

Autumn Roberts

Senior Seminar final project

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Organizing an Event through COVID-19

Abstract

This project focusses on the event I have been planning with my current internship. My internship is through a non-profit organization called Agassiz Village, a summer camp for underprivileged children. The camp is located in Portland, Maine and I work from their business office in Norwood, Massachusetts. I have had the privilege of being their social media and events coordinator intern over these past couple of months. Every year, the organization puts together an event to benefit the children that attend this camp called the Maine Course Event. This event is a casually elegant evening that brings the fun and nostalgia of summer camp to all the alumni who attend. Wine tasting, food sampling, and local entertainment brings everyone together for this special night. Due to COVID-19, our event looks a little bit different this year and we are still in the process of planning in hopes for this event to take place in 2021. I will be sharing what we have accomplished so far in order to make this experience memorable.

About Non-profits

Non-profit work is known for its mission driven core. While working in this type of organization, I have learned a thing or two about how a non-profit runs aside from a profit making organization.

- **Flexibility:** Being able to adapt to the changing needs of your target population and/or the surrounding community is critical for success in the non-profit industry. Flexibility was something I learned how to channel in response to the unique criteria of this organization. Due to COVID, I would also have to be flexible with the hours I scheduled to either physically work in the office or work from home in order to keep social distancing in affect.
- **Communication:** In addition to engaging with clients via verbal and nonverbal communication, technical writing skills are equally critical to the ability to convey a compassionate message that reflects the core values of the organization. Throughout the planning of this event, I have been in contact with many different venue prospects, vendors, restaurants, and sponsors. I have crafted emails and letters describing our event and ways in which we needed the help.
- **Passion:** Maintaining motivation and stamina for the work of non-profit organizations requires a tremendous passion for the communities and issues these types of organizations serve. I can see the passion my coworkers have for the underprivileged children that we serve, ones that have been apart of the Agassiz community for a handful of years and consider us their home away from home.

The Event: Budget

Non-profit event budgets are unique and take time and energy to pin down. Whether it be a gala or a house party, organizations need to understand how to create an event budget in order to successfully plan and execute their events.

Event/Revenue	Maine Course 2019 Budget								
	2020 Actual	2020 GOAL	2019 Actual	2019 GOAL	2018 Actual	2018 Goal	2017 Actual	2016 Actual	2015 Actual
Event Sponsors		\$11,000	\$55,500	\$65,000	\$91,000	\$58,000	\$51,500	\$40,500	\$42,500
Presenting (\$15,000) *New this year									
Master Chef* (\$10,000)	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000
Falconsan (\$5,000)			\$10,000	\$15,000	\$20,000	\$15,000	\$16,000	\$12,500	\$10,000
Gourmet (\$3,000)	\$6,000	\$12,000	\$18,000	\$20,000	\$21,500	\$12,000	\$9,000	\$9,000	\$9,000
Foodie (\$1,500)	\$7,000	\$9,000	\$7,500	\$10,000	\$19,500	\$21,000	\$16,500	\$9,000	\$18,500
Tickets	5,525	35,500	19,840	\$35,000	\$55,150	\$42,750	\$58,575	\$41,525	\$55,275
Raffle/Silent Auction	0	28,000	22,555	\$28,000	\$28,850	\$34,000	\$30,720	\$20,924	\$21,810
Donations/Campships	0	20,500	15,560	\$10,000	\$32,672	\$20,000	\$14,350	\$15,536	\$7,225
Total Revenue	\$26,325	\$115,000	\$113,455	\$158,000	\$187,722	\$154,750	\$135,145	\$118,485	\$108,910
Event Expenses									
GiveSmart	\$1,697	\$1,697	\$3,350	\$3,350	\$3,350	\$3,350	\$0	\$0	\$0
cc Fees		\$3,000		\$3,000	\$3,000				
Bartenders		\$1,800	\$1,886	\$1,888	\$1,888	\$1,888	\$1,886	\$1,414	\$8,894
Venue Rental Fee	\$9,750	\$8,600	\$8,665	\$8,555	\$8,565	\$8,555	\$8,873	\$8,342	\$8,500
Audio and Video		\$2,800	\$2,812	\$3,500	\$2,956	\$3,200	\$1,100	\$965	\$1,125
Lighting	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$500	\$0	\$500	\$0
Tables/Chairs/Liners/ Bar	\$2,842.00	\$2,700.00	\$2,735.35	\$3,000	\$2,910	\$2,000	\$1,650	\$1,106	\$2,135
Decorations/Supplies		\$200	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$470	\$488
Invitation printing/mailing		\$400							

