French Quarter Festivals, Inc.: An Analysis of Festival Operations (Internship Academic Report)

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French Quarter Festivals, Inc.: An Analysis of Festival Operations

An Internship Academic Report

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of New Orleans in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Arts Administration

By

Emily Osterholt

B.A. History, Tulane University, 2012

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Abstract

French Quarter Festivals, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that annually produces three festivals in the New Orleans area with the intention of promoting the Vieux Carré and the culture of the city. My internship began near the beginning of preparations for the 2015 French Quarter Festival and concluded just after the event had passed. While the organization is very successful and French Quarter Festival has grown to be the largest free music festival in the United States, there remains room for improvement and growth within the organization. The following report serves as a case study of the organization and addresses issues that were revealed during both analysis and personal observations. The conclusion of the report includes recommendations intended to aide in the continual success and growth of the organization.
Chapter 1: Organizational Profile

History

It is hard to believe by looking at French Quarter Festival (FQF) today that it started from such humble roots. Early in 1984, the City of New Orleans was preparing to welcome the World’s Fair into the Central Business District (CBD), and in an effort to put forward its best face, the city was tearing up streets and sidewalks all over.

There are two things that nearly all events in New Orleans tend to revolve around: food and music. Amongst the maze created by repairs, businesses were suffering and threatening to shut their doors. It is, therefore, no surprise that Mayor Ernest “Dutch” Morial turned to these two things to provide a cure for the ailing French Quarter. The idea that emerged was of a festival “that would celebrate the neighborhood’s charm and culture.”1 A committee was formed and FQF was born.

The first festival was held as a three-day event from April 6-8, 1984. A volunteer committee and an in-house staff member from City Hall produced the first festival with full financial support from the city administration. In the years since, the Festival has grown significantly and now includes twenty-three stages throughout the Quarter and welcomes hundreds of thousands of guests to what has become known as the “World’s Largest Jazz Brunch.”

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Mission

FQFI has a well-written mission which clearly articulates their organizational goals and leaves room for growth and change. The mission reads as follows:

“FQFs, Inc. (FQFI) annually produces three festivals: FQF, Satchmo SummerFest, and Christmas New Orleans Style. FQFI is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the Vieux Carré and the City of New Orleans through high quality special events and activities that showcase the culture and heritage of this unique city, contribute to the economic well being of the community, and instill increased pride in the people of New Orleans.”

Leadership and Structure

French Quarter Festivals, Inc. (FQFI) is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that produces three different festivals over the course of the calendar year: French Quarter Festival (FQF), Satchmo SummerFest (SSF), and Christmas New Orleans Style (CNOS). FQFI employs nine full-time employees in the following positions:

- **Executive Director** – Marci Schramm
- **Operations Manager** – AJ Gaulton
- **Sponsorship and Development Manager** – Stephanie Loman
- **Manager of Musician Sponsorship and Food Vendors** – Georgia Rhody
- **Entertainment Manager** – Greg Schatz
- **Marketing and Publicity Manager** – Rebecca Sell

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• **Business Manager** – Dave Stover
• **Merchandise Manager** – Erin Stover
• **Manager of Volunteer Resources & Educational Programming** – currently vacant

**Board of Directors**

The FQFI staff is supported by a board of directors made up of twenty-one community members who assist in the production of the three events. The following individuals currently sit on the FQFI Board of Directors for 2015:

• Ann Wills, *president*
• Errin Bellan, *vice president*
• Jeremy Thibodeaux, *treasurer and secretary*
• Leslie T. Alley
• Stu Barash
• Charlie Bateman
• Michael Biri
• Barrett Cooper
• Richard Eglé
• Aynsley Fein
• Chimene Grant
• Paul Harang
• Shelley Hardison
• Tim Laughlin
• G. Patrick McGunagle
• Deborah J. Moench
• James L. Moffett, III
• Robert Rizzuto
• Jon Smith
• David Teich
• Trevor Kade Theunissen

Programming

French Quarter Festival

Every year, over the second weekend in April, FQFI produces French Quarter Festival (FQF). The four-day festival showcases local music across numerous stages throughout the French Quarter. It has grown to become the largest free music event in the United States and offers over 400 hours of free music by local musicians. Community vendors sell food throughout the weekend to festivalgoers and add to the event’s appeal.³

Satchmo SummerFest

Satchmo SummerFest (SSF) takes place over the course of three days during the first full weekend in August. Held on the grounds of the Louisiana State Museum’s Old U.S. Mint, Satchmo SummerFest honors the music and life of Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong by focusing on contemporary and traditional jazz and brass bands. This smaller-scale festival

features two stages and a variety of local food vendors. In addition to the music and food offerings, FQFI also produces a symposium during SSF weekend featuring numerous presentations related to Louis Armstrong.4

**Christmas New Orleans’ Style**

The last event that is produced by FQFI is called Christmas New Orleans’ Style (CNOS) and lasts the entire month of December. During the month of celebrations, FQFI helps to produce a variety of events to showcase the unique New Orleans flair placed on common holiday traditions. Included in these events are special reveillon dinners, shopping promotions, and holiday concerts at St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square.5

4 Ibid
Chapter 2: Internship Experience

Operations are the backbone of an organization: it involves all the nitty-gritty details that often get overlooked but are critical for success. In marketing and development classes, we learned about big-picture planning. Through my FQFI internship, I learned and was directly involved in the moving pieces that must stay in motion for these bigger-picture things to be successful. I worked almost exclusively with the Operations (OPS) Manager at the time, Stephanie Loman who has since transitioned into the Sponsorship and Development Manager position. Until I started working with FQFI, I knew very little about the actual procedures required for executing a successful event. I believe this experience will prove to be crucial for my future success in the field.

