



## EVENTS NOVA SCOTIA

Inspiring times

## CHAPTER 2: THE FESTIVAL IDEA – WILL IT WORK?

*A festival starts with an idea, a dream, and a vision. Then the idea must be explored and developed.*

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### The Concept

Developing an event starts with an idea. Ideally, this is a strong, unique, and creative idea seeded in an individual with energy, leadership, and vision. The idea then needs a capable team to move it forward, evolving it into a real project.

To create a vibrant and successful festival, organizers need to clearly define their objectives and timeline.

### Explore Your Idea Fully

Building a full concept for the festival is a critical early step in the planning process. Fully consider all aspects of what the event will entail before moving forward. The concept behind the festival needs to be a compelling and unique idea. It needs to be strong enough to entice people to support it, attend it, recommend it, and spend money at it.

### Questions to Ask:

#### Why?

What are your objectives? What will this do for you or your community? Will people experience something different, compelling, and not to be missed?

#### Who?

Who are your target audiences? Local community, tourists, families? Does it engage the community at large?

#### What?

What is the experience you want to provide for attendees? Is it unique to your community?

#### When?

Make sure to give yourself a minimum of 10 to 12 months for planning, depending on the size/scope of the event.

#### How?

Who is going to help you make this happen? Will others in the community benefit from your festival? E.g. accommodations, restaurants, sports bodies, cultural organizations, etc. Are there sponsors out there that could help? What about other sources of funding?





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*Here are the  
key ingredients to  
major event hosting.*

*Having these  
partners work  
with you  
is essential.*



*We suggest you deal with the Why  
and the Who before the What.*

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### Why? Your Vision and Objective(s)

Write down “What is the Vision?” Be clear, be brief, and be inspired. Your vision will help motivate others and set the standard you want to reach.

See this example from Celtic Colours, an annual event in Cape Breton, NS (<http://celtic-colours.com>):

*“To promote, celebrate and develop Cape Breton’s living Celtic culture and hospitality by producing an international festival during the fall colours that builds relationships across Cape Breton Island and beyond.”*

Once you have your vision, decide on your objectives. Objectives should be SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time specific

A festival is a celebration. What is it you want to celebrate?

What is the purpose of the celebration? What is it you hope to achieve in the end? Clearly answer these questions as a first step.

Common objectives include to:

- create a celebration
- leave a legacy to the community
- make money
- attract tourists
- educate others about a particular art form or cultural heritage
- commemorate an important aspect of the community that is a source of pride
- celebrate the uniqueness of your community

Be as clear as you can in defining your objectives and what you intend to accomplish.

Once you start putting the concept on paper, be open to allowing it to change somewhat. It will morph, it will solidify, and it will start to appear as a real festival.

### From Vision to Reality

*“The Nova Scotia Lobster Crawl was a natural for us. Nova Scotia is known for its lobster. Guests travel from around the world to eat our lobster, but only as a summer experience. However, [lobster season] is a winter fishery. Our South Shore Tourism Co-operative had been looking for opportunities to grow demand for local businesses on a year-round basis. Our goal was to strengthen operational sustainability and our contribution to the economies of our communities. While we were known as a summer destination, we needed something new and innovative that would enable us to capture the attention of the public, our target markets, and media. Capitalizing on this tremendous market awareness of Nova Scotian lobster and working with businesses and organizations that were open and wanting more business, we set about creating a lobster festival to take place in February.”*

**Donna Hatt, Executive Director**

Lobster Crawl Festival, South Shore, Nova Scotia

### Who? The Target Audiences

Who is your target audience(s)? Your answers may spring from your objectives.

- Is your prime audience local, a segment of the local community, other Nova Scotians? Or is it visitors to Nova Scotia? Or is it both?
- What age group are you looking to attract?
- Are you looking to attract a specialized market? Music genre fans, car enthusiasts, foodies, for example?

In the context of your objectives, identify the audiences you intend to target in order of priority. Pay attention to the question of how you are going to reach your target markets with the marketing resources you have. This may influence which ones you choose to target.

Identifying your target markets and reaching out to them has never been easier thanks to social media (though it still takes time, skills, and money). Refer to Chapter 11 on marketing for more information on how to identify and reach your target market.

