

## Introduction

Fairs and festivals have grown in popularity in recent years. According to the Travel Industry Association, Americans are changing their travel patterns toward more domestic travel and trips closer to home. This trend increased by 8% for in-region trips in the first half of 2002 and is good news for the many rural West Virginia communities that host fairs and festivals throughout the year.

The benefits of fairs and festivals to host communities are many. They give the community an opportunity to provide a fun activity for residents and entice out-of-towners to come for a visit. Because most festival themes are connected to the cultural heritage of the community, they contribute in a big way to the development of a local identity, increasing community pride, and can also provide various economic benefits. Fairs and festivals draw residents' attention to their community's positive assets. In addition, these events can attract the participation of residents who have not previously been involved in other community projects, thus increasing the pool of event organizers and new community leaders.

Communities and event organizers must also recognize the drawbacks of fairs and festivals. Many times the events are very successful but they can also end up being complete failures with economic and social consequences for the host community. These events are labor intensive and typically involve months of planning by fair boards and civic organizations resulting in an event that is only repeated annually. The Fair & Festival program is designed to help communities evaluate their fair and

festival events. The objectives of the program are:

- to provide a fresh perspective of the event's strengths and weaknesses,
- raise local awareness,
- suggest actions to improve the event,
- help identify areas where additional leadership for the event is needed, and
- help enhance the connection between the event and other community assets.

## The Program

Anonymous visitors record their impressions of the fair or festival and the surrounding area. Getting good visitors is a key to this program. Potential visitors include Chamber of Commerce directors, economic development directors, fair board members from other communities, business people, and county extension faculty.

Visitors explore the surrounding area and the fair/festivals grounds during peak periods of the event. The approach to the fair/festival grounds, the signage and advertising for the event, directional signs to the event, entrance signs, traffic patterns and road conditions, parking, vendors, food booths, activities and exhibits, security, and an overall impression of the event are just a few of the elements the visitors evaluate.

Each team member uses a manual of established procedures and guidelines. This ensures that evaluations are standardized and reports are thorough. The manual is self-explanatory, so there is no need to train visitors.

## The Report

The whole event is evaluated; no individual element or comment is considered as an impression of the total event. All observations and comments are included in the summary report. Photographs accompany the report to illustrate the points raised by the visitors. Recommendations for fair board and community action are made based on the issues raised by the visitors. The information in the report is credible because the event evaluation involves individuals who have nothing personal to gain from the results.

## The Impact

The Fairs & Festivals program is a useful tool for increasing awareness of the event's strengths and weaknesses that can lead to community action. Potential program outcomes might include event improvements in signage, parking, exhibits, vendors, and the event facility. The program could also result in the improved access to other information about the area such as local accommodations and other points of interest. Other potential outcomes of the Fairs & Festival program are improvements in the appearance of the host community, improved marketing and coordination of local attractions, new business development, and expanded community leadership.

## How We Help You

We identify people to visit your fair or festival, collate the visitor's impressions into a single report to the community, and pay for film and processing. We also make an oral

presentation of the results to the fair board or community group. A \$500 program fee helps us cover our costs. Fair or festivals boards are also asked to provide six volunteers to visit other Fairs & Festivals program events.

## **Program Application Deadlines**

Program application deadlines are August 15, November 15, February 15, and May 15.

## **For More Information or a Community Application**

Contact: Your WVU County Extension Agent

OR

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Look for the Fairs & Festivals Program at our website:

<http://www.wvu.edu/~exten/depts/ced/ced.htm>

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# *Fairs & Festivals*

***A Program for Event  
Assessment and  
Improvement***



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