**Festival Governance:**

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*Under a larger umbrella*

In this arrangement the basic administrative functions are taken on by an existing organization, often a museum or university. The benefits of this approach include:

* Systems are already in place for accounting, legal, and insurance functions, as well as an existing charity status.
* The host organization is a built-in partner ready to bring considerable resources and reputation to bear on making the festival a success.
* Festivals are about rallying all of the stakeholders in a region, and this is often easiest when building on the existing trust and connections of an established organization.

For these reasons, this is the most common arrangement for science festivals. However, it is not without its potential downsides:

* The host organization must be committed to the widespread collaboration, and sharing of credit, needed to make a festival community-wide.
* Festival decisions sometimes must be made quickly, and may not thrive in a bureaucracy.
* Internal conflict can arise when a festival's annual fundraising push competes with the host organization's larger funding goals.

*Going it alone*

A less common option is to incorporate an independent organization to take on basic administrative functions. Benefits to this approach include:

* Rapid decision making
* Absence of fundraising conflicts
* Ability to neutrally form relationships with potential partners
* The independence and freedom to make decisions that are solely in the best interest of the festival.

On the other hand, it can take as long as a year to incorporate, and the overhead costs of attending to administration can be a drain on festival resources, even as the festival grows. Importantly, without the imprimatur of a trusted charity it can be very difficult for a festival to secure the initial funding needed to give it the momentum to succeed. Science festivals that are too closely identified with a single founder risk running counter to the idea of the community itself stepping up to embrace and celebrate science.

It’s worthwhile to note that the majority of science festivals in the United States are not independent 501c3s. There are exceptions of course, but they are outliers (for example, New York City's World Science Festival is it's own organization, but they have a budget in the millions).

The main benefits of having a festival "hosted" within a larger 501c3 include: avoid the long lead time and administrative burden of setting up an independent organization—rely on existing policies and procedures, administrative support, legal liability, insurance requirements, and other in-kind resources that an institution might bring to bear. The cyclical nature of festivals may mean that cash flow for the initiative is low during the months following a celebration, so while your annual festival budget obviously must at least balance, the financial stability of a larger organization can be helpful.

A softer reason to start within an institution is the immediate trust that it can bestow on the initiative, as well as the buy-in of the host organization.

Of course, there are some aspects that might tempt you toward 501c3 nonetheless. For example: the festival can move without the burden of inappropriate bureaucratic systems (the work of organizing a big event can require split second decision making at times); the festival is free to raise funds from any source (no conflicts with other development priorities); and without a larger host organization it may be easier to make the case that the festival is a neutral rallying point for many organizations.

*A team effort from the beginning*

Many of the most successful science festivals are the products of deep collaborations. So why not formalize this collaboration into the festival's basic organization? Using the research consortium as a model, this arrangement may identify a single organization as the fiduciary agent without giving it overwhelming decision-making power. Benefits include:

* A built in team that distributes workload
* A combined pool of diverse contacts and audiences
* A balance of perspectives, and several groups invested in a festival's sustainability
* A very strong message about the need for the entire community to work together to make the festival a success.

However, relying on a committee to attend to the details of producing a large event is not a good idea, so such a consortium will only work if responsibilities are very clearly articulated. Establishing these relationships in the first place may take longer than incorporating a new charity. Furthermore, when the weight of festival organization never fully rests on anyone's shoulders less work may get done. As Dom McDonald of the Oxfordshire Science Festival puts it: “It's easy for people (partners) to see the festival in general, and its funding in particular, as ‘somebody else’s problem.’ That has led us to struggle because we have never had any security in our funding.”

*Committees and boards*

Festivals often form committees comprised of diverse stakeholders to perform specific festival functions, such as fundraising, event planning, and marketing. For more information, visit the SFA Resource Center page on Festival Management Team.

*Governance of existing science festivals*

The following festivals are independent nonprofits:

* World Science Festival
* Light in Winter (Ithaca)
* USA Science & Engineering Fest

The following are festivals with administration housed at larger institutions:

* Cambridge (MIT Museum)
* San Diego (UCSD)
* Philly (Franklin Institute)
* Bay Area (UCSF)
* St. Louis (St. Louis Science Center)
* Eureka!Festival (La CRÉ de Montréal—a group of elected officials—and the Montreal Science Centre)
* North Carolina (UNC and the Moorehead Science Center)

All of the festivals mentioned above (in both categories) are collaborations to some extent, often with multiple institutions providing sizeable in­kind, staff, and even cash support. The ones in the first category seem to be strongly identified with a single personality.