Pre-Festival

My internship started just after New Year’s, as FQFI was wrapping up from CNOS. On my first day, I was given a number of resources to review to develop an understanding of the role of the OPS department within FQFI. Included in these resources were a binder with an extensive array of photographs from FQF ‘14, packets of maps from previous years, and old programs. From these, I learned about the five different zones that make up FQF: the Riverfront, Jax Parking Lot, Jackson Square, the U.S. Mint, and the Street Stages. I also began to familiarize myself with FQF’s terminology for its operations. After reviewing these materials, I met with Loman to discuss the list of tasks I would be assigned over the next four months. We discussed how I would likely find myself unsupervised and should refer to this list when I wasn’t working on another project. The list included a wide range of tasks, and by the end of the internship I had completed every entry.
The first major project that I was assigned was to update the parking maps. Before every Festival, the OPS department submits a request to the city to bag numerous parking meters and meter stations throughout the French Quarter. The purpose for this is to ensure there are enough spots for Festival personnel. After FQF 2014, the City of New Orleans changed the system with which it numbers its meters. Because the request form requires numbers, I needed to update all of the departmental maps to ensure that Loman requested the correct meters. During the remainder of my first week, I walked around the French Quarter to every single meter that would later be included in the requests for the city to verify that our maps were correct. This crucial task helped me immensely during Festival since it helped me become familiar with all the blocks we visited frequently before and during Festival.

Another major task I was given early in my internship was to create a spreadsheet that included all the musicians who have ever played at FQF that could be added to in the future. Upon completion, the document was immediately used by the PR Manager to determine the last time that Allen Toussaint played at FQF so the date could be included in press releases. By creating this document, I gave FQFI its first method for cross-referencing all the musicians who have ever played at the Festival. Building this document was time-intensive and required me to dig through archived files to find the older festival programs.

During January and February, the majority of my time was spent helping prepare for load-in, the period of time during which the sites get built before the event. I spent a lot of time in the FQF on-site storage room taking an inventory of supplies that were left over from FQF 2014 and organizing what was still usable. These tasks were essential and
helped us to order only as many supplies as were actually needed. I built my knowledge about the Festival extensively during this time, which helped me greatly during the actual event.

In late February, Casandra Corrales, the OPS Assistant joined our team. This position is one of the many contract jobs that are offered during Festival. Once Corrales started, preparations kicked into high gear. Throughout March, the majority of the staff’s time was spent in meetings with vendors, which left Corrales and I to handle much of the prep work on our own. We attended several site walkthroughs and were familiarized with stage and tent placement that we had only seen on maps until that point.

Throughout March, the major projects that I worked on were the operational documents to be given to the staff, crew, and vendors. Using the 2014 files as a reference, I drafted both the festival-wide production schedule, as well as the phone list. With scheduling information from security, staging, tents, and sound equipment vendors, I compiled everything into one place to be used as a reference starting during the week leading up to Festival. These documents changed repeatedly before the event, and it was my job to make the changes and keep each document up to date at any given point.

On April 1, all of our preparation came together at the OPS Meeting. Hosted by the FQFI staff, this meeting serves as an information session for all those involved in production. Each member of the crew receives a bag that includes his or her crew shirts, a production schedule, a phone list, parking information, and credentials. With so many other projects to tackle, Loman delegated the task of putting together these bags to Corrales and I. Having written the documents we were distributing, we were able to
answer most questions before and after the OPS meeting and help alleviate some of the stress from Loman.

After the OPS meeting, the focus in the OPS department shifted to our load-in responsibilities. We looked at the production schedule that I had created to monitor the progress of each of the vendors. Our workdays became longer and increasingly busy; our attention was often needed in multiple places at once. Not only did I need to complete my own responsibilities as an intern, but I was also given tasks for positions where the contracted person had yet to start working. For instance, FQFI rents radio equipment from an outside party and brings a technician on-site during the event, but leading up to his arrival, the troubleshooting responsibilities fell on Corrales and me. We helped distribute and maintain the staff and vendor radios, as well as managing the golf carts that had started to arrive.

All of these responsibilities required us to be out of the office and on-site for the majority of load-in. We were in contact with Loman via our radios, but frequently we were on our own, helping to address any OPS related issues and alleviate the stress from her. Working as a team with Corrales was a very important aspect of my job as an intern and it was crucial that we updated each other on the status of all our projects. Much of our work overlapped, and to accomplish things in the most efficient manner, we were in constant communication.

In addition to our on-site responsibilities, our time revolved around the weather contingency plan that would be in place. During the week before Festival, the weather forecast looked dismal and we were asked to make sure all the tents were prepared for the impending rain. This included distributing tarps throughout the sites and staying up to
date with the weather briefs and instructions sent out to the staff, including where we would be stationed. In the event of severe weather, Corrales and I were asked to head to the Canal Street Entrance site to monitor the entrance of the IMAX at the Aquarium, where the food vendors, musicians, and volunteers on the Riverfront would be told to take shelter. The small space was off limits to the public and we were asked to explain this to them so that they could seek alternate shelter (Appendix D). Our main concern going into the actual event was that everyone would be prepared for any situation. The strong weather contingency plan helped immensely in the process of ensuring that each site had the proper materials and all crewmembers knew their roles in the plan. Throughout load in, I made the rounds to each site and by the time day one arrived, we felt ready to tackle any problems that might arise.

