Campus Activities Professionals Respond to Programming Challenges

In “What Would You Do?,” a revolving panel of campus activities professionals offers its opinions on how to resolve a specific programming challenge posed by another campus activities professional or one that actually happened at an NACA school.

A HYPOTHETICAL SITUATION:

Brian Johnson, formerly interim director at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, offers a challenge any school could face in connection with a live concert:

During a concert, the leader of the band encourages the students in the audience to “get rid of the chairs” on the floor. Consequently, people start throwing chairs and rushing the stage. The campus head of security threatens to shut down the event and arrest the leader of the band. What do you do?

Brad Balser, assistant director for Student Activities & Leadership at the University of Dayton (OH), and Lucy Croft, assistant vice president for Student Life at the University of North Florida, respond:

With all programming, safety is the highest priority and this situation is no exception. The band, with their statement, “get rid of the chairs”, has clearly compromised the safety of the patrons.

Preplanning is fundamental to the creation of a safe and well-managed event. Meager attempts at security planning in this type of situation may damage more than just your programming board’s reputation. To help avoid this liability, our campus routinely and strategically prepares a course of action that is reviewed before the start of any campus event.

Our office and student programming body begins the preliminary planning stages by meeting with other special event entities on campus, including public safety and emergency personnel. During this meeting, event logistics and safety and security contingencies are discussed. As a result of this meeting, an operational plan is developed that, at a minimum, addresses the following subjects:

- Anticipated audience concentration based on particular artist(s);
- Contractual parameters;
- Designated campus and non-campus security;
- Venue layout specifics; and
- Communication (including with the audience).

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The day of the event, we have found it crucial to equip ALL parties involved with the complete security education and/or training needed. It is a time to come to consensus with band management and other entities on the exact security procedures that will be taken at any given time throughout the concert.

It would also be important to have a debriefing meeting with all involved to ensure [you are] ready for these type of issues should they arise at future events.

Because of preplanning and due diligence, such a scenario can be handled with professionalism. The following are the steps you interject during the chaos:

- Always remember—safety first;
- Have the band stop playing and turn on house lights;
- Make an announcement that the concert is over and direct patrons to exit safely and calmly;
- Escort the band safely off the stage; and
- Make sure security is directing people to the nearest exits.

Also, due to proper preplanning, the emergency medical personnel should be present to address any injuries. Follow university policy on notification of injury to legal guardians.

The next day, work with your public relations office to ensure a clear and appropriate message is portrayed to the press and community. You may also want to conduct a couple of open forums to address student concerns first-hand. Follow up on the status of anyone injured during the event. Prior to calling the agent, consult with your legal office/general counsel office on who is liable for payment, injury etc. Upon clarification and direction from your legal advisor, contact the agent and inform the agency on the legalities. You may want your legal advisor to contact the agent directly.

Lastly, you need to process the incident with the event planning committee during a post-evaluation meeting. Make sure to include all parties involved in the process, including the student programming board members.

Daniel Ferguson, director of College Activities at Linfield College (OR), responds:

First, I would tell the head of security to let me make an attempt to settle the crowd before he shuts the event down, as that most likely will lead to an even bigger problem than the one already in progress.

If we were successful in keeping the concert going, I would work with the head of security to reassess security needs on the fly. I would want to station a few more people at the front of the stage and send other personnel to float through the crowd as troubleshooters.

After the show was over, I would have a conversation with the artist or tour manager about the band’s inappropriate behavior. I would let them know I would like to discuss the security issue with the agent and I would mail the check to the agent after we had talked on the phone and I felt my concerns were properly acknowledged.

It would also be important to have a debriefing meeting with all involved to ensure we were ready for these type of issues should they arise at future events.

THIS MONTH’S PANELISTS

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WHAT Would You DO

Do you have a programming challenge you’d like to share?

E-mail Glenn Farr at glennf@naca.org.