### What? The Experience

The concept behind the festival needs to be compelling — something that captures the imagination. It needs to be exciting. It needs to be strong enough to attract the interest and support of others in the community, particularly those you are looking to get involved.

Ultimately it will need to attract the interest of the audience(s) you wish to attend. If you are targeting tourist markets, it also needs to be unique to your community, something different from what else is happening nearby.

Identify the experience. What is going to be happening for the duration of your event? What is the primary focus, secondary focus and, perhaps, third? For example: 1) music is the primary focus, 2) vendors, concessions, and experiencing the food is the secondary focus, and 3) workshops, the third.

Check out the competition both nearby and beyond. Search out festivals in other communities, across the province, even across the country. Is your idea being done in Alberta, Ontario, and New Brunswick, but not in Nova Scotia? Check out their programs, see what's working, and incorporate those ideas into your concept.

### Know Your Local Audience

*“Before starting the planning process, it’s important that you look within your community for strengths, shared challenges and begin a journey together to explore opportunities. Take inventory of what you already have, adopt a ‘glass is nearly full’ attitude and surround yourself with like-minded leaders and businesses that stand to gain from the efforts.”*

**Donna Hatt, Executive Director**

Lobster Crawl Festival, South Shore, Nova Scotia

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### Helpful Tip: What is a Vision?

*A vision is a picture of a future desired situation. It is a description of what you want your festival to become and achieve in the long term.*

*Establish a vision that is brief, realistic, and attainable. Your vision will become the foundation for your festival strategy and the map of how to get where you want to go.*

Think like a professional marketer with respect to how your festival is going to be represented in the marketplace. It should have a strong unique selling proposition (USP) that will capture attention and interest. The event should be “positioned” in the marketplace as an experience that is different, compelling, and not to be missed. And, it should have a strong and readily recognizable theme that connects with the target audience(s) and is communicated in the form of a logo, which may be accompanied by a tag line.

Don’t make your event scope too restrictively narrow and specialized. In order to be successful in attracting the desired level of attendance, a festival needs a broad enough scope to appeal to the various markets available. At the same time, it shouldn’t be so broad that it loses focus.

Determine the scale of your event. The number of things to do and see, and the duration, needs to be appropriate in a number of respects:

- How many days are you planning and what time of year?
- What times of the day or evening will you have programming?
- What is the likely number of attendees?

- What resources are available?
- What makes your idea unique from other common festivals at that time of year?

With new festivals or events, a modest start is a good approach – you might want to consider keeping things short in terms of hours and days of operation. It’s far easier to build on a successful first edition, adding hours and days as appropriate.

Programming should be fun, sometimes educational, definitely experiential, memorable, and, for some, perhaps something never seen before. Although people generally come out to events to have fun, many are now seeking healthy experiences, nature experiences, and food-and-wine experiences. All of this is considered fun to the participants, yet there are often opportunities to have a legacy of learning and opening people up to new experiences. For example, a marathon is challenging to the participants who run and entertaining to the audience and families cheering them on surrounded by food, music, and celebration. A music festival might have an educational component or the opportunity to support musicians in the community.

Above all, remember to keep things simple, especially in the first years. Add to your event by layers each year you are in the business.

Sometimes you can attach your festival to another festival or event—one that is a larger, more successful project, or a more established event. This strategy offers a number of potential advantages relating to marketing, appeal to the visitor, and operational efficiencies. As an example, you might link a culinary event to a harvest festival. This is a reasonable proposition given that the two events are complementary in theme and experience: They cater to similar audiences and provide mutual benefits to the two organizing groups.

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### When? The Date

You will want to make sure there are no conflicting dates with other festivals in the community or surrounding communities. Many municipalities have a centralized schedule that outlines all events and activities in the area.

Some sources to check for potential date conflicts:

- Online events calendars such as <http://www.novascotia.com/events>
- Events Nova Scotia – <http://eventsnovascotia.com>
- Your local municipal website
- Local service clubs like Rotary Club, Lions Club, Legion, Knights of Columbus
- Local schools, colleges, and universities
- Community newspaper or radio
- Chamber of commerce
- Visitor Information Centre
- Churches

Make sure you are not competing for the same market. If there is another event planned nearby for the same days, work with them to coordinate your programming schedules.