**Festival**

At the beginning of my internship, I was nervous and anxious that I would be able to learn enough over the next four months to feel important during the event. However, by the time day one of Festival arrived I was more than prepared. As the majority of our work had occurred during load-in, when Festival arrived we had more down time. Each morning, Corrales and I visited each site to ensure that everything was in place for the day. Once the Festival opened to the public, we remained available via radio and cell phone to assist any of the staff members with problems that arose. Thursday, day one, went smoothly with beautiful weather throughout the entire day.

Friday, the forecast was threatening. Throughout the whole weekend, the National Weather Service was onsite to provide frequent updates. Friday morning the Executive
Director sent an email to staff and crew explaining the plan that would be in place if severe weather entered the area (Appendix E). Two hundred and fifty copies of this plan were printed and distributed around the Festival. Throughout the morning and early afternoon, I made rounds throughout the sites to make sure that everyone was prepared for the weather. In the late afternoon, the anticipated severe weather arrived and the staff at each site started safety preparations.

Saturday morning again brought threats of bad weather. Because we had used some of the weather supplies on Friday, I spent my morning making sure each site headquarters had enough materials left in case we experienced storms again. This time, they arrived in the mid afternoon and were severe enough to require the music to shut down and crew to take shelter. Corrales and I took our position and had no issues monitoring the IMAX theatre entrance. After suffering severe weather delays during Festival hours on both Friday and Saturday, the process was less time intensive the second day and, with the exception of the delays, things closed down and opened back up quite smoothly.

On Sunday, the last day of Festival, there was some heavy rain in the morning before Festival opened to the public, but after 11am, the rains held off until after the day closed out at 8pm. Everything was a little soggy throughout the day and we had some related issues with electricity. Otherwise, my responsibilities on the final day of Festival were minor until the gates closed for the day.

**Post-Festival**

Immediately after the last acts performed and the gates closed, we moved into overdrive. Typically after Festival closes on the last day, the crew breaks down as much as
possible on each site in addition to completely clearing the Jax Lot site before going home for the night and starting fresh the next morning. However, this year we had more severe weather in the area just after close. Through the heavy rain, the staff and crew worked to tear down these tents. We dragged soggy equipment into storage and staging areas and worked to get the site clear as fast as possible. Our main priority that night was to clear out that lot and once that was accomplished we went home to rest.

The next day, Monday, brought even more heavy rains and we worked through them as much as we could outdoors, but the majority of our time was spent organizing all the supplies that had come in from all the sites. This process is extremely important moving forward into next year’s Festival; having an accurate inventory of what is leftover helps with future ordering as well as evaluating what was used during this year’s event. Once this was completed, the rest of my week was spent supervising the breakdown process at each of the sites to ensure that no damage was done to the property.

Once load-out was complete, my remaining responsibilities dwindled and I was left with a few wrap up tasks for Loman. These included some additional organization in the on-site storage room as well as assisting in returning the remaining radios that had been used during load-out.

**Post-Internship**

After the conclusion of my internship, I was hired to work with FQFI for its smaller festival, Satchmo SummerFest (SSF), as the Headquarters Manager. The experience that I gained from my position as OPS Intern for FQF prepared me perfectly for this position. Throughout the weekend, I was in charge of managing the on-site Headquarters tent. This tent serves as home base for the staff and volunteers. It also houses the festival lost and
found, as well the Festival radios. I was tasked with checking all crew radios in and out and ensuring that they were functioning correctly throughout the weekend. Having spent so much time handling more sophisticated radios during FQF, this proved to be an easy project.

Because SSF is much smaller scale than FQF, there is no designated information tent and guests are often directed to Headquarters with any questions. The majority of the knowledge that I gained from FQF easily transferred to SSF and I was able to answer nearly all the questions that were brought to me. This removed a great deal of stress from the FQFI staff, as I was able to deflect many of the questions that would otherwise have been directed at them. This position was a great culmination for my experience with FQFI and helped to reinforce all the information I had learned during my four months with them.
Chapter 3: SWOT Analysis

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**Strengths**

**Motivated, Passionate and Qualified Employees/Loyalty to Employees**

Because of the small size of the staff at FQFI, the community feel throughout the office is overwhelmingly positive. Each employee has his or her own set of responsibilities, but everyone comes together in weekly staff meetings to discuss ideas with each other. When Festival time arrives it becomes all hands on deck to complete every task. Because the staff members come from varied backgrounds, their cumulative experiences help to strengthen the team even further. The qualified staff handles each aspect of the production as a team and together they are able to produce three successful events.

In addition, employee loyalty within the company is strong. If a position becomes available or new needs arise, the organization typically looks first to make changes from
within before hiring new people who are unfamiliar with the operations. By being loyal to their employees, operations remain smooth through the transition. As a small organization that produces three labor-intensive events, it is crucial for the staff to maintain a consistent level of productivity in spite of any unforeseen obstacles.

