Planning
Safe
Community Events

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Contents

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This planning handbook was written by Stuart M. DeLuca, a member of Travis County *REACT* (Austin, Tex.) since 1976. Mr. DeLuca has assisted in planning and conducting hundreds of community events over the years. He is also a freelance writer, and is the editor of *The REACTer* magazine.

This planning handbook is offered by *REACT* International to assist in planning safe and successful community events.

Introduction: Defining Terms

A *community event* is any event that is planned and conducted for the general public. It may be a commemorative event such as a parade in honor of Memorial Day, or a community celebration. Often community events are held by nonprofit organizations to raise funds for their charitable activities. Local *REACT* Teams frequently provide support for a wide variety of community events, supplying personnel and equipment for communications, traffic control, crowd management, and security.

Over the years, I have noticed that most of the organizations that conduct community events do a creditable job of planning the event itself and promoting it to the public. However, I have also observed that a few critical aspects are often neglected in the planning. This handbook focuses on those critical aspects, all of which concern **safety**.

It should be obvious that a community event cannot be considered successful if someone gets hurt. Athletic events naturally involve the possibility, if not the likelihood, of injury, and the organizers of athletic events usually make some provision for that eventuality. Otherwise, event organizers too often forget to consider the possibility that a participant, spectator, or volunteer might be injured or ill and need urgent medical attention. Almost always, planning for parking, traffic control, and crowd management is given too little attention, which increases the possibility of accidents and other safety problems.

The potential costs of a serious safety incident can be a major show-stopper. Liability insurance may take care of personal injuries and property damage, but that doesn't do much for the event participants whose day was spoiled by witnessing a serious accident. In the long run, nothing can be more devastating to the organizers' standing in the community than a reputation for holding a poorly managed, unsafe public event.

Planning for safety is not overly complicated; this is not rocket science. It merely requires some imaginative consideration of potential vulnerabilities, and some specific steps to either prevent or mitigate any threat to the people and the property involved in the event. In this handbook, we will address the kinds of planning that should be done for *every* community event, large or small, regardless of its nature or purpose.

First, however, I will present a vocabulary list so that we will have a standard set of terms for the rest of this presentation.

Community Event – An event organized for the public's participation; an athletic event, celebration, commemoration, entertainment, etc.; often a fundraiser for a nonprofit.

Organizer – The organization that plans and conducts a community event.

Sponsor – An individual or company that donates funds, goods, or services in support of a

community event.

Participant – A person, company, or organization that takes part in a community event; a fee may be charged for the privilege of participating.

Performer – A person or group that presents music, dance, or other entertainment, or demonstration of skills, etc., as part of the event

Spectator – A person who is present at an event only to observe it; the audience, bystanders, etc.

Vendor – A person or company that exhibits goods for sale at the event or elsewhere, or that provides food, beverages, or other amenities to participants, staff, etc.

Staff – The people who are responsible for various aspects of planning and conducting the event, including paid and unpaid workers; often employees of the organizer.

Volunteers – Workers who are responsible for limited, specific aspects of conducting the event; may be paid, partly paid, reimbursed for expenses, or unpaid; usually not employees or patrons of the organizer.

Security – Workers who are responsible for the safety of the people and property involved in the event.

Static Event – An event organized so that participants, spectators, and others arrive at about the same time, remain throughout the event, and leave at about the same time; for example, a football game, a concert. (NOTE: A parade, bicycle race, or footrace is considered a static event even though it travels over a route more or less continuously.)

Continuous Event – An event organized so that participants/spectators come and go more or less continuously throughout the event; for example, an arts and crafts fair.

Open Site – An event site that must remain open to the general public (people who are not involved in the event), such as public roads or highways, city park, mall parking lot, etc.

Closed Site – An event site that is reserved for the exclusive use of the event.

Parking and Traffic Control

It ought to be obvious that, in the vast majority of cases, the people who attend a community event will arrive by automobile. Oddly enough, the single aspect of planning that seems to be most often ignored altogether is parking.

To be sure, there are events for which parking is not a consideration. In some major cities, most people rely entirely on public transportation. Sometimes an event is held for people in a given neighborhood or small community and most participants can walk to the site. However, with these few exceptions, the organizers of almost all community events must assume that the majority of participants, volunteers, performers, and others involved in the event will arrive by car.

