



Great Fetes:

Fundraising and fun – without the fuss

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Our Community Pty Ltd
PO Box 354
North Melbourne 3051
Victoria, Australia

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Contents

1. Introduction	5
2. Research	7
3. Planning	15
4. Committee	21
5. Finances	33
6. Risk Management	43
7. Marketing	53
8. Sponsorship & Donations	65
9. Venue & Facilities	73
10. Entertainment & Activities	79
11. Stalls	95
12. Catering	101
13. Volunteers	107
14. Celebrations	119
15. Review	123

Appendices (see attached CD)

Appendix 1: Fete Calendar – Timing

Appendix 2: Fete Committee Contact Details

Appendix 3: Sub-committee Contact Details

Appendix 4: Sub-committee Responsibilities

Appendix 5: Fete Checklist

Appendix 6: Fete Budget

Appendix 7: Budget Versus Actual

Appendix 8: Expenses Per Activity

Appendix 9: Income Per Activity

Appendix 10: Activity Profit

Appendix 11: Risk Management Plan

Appendix 12: Home Produce Labels

Appendix 13: Sponsorship Letter to school community

Appendix 14: Sponsorship Letter 1

Appendix 15: Sponsorship Letter 2

Appendix 16: Site Survey

Appendix 17: Equipment Borrowed

Appendix 18: Entertainment Planner
Appendix 19: Entertainment Timetable Per Area
Appendix 20: Entertainment Running Sheet
Appendix 21: Volunteer Management Plan
Appendix 22: Volunteer Flyer
Appendix 23: Volunteer Timetable
Appendix 24: Volunteer Position Description
Appendix 25: Debrief Checklist

I. Introduction

Fete is the French word for party, and all parties are different.

French fetes were of all sizes – both big and small – and similarly there's no real way to distinguish a fete from a very large garage sale at one end or a regional festival at the other.

Whatever the size, fetes were and are about people having fun, to which we in the English-speaking world have added the concept of organisations making money – a best-of-all-worlds marriage of frivolity and virtue.

Beyond just making money, though, fetes offer other benefits – if all goes well they can strengthen your donor base, energise your volunteers, publicise your organisation, and be a fun way for your group to connect with the local community, raising your profile and extending your reach.

This book is designed to help you run a successful fete with a minimum of fuss. Drawing on the experience of teachers, parents and fundraising experts, we've pulled together all of the tips and tools you'll need to pull off a fantastic event.

We focus in this guide on schools, kindergartens and preschools but in effect most of the information we offer is relevant to any type of community organisation running any type of special fundraising event. Feel free to adapt the ideas and the templates to suit your own group's needs.

We're indebted to teacher, parent and enthusiastic fundraiser Cathy Green for her work in compiling this guide. Her practical wisdom has been invaluable.

Denis Moriarty

Group Managing Director
Our Community

2. Research

As the old saying goes, failure to plan is a plan for failure.

Start preparing as early as possible by researching other fetes.

Get out and have a look at what everyone else is doing in the area you want to cover. Who's doing what on which weeks? What are they offering? Keep records.

Ask questions. Hang around the stalls and chat. Talk to customers, donors, helpers, critics – anyone with opinions or expertise.

When you visit a fete, keep a note of which stalls draw the crowds first and look for those attractions that are busy/quiet. Also try and look at the way traffic moves through the area and where the queues are and whether the groups have taken advantage of captive audiences in queues by offering food and drink, face painting, balloons or other activities nearby.

Ask the basics – what did they do? Who did it? When? Where? Why? and How? More specifically:

- Why was the event held where it was?
- Was the timing right?
- Were there any problems that reduced crowd numbers?
- What happens when it rains or it's too hot?
- What attractions or rides or gimmicks have they got?
- How did they advertise?
- Who did they get to donate what?
- How successful has the day been?

Whether a raging success or a flop, there's no such thing as a fete you can't learn from.

Timing

Think about whether your fete has to be staged every year, or could be held every second year.

The latter is an option being taken up more often by community groups, particularly schools and preschools/kindergartens or childcare centres in areas where they are in competition for the same parents/friends/supporters/residents/sponsors.

As well as giving you two whole years to prepare, this option also means that you can spread your volunteer efforts over two years.

To take advantage of this you will need to start planning virtually

immediately after the previous event finishes. You also have to be able to ensure you will make twice as much money, attract more people, attract the same or more sponsorships, etc.

There is also a downside to consider. There are going to be a number of volunteers, and a number of customers, who are not going to be around next year, and if you want anything from them you have to hit them now.

There may be only so much money in the community to spend on fetes in any given year; and offering them twice as much in the way of goods and services may just mean that they run out of money before all the fairy floss is gone.

