

BMDL PTSA GENERAL EVENT PLANNING GUIDE

Assemble a committee. An event has a lot of different elements that need to be in sync. Look for creative, enthusiastic parents who are not already bogged down with other commitments. Recruit volunteer leaders to head up food, games, and logistics.

Decide on your goal. Events are often fundraisers, but sometimes the goal is just to provide a fun event for the school community. Some events are offered as a safe alternative to trick-or-treating. Make sure everyone involved in planning the event is on board with your parent group's goal.

Talk about a theme. Harvest festival and Halloween are good fall themes. In spring, think about a luau or barbecue. An international theme offering food and activities from a variety of cultures is a hit at many schools.

Choose your location. Will your event be indoors, outdoors, or both? If the event is held outdoors, work out a contingency plan in case of bad weather. Make creative use of space. That way, everyone isn't crowded into the cafeteria or gym.

Set the date and time. Think about weather and other commitments families have, especially youth sports. If your community is into college football, make sure your event doesn't conflict with a big game. When you have a date in mind, check your town and school district websites for scheduling conflicts. Set a start and end time.

Apply for permits. Check with local government offices to find out whether any permits will be required for your event. Many cities require permits for rides or inflatables, outdoor use of electricity, and food preparation and sales. Liability insurance is often a requirement for obtaining a permit. Permit applications may be due 90 days or more before an event, so it's important to find out your community's rules early in the planning process.

Check on insurance coverage. If your parent group is insured, find out whether the policy covers carnivals or other events. If your group is covered under a school insurance policy, ask whether a binder is needed to cover the carnival or other event. Be sure to ask about coverage for carnival rides and inflatables like bounce houses; these often carry greater risk. For a fee, some carnival attraction rental companies will name customers as an "additional insured" on their policy.

Nail down your budget. This will drive your big decisions. Many parent groups have put on wonderful, well-attended events with tight budgets. With a bigger budget, you may be able to afford rides, more elaborate games, and additional food options. Whatever the size of your budget, look into ways to cut event costs. Common cost-saving strategies include borrowing homemade carnival games from another school or asking parents to make and donate them. Some parent groups defray costs with business sponsorships or donations. The Carmel Elementary PTA in Woodstock, Ga., kept its budget in check by

obtaining thousands of dollars in donated goods, including wristbands provided by a tae kwon do studio. Many of the items were used for raffle gift baskets, says president Gary Parkes, who began seeking donations for the fall 2010 carnival in April. If your group gets support from businesses, be sure to publicly acknowledge them with a sign or banner posted at the carnival.

Staff your event. You'll need plenty of volunteers to run your event. Keep in mind that parents, especially those with younger kids, will want to participate in the carnival with their children. Those parents may be limited to helping with event setup or cleanup. Some parent groups find teachers willing to help, and others don't want to pressure their already stretched-thin faculty. Older students can be a great resource—at Fort Belvoir, high school football players in their team uniforms manned the booths, and the kids loved it! Some groups have arranged volunteer exchanges with other schools so that parents can join in the fun and games at their own child's school. Other potential volunteer sources include scout troops, community organizations, and church groups.

Talk about food. With many of the logistics in place, you can start talking about everyone's favorite subject: food. The first step is to consult your local health department to find out what rules you'll have to follow to prepare and serve food. You can hire a company to provide carnival classics like hot dogs and cotton candy, or rent equipment and have volunteers make them. Although you'll save on labor costs by using volunteers, equipment rental fees can vary widely, so run the numbers before deciding. If regulations allow, another option is to recruit parents to make crowd-pleasing dishes such as spaghetti or lasagna. Don't forget to include drinks and desserts, which local businesses are often willing to donate.

When deciding how much food to prepare, consider a best-case scenario for attendance and assume everyone will arrive hungry. Then prepare enough food for a crowd of that size plus 10 percent. Once you have a few years of data from previous carnivals, you'll have a better idea of how much food to make or buy. If you work with local restaurants, see whether they can accommodate last-minute orders of pizza or chicken should you run out.

Play games. Interactive games are one of the hallmarks of a carnival. They can also cause anxiety among parents who fear kids will reject homemade games. Test-market new games on your children, and don't be surprised if they're just as happy throwing a ball in a hoop as playing an active video game. Standard go-to games include a cakewalk, a ring toss, and a fishing activity.

Plan other activities. Beyond games, carnivals often feature pony rides, face painting, hayrides, and even amusement rides like a small Ferris wheel. Musical performances by students or local bands are a good way to draw a crowd. Contests such as a bake-off or a chili cook-off are also popular.