**Location (both for the office and the venue)**

The location of FQF, the French Quarter, provides a huge strength for the organization. The area is known worldwide as a “must visit” tourist destination and it constantly welcomes a steady stream of visitors. There are many famous hotels and restaurants in the vicinity of the Festival that add to the draw of the area. As a result, even tourists to the French Quarter with no prior knowledge of FQF before their visit, don’t have to travel far from their hotels to partake in the event. This is extremely beneficial for FQFI since it does not have to directly market to these individuals, yet it benefits from their attendance.

The organization’s name inherently makes the connection to its location. French Quarter Festival is just that: a festival that is spread throughout much of the French Quarter. Its home being in the French Quarter is a major benefit for the organization as this helps to bring tourists to the annual event.

In addition to the French Quarter being the venue for the Festival, it is also houses FQFI offices. Located just steps from one of the largest parts of the Festival, having direct access to their desks gives staff a major advantage during Festival (Appendix B). There are a significant number of moving pieces involved in producing the Festival, and being close to their offices during the event allows staff members to access the resources needed to solve
any issues that might arise. In addition, the office is used as an extra home base that removed from the crowded festival grounds.

**Updated Website/Smartphone App**

In the past, FQFI has been criticized for its website. In response, FQFI has done extensive work to modernize the organization’s web presence. One major step has been to update its website. The new site is significantly more user-friendly than past versions, and visitors are easily able to find information about all three events as well as the organization and easily navigate throughout the site (Appendix C). The updates create a visually appealing site with an informative homepage. To support this, the Marketing and Publicity Manager happily welcomes feedback from users in hopes of fixing any problems quickly and efficiently. That way, she is able to find problems that might have been overlooked by the staff.

In addition, in recent years a smartphone app has been introduced to help festivalgoers enhance their experience. Each year, the organization learns from feedback and improves the app to satisfy users. This use of technology is another way to ensure that the Festival stays competitive with others of its kind.

**Support from Contract Workers**

In addition to nine full-time staff members, FQFI also employs numerous contract workers to fill additional positions during load-in, Festival, and load-out. Over the years, the OPS Manager has developed a loyal and knowledgeable team of workers who return
annually to help produce FQF. This is an important strength for the organization; the ability to bring back the same people year after year eliminates having to train an entirely new staff before each Festival, and the job gets done more efficiently. The positive relationship that is maintained between FQFI and its contract workers is very important to the successful production of the event, as it would be impossible to produce without their help.

**Event Reputation**

FQFI has a long and successful history of putting on great events. What originally started out as a way to bring the locals back into the French Quarter has grown into a weekend of music with international draw. Part of the success can be attributed to the strong reputation that has grown since the organizations creation. New Orleanians are as excited to attend the festival as they are to talk about it. This makes word of mouth marketing a very beneficial tool for the organization to help generate attention and boost attendance. The strong reputation helps in many other ways outside of bringing in guests. It also helps the staff with their fundraising and sponsorship goals, which in turn help to grow the organization.

**Respect for the Community**

Planning and production of French Quarter Festival is very complicated and involves many different aspects of the community. Therefore, it is very important for the organization to remain on good terms with all of the parties with which it interacts year
after year. The organization’s respect for the neighborhood in which it operates is obvious; after all, it is in its mission to give back to the community that hosts it. Whether it is the partnerships with its venues or the local businesses, FQFI is always careful to address all relevant interests. One of the major processes involved in producing the Festival is that of permitting. In order to close streets in the Quarter, like North Peters/Decatur, approval is required from all of the businesses on the block. Early in the process, the OPS department acquires signatures from the business owners. Most owners are very willing to grant their permission, but occasionally when an owner is hesitant, FQFI is careful to remain polite and respectful. It takes the time to discuss the concerns of the owner and discuss the potential for increased business that is associated with the Festival. With this sort of interaction, nearly all concerns are quickly eliminated.

**Active and Involved Board**

FQFI has a board of twenty-one members. According to FQFI bylaws, each board member is eligible for two three-year terms serving on the board. It is also stated in the bylaws that the board is asked to maintain active participation in FQFI events. According to Schramm, the Executive Director, there is currently a 90% participation rate from board members. Board participation includes volunteering at events, purchasing tickets to opening night festivities, purchasing merchandise, attending all board meetings, and sitting on committees.

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This is a significant strength for the organization as it helps the board members remain knowledgeable about the organization they serve, the related issues they discuss in meetings, and the decisions they make as a group.

**Strong Contingency Plan/Preparedness**

Because French Quarter Festival takes place almost entirely outside, weather is a big concern for the organization. The event goes on rain or shine, and having a strong contingency plan is important to the success of the event and organization. In the days leading up to the Festival, the staff routinely checks the weather to determine what preparations might be necessary. Based on the forecasts, supplies are purchased and distributed throughout the Festival at site headquarters. Leading up to FQF 2015, there was a significant threat of rain, and the staff was fully briefed on the procedures for various different situations. When it ended up raining during three of the four Festival days, this preparedness became critical to the success of the event. After the weather cleared the area each day, the process of getting the Festival running again went very smoothly due to the knowledge and preparedness of the staff and workers.

