



WESTERN FAIRS ASSOCIATION
BUILDING BETTER FAIRS

Best Practices Guidelines

2024

Edited and Submitted by the
Industry Standards Committee

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WESTERN FAIRS ASSOCIATION
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SUMMARY OF STANDARDS

STANDARD #1:

WFA MEMBERS' FIRST RESPONSIBILITY IS TO THEIR PATRONS AND COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE

STANDARD #2:

WFA members respect each other as professionals and maintain open and honest communication

STANDARD #3:

WFA members conduct themselves in a responsible business-like manner and are accountable to each other

STANDARD #4:

WFA members actively participate in programs for the betterment of the industry.



STANDARD #1: WFA MEMBERS' FIRST RESPONSIBILITY IS TO THEIR PATRONS AND COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES

Patron Safety

1. Fairs should provide a safe, family-friendly environment and policies should be established promoting such. Examples of such policies might include:
 - Policy regarding weapons being sold or brought onto the fairgrounds
 - Policy regarding alcohol management
 - Policy regarding disruptive patron or group behavior
 - Policy regarding profanity and pornography (e.g., entertainment content and consumer products and prizes)
 - Policy regarding a drug free facility
 - Policy regarding on grounds smoking
 - Policy regarding food safety (e.g., food allergy notifications and food at temperature)
 - Policy regarding ride safety
 - Policy regarding ecologically sound and environmentally friendly practices
 - Policy regarding disease control (e.g., hand washing in animal areas)
2. Fairs should have a current emergency evacuation and preparedness plan that includes the resources of Service Members (e.g., generators, tents, benches, and phones).
3. Fairs have a legal obligation to make their grounds accessible to the disabled.
4. Fairs should keep grounds, including restrooms, clean, neat, trip-hazard free and trash free; likewise, Service Members should keep their space and surrounding area clean, neat, trip hazard free and trash free.
5. Fairs should provide places and equipment that protects patrons from uncomfortable and/or potentially dangerous weather events (e.g., shaded areas, misters, legal shelters, and buildings with heat and air conditioning).
6. Fairs should monitor the safety of products sold during the fair.

Community and Patron Courtesy

1. Service Members and Fairs should always maintain an accurate representation of products and services to the public. For example:
 - Never engage in deceptive pricing or the practice of “bait and switch”
 - Descriptions of products, services, and food items should accurately reflect the true product or service (e.g., “all beef,” “homemade, and “lifetime guarantee”)

2. Service Members should recognize, acknowledge, and encourage proper behaviors from each other and their employees; mindful of the fact, that even though conducting business at a fair, they are still guests of that fair and that community.
3. Fairs should diligently reduce dust, trash, pollution, noise, and traffic on grounds and in the surrounding community.
4. Fairs and Service Members should display only professional looking or computer generated signage when communicating with the public.
5. Fairs and Service Members should not use mobile communication devices in public view unless they are being used to assist the patron or for business or safety reasons.
6. Fairs and Service Members have an obligation to provide patrons with high guest service standards. For Fairs that includes staffed guest service locations, first aid services, lost children programs, map kiosks, and a locatable lost and found. For Service Members this includes refund policies, quality products and honest terms. For both, this includes trained, attentive, and courteous employees.
7. Fairs and Service Members have an obligation to serve all patrons regardless of race, color, sex, nationality, disability, language, age, sexual orientation, or religion.



STANDARD #2:

WFA members respect each other as professionals and maintain open and honest communication

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES

1. Fairs need to view themselves as part of a professional industry, as “one small part of the whole” rather than as a stand-alone organization whose actions have no impact on other fairs or event centers.
2. Fairs have an obligation to help control the impact of operational changes (e.g., dates, carnivals, acts, and competing trade and consumer shows) by communicating with other fairs within their market area.
3. Fairs should refrain from misrepresenting or “putting down” another fair or facility, or starting or perpetuating rumors or false statements. Concerns should be communicated directly or questions asked in a professional manner.
4. Service Members should refrain from misrepresenting another’s business, (e.g., starting or perpetuating rumors of false statements, and writing negative letters about another business rather than communicating concerns directly to the Service Member owner).