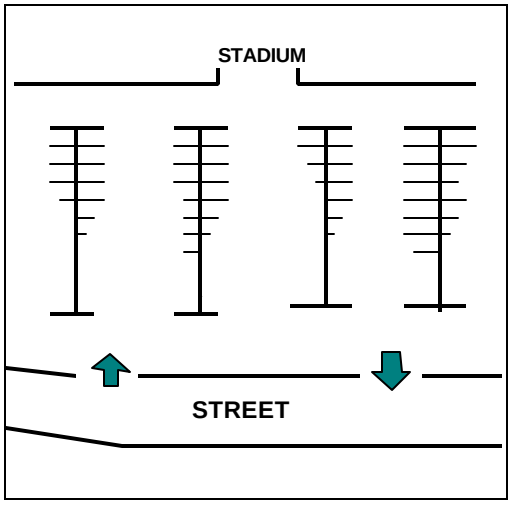
The first question to be addressed is, *How many cars must be accommodated?* There is no hard-and-fast rule, since the answer depends partly on the nature of the event. For some athletic events, many participants arrive by themselves; in fact, family members sometimes come in a separate car, doubling the number of vehicles that must be accommodated. At the other extreme, events that are family- or child-oriented usually mean that three or more participants will arrive in each car.

In general, you can assume that between 1 1/2 and 2 participants will arrive in each car, at least to get a general idea of the parking facility that is needed. Thus, if your goal is to attract 1,000 people to an event, you should assume that they will come in between 500 and 750 cars.

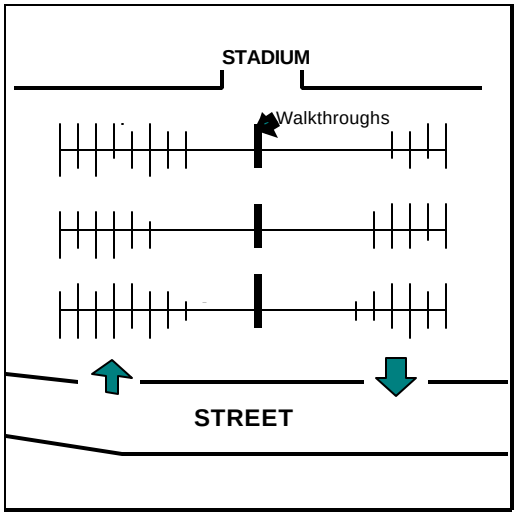
However, they do not necessarily all come at once. Again, depending on the nature of the event, the participants may all arrive at approximately the same time and leave at approximately the same time (a *static event*), or they may come and go throughout the day (a *continuous event*). In the latter case, the parking facility only needs to accommodate the peak number of vehicles. For 1,000 participants distributed over a continuous event, the peak is likely to be around 250 to 300 vehicles. The length of time each participant spends at the event also affects the peak traffic load, of course. If people come and go throughout the day but spend three hours at the event, the number of cars on the parking lot at any one time will be larger than if most people spend only an hour and a half at the event.

Once you know approximately how many cars must be accommodated, the next question, of course, is where to put them.

Naturally, every participant wants to park directly in front of, and no more than five feet away from, the main entrance. That level of convenience is impossible, but planners should try to come as close to it as they can: the parking lot should be as close to the main entrance to the site as possible, and should be arranged so that the cars in the lot are about equally far from the entrance. (See diagrams 1 and 2.)



1. This parking lot won't be very popular with participants; the later they arrive, the farther they must park from the site entrance.



2. This is better: As much as possible, cars in each row are at roughly equal distances from the entrance. Having two or more entrances would be even better.

A parking lot does not have to be paved and striped, but there are clear advantages to both. Paving keeps down dust and avoids a serious danger I will mention in a moment. Striping helps to use the space most efficiently and guides drivers to the area where they are supposed to park. Naturally, if the event is held at night or inclement weather is likely, the parking areas should be well lighted.

A graded (gravel or dirt) field can be used as a parking lot; it usually can be striped using a chalk line-marking device (the sort used for athletic fields). The striping may not last long but it will help direct cars for a while. Another alternative is to use string and stakes to mark the intended parking areas.

A grass field presents a serious problem. Most newer-model cars are equipped with *catalytic converters*, antipollution devices that are part of the exhaust system. These devices operate at extremely high internal temperatures, and even the outer surface of their metal containers can be hot enough to set grass on fire. If a grass field must be used for parking, it should be mowed to a length of about 2 inches the day before the event, and it is helpful to wet the grass a few hours before the event begins. A fire that starts underneath a car may spread to its gas tank, and to adjacent cars, before it is detected; by the time the fire department arrives, dozens of cars may be lost.