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Misc Supplies				\$375	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$0	\$0
Total Expenses		\$14,359	\$22,407	\$20,548	\$25,591	\$26,845	\$25,313	\$17,345	\$16,315	\$13,280
Net Revenue			\$92,193	\$92,912	\$132,409	\$160,877	\$129,437	\$117,800	\$102,170	\$95,630
Cost Ratio			19.83%	18.11%	16.20%	14.30%	16.36%	12.83%	13.77%	12.42%

Pictured on the spreadsheet above shows our organizations's budgeting for the Maine Course event for present and years past. In 2019, the revenue goal Agassiz set for themselves was \$132,409, but they only ended up netting \$92,912 after expenses. This year, we shot a little lower for our goal at \$92,193. Currently, as the year is not yet over and we are still in the process of planning the event for 2021, our actual revenue amount is still being counted and we are trying to come close to our goal. Netting money has certainly been more of a challenge due to COVID and this is why the organization had to make their 2020 goal much lower than 2019.

Looking towards the top of the spreadsheet on the sponsorship end of things, in 2019, the organization's goal amount to receive from sponsorships was \$65,000 and they only reached \$55,000. This year, we had to shoot much lower in our goal at \$31,000 as COVID made things

difficult. As we are still in the process of reaching out to sponsors and receiving funds, we have managed to receive \$23,000 in funds from sponsorships and we continue to work towards our goal.

Fundraising and promoting via Social Media: Our organization took part in many different fundraising opportunities. When I first started with Agassiz Village they were currently taking part in their annual 5K for Kids fundraiser which was new this year. Due to COVID this year, families could not physically come together to participate in a 5k event, so the actual 5k was completed on the individual's own time. For the event, each participant had to register at our event website. Each participant had the opportunity to register as a team captain, a participant on someone else's team, or as an individual. Next, each participant was to set up their own personal fundraising page. Most of the work was done here for the participants, but if they so chose to do, they were able to personalize a message and upload photos to make it their own. The last piece of the registration process was to email family and friends, asking them to help make a difference in a child's life...it takes a village!

Following registration, Agassiz had "challenge week" for the kids that enabled them to win prizes. Their challenge was to recruit three new team members for the race and have the chance to be entered for two raffle tickets. The next challenge was for an individual to send out 10 emails to new people who they hadn't asked yet to support the 5k for Kids. This prize was the chance to enter four raffle tickets for the chance to win a trip to Storyland. The third challenge was a personal contribution of 10 dollars or more towards the fundraising goal and for the chance to be entered to win two tickets to the New England Aquarium. The fourth and final challenge

was for each individual kid to share on social media why Agassiz was special to them and why they were choosing to participate in the 5K for Kids.

These tasks were simple and centered towards the kids in a fun way for them to raise money. On race day, all participants were encouraged to wear their camp merch while running their 5K. The final product was wrapping up, sharing the success and amount raised and thanking all who participated and donated. This is Agassiz's biggest and most successful fundraiser for their Maine Course Event and I was glad that I could catch the end of it upon my hire to Agassiz Village. I was able to learn how something like this works and what kind of process goes into a fundraiser like this. I also had the privilege of stuffing envelopes with thank you letters to our sponsors, thanking them for all they had done in giving us their generous sums of donations.