5. Fairs should include basic information about the fair (e.g., dates, hours, attendance, and map) to Service Members with applications that are sent and responded to in a timely manner.
6. Fairs should send detailed information about the fair with their agreement. Examples might be:
 - Service Member Rules and Regulations
 - Map showing Service Members location(s)
 - Cost of doing business (e.g., cart fees, business licenses, utility fees, health department, parking, and credentials)
 - List of community resources (e.g., state employment office site, suppliers, hotels, RV parks, and banking facilities)
 - Temporary hiring assistance
 - Special promotions
 - Entertainment and Featured Exhibits
 - Evaluation criteria
7. Fairs and Service Members need to recognize that technology has changed the speed of and opportunities to communicate; and therefore, should commit to be available to communicate openly and clearly, to adhere to rules of courtesy, and to respond in a timely manner even when the answer is “no.”
8. Fairs should strive to communicate openly and in a timely manner regarding significant changes that have occurred between annual fair dates. Examples might be:
 - Changes in rules and procedures
 - Changes in layout (e.g., supply routes, developing new areas)
 - Changes in promotions
 - Changes in personnel that work with Service Members
 - Changes in dates and hours
9. Service Members should inform Fairs immediately of any significant changes being made before the next fair. Examples might be:
 - Changes in equipment including size, power needs, and appearance of stand
 - Changes in products including new products or discontinued products
 - Changes in legal status including partners and incorporation
 - Changes in contact information
 - Introducing a new website
10. Service Members should consider it their professional responsibility to question the Fairs regarding their assigned locations, product duplication, and what businesses have been assigned to be next to them, if not already so informed. If the assigned location could be detrimental to both businesses, those businesses should consider negotiating different locations with the Fair.

11. Fairs and Service Members should publicly display only professional looking or computer generated signage.
12. Fair Management should strive to have a communications outreach program with the Service Members participating in their fair. Examples might be:
 - Could form a Concessions Advisory Committee or Service Members Focus Group to further enhance communication
 - Could hold an informational meeting with Service Members during the annual WFA convention
 - Could send informational updates between fairs: changes in policies or rules, new construction or remodeling that would affect Service Members, changes in local regulatory agencies' policies and practices, and upcoming fair dates and themes
 - Could allow a reasonable amount of time for a response to the sending of a correspondence that recognizes Service Members are often traveling
 - Could schedule an information meeting for Service Members immediately before or immediately after the fair opens
 - Could distribute a daily fair newsletter with the information pertinent to that day
 - Could have a "suggestion blog" to encourage observations from Service Members



STANDARD #3:

WFA members conduct themselves in a responsible business-like manner and are accountable to each other

GENERAL PRACTICES

1. Board of Directors and Fair Management should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
2. Fairs need to recognize that one fair's actions can have an impact on the entire industry, particularly in regard to legal, insurance, safety, environmental, and fiscal issues.
3. Fairs should refrain from recruiting each other's employees at an inopportune time and without courtesy of professional communication to the fair manager. Service Members should refrain from recruiting each other's employees during a fair's run.
4. Advertising for fairs should be done in a positive way, mindful of the fact that advertising which negatively affects one fair hurts the entire fair industry.
5. Fairs should engage in well planned promotions with input from Service Members that drive attendance and increase profitability while creating value for the patrons.

6. Fairs have a legal obligation to consistently enforce their contracts, rules and regulations, governmental requirements, and breach of contract remedies during the fair with trained, on-site personnel.
7. Service Members should adhere to their contracts in which products and menus are specified and should avoid expanding or changing their line of products, pricing and menus for the duration of that contract. This also includes adhering to governmental regulations and the fairs' rules and regulations.
8. Service Members should refrain from purposely undercutting another "like" businesses prices. "Undercutting" includes but not limited to the offering of "free" products.
9. Service Members should not encroach upon another's business, thus affecting their ability to conduct business. Examples might include:
 - Excessively loud music or microphone volume
 - Moving booth product or equipment beyond the established physical limitations
 - Sales personnel outside booth
10. Service Members have a professional responsibility to assure adequate levels of staffing so that booths are staffed at all times.
11. Service Members should not set up booths late or dismantle booths early.
12. WFA members should not expect discounts from each other. Service Members should not expect discounts from one another. Fair Management should not expect discounts from Service Members. Service Members should not expect discounts from Fairs.
13. Business-like conduct includes communicating critical information promptly. Fairs have an obligation to inform Service Members as soon as possible after a fair's run, of next year's fair dates, rental rates, and the business location for the coming year. Likewise, Service Members have an obligation to inform fairs of any changes from the previous year such as new products, changed appearance of booth, new partners, etc.
14. Fairs and Service Members both should recognize that credentials have a monetary value. Fairs have an obligation to provide Service Members with a reasonable number of credentials. When it is necessary to charge for credentials, the charge should be fair and reasonable. Likewise, Service Members should recognize that the receipt of credentials is a voluntary benefit offered by the fair and not a "right." Therefore, Service Members should not abuse the privilege of the use of credentials.
15. All WFA members are encouraged to honor and not misuse the WFA Credential.
16. Fairs should recognize that all fairs on a Service Member's route request deposits; therefore, they should be reasonable in setting the amount of business deposits. Deposits should not be excessive nor held for extended periods of time.