You also need to consider the time of year and the time of day/night/ weekend you will hold your fete. Your decision on this will depend on local circumstances.

Piggybacking on success

Sometimes the best way to be a part of a successful fundraiser is to abandon thoughts of running your own event, and piggyback on one offered by another organisation.

Have a look around your area and see what successful events or popular fundraisers already exist, and how you might be able to link up with them.

Could you set up an attraction or stall at someone else's fete? Could you invite another school/preschool/kindergarten to join your event or run a stall? (Be warned, though: this can require a huge amount of organisation and liaising which may become a headache.

TIPS:

- *Before setting the date check your school calendar for events that may clash. Don't schedule your fete the week of school camp.*
- *Contact other schools in the area to see when their fetes are scheduled. Check your council's community calendar as well. You want to know if there are any other events scheduled that you (a) need to avoid or (b) could piggyback on.*

POD (Point of Difference)

Try to find something you can offer in the way of stalls, rides, games, sales, and activities that will both make money and keep the mood buoyant.

Some will do both. Other activities will be designed to give parents options and to provide enough entertainment – timed at different stages – to encourage people to stay for the longest length of time possible.

Of course, the longer they stay, the more they spend and the more likely it is they will enjoy the day and be prepared to come back next time.

Even if you don't think you have anything distinctive or extraordinary, you will need to decide on one aspect as your "unique selling point" or theme that will feature heavily in your advertising and publicity. Often, this will be the entertainment.

Again, this is where your research will come in handy. You will have seen groups or acts that work and know to avoid acts that are unsuitable. If you are booking entertainment, ask what similar events they have played at and ask those organisers if they were successful and whether they pulled in many paying customers.

Like supermarkets, it may be necessary to have what is known as a "loss leader" where you pay for a unique act or celebrity that won't necessarily make you money but will draw people who will pay for food, take their kids on rides, buy a plant, or have a lucky dip.

Resources

Once you've got a draft list of the activities you want you can then do a rough count of how many people and how much in the way of up-front funding you'll need to make it work. You will need to work out whether you have the support you need already, or whether you'll need to bring it in.

Make a list and tick off your estimates against your guesses. You also need to know your school's enthusiasm levels for the fete – enthusiasm is your most necessary resource, and may be your scarcest.

This is where planning, particularly early planning, is so important. It will allow you to know exactly how many volunteers you'll need and help you work out how to spread the load across as many people as you can.

To fete or not to fete

After you've done the sums and the scribbles and the guesses and the rough plan you can ask the most important question of all; should we still go ahead with this?

In making this decision, think not only about your projections, but about what other things you want to get out of the fete besides money.

Money is not always the end consideration for a community group or school, although no group deliberately sets out to lose money.

But you might hold a fete to also raise your local profile, to involve your volunteers more closely, to gain fundraising experience, or to bring your community together in a fun atmosphere where everyone can enjoy themselves with their families and friends.

Make sure you know what you want out of this event (whatever that is) and that you are confident you can deliver on those aims.

The finer details

If, after all this, the general outlook is passable, zoom in to the detail. Here's a 10-point checklist:

- The school board / council is informed and committed to the event.
- Ditto for the staff.
- You've checked out the competition in your local area, you know what works and what doesn't, and you're sure there won't be calendar clash.
- You've sketched out a plan that has
 - Identified all the costs and other resource inputs (volunteers, money, skills, venue)
 - Predicted the size of the audience
 - Identified means to advertise the event to that audience
 - Identified income sources (ride prices, stall sales, sponsorship, advertising)
 - Laid out a feasible timeline.
- You've identified, with a fairly high degree of certainty, sources for the costs and inputs.
- You've identified any aspects of the event that could be sponsored or donated.
- You've budgeted the probable costs against the probable takings and have set a profit objective (presuming that's your aim).
- You're confident that the projected profit has a return on investment (ROI) that is higher than other possible fundraisers.

- You've prepared contingency plans for foreseeable hazards (e.g. weather).
- You've calculated the downside risk if anything goes unexpectedly wrong, and have asked yourselves:
 - What can go wrong?
 - What have we done to prevent it from happening?
 - What will we do if it does happen?
 - What insurance coverage do we need and what will it cost?

A number of the 10 points above are simple processes; others take some planning and some nitty-gritty organisational work. But they are worth investing the time in the long run.

What about the downside? How much do you stand to lose if things go pear-shaped? With a fete this usually isn't much – it's one of their main advantages – but ask the question anyway. Is this going to make a difference to your decision?

Also consider the risks associated with wasting the goodwill and energy of your volunteers by overworking them or involving them in an event that ultimately fails to deliver on its promise.

If you do decide to go ahead, it is time for more detailed planning.