Promotion on Social Media: The social media strategy we created in order to promote our fundraising event started off with first announcing the fundraiser and its start date and how it would work due to COVID protocols. Our next post included information about joining teams and why the individual had chosen to participate. We also sent out reminders via social media on how anyone was able to participate and how their participation would benefit Agassiz Village and its youth. Our organization also posted about and would notify those that followed us how close we were to reaching our goal and how prizes could be won by those that did their part in the fundraising. We also encouraged participants to post pictures of their personal 5K routes and to give shoutouts to teammates.

Shown below are some of the social media posts made during the beginning of the fundraiser and challenge week!



We used this photo on our Instagram platform to get the fundraiser off and running.



Here is an example of a media post made to advertise the prizes during challenge week.

This post was one of the last posts we made to thank our participants and show them that we beat our goal in raising the money! For the 5K being a first time fundraiser, we received very positive



feedback from both parents and kids alike! It was a fun distraction during this odd time while still raising money for the organization and Maine Course event.

Venue Search: We have experienced great turmoil in finding a venue that is large enough for an outdoor gathering, as COVID as limited us to how many people can meet together in one place. As I have searched for venues, a lot of restaurants or event centers have either closed themselves until further notice or drastically lowered their occupancy numbers.

Our organization has narrowed down our searching to four hopeful venue prospects with an outdoor space. These spaces are Modern Relic, Gore Place, Pavilion, and Venezia. All of these places offer a reasonable outdoor capacity rate where social distancing can still be put into affect. Agassiz is striving more of a “tent and food truck” type of set up this year as it appears to be a

safer option as we still combat COVID. As of right now, there are no capacity numbers set in stone, but if COVID has lifted some restraints by the time we host this event, the Venezia can hold up to 350 people in their outdoor space, Modern Relic can hold 250 people outside, the Pavilion in Boston can hold 500 people outside, and the Gore Place can hold 200 people outdoors under a tent which is what we are leaning towards. I have reached out to several venue prospects with questions about pricing, spacing, capacity due to COVID, as well as Food Truck services and I have calculated this into our budget. As this event is something that is usually held indoors, we are all prepared for the new factors that we now have to incorporate into this event such as the weather and spacing.

Agassiz Village has altered this event to hold at least 100 people in an outdoor space per governor's order, with others welcome to join the celebration over a live stream if they are not comfortable with physically joining. As this has become the norm for us, people are happy to comply. In general, they are appreciative that we are still making efforts to host this event. Others have also chosen to simply donate to us as an organization if they so choose.

As we are not quite done planning this event and there is much left to do until hopefully hosting in the spring of 2021, I have continued to reach out to sponsors, venue options, and different types of rentals. I also continue to log prices and budgeting. One of my most previous projects I put together was a survey for the event. This survey was sent to all people wishing to participate in the event. The questions were simple, such as asking those attending if they would rather physically attend or attend the live stream, what kind of activities they wanted to have, such as wine tastings, silent auction, and raffle prizes, if a more traditional meal was preferred over tasting portions and cocktails, and if by the time the event approaches and COVID

restrictions are still in place for large gatherings, if people would be comfortable attending if two separate time slots were offered in order to enjoy the event, so we could limit the number of guests in each. The responses were positive and most responses came back with people expressing that if at all possible, they would still like it to be hosted in person if guidelines allowed. As we continue to prepare ourselves for what is ahead, we are determined to make this an amazing experience for all who attend, both physically and virtually.

Pictured below are a few shots of what the survey looks like!



Conclusion: This internship has been an amazing experience thus far, even with my short amount of time as a part of the organization. I have learned how to take everything in stride during this stressful time with a company, as planning an event with COVID has had its fair share of trials and tribulations. Even through COVID, this experience has shown me what my life could look like after college, as event planning is what I would really love to pursue after I graduate. It has already taught me how to be confident, persistent, and professional and how to take on adult tasks. Public speaking has always been something I've struggled with and lacked confidence in, but through my time of reaching out to sponsors and venue prospects, I have gained confidence in speaking with other professionals and discussing how my organization plans to put on an event in the midst of COVID. I am grateful for this opportunity and it has been an amazing experience putting together an event with Agassiz Village.

WORKS CITED

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