



EVENTS NOVA SCOTIA

Inspiring times

CHAPTER 9: PROGRAMMING & PRODUCTION

Programming is the most important aspect of your event – it's what sells the tickets. Invest the time, people, and money to get it right.

Programming

You will want to re-visit your vision, goals, and objectives when planning your programming. There are often arguments to be made for and against certain types of programming and you and your board of directors will have to determine how strictly you follow your objectives.

Artistic/Program Director

Having an experienced artistic/program director who understands the board of director's vision and programming subcommittee's goals is essential to a successful event. An experienced artistic/program director will know about proper etiquette in regard to formal offers to artists, contracting and technical requirements, and will have other important insights into the industry.

Helpful Tip: Artistic/Program Director

Programming is a very important aspect of any event—it is what is going to sell the tickets ultimately—so you need to have the right person in place with a supportive team. It's also one of the more coveted roles at any festival. The challenge is finding the right people.

Daily Programming

Daily programming is your scheduled events that are listed on a festival program, website, social media pages, in the newspaper, or at the entrance gate.

Research other events in the region with a similar program (music, film, etc.) to see if there is a performer who fits within your event's vision. There may be an opportunity to recruit them to your festival if they are already in the area.

Special Events

Special events serve to add value for your existing market, or to draw visitors to your festival who would not normally consider attending. These could include workshops and interactive sessions on such things as creative writing, singing folk music, making musical instruments, oil painting, making model tall ships, food and wine pairing, or any variety of topics related to your festival. Special events could also include the screening of a documentary, hosting a celebrated speaker, or a behind-the-scenes tour.

Multi-Venue or Off-Site Events

Events vary from having a main festival site, to one that uses multiple venues, or a mixture of the two. How you choose to place your festival events will be determined by the scope and theme of your event as well as your area's available facilities.

Make sure you understand staffing, volunteers, and general logistic requirements that come with multi-venue events.

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School Programs

Your programming may fit well into the curriculum of your local schools. Some festivals have assisted in creating teacher's aids, and then have a school initiative where busloads of students are brought on-site for special programming.

If your board of directors is keen to involve schools, keep in mind that teachers have set curriculums and you may need to plan a full year ahead to be included in class studies.

This could be done as a way for the festival to contribute to the community, or it could be a source of revenue from the students' attendance. Keep in mind there are also government special event—funding streams that encourage youth engagement. Have your team research possible government funding for your special events.

Helpful Tip: Proximity Clauses

Be careful of proximity clauses in contracts. These are becoming bigger issues, particularly in the U.S. and are becoming more mainstream. Proximity clauses are put in contracts by an event and state that the performer can't play anywhere else in a defined geographic area for a specified amount of time. So, the entertainer you want may be restricted from playing again in the region for the time you want them.

Show Management and Production

If your event is focused around music and large stage productions, you will need to hire a professional sound and lighting company. They will often be able to provide staging as well as all the technical knowledge required to run a professional music festival.

You will need a stage manager (along with volunteers) who will do everything from ushering performers on and off the performance area to moving chairs and microphones and communicating with the sound technicians. The stage manager is an integral part of the team. If you are doing a big show and have a volunteer stage manager, you will likely need an experienced team to coordinate technical production, artists/performers, etc.

The more well-known artists you book, generally the more complex the arrangements.

Contracting and Riders

Your contracts with performers can be as simple as a letter of agreement that states what the performance times are, the type of performance, how much they are getting paid, and when they are getting paid.

If your event is contracting with performers who are more well known, contracts and agreements become more detailed and having a qualified artistic director is an asset. Bands come with various types of riders.

There are technical riders (specific requirements on the type of equipment or musical instruments, the exact stage setup for chairs and equipment, sound requirements etc.), and hospitality riders (requirements for food and drink, accommodation, and transportation).

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Bands will often put small things, like certain types of food or drink, in their riders to ensure you are reading the contract clearly and will have all on-stage technical requirements taken care of properly.

