skills, client understanding, financial resources, community support, commitment, health or human resources. An equal sharing of each partners resources is vital in creating a balanced and long-lasting partnership.

Remember, when forming partnerships your organization should strive for quality, not quantity. Not all partnerships result in benefits for your city, organization or community. Partnerships should have a specific purpose and be based on the value that they bring to your organization. Working with a partner that does not have a mission or values that complement your

own does not typically bring added value to your organization.

Type of Partnerships

While creating your list of potential partners, four types of partnerships may stand out: partnerships with new businesses, community-based organizations, schools/ educational institutions and faith-based institutions. Each one of these types of partnerships can potentially assist you in achieving your event goals.

Partnerships with Businesses

Businesses in your community are often be a valuable resource for your event. The most common partnership between businesses and events is probably a financial or in-kind partnership, more commonly called a sponsorship. Sponsorship is the act of supporting an event or activity financially or through the provision of products or services. Sponsorships between events and new businesses can be especially beneficial. When a new business moves into a city, it is vital they get their information out to the public as quickly as possible. What better way for them to do this than to partner with an established event? Many new businesses have larger marketing budgets their first year and therefore, are an important resource for sponsorship dollars.

Outside of a financial partnership, you can work with businesses to create lasting cross-promotional partnerships. Many businesses have a grand opening event, seasonal events or promotions or some other type of community outreach campaign. You could share or promote these type of community benefits to your followers on social media and in return the business may be more willing to share your information with their follower or hang promotional material in their store front. The goal her is to develop and cultivate a partnership that can continue for many years to come.

Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations

Long-standing community organizations that are currently visible, involved within the community and have a positive standing among the residents of your immediate and surrounding communities offer a wealth of event resources. They can offer resources such as community building, volunteers or host game or craft at your event. These organizations can be consistently relied upon to introduce a fun and interactive activity for your patrons at your event.

Faith-based institutions are a part of every community and are therefore a valuable group for any type of partnership. There is a lengthy history of partnership between events and the charitable work of faith-based communities.

Community-based organizations can also be a valuable resource in providing whole events or event elements for your community that you might not otherwise be able to provide. Whether it is finances, staffing, policies or leadership holding you back - community-based organizations will often help you accomplish what you cannot do alone.

Partnerships with Schools and Educational Institutions

Schools and educational institutions provide you access to the largest part of community that many cities or organizations serve. Your school district can be the largest resource when it comes to getting event information out to the majority of the community. By partnering with the school district to your event information included in their monthly emails, shared on their social media sites, and readily available at their back to school events you can increase your reach within our own community.

Partnerships between events and schools can also provide learning opportunities and valuable experience for the professional world to students who work or volunteer at the event.

Partnerships with Faith-Based Institutions

Faith-based institutions are a part of every community and are therefore a valuable group for any type of partnership. There is a lengthy history of partnership between events and the charitable work of faith-based communities. They have long been integral in providing services and resources for many events. They can be an endless source of volunteers who may simply assist on event grounds or who may be willing to provide entire interactive areas of an event.

By partnering with these institutions, you can easily increase your attendance. They can provide you access to part of your community otherwise unreachable. When they share your event information with their members, they are more likely to take notice as it is coming from a source that holds their trust.

Partnership Agreement

To ensure you both get what they need from a partnership, partners must come

to the negotiation table with a sincere interest in working together and drawing from one another's strengths. You should clearly express what you can bring to the partnership, as well as understand what your potential partner can offer. You will begin negotiations already knowing what you want but make sure to take time to think through possible alternatives and how flexible you are willing to be.

Remember this is a two-way-street and come prepared to commit resources. Resources can take the form of funding, staff, materials, supplies, transportation, and facilities, often in combination. An acceptable commitment in resources demonstrates your commitment to the partnership.

Partnership agreements should always be put in writing. The agreement should contain enough detail to guide the partnership and serve as a way in which partners can assess the fulfillment of their commitments and evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership. Partnership agreements may also include an addendum that describes how the partnership conducts business. This might specify who does what, when, how, with whom, and for what purpose. As a legal document, the agreement will protect all partners' best interests. While agreements can and should be reviewed and revised over time, a strong agreement forged early in the partnership lays the foundation for a strong and sustainable partnership.

Evaluating the Partnership

Before entering into a partnership, give some consideration to how exactly you will evaluate its effectiveness in the future. Knowing what success will look like before you start will help you know when you achieve it and when it's time to walk away.

Partnerships take time to develop and may change over time but are never to be taken lightly. You are after all sharing your brand name, reputation and event. If it's not right, don't force it. Don't feel pressured to continue a partnership that is no longer aligned with the same goals or priorities or has become one-sided and is no longer beneficial to both parties.

Partnerships need to be mutually beneficial. If you are being asked to provide a large

amount of resources for something that is providing little to no benefit to the community or the other partner is difficult to work with or wants complete control, it is probably time to end the partnership. Sometimes what they are bringing to the table is not worth the time, headache or potential liability.

Conclusion

No matter the partner, the key is identifying potential partner assets and how to pool resources to produce and provide successful events for your community that you may not have been able to otherwise offer. Events and festivals are a vital part of any city's life and identity. Taking the time to target and build a relationship with partners who share your goals, will lead to the success in producing events and festivals for your community that are fun to attend, well-coordinated and provide a wide range of economic and social benefits.

Sources

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