Sometimes it is simply not possible to provide parking facilities immediately adjacent to the event site, especially in an urban area. In that case, off-site parking must be arranged. Often a nearby school, office building, or other public facility has a parking lot that is not used on weekends, when most community events are held. If an off-site lot is within easy walking distance (generally no more than a city block, or roughly 500 feet) of the event site's entrance,

this may be a good solution.

However, some consideration must be given to the route between the parking lot and the event site. If participants must cross a public street, it will be necessary to provide traffic control at the crossing – and it will be necessary to provide crowd management devices, such as fences or barriers, to ensure that people cross at the proper crosswalk. If participants would have to cross a major highway or high-traffic-volume city boulevard, the parking lot is not suitable and some other arrangement should be made.

Event organizers often overlook the possibility of providing a shuttle service between the event site and a good parking facility that may be some distance away. Shuttle buses may not be inordinately expensive; many municipal transit systems offer this service at very reasonable cost. Some school districts also might be willing to provide buses and drivers on the weekend at modest cost. There are also commercial bus and tram operators who are eager to find new customers. Given a choice between an undersized parking lot in a dangerous location, and an ample lot some distance away, I think organizers should at least research the feasibility of using a shuttle bus.

Special Parking Needs

Depending on the type of event, there may be a need to set aside some parking areas for specific purposes.

Almost always, there should be a parking area as close to the event site or entrance as possible, reserved for people who are physically handicapped. In most states, special permits are available for people who are entitled to park in handicapped spaces. Unless you are certain that no one with a handicapped permit is likely to attend the event, there should be a reasonable number of reserved spaces. For some events that attract mainly older people or that are specifically intended for people with physical handicaps, it may be necessary to reserve quite a large number of such spaces.

The event staff and volunteers should have their own reserved parking area but it need not be close to the site entrance. The staff and volunteers are expected to be at the site throughout the event, usually a period of several hours, and they do not need to have easy access to their cars. Furthermore, as a matter of courtesy and good public relations, it is more important to give the event's "paying customers" preferred parking spaces.

Performers and vendors may need access to the event site to deliver and load equipment and supplies. In this case, they should have a reserved loading/unloading area but they should not be allowed to park in that area throughout the event. After they have unloaded their equipment or supplies, they should be required to park in the staff/volunteer parking area.

Traffic Flow

Once you know where cars will be parked, the next concern is the flow of traffic into and out of the parking site. The general principle is simply to avoid having streams of cars follow conflicting paths.

If you are using a permanent parking lot, already striped, you have no control over the parking pattern. If you are using a temporary lot or a paved lot that is not striped, you should plan to park cars in rows that, as far as possible, give people the shortest distance to walk from their cars to the event site or entrance (as suggested in diagrams 1 and 2).

Next, consider the entrances to and exits from the parking lot. In nearly all cases, these entrances and exits will be from and to a public road, and usually there will be traffic on the road or street that is simply passing by, not involved in the event.

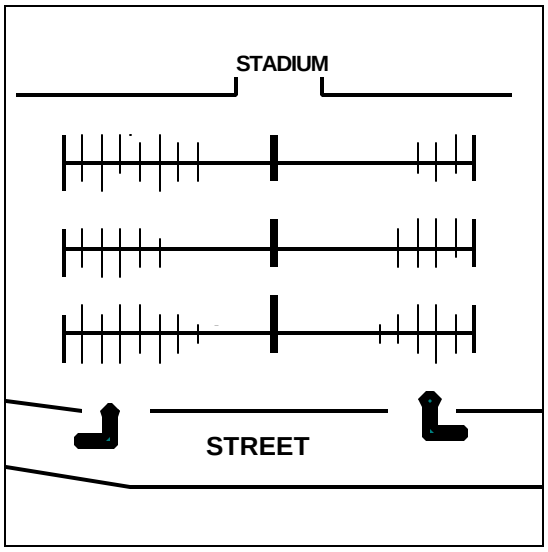
For a *static event*, where everyone arrives and leaves at about the same times, the goal is to provide as many entrances and exits as possible without creating chaos within the parking lot itself. The driveways used as entrances before the event then become exits after the event. (See diagram 3 below.)

For a*continuous event*, where people arrive and leave at various times throughout the day, the opposite approach should be used: entrances and exits should be limited and should be clearly designated for one or the other purpose. (See diagram 4 below.)