17. Because fairs have annual dates, beginnings and endings, and openings and closing, the activities that encompass it are time sensitive and the event has its own urgency. Therefore, being on time, delivering products, leaving enough time to switch over, having maintenance and repair procedures, asking if don't know, being ready, and timing of complaints all take on heightened importance. In this environment Fairs and Service Members are encouraged to be understanding, friendly, timely, cooperative, flexible, courteous, and positive.

FOOD AUDITS

1. Fairs are encouraged to assure their auditors and/or audit teams are trained and familiar with fair operations and that auditors conduct themselves in a professional, ethical manner.
2. Fairs should strive to keep audits as simple and as consistently uniform as possible.
3. Fairs should respect the privacy rights of Service Members and properly protect their information from identity theft.
4. Service Members should report all sales, regardless of how they are collected.
5. Fairs and Service Members should work together to establish requirements and timelines for purchasing new sales-capturing, electronic equipment.
6. Audits could be conducted randomly i.e., not everyone, every day. The random selection of days and business should vary and be unpredictable. Whether conducted randomly or not, Service Members should be instructed to save tapes in the event of an audit. If discrepancies are revealed during an audit then all previous cash register tapes are subject to the audit.

EVALUATIONS

1. Fairs and Service Members are encouraged to engage in a two-way evaluation process: i.e., the fair evaluates the business and likewise, they evaluate the fair.
2. Fairs are encouraged to view Service Members among the front line of their event; and therefore, an eyes and ears resource during the event and a source of ideas for future events. Service Members should offer suggestions during the evaluation process.
3. When a written criterion has been developed for the evaluation, Fairs are encouraged to give a copy to the Service Member before the fair, preferably during the application-agreement process.
4. When developing criteria for the evaluation, consideration will be given to an overall evaluation; i.e., not an evaluation of one particular day or one particular moment but an evaluation of performance during the entire fair.
5. Fairs are encouraged to conduct evaluations on all entertainment, commercial exhibits, independent amusements, suppliers, and food and beverage stands, including those in the carnival.
6. All evaluations should be conducted by trained fair staff. The training should include an emphasis on writing positive comments, as well as, pointing out problem areas.

7. Fairs are encouraged to develop a recognition program for outstanding Service Members. Awards could be presented at a special event held near the end or immediately after the fair hoping the Service Members receiving awards will also be recognized by their peers and the local media. Likewise, it would be appropriate for Service Members to honor outstanding fair staff.
8. Although it is accepted that the evaluation process is meant to be a positive method of improving performance it is also recognized that occasionally serious infractions occur which warrant disciplinary action. It is recommended that each fair adopt an evaluation policy addressing the subject of standards of performance for Service Members and actions taken when infractions occur.
9. Fairs should notify Service Members immediately of evaluation results, particularly when infractions have occurred. Major issues should be handled immediately, not several months after the fair has ended. Fairs are encouraged to be fair and impartial in their judgment.
10. When dismissal from the fair is pending, it is standard practice to allow the Service Member the right to discuss the decision in a timely manner. All decisions and activities regarding dismissal should be completed 150 days before the next fair.
11. Fairs should notify Service Members promptly after the close of the fair and not later than 120 days before the next fair if the desire is for the Service Member to return the next year.



STANDARD #4:

WFA members actively participate in programs for the betterment of the industry.

