

ALTERNATIVE HOLIDAY GIVING FAIR

NOTES ON HOW TO DO IT

By Melinda Wallis, Subud USA

The Concept comes first: Understand and love it! -

Instead of buying another unneeded candle or necktie for a relative for Christmas, make a donation IN THEIR NAME, to a social service project! You are thereby doubling your giving! Customers are given a card by the organizations they donate to. The card is given to the friend in whose name they are donating.

Such as Merry Christmas! A donation has been made to Organization Name in your name.

Through this gift, you are helping to (save hungry children in Africa or whatever) □

This fair gives financial support to participating organizations as well as promoting an attitude of giving service instead of material objects. (sample cards available)

People Base

The next step is to be sure you have a group of people behind you; a fair like this is too much work for one or even two people!

Mission Statement be clear about your goals!

KIN (Kirkland Interfaith Network), who wrote this up, do not keep a percentage of the donations. It all goes to the participating organizations.

Creating the Fair- generalities

The goal is to create a friendly feeling situation where people feel comfortable, feel they can relax and have time to talk to participating organizations, have some good food, sit and chat, and decide how to spend their money in peace! Cheerful music*, and lots of smiles

The Place - the location is often dependent on who is sponsoring the fair and what is available at low to- no cost. Churches are a good bet; community centers are nicer for access and visibility, but usually require rent.

Date and Time - this is also dependent on who is sponsoring the fair and where you will be holding it. If a church or church-related group is sponsoring the fair and it will be at the church, holding a fair on a Sunday after worship services is a good way to get a "captive" audience, especially the first year. If you are a community group, Saturday all day is better for the general community. The specific date should be set as close to Thanksgiving as you can; before is better than after (you'd be surprised how many people actually have their Christmas shopping done by Thanksgiving). The weekend right before Thanksgiving doesn't seem to work out too well as people have started traveling then; two weekends before seems about right.

Participating Organizations

You want a variety - try to get a balance between local and international agencies, and a balance between those providing immediate relief and those providing long-term development assistance. You also need to look at your volunteer pool to see if you have

enough help to provide a table for international organizations which may not have a local office or presence. For example, at our fair, KIN folk staff the tables for Heifer Project and Church World Service. I recommend including both of those if at all possible. People love the animals and blankets. Organizations that work with/for children are usually pretty popular; we also try to find something medical and something about literacy. Prepare the organizations ahead of time to be ready to hand out their literature and a special card to the donors.

We have chosen to have a few organizations which primarily sell goods at the fair. Ten Thousand Villages and UNICEF, staffed by us, are the main two, and are very much in the spirit of the fair. Any participating organization is allowed to sell small items, as well as selling donations to the donors.

Contacting, Booking organizations

Written instructions re display, volunteers, set up

Especially the first time, contact organizations in early September and be prepared to make one or more follow-up phone calls to answer questions and get a commitment. Get a name of the person who will be responsible for the organization.

Cover Letter, Tips for Being Successful, Instructions for Volunteers

These documents are all available.

Advertising - this is the hardest part. Good media contacts make a big difference. If you have organizations on board by September, they may have mailing lists and/or their own newsletters which should be used to publicize the event. One year we had a grant for a paid advertisement and it didn't seem worth the expenditure. Free publicity is harder to come by, especially from newspapers, unless you have a good connection with a human interest or community affairs type columnist.

Signs

Newspapers

Church Bulletins/Announcements

Posters

Flyers

e-mail

Sample newsletter announcements, bulletin inserts, and invitations are available.

Your mailing list: build this by collecting names and addresses of customers each year.

Food - the type of food you can offer will depend on the sponsoring organization and the place. Churches have kitchens and women's groups who may be willing to help - and also seem to be able to avoid the health department concerns! Snack foods seem to sell better than lunch stuff, but you will need to have food for the volunteers (or tell them to brown bag it if they are coming for the day).

Entertainment - it seems like this is an area where churches could be a big help, but that's not been my experience. Personal connections work better. Schools might be helpful.

Mostly what you want is nice, seasonal background music. If you can't get any one to perform, use whatever sound system you have available to play music. It really helps. We get the kid choirs from churches(which bring s their parents as customers as well as the kids!). Individual musicians are also asked to volunteer.

Decorations - this is an area where the churches have been a help. They usually have whatever decorations they use for the space you are using for the fair. If you're in a community center, you're probably on your own. (We have tried to stick with a "seasonal" rather than Christmas theme, since we are, at least in name, an interfaith group.)

Set Up Needs - get a count of the number of tables you think you will need and check with the facility ahead of time to find out what's available. Six and eight foot tables are pretty readily available. Make a chart of how the room should be set up. If you are having food, don't forget to include tables for folks to sit down. (People like to browse the fair, picking up literature, then sit down to have a snack and coffee as they decide how to spend their money.) Also, decide if you will be providing tablecloths (for consistency) or if the organizations should each provide their own. You also need at least two chairs at each table for the volunteers. Find out what restrictions there are on using the walls for hanging signs, posters, etc.

The Night before - if you can get the tables set up the night before, it's one less thing to worry about the morning of the fair. If not, plan on about an hour to set up, to allow for any unforeseen problems.

Handling The Money - recruit a treasurer. There are two ways to handle the money. One is to have each organization accept their own donations; that's easier for you, but not easier for the organizations or the customers. The other is to have one cashier, and have all the money go through the sponsoring organization and then back out to the participants. That requires that you track the donations; we use a shopping list to do that - one form per donor to indicate where the individual donations should go. You probably want to stick with cash and checks - no credit cards. Be prepared to write a receipt for tax purposes for anyone who needs one; for most people, their cancelled check is their receipt, but there is a maximum donation that can be handled that way. Check what the IRS rules are. The cashier's table is also a good place to have a place for folks to sign up to receive an invitation next year. If an organization has any material goods for sale, have them handle those transactions themselves, so that they can deal with sales tax appropriately.

Necessary Expenses: (although, of course, try to get these donated)

Wooden sign boards for outside, and other sign making supplies

tablecloths

copying

mailing

Possible Expenses

Paid Ads-if you can afford them

The Day of the FAIR!

Get the signs people out there putting up signs nice and early!

Set up your schedule to allow participating organizations as much as an hour to get set up (this means you have to have the tables up). Each table should have another copy of the volunteer instructions and a few copies of the shopping list if you are using one if you are handling all the donations through one organization, ask the treasurer to turn that money around as soon as possible. We capture the names and addresses from all checks to send those people an invitation next year.

When customers come to the fair, MOST at first don't know how it works. It's important to have friendly greeters/explainers at the door. Prepare and print a handout/shopping list: it explains how the fair works and lists the participating organizations with a place for customer to write how much they are giving to the organizations they choose to give to. We do a 3-fold, with a third being torn off by the customer to keep as their reminder list.

(copies available)

Clean Up Committee

Of course each participating organization is responsible for their own clean up, but get some die-hards to stick in there to the end!

Documents available:

Letter to the organizations

Tips for Success

Volunteer Guidelines

Display Guidelines

Flyer for advertising

Sample newspaper article(?)

We are happy to talk to others who want to put on a fair of this sort.

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