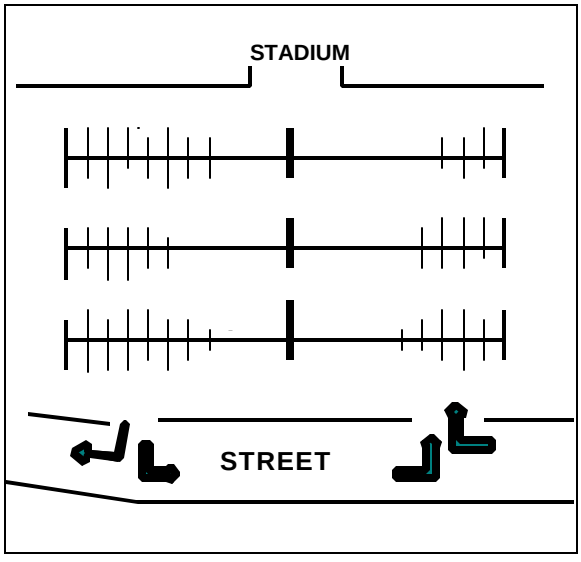
In both cases, the traffic flow plan must accommodate the through traffic on the street. You should realize that the general public may not be aware of the event at all; people simply want to get to work, the store, or home, usually following their normal route, and the event is a disruption in their normal routine. Keeping that disruption to a minimum will reduce the annoyance to the public, encourage the public to cooperate with your traffic control, and minimize safety problems.

Planning an ideal traffic flow pattern will do no good unless you establish reasonable means to enforce the pattern. In most cases, this will require assigning *REACT* members or other volunteers to direct traffic at the key points (usually the entrances and exits to the parking lot). Additional traffic direction within the parking lot will help to keep the stream of traffic moving smoothly and safely.

Maintaining the traffic flow pattern begins with adequate *signage*. The pattern usually will be significantly different from the ordinary flow of traffic on the street; people must be warned that there is a change from what they expect. The peo



3. For a static event, several entrances should be provided before the event; they then become exits after the event.



4. For a continuous event, there should be a limited number of designated entrances, separate from designated exits.

ple attending the event should be given clear directions so they are not confused about where they are supposed to go. People not attending the event should be warned to expect congestion.

The most important criteria for traffic signage are, first, to make the signs *big enough* for people to see from a distance; second, to make the signs *simple enough* that there is no confusion or uncertainty about what is intended.

On a public street where traffic ordinarily moves at 30 miles an hour, a driver needs at least a block (roughly 500 feet) to respond to a traffic sign. In order for the sign to be seen from a block away, it should be at least 4 feet square with lettering at least 12 to 15 inches high; lettering always should be black against a light background or white against a dark background. If the event takes place, partly or entirely, at night or in inclement weather, the signs should be lighted, or at least the lettering should be done with reflective paint. Signs also must be placed high enough that drivers can see them over other vehicles. Ideally, the bottom edge of a sign should be about five to six feet above the ground.

The entrance(s) to the parking lot should be clearly marked with signs visible from at least half a block away. If separate entrances and exits are used (such as for a continuous event), the exits should have large “DO NOT ENTER!” signs placed so that drivers approaching from any direction can see them.

Signage within the parking lot does not need to be as large, but there should be clear marking of reserved parking areas, loading/unloading areas, and so forth. The entrance to the event site also should be clearly marked. Sawhorse-type barricades, traffic cones, and traffic barrels should be used to control the flow of traffic by preventing cars from going the wrong way or entering areas where they don’t belong.

Signage and barricades *do not* eliminate the need for traffic direction. The purpose of the signs and barricades is simply to inform drivers as to where they are supposed to go; if there is no one present to give specific directions or to enforce the intended traffic pattern, drivers will become confused or will deliberately ignore the signage.

State laws and local ordinances concerning traffic direction vary. In Texas, for example, there is no law prohibiting, permitting, or authorizing anyone to direct traffic on a public street. The only relevant law is a section of the motor vehicle code, making it an offense to disobey the directions of a certified law enforcement officer. In some states, however, *only* a law enforcement officer is permitted to direct traffic on a public road, except under specific circumstances (for example, flagger at a road construction site). In yet other states, permission to direct traffic must be obtained from the local police department or sheriff’s office. Naturally, you must know the law in your state, and any local ordinances that apply.

Even in places where anyone can direct traffic legally, it is extremely helpful to have a

police officer – preferably in a marked police vehicle – at or near the scene. Even if the officer does nothing but sit in the squad car enjoying its air conditioning, the visible presence of a police officer significantly improves the public's willingness to cooperate and follow directions. Just as important, if an impatient driver creates a dangerous situation, the police officer is immediately available to explain matters to the driver.

