

7

Festival Operations

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After reading this chapter you should:

- Understand the role and importance of festival operation
- Understand the processes and key operational documents will you need to satisfy licensing authorities and run your event safely and efficiently
- Understand the processes and people involved in licensing
- Understand the Health and Safety issues involved in running festivals and what you need to do to meet them
- Understand the importance of communications with your team and third parties

Introduction

In our previous chapters we have covered festival planning, logistics and the different types of licensing and insurances that you might require to run your event. This chapter assumes that you now have a viable festival plan and it focusses on how you put that plan into practice in the run-up to your festival and during the festival itself.

We will start by looking at the purpose and principles of operations management, then turn to the processes of getting the necessary permissions and the paperwork you will need to assemble. We will then look at the permissions you will need to run your event and how to obtain those. We will outline the sort of health and safety documentation you will need including risk assessments. We go on to cover issues of first aid, crowd management, security, staffing and communications. Our experience of these systems and processes is from the UK, and we have used that throughout this chapter. Other countries and territories will have different arrangements, but the principle that your event will probably need some form of authorisation should alert you to the importance of identifying whom you need to talk to and what factors you should consider.

An Event Management Plan (EMP) is a key document enabling you to run your festival smoothly and effectively and demonstrating to others that you

can do so. But the EMP, however good, will not run your festival for you. Only you and your team can do that. The success of your festival will partly be down to the quality of your planning and partly down to the effort and vigilance you put in whilst it is running. But a good EMP and a simpler Operations Plan will help you hugely to run your festival smoothly and will be a vital support if you encounter problems.

What is operations management?

The basics are really quite simple: festival operations management is about getting the right things to the right place at the right time. That includes both equipment and people. The reality is more complex, as there are a wide range of factors to consider and manage, and there are also a large number of human expectations to deal with, which can range from the outright demanding to the so-subtle that they are easy to miss. These factors include:

- ◆ The requirements of the artists
- ◆ The nature of the performance environment
- ◆ Stakeholders – like councils and sponsors
- ◆ Permissions and paperwork
- ◆ External contractors and
- ◆ Physical logistics

Running a festival's operations aspect goes hand in hand with the event's creative design. It is the fulfilment aspect in terms of the artists, the audience and the festival's creative director and management.

Operations management is the crucial and largely hidden aspect of festivals management, it is the linchpin of a successful festival or event. Everything is expected to run smoothly and effectively, and if it does you will probably get little thanks because nobody should really know you are there and doing it. It's only when things go wrong that operations become visible and festival-goers and artists will then certainly let you know they are unhappy.

Permissions and process

Operations management has an inward facing aspect and at the same time has to deal with external bodies, it has to look both ways at once.

You need a good internal plan showing what is needed where and by when, how it is going to get there, and who will be delivering it by when. You also need a body of documentation that will satisfy the authorities concerned that you have thought of all eventualities and have the necessary insurances. This will be needed to obtain your event licence.

The level and type of documentation required will very much depend on the nature and duration of your festival and the type of venues you are using. If it's a one-day festival in a fully serviced venue like a theatre or arts centre then your Event Management Plan could be quite simple. If, however, you are using outdoor public spaces like town squares or roads that require closure, or greenfield sites involving traders, stages and technical installations, then you will be expected to provide a lot more documentation.

The licence you are seeking will ultimately be decided on by a local authority Licensing Committee. You may get to meet them. But they are likely to be advised, in turn, by a Safety Advisory Group (SAG) who will comprise quite a large number of people which will probably include:

- ◆ The council's licensing officer
- ◆ The council's environmental officer
- ◆ The council's health and safety officer
- ◆ Maybe a council parks officer if public parks are involved
- ◆ Members of the emergency services (Fire, Police, Ambulance)
- ◆ The council's events officer

You may be asked to attend a pre-meeting prior to your licensing application. At this you may be asked questions and given advice. Treat the SAG as your friends. They have lots of experience and good advice to give. They will probably want to see your festival take place just as much as you do. But they will also focus on public safety and the risks your event may pose to that. If they appear to be putting obstacles in your path, then it is perfectly reasonable to ask them for advice on how to address their concerns. They may tell you anyway. The SAG may just want reassurance on points of detail and once you have that, the way may be clear to getting your Event Licence. The Health and Safety Executive's website has useful information on the role of SAGs. (<http://www.hse.gov.uk>)

Once you have satisfied your local SAG then you are on course to being issued with a licence. The issuing of it may never actually go to the Licensing Committee. It may be delegated to the Licensing Committee chair in consultation with a senior council officer. The full Licensing Committee may only hear large or contentious applications. If you are planning a festival that aims to take over a town centre or bring a 20,000 capacity festival to a local park, you may have to meet and present to the Licensing Committee in person. But your key contact is likely to be a council events officer and/or the SAG.