Figure out prizes. Kids like prizes. It doesn't seem to matter what the prizes are; they can be small and inexpensive. One year, the Fort Belvoir PTO tried a punch card that allowed participants to claim a big prize at the end of the day. Another year, they gave children a bag of trinkets as they exited. They found that kids would rather get a little prize after playing each

game. Order enough to allow each child to win a prize at each game, plus at least 20 percent more. Extra prizes can be saved and used the next year, so it's better to have too many than to risk running out.

Think (hard) about money. Your goal is to have as few people handling cash as possible to reduce the risk of mismanagement and theft. One way to keep money in a safe, central location is to sell tickets or tokens at the door and have participants redeem them for food or activities. Another approach is to charge a flat fee for admission and give each participant a wristband that covers all food and activities.

If your goal is to raise money, tickets may be more profitable since you can charge a higher price for more elaborate and popular activities. If your community is value-minded, parents may welcome the wristband. At Carmel Elementary, the PTA had both: Wristbands were sold for \$20 each with a \$3 discount for siblings, and tickets went for 50 cents each. That way, parents and children had options. Still, some parents lamented that \$20 was steep, says Parkes.

Setting prices is a challenge, especially if it's the first year for your event. The delicate balance is to price your carnival high enough to cover expenses while taking care not to price families out. The less money you spend, the less you'll need to charge. It's a good idea to send out surveys asking parents how much they can afford to spend at the event. For a baseline, estimate how many kids will attend and how many activities each will do. Determine the per-child price needed to cover expenses.

Communicate. Decide on the best methods of getting the word out about the event in a timely manner. Does a notice need to go in the local newspaper for open houses and other community wide events? Give teachers an early heads up so they can plan their day's activities and participate as well. Send out multiple communications to parents well in advance and repeatedly. Work with the communications VP to coordinate with newsletters and other scheduled events. Use the principal and PTSA newsletters, the PTSA website, posters at school, flyers sent home, communications through class parents, etc to draw interest in the event.

(Heavily sourced from PTO Today's article [School Carnival Planning Basics](#), also refer to [Figuring Finances for Events](#) for additional help.)

BMDL PTSA GENERAL EVENT PLANNING WORKSHEET

Assemble a committee.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Decide on your goal: Fundraiser or Family Event?

Talk about a theme: brainstorm ideas

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Choose your location:

Indoors or Outside or Both

Contingency Plan:

Set the date and time: Cross reference district and school calendar, obtain approval from Principal and district for building use.

Date:

Date:

Time:

Time:

Date:

Time:

Apply for permits: Permits are needed for _____
and the time frame to apply for them is _____.

Check on insurance coverage: Double check insurance coverage. Completed ____.

Nail down your budget: Can you borrow equipment from another group? Are sponsorships going to be solicited? Will other donations be requested? Double check available supplies.

Operating Budget: \$ _____.

Staff your carnival: Request volunteers from the high schools to help them complete their volunteer hours. Fill in remaining spots.

BMDL PTSA GENERAL EVENT PLANNING WORKSHEET

Talk about food: Check with Health Department regarding rules for preparing and serving food. Add 10% to your estimate. Ask local businesses for drink and dessert donations.

BSD Catering Food Truck/Restaurant Potluck Other _____

Type of Food Served:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Play games:

Plan other activities:

Figure out prizes: Add 20% to your estimate.

Think (hard) about money:

Where to set up the payment tables?

Who will staff them? Keep to a minimum number for security.

How to charge for the activities?

BMDL PTSA Post Event Survey

Thank you for volunteering to coordinate:_____!

The budget for this event:_____.

Please keep all receipts for reimbursement and submit to:_____.

After your event is completed, we'd love to know how you did it!

Please share the following information to assist coordinators in the future.

- ❖ Who served on your planning committee?

- ❖ How many people attended (adults/children)?

- ❖ How much did the event cost to run? (Please give a general breakdown.)

- ❖ Did you feel you had an adequate budget? If no, why?

- ❖ How was the event communicated?

- ❖ How many volunteers did you have? Were there enough?

- ❖ What methods did you use to get volunteers?

- ❖ If food was served, please list items and quantities bought and used (be specific).

- ❖ What worked well?

- ❖ Any suggestions to improve things that could've gone better?

- ❖ Any other information that could be of assistance to next year's coordinator?

Thanks again for your help!
(Source: PTO Today Event Coordinator Sheet)