**Weaknesses**

**Small Staff**

It is very impressive how successfully the small staff of nine can produce an event as large as French Quarter Festival, but size is also a weakness for the organization. The limited number of employees causes excessive pressure that could be eliminated if there
were more employees. For instance, the job of Volunteer Management and Educational Programming belongs to one individual. This job could easily be split into two positions to foster additional growth. Currently, this one staff member manages thousands of volunteers required for the Festival, as well as producing an education program to support hundreds of children each day of the event. The OPS department consists of one full-time employee. In preparation for the 2015 Festival, an intern (myself) and an assistant were added to the department. The support we were able to provide to the OPS Manager was essential to the pre- and post-production operational success. The list of tasks that are required of this position could be easily be split between at least two full-time employees, and doing so would significantly decrease the amount of stress associated with the position.

**Heavy Reliance on Volunteers**

Volunteers are fundamental to the success of FQF. They staff the beverage tents and information tents, along with many other roles. This reliance is also a weakness for the organization because it requires placing a lot of trust in thousands of unpaid individuals. Event success can depend heavily on whether or not they show up for their shifts, and how they behave during them. Because of FQFI’s great reputation, people are willing to volunteer at least once in the weekend, some more than once. This year, severe weather threats placed additional stress on the volunteer manager when people cancelled their shifts.
Unbalanced Profits

The sizes of the events that FQFI produces are vastly different. FQF is significantly larger than SSF. Because the revenue generated from FQF is much greater, it is used to help cover many of the day-to-day expenses incurred by the organization, in addition to funding FQF in the future. This puts increased pressure on the success of FQF, and if its profits are down, the cash flow available for the rest of the year also decreases. This is a weakness for the organization as it has limited sources of income outside of the three events it produces.

Geographic Limitations

Its home in the French Quarter presents some unique challenges to the organization. Most importantly, the geographic footprint of the Quarter is limited. While this doesn’t have a profound effect at present, as the festival continues to grow, it could pose a problem. Once FQF reaches the capacity of the Quarter, they will need to evaluate what and where the next step for expansion will be. In addition, as more people attend the festival, the festival sites get more and more crowded. This is not only a potential deterrent for some from attending the festival, but it can also pose a safety hazard. With more people crammed in the limited area, the ability for security personnel to successfully monitor the sites decreases.

Not Enough Storage Space

Storage is a big issue for FQFI. The supplies required to produce one festival are extensive and the organization annually produce three. With the purchase of new
materials every year, space is becoming increasingly limited on-site. Limited storage is a weakness for the organization as it causes staff to spend extra time searching through materials to find what they need. This time could be better allocated to different elements of festival preparations.

**Don’t Own Land/Venues**

The fact that FQFI does not own any of its venues is a major weakness. To complicate matters, its venues are owned by multiple different organizations such as Audubon Institute, the Louisiana State Museum and the Outlet Collection at the Riverwalk. This requires FQFI to maintain multiple relationships throughout the city to ensure the use of the land is granted to it each year. The one exception is the use of Jackson Square, which is granted to FQFI through Sec. 106-262 of the New Orleans Municipal Code. Written permission is granted each year from the other host organizations and this process can be taxing on the organization, if there are additional requests from each host.

**Parking**

Parking is limited within the French Quarter even when there isn’t an event going on. On a typical weekend, some streets become pedestrian-only, and most locals avoid

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driving in the Quarter at all. When FQF weekend arrives, the streets throughout the Quarter become unavailable to locals and tourists alike.

During the months leading up to Festival, one of the tasks of the OPS Department is to request for the bagging of numerous meters around the area. The purpose for this is to ensure there are enough parking spots for Festival personnel. This further limits the parking available for visitors to the French Quarter. As a result, tourists are required to park farther away and walk.

In addition, during Festival weekend, FQFI has the authority to enforce the parking restrictions put in place for the event. One of the contracted positions during the event handles parking enforcement. This position is in place to ensure that all of the reserves spaces are available to the assigned festival personnel. Using a direct contact with the city’s Parking Enforcement division, FQFI is able to request tow trucks to free up occupied spaces. This position requires both manpower and time to accomplish a task that could be covered with stricter enforcement from the City of New Orleans.

These are weaknesses for the organization and could be a deterrent for some visitors who are not interested in walking to the event or finding alternative ways of getting there. In addition, the time that is spent reserving parking creates a weakness as it requires attention from staff that could be allocated to other tasks.

Opportunities

Sponsorships

The growing notoriety of FQF and the significant impact it has on the city and its businesses creates a huge funding opportunity for FQFI. Local businesses are typically
familiar with the event and its popularity before they even consider sponsorship opportunities. Therefore, many businesses welcome the opportunity to boost their business by associating with FQFI.

**Broad Mission to Allow for Growth/Consistent Growth**

The mission of FQFI is:

“To promote the Vieux Carré and the City of New Orleans through high quality special events and activities that showcase the culture and heritage of this unique city, contribute to the economic well being of the community, and instill increased pride in the people of New Orleans.”

With this mission, FQFI is specific about the results it wants to create for its visitors, but it remains broad about the actual “high quality special events” which it produces. In this way, it is able to leave the events open to growth for years to come. Just this year, the organization chose to grow the footprint of FQF to include a new stage outside the newly renovated Outlet Collection in Spanish Plaza. Even though this location isn't in the Vieux Carré, it is in the City of New Orleans, which the organization also hopes to promote through the production of its events.