Open Sites

So far, everything has been planned on the assumption that the event is being held at a *closed site*, an area reserved exclusively for the event. Events held at an *open site* pose some special problems.

For example, if the event is held on a shopping center parking lot, usually it will not be possible to change the existing arrangement of entrances, exits, and parking patterns. At most, it may be possible to close off a portion of the lot, using barricades, to reserve some parking spaces for the event.

If the event is held on a public street or highway, such as a bicycle race or footrace, traffic control is a major concern. At a minimum, one lane should be reserved for the event participants, using cones, barrels, and barricades to restrict it from the general public. However, the public still must be able to cross the restricted lane to get to side streets and driveways. Sometimes it simply isn't possible even to reserve one lane, and the event participants must be mixed in with the public's traffic. In such cases, the general rule is that *the public has the right of way*. Even if event participants are involved in a race, they must give way to vehicle traffic and must obey traffic controls such as traffic signals and stop signs.

Crowd Management and Security

For many community events, *REACT* is asked to provide crowd management and security services. Again, the precise nature and extent of these services will depend on the nature of the event itself, but some general principles should be observed.

Crowd management (a term that is preferable to "crowd control") simply means providing for the safety and convenience of a large number of people. A "crowd" can be anything from a couple of dozen people in a small space, to tens of thousands of people at a large stadium or fairgrounds.

The first question that must be addressed is, *Where do we want people to go?* This question must be answered by the event organizer, and it is often implicit in the nature of the event. For example, if the event is a footrace, the organizer wants participants to follow the race course and spectators to line the course. If the event is an arts and crafts fair, the organizer wants participants to wander among the vendors' booths; usually it doesn't matter whether the participants follow a particular route.

Sometimes there is a specific route that participants are supposed to follow, in which case there must be adequate signage to direct people, and barricades to keep people from wandering off the intended path or into restricted areas.

Access Control

Often there are areas, especially in a closed site, that are not intended to be open to participants. Such areas might include performers' dressing or preparation areas, food preparation areas, vendors' storage areas, and so forth. There also may be areas that have specific restrictions for some but not all participants. For example, at Special Olympics and similar athletic events, access to the playing field should be restricted to the athletes (and their coaches) who are scheduled to compete within a few minutes.

Access control usually requires the use of barricades or gated fences, an attendant at the point of access, and identification of the specific people who are permitted access. Signs specifying the access rules should be placed prominently at the barricade or gate.

Access permits can take any number of forms; name badges, for example, can be color coded to indicate which areas the wearer may enter. Field passes can be worn on a lanyard or clipped to a shirt collar or pocket; again, color coding is helpful. Plastic wristbands are inexpensive but they are easily lost and not as readily identifiable, especially from a distance, as badges or field passes. For some events, staff members and volunteers might be given T-shirts or caps in a distinctive color or design.

Attendants, usually *REACT* members or other volunteers, should be given clear instructions concerning who has access to a restricted area and why the area is restricted. The attendant should be placed directly in front of the access point or next to a gate; a chair may be provided if the volunteer will be at the post for more than an hour, but the attendants should be instructed to *stand* whenever people approach. Anyone seeking access who is not immediately identifiable through the use of a name badge, field pass, or other device should be stopped by the attendant and asked, politely, not to enter. If the person insists that he or she is authorized to enter the area, or should be permitted to enter as an exception to the stated rules, the attendant should ask the person to either obtain proper identification or have someone in authority approve the entry. Attendants always should have radio communications to a central command point and should ask for assistance if someone refuses to obey the access rules. *Under no circumstances should the attendant attempt to use physical force to restrain someone who refuses to obey the rules.*

Crowd Monitoring

Another common aspect of crowd management is monitoring, or "observing and reporting." When a large number of people are gathered at one place, especially if they are expected to remain more or less in place for a long period of time (such as the crowd in a football stadium), there is always the possibility that someone will become ill, have an accident, or become involved in a dispute with other spectators or participants. Crowd monitoring simply means observing the crowd and, if some incident occurs, reporting it to the proper authorities.

Emergency medical personnel should be present at any event that involves a crowd of more than a few hundred people or in which the crowd is present for more than an hour or two. For relatively small crowds or relatively brief events, one or two people with Red Cross first-aid certification (whether or not they are *REACT* members) should be sufficient. For a large crowd that is present for longer periods, there should be a minimum of one person with emergency medical (paramedic) training and license for every 1,000 participants and spectators. For an athletic event, whether at a stadium or an open site such as a bicycle race on public streets, at least one emergency medical vehicle should be available. First-aid stations should be established at various places in the event site and should be clearly marked.

