



## Chapter Five

# Developing a Weekend Activities Program

By Jennifer M. Mussi

Family Weekend. Spring Fling. Sibling Weekend. Homecoming. Outdoor Adventures. These are just a few of the exciting programs that college program boards across the country plan for their communities each year. What makes these programs different from a Tuesday movie night series or a final exam study break? They take place over an extended period of time and most often during the weekend.

Weekend programs are a valued component of a successful campus activities program. The weekend format offers programmers ample opportunity to build traditional, recurring programs and offer new, creative ideas to enhance campus life. Weekends are also more conducive to lengthier programs where more time is needed to execute the program and when travel, sporting events or other weekend schedules need to be considered. Learning how to create new and exciting weekend activities programs is not a daunting task if programmers follow a few simple steps.

### Determine If and Why You Should Offer Weekend Programming

Before programmers can add a roster of weekend activities to their program offerings, it is important to consider whether weekend programs should be offered at your campus. A good starting point is thinking about your student population and campus culture.

Ask yourself, your advisor and your program board the following questions:

- Who is on campus during the weekend?
- What are students' weekend schedules like?
- What programs would interest participants if they were offered during the weekend (as compared to being offered during the week)?
- What is the breakdown of resident and commuter students on campus during the weekend?
- When do parents and families typically visit campus?
- What other events or aspects of campus life compete with weekend activities? (i.e. midterms, finals, sporting events)

After your program board and advisor consider these questions and determine that offering weekend activities is a viable option for your campus, you may want to host a focus group and ask students the same type of questions. A focus group is a small gathering of students who represent a wide cross-section of the campus community. The focus group facilitator asks questions and takes notes on group members' perceptions of an idea, concept or program. Consider the focus group a random sampling of what students think is important or their perception of the campus culture.

After determining that you want to move forward with weekend activities programming, you can think about the unique opportunities programming during the weekend can bring to your campus. The weekend format affords programmers the opportunity to offer a series of programs packaged around a theme or concept. The weekend format also enables programmers to offer stand-alone day trips that would likely not be feasible during the week.

Weekend activities can also provide programmers with the opportunity to build traditional, high-quality and recurring programs for all members of the college or university community to enjoy, but when developing these programs, it is necessary to think about student health and safety. Any college or university sponsorship of a program must comply with local, state and federal laws, and comply with university policies and procedures.

Once you have determined there is a need for weekend activities on your campus and considered the health and safety factors, it is time to brainstorm potential program ideas. Begin by thinking about the needs of the community and how your program board can address these needs.

## Brainstorm Weekend Program Ideas

The next step in building a weekend activities program is generating a list of fun and creative ideas that will serve as a starting point for your program offerings. Host a brainstorming session for your program board members and start out by asking, "What would be a fun, interactive and educational program for us to offer our campus?" The question is simple, but it will spark many ideas. During your brainstorming session, write down each idea that is generated. You can keep the brainstorming going for as long as you like, but make sure you take time to revisit at least three of the most interesting ideas that were generated and start to explore how that program can become a reality on your campus.

Some of the ideas you come up with may include:

- Family Weekend
- Sibling Weekend
- Spring Fling/Spring Fest
- Substance-Free Programming
- Homecoming Weekend
- Bus trips to local attractions/cities that require a full day for the activity and travel (i.e. theme/amusement parks, whitewater rafting, paintball, snow tubing, day trips to casinos, etc.)
- Dances (i.e. Harvest Ball, formal events)
- Recurring series (i.e. Friday night comedy programs, open mic coffee house)

## Determine How to Build the Program

Once you have brainstormed program ideas, it is time to begin the planning process. It is always advisable to test the program idea with students on campus to develop an understanding of whether there is

### Example 5.1 Tentative Schedule

#### Friday

- 3 pm – 6 pm .....Early Arrival Registration  
(Student Center Lobby)
- 5 pm – 7 pm .....Main Cafeteria Open for Dinner
- 8 pm .....Movies Under the Stars: *Shrek 2*  
(Library Lawn)
- 10:15 pm .....Ice Cream Social  
(Student Center, Student Lounge)