**Threats**

**Weather**

Weather is always a huge threat for FQFI. Because its festivals are outdoors and go on rain or shine, severe weather can hurt the organization in many ways. This is a result of

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the structure with which FQFI generates revenue from their events. In addition to sponsorships and food tent rentals, FQF also receives a piece of all beverage sales from some of the vendors. Rain during an event typically causes visitors to stay away. As a result, sales decrease, which results in lower profits and in turn, fewer funds to produce the event the next year. It also stresses the budget and causes the organization to rely on other funding sources that are less readily available. In addition, severe weather threatens to damage equipment required to produce the Festival, which would also put stress on the budget.

**Construction**

The City of New Orleans frequently schedules construction throughout the city. This can prove to be detrimental to FQFI if the city chooses to start construction in an area near the event. For SSF 2015, for example, construction on a streetcar line expansion caused the organization to reroute the annual second line parade.

**City Changes**

One unavoidable threat to FQFI is changes at the city level that make extra work for FQFI staff. For instance, between FQF 2014 and 2015, the city changed the numbering system that it uses for parking meter and meter stations. Because FQFI takes up so much parking around the Quarter, this was a huge setback during pre-Festival, and required extra attention that could have been allocated to other tasks had the system not changed.
Chapter 4: Industry Best Practices

Best practices in festival production and event management vary depending on the organization. It is more beneficial to analyze the best practices of different parts of the organization than of the organization as a whole, since each type of event requires different production methods. A small-scale festival requires very different components for success than a large-scale festival like FQF. The components to be analyzed here are those of staffing, volunteers, and parking.

Staffing

Nonprofit management is a difficult topic to discuss in a universal sense. Every organization is different and requires a different style of leadership and approach to achieving its goals. However, there are several industry standards that can be used to compare the effectiveness of employees within their organization. According to Unemployment Services Trust, a 501(c)(3) with the purpose of helping other nonprofits manage their unemployment overhead costs, as well as reduce operating costs, it is critical that organizations develop an agency-wide plan for employee development. Successful organizations not only have employees who do their jobs, they also have employees who have the potential to become effective leaders someday. 9

UST suggests a number of different ways in which organizations can impact employee development. These include: having key employees lead monthly meetings; allowing potential future leaders to manage junior staff (interns or volunteers); organizing

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and executing team building activities; allowing key employees to represent the organization in professional or community networks; asking employees to participate in the drafting process for grants or business contracts; helping to develop budgets; and asking staff to organize initiatives throughout the organization or in the community.

Although FQFI does utilize a number of these strategies with its employees, there is room for growth. FQFI has a very limited junior staff system in place; only a few of the departments have consistent long-term help leading up to FQF. If each department were able to budget for an assistant to start at least a month before the event, the departments would be able to more effectively allocate their manpower. Implementing a more extensive intern program would also help FQFI increase manpower more consistently throughout the year.

**Volunteers**

According to the *Volunteer Management Practices and Retention of Volunteers* study completed by the Urban Institute in 2004, there are nine standard management practices in organizations that operate using volunteers. They are:

- Regular supervision and communication with volunteers
- Liability coverage or insurance protection for volunteers
- Regular collection of information on volunteer numbers and hours
- Screening procedures to identify suitable volunteers
- Written policies and job descriptions for volunteer involvement
- Recognition activities, such as reward ceremonies, for volunteers
• Annual measurements of the impacts of volunteers
• Training and professional development opportunities for volunteers
• Training for paid staff in working with volunteers

Even though this study is over ten years old, these practices still apply and are relevant to FQFI and other similar organizations. FQFI has a history of experienced volunteer management teams and paired with the organizations reputation, attracting volunteers is never a problem.

The most important component for an organization that relies on volunteers as heavily as FQFI does is the screening process for suitable volunteers. This is also the component that is most lacking for FQFI. Thousands of volunteers help make FQF possible every year and if the organization turns away too many candidates, festival operations suffer. On the other hand, letting potentially harmful volunteers participate can also be detrimental. The solution that FQFI utilizes is an in-depth quiz that is designed to help ensure that volunteers will show up for their shifts.

Parking

According to Carl Walker, Inc. in his document the “20 Characteristics of Effective Parking Programs,” “a well-managed parking system is vital to attracting and supporting new development and is essential to sustaining healthy and vibrant downtowns.”

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can also be applied to the parking systems of large special events. A well-managed special-event parking program is also essential to a healthy event.

Some of the components of a good parking program include strong planning, organizational effectiveness, strong communication, creative, flexible, and accountable parking management, and effective and consistent parking enforcement. FQFI applies all of these components to its parking management structure for the event weekend. Even though the organization effectively manages these components of the production process, there are a number of external factors that cause inefficiency within the organization. The major cause for inefficiency is a result of the city: its parking management system is outdated and disorganized. The city has made strides to modernize its system in the past few years, a process that has only caused problems for FQFI.

