

WORKING ON WEEKENDS: Organizing your dance festival

Leda Shapiro

Organizing a dance series is one thing, but planning a weekend-long event for 100 people or more with big name talent is something else entirely. How is it done? Can it be a source of revenue that helps the dance community all year long? We'll expose the sweat and magic that goes into creating a wildly successful dance weekend.

OUTLINE: Working on Weekends (Leda Shapiro)

I FIGURING OUT WHAT YOU NEED

What result do you want? A hot weekend? Build skill level? Local participation?

II DO NOT GO IT ALONE

What skills do you need?

III BUDGET for different options for:

Talent : 1 out of town band/caller, 1 local? 2 out of town?

Travel: Local versus out of town or both

Potluck or catered? Or all meals out?

Be open to change, hone budget.

IV COMMITTEES & MEETINGS

The art of delegating

Detailed task lists

V DEBRIEFING

Compare Budget to actuals

Meeting discuss things that went well, things that didn't

ATTENDEE NOTES:

- ran weekend for 20 years
- started with ~20 dancers in regular dance
- first weekend, local talent, charged \$25, in regular hall
- Penn Fix came in to teach style the next year (from Spokane)
- weekends = generally Friday night -> Sunday afternoon
- Fiddler's dream camp in Texas, around New Years for 3 days, largely unstructured
- NM Folkmads does Boo Camp in Jemez Springs (residential, 1 or 2 nights), local + regional talent
 - Folkmadness, 4 day over Memorial Day on a college campus, some national talent
- need to decide if you're doing a local camp, bring in national talent, do a resident camp, etc.
- resident camp gives a camaraderie you can't get otherwise

- figure out what you need, and what you want it to be
- picking a named band: how big a name they are, how much they cost, availability, travel costs
- camps are exhausting for a single band if you have dances all day
- some bands only want to play for x hours per day
- important to write everything down: every detail about the band, space, toilet paper, etc.
- need really good volunteer staff, have frequent meetings to go over things
- know who to go to with various issues during the weekend
- used to have other various dance workshops, sessions of talking about pet peeves, style workshops
- themes for a weekend: something that's unique to the weekend
 - thrift store prom
 - temporary tattoos
 - t-shirts
 - clothing exchanges
 - polka dots and stripes
- first need to figure out your revenue (conservative estimate of attendance)
- can be flexible about meals: volunteers prepare meals or potluck is much less expensive than catering
 - catering is not community building, but is much easier
- can organize people to host out of town people
- need to know what percentage of out of town people you expect
- 1996 budget on handout
- how long to plan:
 - band is determining factor: will be booked a year ahead
 - need to know what you can afford by a year before (and a date and location!)
- what to charge?
 - look at other weekends around you, see what people are willing to pay for similar events
 - can require exclusivity with bands: can't play within certain radius and time
- the bar goes up as weekends are held repeatedly
- previous discussion from 'crossing borders' workshop: you can sometimes get a better band to come if you organize other associated events (house concerts, musicians workshops, one-night dances, etc.)
- other groups hosting the band need to be willing to contribute to travel costs
- dance groups can help host house concerts (even though the audiences will be different)
- there are pre-existing communities in some places that host house concerts
- just need to know who to talk to
- working to replace an ECD ball with a weekend workshop
 - want style workshops + place for people to dance at a higher level setting
 - big challenge in LA is venue: breakout rooms, dancing rooms, cost issue (with people travelling)
 - not likely to convince new dancers to commit to a weekend: something to consider
 - big name bands don't draw for ECD in the same way as they do for contra
 - newer dancers aren't going to recognize big-name callers

- some week long camps are being eroded by proliferation of weekends, and the difficulty of traveling and doing a whole week
- ECD ball in Santa Fe gets free venue for letting in students free
- a lot of colleges want to keep their campuses open and active during the summer
- what will take a lot to plan that you might not expect?
- what to check?
- have a group of people, go to the hall multiple times, think through every step of the program
- contact presenter for checklists
- think a lot about food details
- catered vs. potluck
- staff is the most important thing: have designated people for meals (if not catered)
- it's surprising how much time goes past that you don't have to do anything: flurry, nothing, etc.
- decide to have it, book a band, start discussing broad strokes with small committee
- then have a programming community to discuss workshops, someone else doing logistics (facilities committee)
- alternate model: have a single committee that does everything
 - everyone wants input on everything
 - discuss order of program, length of dance periods, concert, breaks, related workshops
- plan out project in time: when different parts need to be completed
- how do you deal with getting people to register ahead of time?
 - already have online registration
 - use PayPal
 - have Facebook group
 - just ask people to please sign up now
 - give an incentive for early registration
 - mail chimp gives a measurement of open rate: (26% space still open for Stellar Days & Nights)
 - people need to be reminded in multiple ways
 - people might not need to open email: just read subject line
 - if you do gender or lead/follow balance, then advertise that
- include things like "how to ask/get asked to dance" in workshops, remind people to pick a new partner
- don't want a single person in charge of program
 - if changes are made to a traditional schedule, explain why!

Notes taken by Lucy Frey

P&L FROG

		BUDGET	ACTUAL
Revenues			
125 @ \$75		9375	9900
Sunday night		770	908
		10145	10808
Expenses			
Hall		2000	1800
Travel		2200	2200
Band/Caller		2200	2000
Cajun		50	50
Supplies/Coffee/		150	251
Post FROG lunch		150	120
Publicity		500	446
Photography		150	164
Local Band		500	510
buttons		55	55
Sound		550	550
Refreshments		150	140
Refreshments		30	20
Decorations		70	45
Sun Breakfast		300	311
Sat Lunch		200	162
Fri Refresh		50	35
Telephone		50	65
Co-op Fee		180	198
T.P./bath supplies		40	36
Tattoos		55	66
Sat Breakfast		300	278
Rental coffeepots		40	40
Fri-dinner/groceries		75	63
Staff SUnDay dinner		100	75
Total Expenses		10145	9680
PROFIT		0	1128