All artists, whether amateur or celebrity, can run the gamut from being completely flexible and accommodating, to being demanding and difficult. A calm and respectful attitude in your stage staff goes a long way to successfully handling almost any situation.

Having a production manager and/or staff and volunteers who have direct festival experience is a great benefit to your event. Outdoor venues are much more complex than events held indoors. They can bring unexpected situations, such as 70 km/hour winds and a thunderstorm resulting in ruined soundboards. Even a small, one-day event is best served by staff who have dealt with adverse weather and other on-site crises.

Advancing

Advancing with artists and technical teams is essential to a successful event. This is when you have an opportunity to discuss any specific requirements with performers. Contracts can be double-checked to make sure both parties are on the same page. Many issues can be avoided when advancing is done appropriately. This is your chance to discuss any limitations of your event with the key stakeholders – performers, technical staff, etc.

Staging

There are many different types of stages. These range from 12-inch risers placed together to form a surface area, to a space on the grass, to a 5 ft. high stage that unfolds from the back of a tractor trailer, to a stage that is built piece by piece over a period of days.

If your stage is too small, your audience will complain about not being able to see everything. Too large, and your acts will look lost and your audience will complain that everything is too far away. Research and talk to other festivals and rely on the professional knowledge of your sound and technical team to know what is appropriate.

Backstage Security

Again, depending on your performers and the nature of your event, backstage security will either be a non-issue with artists and visitors mingling about, or it will be a tightly controlled secure area with only those having a certain level of accreditation permitted.

Celebrities have a reasonable expectation of privacy and may have legitimate worries for their safety.

You will know from your consultations with police whether you have any unusual safety and security issues and need to take appropriate precautions.

Rehearsals and Noise Level

When meeting with local residents and other stakeholders, keep in mind that, aside from your scheduled programming times, some shows may need sound checks and rehearsals. These can be as loud as the event itself. Make sure that by-laws allow for the appropriate level of noise during sound checks (they normally occur in the late morning or afternoon), and that you inform police and other stakeholders (city hall switchboard or municipal councillors) in case of complaints.

If you need to, apply for a noise by-law exemption: This allows a certain decibel of music past the normal hours for noise. Then

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conform to that time limit to the minute. Residents will be more tolerant of excessive noise as long as they know about it ahead of time and it ends when it's supposed to.

Artist Hospitality

Your performers will appreciate some form of hospitality, from meals to accommodation. The sponsorship coordinator may be able to negotiate hotel or motel rooms, or they may need to be factored into your expenses. For meals, you could have the concessionaires provide these under their contractual agreements.

Some festivals have staff and volunteers specifically assigned to artist hospitality. Their duties might include

- transporting artists from the airport, to and from hotels for sound checks and show, and back to the airport
- providing refreshments and snacks in the artist trailer, tent, or green room
- fetching the performer for sound checks and show time
- arranging meals
- delivering welcome packages to hotel rooms (for artists, delegates, VIPs)

Essentially, whether you are supplying bottles of water and pizza or gourmet catering, performers just want to feel as comfortable as possible while providing your visitors with what they came for — great entertainment.

Production Schedule

A production schedule is essential for anyone involved in the technical production of a more involved show. This usually details all production-related activities from early morning to late night.

It becomes your “bible,” so to speak, of who should be where and when and what should be happening.

Production schedules are also important for paid staff as many technical crews are part of a union that does not allow excessive hours without meal breaks. For some larger shows, even a half-hour delay can throw a schedule off and end up going over budget because of overtime.

Helpful Tip: Hospitality

Meals are important and becoming more and more complex due to dietary restrictions, preferences, and other needs.

Meals can be a big deal – if your artists are not well fed, they are not happy. Make sure they feel well looked after.

Key Takeaways

An experienced artistic/program director who understands the vision for the festival or event is essential.

A significant music or stage production event will need professional help and possibly a stage manager as well.

If you are booking artists, take care to read the contracts and technical riders carefully.

Hospitality for your artists is important to their comfort and happiness.



For more information, please contact our Events Nova Scotia staff
at Communities, Culture and Heritage at events.novascotia.ca/contact