If you are developing a niche event you want to position on the national or international stage, you will need to research what else is happening of a similar nature at that level.



### Location is Critical

*“You have to be able to look down the road long term and ask yourself if there is room to grow the event in this place. Is there enough space, accommodations, venues, restaurants, parking, etc.? If not, you have to be prepared to help build that infrastructure as part of your overall plan in order to stay there.”*

**Lia Rinaldo, Managing Director**

Devour! The Food Film Fest, Wolfville



### Where? Location, Location, Location

Location seems an obvious thing, but it isn't always so. Your choice of venue will set the tone and atmosphere of your event and admission costs. A music festival held in a professional soft-seat theatre will have a totally different feel for your attendees than one held in a field in a tent. This doesn't mean you can't do both.

Having the bulk of your event outside, with either a "sneak peek preview gala" or end-of-festival "all-star show" in a theatre may be a way to change up the feel of the event and even target a different audience.

If you are thinking of an outdoor event, you will have to take extra logistics into consideration. You have to book these areas well in advance and be sure to consider any power requirements. Using generators can be noisy as well as costly.

Arenas are another option. Again, keep in mind they also have a high and low booking seasons and you will need to consider extra costs for covering ice or basketball courts.

Depending on the scope of your event and its proximity to other communities, you may be able to share resources or combine efforts

#### **Helpful Tip:** **Engage with Connected People**

*If well-connected people in your community take a vested interest, engage them immediately as potential board members or partners. You need as many event ambassadors as you can get in the early stages.*

with those communities. Sporting events will often partner with surrounding communities so they have more fields or ice surfaces to work with.

### Spreading Your Wings — A Festival as a Tourism Generator

Festivals and events can be successful tourism generators, if you focus on the following:

- The theme for the festival must be of interest and relevance to your target tourism markets and not just the local audience
- The experience must be extensive and appealing enough to motivate people to travel to the event or add it to their itinerary
- You must promote the festival to visitor markets
- You need to have visitor services in the entry area, such as maps, information on accommodations, restaurants, etc.
- The event should have the capability of handling groups, such as bus tours

While tourists passing through your area at the time of the festival may be an easy sell, motivating people to travel to the festival is a tougher challenge. How far will people travel to attend the event? There has to be enough going on to make it worth their while to travel to your festival. Providing tourists with information on other attractions in your region may give them a reason to come, as well as stay – benefiting not only your event but also your local hotels and businesses.

The festival may also be of interest to tour operators. The scope and appeal of the event will dictate how feasible this might be. Contact your regional tourism organization or Tourism Nova Scotia to see what opportunities might be available.



### Research, and More Research

Part of the decision to proceed requires addressing financial feasibility. As an overview, consider the following:

1. The attendance and revenue potential for the event, including funding from festival attendees, government, sponsors, and the community
2. What it is going to cost to stage the event, including its organization, implementation and promotion – include expected capital costs, if any, for facilities and infrastructure as well as operating costs before, during, and after the event
3. Illustrations of comparable festivals elsewhere and how they have performed with respect to points 1 and 2
4. An analysis of competing festivals on at the same time in the province and how they might impact yours

Determining whether your festival or event can sustain itself financially is an important step in your planning process. You should strive to ensure the festival/event is self-sufficient, and based on a reasonable and realistic set of assumptions with respect to visitation and revenue sources.

### Preparing a Business Plan

You will need to summarize all of the foregoing in a business plan. This is important even for a small festival. The plan can be a very simple, point form document that covers the

- legal status of the festival/event planning team and its structure, committees
- history of the festival/event
- vision and objectives

- festival concept, date, location
- market analysis
- situation (SWOT) analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
- festival program
- budget – costs and revenues
- partners and sponsor opportunities
- event evaluation plans
- long-term strategy

### Key Takeaways

- *Have a strong, creative idea and a vision for what you want to achieve.*
- *Think about the basics – the who, what, why, when, and how.*
- *Do your research – look at what others have achieved. Calculate potential revenues and costs and decide if it's feasible to proceed.*
- *Write a business plan – and a detailed critical path schedule for what has to be done when.*



For more information, please contact our Events Nova Scotia staff  
at Communities, Culture and Heritage at [events.novascotia.ca/contact](https://events.novascotia.ca/contact)