Cities with effective parking programs currently in operation include Boulder, Boise, Ann Arbor, Anchorage, Tempe, Cedar Rapids, Charlotte, and Missoula. In these locations, Business Improvement Districts, Downtown Development Authorities, and Urban Renewal Agencies handle management and as a result, parking is managed as a primary tool to help revitalize downtown areas. This “Dual Mission Philosophy” results in different parking decisions than are made in traditional city parking departments, and these could be used to make the overall parking experience in New Orleans more streamlined. That, in turn, would be beneficial for the numerous organizations that utilize the system every year.\footnote{Parking Management, City of Houston Parking Management Toolbox, Kimley Horn and Associates, Aug. 2012, http://www.kimley-horn.com/projects/houstonparkingplan/Files/COH%20Parking%20Mgmt%20Best%20Practices%202012%20Tool%20Box%208-29-2012.pdf}
Organizational Comparisons

One organization in the New Orleans community that is similar to FQFI from an operational standpoint is Bayou Boogaloo. Boogaloo is another free music festival that takes place annual over a three-day weekend. Like FQF, Boogaloo is produced by a parent organization, Mothership Foundation. The scale of attendance for Boogaloo is smaller than that of FQF, but many of the operational procedures are similar.

Bayou Boogaloo’s smaller size does not eliminate its reliance on volunteers. This is a fairly universal need among nonprofit organizations. The component is as important to the success of the event as it is for FQF. Because Boogaloo is a younger festival, it requires more recruitment for volunteers than FQFI, which is assisted by its more than thirty year reputation.

Location makes a huge difference in the production of the two festivals. Bayou Boogaloo takes place in the neighborhood of Mid-City along Bayou St. John, a large green space along the bayou. Across the street from the site is another large area, which the Festival uses for personnel parking. There are also no parking meters in the vicinity of the event, which eliminates the issue of reserving parking meters.

However, parking is a challenge for those attending Bayou Boogaloo, and like FQFI, festival organizers provide alternatives on the Bayou Boogaloo website. These suggestions are just one way of helping to solve a problem that is often unavoidable in New Orleans. Both organizations also encourage the use of bikes as a means of getting to their events. They offer secure parking for those who choose this option in a much more convenient location than is available for car traffic (Appendix F).
Like FQF, Bayou Boogaloo also relies heavily on volunteers and temporary employees to help produce its event. On its website, Mothership Foundation lists four full time positions and annually posts ads for production position in the months leading up to the event. This works effectively for them, since during most of the year there is not enough work to warrant more full time staff members.
Chapter 5: Recommendations

Through the in-depth SWOT Analysis in chapter 3 and the overview of best practices presented in the previous chapter, it remains clear that there areas within the FQFI organization that have room for improvement. My recommendations for the organization involve better allocations of resources in the form of staff and storage. In its thirty-two years of existence, FQFI has grown exponentially since its small beginnings, but there are still areas where there remains room to improve.

Allocate Staff more Efficiently

One of the major weaknesses within FQFI as an organization is its limited staff. With only nine full-time employees working year round to produce its three events, the amount of stress on each employee is much greater than those at a larger organization. After spending four months with the OPS department and learning first-hand how essential my position was to its success, it was clear that additional staff would be helpful. Until recently, the OPS Manager did not have any help in the department. For 2014, an OPS assistant was added and for 2015, I was brought on as an OPS intern. It is my recommendation that in moving forward, the budget be reworked to accommodate for at least two assistant positions in OPS. The need for this grows with every addition to the Festival. In 2015, when the additional stage was added at Spanish Plaza, the list of responsibilities for the OPS department also grew. It was extremely helpful to have three people with extensive knowledge about all the sites to be on call for any problems. For this reason, I suggest that to keep the Festival growing and succeeding in the future, the OPS staff should grow as well.
Expand Storage Space

The next major operational deficiency suffered by FQFI is the lack of storage space. The organization is lucky to have a moderately sized storage area in its building; however as the Festival continues to grow, so do the supplies needed to produce it. A significant portion of my internship was spent organizing the storage room. When packed to capacity, finding specific things is very difficult. This decreases employee productivity by requiring staff to spend extra time searching through the area in hopes of coming across the item in question.

My recommendation for addressing this issue would be to rent another site to be used as storage space. The goal in finding this space would be to locate something large enough that each FQFI department is given its own specific area to be organized in the desired manner of each. This way, items used in completely different types of applications wouldn’t need to overlap and time would be saved in the long term when prepping for each event. As it is now, FQF and SSF signage is all stored on the same shelf in the same area of the current storage room and needs to be separated before both Festivals to ensure that the wrong signs aren’t used for the wrong event. If a large space could be secured, the supplies for each of these events, as well as those for CNOS, could be separated and easily accessed at the appropriate times. This suggestion would also help to better allocate the attention of the staff to other, more important tasks.

Parking

In the past, one of the solutions that had been utilized to help solve the parking problem for guests is the use of a shuttle. The shuttle ran between several offsite lots and shuttled people closer to the event throughout the course of the weekend. Unfortunately,
due to a shift in funding from the sponsors, this service was discontinued for the 2015 event. My first recommendation to help alleviate some of the stress caused by lack of parking in the Quarter would be to make funding the shuttle a priority for 2016. Not only would this solution help alleviate some of the congestion of people looking for parking closer to the event, but it would also help to bring people back to the event who stopped attending as a result of the distance they were asked to walk. This solution would also help draw guests to the festival, but have stayed away for reasons such as disabilities.

Geographic Limitations

The limitations of the French Quarter are a difficult problem to solve for FQFI. Instead, my suggestion for the organization would be to be strategic about future expansions. In 2015, the addition of the Spanish Plaza site helped to draw some of the crowds away from the typically congested areas. In order to help provide future relief as attendance grows, it would be beneficial to expand the festival into areas, which are not as limited as the streets throughout the Quarter. The organizations mission requires the promotion of the Vieux Carré and the City of New Orleans. It does not limit the geographic footprint of the event only to that area.