#### Saturday

- 8 am – Noon .....Registration (Student Center Lobby)
- 7 am – 11 am .....Main Cafeteria Open for Breakfast
- 7 am – 11 am .....Cartoons Wake-Up  
(Residence Hall Lounges)
- 10 am – Noon .....Hayrides Around Campus  
(Depart from Gym)
- Noon .....Pep Rally (Under the Stadium Bleachers)  
Face painting, pom-poms, hot dogs and popcorn
- 1 pm .....Football game (Stadium)
- 3 pm – 8 pm .....Arts and Crafts  
(Student Center, Student Lounge)
- 5 pm – 7 pm .....Main Cafeteria Open for Dinner
- 7 pm – 10 pm .....Pajama Party  
(Residence Hall Lounges)

#### Sunday

- 10 am – 1 pm .....Family Brunch (Ballroom)
- 1 pm .....Farewell to Siblings

interest in the program. You may acquire this information informally by conversing with program board members or you can host another focus group to run the idea by other students. Simultaneously, you should consult with your advisor, who can help you identify the program's strengths, weaknesses and potential areas of concern.

After you have confirmed that the program will take place, it is time to plan the program's logistics. The first step is to consult the academic calendar and set dates. It is important to factor in other large campus events and religious and national holidays, as those events may cause your program's participation numbers to rise or fall.

When you have chosen a date, secure a venue and location for your event. For recurring programs, such as a weekly open mic night in a coffeehouse-inspired atmosphere, it is important to secure a consistent venue that your participants will easily identify with the program. It is always a good idea to secure your venue immediately after setting the event date. On some campuses where space is limited, the venue availability may dictate the event date.

Now that you have a program idea and a date and venue identified, it is time to create your program outline. In your outline, you are able to see how the program will flow, plan breaks between programs and get a general sense of how program participants will experience the event.

For example, let's use the Sibling Weekend concept. Sibling Weekend is an opportunity for college students to host their younger brothers and sisters on campus for the weekend. Activities for the siblings must be age appropriate and multiple activities for different age groups should be planned. During a brainstorming session, the program board generates ideas for programs during Sibling Weekend. Using the ideas from the brainstorming session, a tentative schedule can be developed. See Example 5.1

Having your program ideas in writing in front of you will help you see where there are program conflicts and how you can adjust the program accordingly. At this stage of planning, some programmers like to use Post-it® notes to organize themselves so that the individual programs written on each note can be moved easily throughout a timeline tacked on an office bulletin board.

Once you have a tentative schedule in place, develop a preliminary budget for each aspect of your overall program. It is important to identify how much funding is needed for each component and where you can cut corners when necessary and still be able to offer your event. See Example 5.2 for a sample preliminary budget for the Sibling Weekend program.

Now that you have your program idea, date, venue and budget in place, it is time to create your marketing and advertising plan. During this stage of planning, it is important to know your audience and method for reaching it. Posters and fliers tacked to campus bulletin boards and in residence hall corridors always attract students' attention. Table tents on cafeteria tables, door hangers on residence hall doors, leaflets attached to lockers and on the windshields of parked cars can also help get the word out. Programmers should always be mindful of your campus' advertising and posting policy, though. Additionally, programs that invite parents, siblings and other guests to campus must consider advance notification of programs so that travel plans can be made.

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#### Example 5.2 Sample Sibling Weekend Preliminary Budget

##### Registration materials:

Printing 1,000 postcards .....	\$250
Printing 1,000 mailers .....	\$750
Postage for postcards .....	\$240
Postage for mailers.....	\$370
Folders/welcome packets .....	\$250
Hospitality Suite, Punch and Cookies .....	\$500
Cafeteria Meals.....	Purchased by host student's meal plan
Movie Screening— <b>Shrek 2</b> rental.....	\$1,000
Movie Screening Snacks—popcorn and soda .....	\$400
Ice Cream Social—Ice cream and fixings .....	\$750
Hayrides—\$150/hour x 2 hours x 2.....	\$600
Pep Rally—hot dog vendors .....	\$750
Face painting.....	\$50
Pom-poms .....	\$250
Football Game—group sales: \$3.00 x 500.....	\$1,500
Arts and Crafts Supplies.....	\$500
Pajama Party Snacks .....	\$350
Family Brunch—\$35.00 per person x 300.....	\$10,500

Creativity is the key to successfully launching a new weekend activity. Creating excitement about a new program is crucial to its success. During initial brainstorming sessions, do your best to develop creative promotional ideas.

