

## HOW TO ORGANIZE A CARNIVAL

Neighborhood carnivals are loads of fun for kids and adults alike! Events such as this provide an opportunity for people to get to know each other and develop a strong sense of community. Does it sound like a big undertaking? Not at all! All it takes is some organization:

1. Set a date and time. Since you are targeting kids and their families, a Friday night or weekend day would work best. Avoid holiday weekends. Check with local elementary schools to be sure your date doesn't conflict with any events they have scheduled. Three or four hours is an adequate amount of time for a carnival.
2. Find a location. Depending on availability, this may influence the event date. What meeting places do you have available in your neighborhood? Consider using church fellowship halls, school cafeterias or gymnasiums, Richmond Highlands Recreation Center, Spartan Gym, club houses or apartment cabanas. Many of these options have rental fees. Is there someone in your community who is a member of one of these organizations and can secure the site for free or a reduced rate? Is the organization willing to donate use of the site? Reserve the location.
3. Consider co-sponsoring the event with another organization. For example, if you collaborate with a local elementary school or the school PTA, the school district will allow you to use the school's facility at no cost. Make sure, however, that you research insurance coverage for all parties involved before committing to a partnership.
4. Decide how much you want to charge for tickets—2 for \$1, 3 for \$1? This is going to be an estimate on your part. After your first carnival, you will have a better idea of what you need to charge to cover costs. Charge one ticket per game; if it is a game that costs more to rent (like an inflatable bouncer), charge more. If you are going to have varying prices, post the number of tickets required at each attraction.
5. Determine ahead of time how you will set up your facility. Have a table for ticket sellers at each entrance. Measure how much space you need for each booth and that will determine how many games you can accommodate. Map out the location of each game and the food booth, if applicable.
6. Line up volunteers for your carnival committee—facilities, games and prizes, volunteers, publicity, food, decorations and treasurer.
7. **Facilities** – This person can find a location, make the reservation and make sure there are an adequate number of tables for the games, chairs for volunteers and for people to sit while eating, and garbage and recycling cans. If you are using a school facility, the Shoreline School District has carnival booths that can be borrowed. Fill out a “hauling request” at the same time you submit your “facility use permit”, and the wood frames will be delivered the Friday before your event and picked up on the following Monday.
8. **Games and Prizes** – This person can line up the games and order the prizes. Carnival games and inflatable equipment can be rented from rental companies (check party planning, rentals and inflatables in yellow pages). Ask about the wide selection of games, free delivery and set up, and discounts for nonprofits. You can buy prizes direct from suppliers (search party supplies, novelties and crafts online) or from local party companies. Also order one-part tickets to sell, containers to collect tickets in, and bags for guests to carry their prizes in. Decide how you want to do prize distribution. Will kids only get a prize if they win or will you have big prizes for those who win and

smaller prizes for those who lose? Before the event, collect boxes from liquor stores and grocery stores. Make sure you have enough prize boxes for each booth. Divide up the prizes into the boxes. You may have to shuffle prizes around between booths toward the end of your event to make sure no one runs out.

9. **Volunteer Coordinator** – This person will need to line up volunteers to sell tickets, run booths, set up and clean up (see “How to Recruit and Retain Volunteers”). Have two shifts for each booth, so volunteers have to work no more than two hours. Ask the first shift to come fifteen minutes early so they can go over the game rules beforehand and are ready to go when the carnival begins. Ask the last shift to stay and clean up their booth at the end. Elementary schools are great resources for volunteers. Often parents are bringing their children anyway, so are willing to volunteer for a couple hours. High school students like doing this type of work for community service hours. Scout groups and their leaders can staff a booth. Make a master list of all your booths, shifts, volunteers and contact information. Send a letter or email to each volunteer a week before the event to confirm their commitment. Have extra volunteers lined up in case someone does not show up. Be on hand the day of the event to direct volunteers to their booths, answer any questions about game rules or prize allocation, etc.
10. **Publicity** – This person will be responsible for designing a flyer and publicizing the event (see section on “Publicity for Events”). If you are hosting your event at an elementary school, you may be allowed to send your flyer home through “kid mail” with every child, but this must be cleared with the building principal and through the school district. Utilize as many methods as possible to reach your target audience.
11. **Food** – If you decide to sell food at your event, this person will be responsible for deciding on a menu, purchasing food and supplies, establishing prices, making signs for the menu and prices, preparing the food and serving. Decide if you want guests to pay with tickets or cash and specify this in your signage. If you serve hot items (such as pizza or hot dogs), you will need warming trays. Other ideas for food include bagels and cream cheese, popcorn, small bags of chips, cookies, candy, donuts, vegetables with dip, bottles of water and cans of pop. Keep it simple! Be sure to purchase food service gloves, napkins or plates to serve food on, eating utensils, and condiments, if needed. If you don’t have access to refrigeration, you may need to bring ice chests and purchase ice. Large discount stores are good places to shop when you are buying in quantity. If you are hosting your event in a public school, it is necessary to hire a school district cook to be present during the time you will be using the kitchen.
12. **Decorations** – Decorations are optional, but add festivity to your event. If your event centers around a holiday, decorate accordingly. If you plan to make your carnival an annual event around a certain holiday, shop for decorating items *after* the holiday when they get marked down significantly. Cut outs, balloons, streamers, etc., make great decorations. Check out the dollar stores for inexpensive decorating items. Save the decorations for future use.
13. **Treasurer** – This person is responsible for obtaining cash boxes and starting change for ticket sellers (and possibly the food vendor) and for collecting, counting and depositing the money after the event. Make sure to have more than one person count the money and, if the money cannot be deposited in a bank immediately, have a secure location to keep the funds until they are deposited.
14. A week before the event, confirm all the arrangements. Check with committee members to make sure everything is ready to go.
15. After your event, make sure you return your facility to its original condition (or better!)
16. Do a debriefing with those involved in the event. Determine what went well and what you would change. Encourage volunteers to give input and then use some of their ideas. Keep notes for future use.
17. Create a notebook or file system and capture the “how to” knowledge, key contacts and vendors and lessons for improvement soon after the event. Ask committee chairs to contribute their specific knowledge. The more you record, the easier next year will be, including recruiting new volunteers.