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES

1. Fairs have an obligation to act as mentors and share information and knowledge with new fair managers.
2. In an effort to promote uniformity and consistency among fairs, fair management and directors should continually work together to develop, update and communicate operational guidelines (e.g., guidelines for commercial exhibits, and policies for interim events).
3. Fairs should consider joining together to reduce costs, perhaps through such joint ventures as cooperatively booking entertainment, carnivals, equipment, and judges. Such joint booking and routing efficiencies could help Service Members establish convenient routes and provide Fairs with better choices and possible cost savings.
4. Fairs have an obligation to participate in industry cooperative efforts and/or programs, such as:

- Legislative efforts
 - Purchasing programs
 - Setting program standards (e.g., motorized racing and animal welfare).
 - Alcohol Management programs
5. Fairs and Service Members need to foster the professional development of directors and employees through participation in industry programs and training.
 6. Fairs should commit to learning what the cost of doing business is for Service Members and likewise, Service Members should commit to learning what it costs to put on a fair. Pricing and fees should be based on this shared knowledge.
 7. WFA members have an obligation to stay informed, be aware of trends, and continually upgrade equipment, product, and programming.
 8. WFA members are encouraged to attend industry conventions and gatherings, provide leadership on committees and in sessions, and support WFA and The Blue Ribbon Foundation with their time, talents, money and other resources

WFA BEST PRACTICES GUIDELINES SUMMARY

The Process

In 2013 WFA worked with Rey O’Day to update and blend the two Best Practices documents from our WFA past: the January 1991 Industry Standards and Guidelines (ISG-91) and the July 1998 WFA Best Practices Study Group Summary (BPS-98). Also included is information from the 2011 WFA Member Survey on Best Practices.

Best practice guideline documents are often organized by topic, i.e. marketing, financial, contracts, etc. However, the ISG-91 is behavior-standard based with activity and action suggestions about how to achieve the goal of best practices. We believe it reflects the sensibilities of the fair industry. Another of its strengths is that it is a good balance between the big philosophical picture and useful guidelines. We retained the ISG-91 Four Standards and Guideline style as the basic structure for this updated version and added the topics from BPS-98 and the 2011 survey to it.

Terminology Definitions

Fairs: Directors, Management, Supervisors, Staff, and Volunteers (full-time or part-time)

Service Members: Carnivals, Commercial Exhibit, Entertainment, Food & Beverage, Service, and Supplier companies and their employees

Synopsis of Thoughts

WFA Members have shared goals. We agree that providing excellent guest service is their primary mission. That doing so includes concerns for safety, creating value, good communication, and understanding that all parties are in the business of “making memories.” Though all believe they are doing their best, there is also a desire to have standards of excellence and quality defined through industry standards.

In their business relationship they want professional courtesy and adherence to the concepts of “The Golden Rule.” Honesty, efficiency, transparency and collaboration are desired concepts. Survival concerns, escalating costs, flat revenues, and the need to make a profit are shared concerns. The shared mission is to serve customers and earn profits with a quality product, service, or event. A commitment to a best practices process creates the forum in which these ideas flourish.

Best practices is about developing industry standards through constructive conversations regarding the most significant fair/event industry issues and ideas in order to create procedures, policies, and guidelines that work and create efficiencies and effective solutions. Hopefully best practices are dynamic and ever changing: I think we will always ask what is an appropriate deposit? Why do we have them? When should they be due? In the final analysis best practices are about behaviors, how we treat others and want to be treated; and industry standards are about results, what we want to accomplish. Organizations and people may choose to use best practice guidelines or not; however, they need to exist for those who want to practice thought out, consistent systems.

Steven Weiss suggests that as industry professionals we have mostly concentrated on the procedural aspect of putting on fairs. I think he is suggesting that we must also respect and value each other as we do that. He goes onto say, “It cannot be pointed out too strenuously that the sole point of this study is to aid the effort of fairs to get beyond an internal focus on process and the resultant friction it creates between business partners so that more energy can be freed up to focus on the customer.”

His comments confirm WFA’s four chosen Industry Standards:

- WFA members first responsibility is to the patrons and communities they serve
- WFA members respect each other as professionals and maintain open and honest communication
- WFA members conduct themselves in a responsible business-like manner and are accountable to each other
- WFA members actively participate in programs for the betterment of the industry.