One strategy could be to look at expansions in other directions, such as towards the Old U.S. Mint. This would not only help to draw more people that direction, but it would also help spread out the crowds and keep them manageable. Areas like Crescent Park could serve as similar sites to Woldenberg Park and would accommodate the growing number of FQFI fans.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

French Quarter Festivals, Inc. has existed for thirty-three years with great success. Its strong, committed staff and board put it in a great position to continue growing its image for many years to come. By carefully examining its budgetary priorities, the addition of more paid staff members will help the overall productivity and efficiency of the organization and the events it produces. Continued focus on finding strategic solutions for issues such as parking and site limitations will help to grow and strengthen the organization well into the future.

While these suggestions are recommended to the organization, they do not require a massive change within its structure. Rather, each suggestion should be examined and experimented upon to determine the most relevant method for incorporation. Small and strategic changes will not only strengthen the organization as a whole, but also help to serve its mission. If FQFI is able to implement these changes and remain true to this mission, it will set itself up for a future of continued success and support for the city and its people.
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Appendices

Appendix A: List of Abbreviations

FQFI – French Quarter Festivals, Inc.

FQF – French Quarter Festival

CNOS – Christmas New Orleans Style

SSF – Satchmo SummerFest

OPS - Operations
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E

From: Marcie Schramm [mailto:mjs@festival.org]

Sent: Friday, April 10, 2015 10:39 AM
To: Marcie Schramm

Subject: IMPORTANT - Inclement weather plan - French Quarter Festival

Importance: High

I just spoke with the National Weather Service crew who are on site with us. They recommend that we be prepared for thunderstorms at noon, and that storms will likely begin at 4 p.m.

Procedure for inclement weather:
Pay attention to weather at all times and prepare. If excessive rain, wind or electrical storms may cause possible harm to performers and audience, Festival representatives will make an announcement that the stage will be shut down until it is safe and advise people to seek shelter. After dangerous weather has passed, Festival staff and crew will work quickly to clear sites of water and make it possible to start again as soon as possible.

Festival personnel, site managers, and stage managers and everyone on FQF radio will be getting regular weather updates from the Command Center, which in turn gets updates from the National Weather Service.

French Quarter Festival wants the show to go on as much possible, but if it looks like dangerous conditions, FQF will make the call to shut things down. If your crew decides that weather conditions should not continue then they should radio Marcie/Stephania/Greg/George.

If booths need to be evacuated, Messina’s, the Banking team, and NOPD will put plans in place immediately to secure booths.

Merchandise booths and Sound tents should drop walls and secure all equipment and inventory. Headquarters booths should pull everything to the center and tarp it.

We want to get up and running as soon as it is safe after a weather incident.

ALL CREWS: following a weather incident, check with your headquarters manager to get assignments. If we have wind, help repair booths and signage. If areas are flooded, check with HQ about procedures for dispersing/pumping water (especially Jackson Square)

If the stage is not ready for live music we ask that the CDs we provide of New Orleans music are played so that fans return. We will work hard to keep the Fest rolling even if there is rain.

SHELTER INFORMATION

Jackson Square: the Louisiana State Museum will let musicians, crew, staff, volunteers and food vendors take shelter in the Arsenal (connected to the Cabildo). Enter at St. Peter Street – directly across from La Pelis Theatre. Yoanne Makia (on the phone list) MUST be notified immediately so that her security personnel can be notified. A Festival representative must be stationed at the door to ensure that ONLY people in the list above are being admitted.

Riverfront: Audubon Nature Institute will let musicians take shelter in the Gulf Conference Room (go to Aquarium Security entrance). Crew, staff, volunteers and food vendors take shelter in IMAX lobby. Jenny Lacro (on the phone list) MUST be notified immediately so that her security personnel can be notified. A Festival representative must be stationed at the door to ensure that ONLY people in the list above are being admitted. NOTE: IMAX films may be playing so personnel must be quiet while in the lobby, please.

Old U.S. Mint: the Louisiana State Museum will let musicians, crew, staff, volunteers and food vendors take shelter in the Old U.S. Mint – which is already free and open to the public. Enter at Barfass Street or Esplanade. Yoanne Makia (on the phone list) should be notified so that her security personnel can be notified. A Festival representative must be stationed at the door to ensure that ONLY people in the list above are being admitted.

Thank you all! Number one priority is to stay safe.

Commander and Paul – please feel free to add to this information.

Marcie Schramm

Executive Director

French Quarter Festival, Inc
Appendix F

Public Transit Directions

Bayou Boogaloo strives to be a ‘zero-waste event’ - you can do your part by taking public transportation to the festival! Use this handy map below, supplied by Transport for NOLA, to find the best way to get to the Boogaloo.

Download a larger version of the map

Driving Directions

If you must come by automobile please consider car pooling with friends. Legal parking in the surrounding neighborhood is limited. Tickets can be issued throughout the weekend for failure to observe signage or the required distances from driveways, corners, and fire hydrants, as well as for parking against the flow of traffic. Please be sure to obey all posted parking signs.
Vita

The author was born in Brattleboro, Vermont. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in history from Tulane University in 2012. She joined the University of New Orleans to pursue an MA in Arts Administration and graduated in December, 2015.