Here is an example of an advertising and marketing campaign and timeline for the Sibling Weekend program:

- Save-the-date postcard mailing (12 weeks before program)
- Registration materials mailing (six weeks before program)
- Bale of hay with event information on display in the student center lobby (after registration materials are mailed)
- Miniature pumpkins with information on cafeteria tables (three weeks before program)
- Poster and flier campaign (ongoing throughout publicity campaign)
- Door hangers on residence hall doors (two weeks before program)

*As with any new program, consulting with your program board advisor and director of student activities is a crucial component in event planning. Your advisor can help you plan the program, troubleshoot mishaps (also known as risk management) and guide you through your college or university's event management procedures and university policies.*

## Attract Administrative Support

As with any new program, consulting with your program board advisor and director of student activities is a crucial component in event planning. Your advisor can help you plan the program, troubleshoot mishaps (also known as risk management) and guide you through your college or university's event management procedures and university policies. Your advisor can also provide advice and perspectives that a student programmer may not consider.

It is also a good idea to speak with your director of student activities about how the program board can offer weekend activities that help keep students engaged in campus life. Many college students engage in activities associated with alcohol consumption on the weekends, but strengthening the program board's activities offerings during the weekend can help combat this trend. (See Chapter Six for more information on offering alcohol-free programming.)

You may also need to secure chaperones to help supervise the programs. Advisors are an excellent resource for identifying university policies and procedures and can help programmers recruit university staff members to attend weekend activities and serve as

chaperones when it is determined that chaperones need to be present for the duration of the event.

## Set the Budget

As the program becomes more developed, firm up and commit to a budget. At this stage in program planning, refer to the preliminary budget you developed in the initial program planning process and finalize overall costs. In the earlier version of the budget, program costs were estimated, but now contracts, ticket sales and actual costs for printing and postage can be factored in.

Once you have determined the actual costs, you will know exactly how much funding is needed for the program. To offset the costs of the program, many programmers charge a ticket price for certain events or require a participation or registration fee for program participants. If your operating budget and registration fees do not balance the budget, however, you can seek additional funding sources from different departments, clubs or other sponsors on your campus.

## Set Guidelines for Running a Successful Program While Addressing Program Challenges

As with any program, unexpected challenges may develop along the way. Programmers can never control such challenges, but they can ensure that the program is running smoothly while specific needs and concerns are being addressed. The first step to ensuring the program runs smoothly is to make sure enough volunteers are available to staff the event. Once trained volunteers have been identified, there will be more human resources available to manage the event.

If your event requires registration and ticket payments, there should be an internal process in place to which programmers and volunteers can refer. This process should be determined in advance and stated in the registration materials, and all program volunteers and program board members should understand the process. Questions to consider include:

- Is there a refund policy?
- What are the minimum and maximum number of participants for the event?
- What happens if an event sells out?



- Is there a deadline for registration and payment?
- How are on-site registration and payments handled?

## Assess the Program

At the conclusion of your weekend activities program, it is important to assess its strengths and weaknesses so you can use this information to modify the program in the future. The first step in program assessment is to evaluate participant satisfaction. The easiest way to do this is through a paper-based or on-line survey, which asks participants if they enjoyed the program and which aspects they valued most. This data can provide programmers with both quantitative and qualitative data that can be used to strengthen the program in the future.

Assessing program board satisfaction with the event is also important. Program planners know the minute details of the program and this knowledge can provide useful information about how to be more effective and efficient in the future. The program board should also review the program's budget and assess its cost effectiveness compared to participant and program board satisfaction with the program.

Through the assessment process, programmers can develop specific notes and plans for the next time the program is offered. Program board leadership is fluid and with student leaders graduating each year, there is a constant transition. By leaving detailed program planning and assessment information for the next generation of program planners, program board leaders are helping prepare for future generations of weekend activities programs.

Planning and implementing weekend activities programs on your campus is a unique and rewarding opportunity for college students. By following a few basic event planning and management concepts, knowing your campus community and applying a little creativity, you can build programs that will become memorable traditions on your campus.

## About the Author

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