The primary duty of crowd monitors is to *report* any problems or incidents, *not to intervene*. If someone becomes ill or is injured, reporting the problem must take priority over all other actions. After the problem is reported, the crowd monitor may offer assistance (consistent with his or her training and certification), but not if it means neglecting to continue to monitor the crowd; there might be another incident that requires attention.

Part of the crowd monitor's job is to restrain participants and spectators from inappropriate behavior. This part of the job requires a good deal of common sense and

judgment on the part of the monitor. Too little attention to it can lead to unruly and dangerous behavior; too much attention can spoil the crowd's pleasure in the event.

"Ground rules" should be clearly established *in advance* and all crowd monitors should be thoroughly informed about the rules. During the event, the established rules should be *strictly and consistently enforced*.

It is vital to understand that a crowd is not just a bunch of individual people. In some sense, a crowd takes on a personality of its own. Individuals in a crowd often behave in ways that they would never do otherwise. In its simplest form, crowd behavior is based on the idea that, *"Whatever one person can do, everyone can do."*

For example, when people line the sidewalks for a parade, everyone in the crowd wants to get as close to the street as possible, to see better. People at the back of the crowd press forward; people on the curb are pushed off, onto the street. If no one insists that they get back onto the sidewalk, soon the entire crowd is on the street, creating congestion for the parade participants. Someone must patrol up and down the curb, telling people to get back up onto the sidewalk.

Similarly, at an athletic event, if one spectator runs out onto the field in the middle of the game and is not immediately made to return to the seats, soon three or four people will run out, then dozens, and finally hundreds, completely disrupting the event and creating an unmanageable – and extremely dangerous – situation for everyone.

Regardless of the nature of the event or the size of the crowd, it is simply essential for the established rules to be enforced consistently. Almost always, enforcing the rules merely requires the crowd monitor to remind people of the rules – and watch to make sure that instructions are obeyed.

Occasionally a spectator or participant will have a legitimate reason to be given an exception to the rules. Unless the exceptions are specified in advance, the crowd monitor should never make exceptions on his or her own, but should contact the central command authorities by radio (or whatever means are available), explain the situation, and ask for instructions.

For example, a street basketball tournament was held on the downtown streets in Austin for several years. For two days, several busy downtown streets were blocked off and more than a hundred portable basketball hoops were set up. The event drew thousands of participants and spectators. Unfortunately, it also severely inconvenienced the owners and employees of the restaurants and shops along those downtown streets.

Once the streets were blocked off, it was not possible to allow local traffic to go around the barricades. On one street, one curb lane was marked off with barricades and kept open

so people could get to their offices in a bank building. *REACT* personnel were stationed at the entrance to this "chute" to control access to it; only people who had proper identification were allowed in. But an exception was made, and enforced as consistently as possible, for people who didn't have proper identification but gave the monitor a reasonable explanation of why they needed to get to that building. Elsewhere, an alley that ordinarily was marked for one-way traffic was opened to traffic in both directions so store employees could get to their place of business.

Such exceptions should be kept to a minimum and, whenever possible, should be established in advance as part of the "ground rules." Attendants or monitors must be given full instructions about the rules and the exceptions. During an event when a large crowd is present, the crowd monitors cannot afford to tolerate even the smallest inappropriate behavior. No one likes to be unpleasant (and rules always should be enforced politely, with a smile), but the dangers in letting a crowd get out of control cannot be overstated.

Children

At any community event in which children are participants or spectators, it is nearly certain that some children will become separated from their parents or other adult guardian. This is a situation that requires special training of crowd monitors.

Monitors should be instructed *not* to use the phrase, "lost child," because it is ambiguous; it isn't clear whether the child is actually missing or simply separated from its family. Instead, monitors should state whether a child is "unattended" or is "missing."

An *unattended child* is not an emergency. When a crowd monitor notices a child who is not with its parents or other adults, especially if the child appears to be confused or frightened, the monitor should approach and ask the child where his or her parents are. If it becomes clear that the child has become separated from its family, the monitor should report it to the central command point as an "unattended child." The monitor should keep the child with him or her. In most cases, a parent or other adult will show up within a few minutes. If a parent doesn't appear to claim the child within a reasonable time, or if the child is extremely upset, the monitor should call again, and arrangements should be made to take the child to the command center or other central location until the parents are found.

A *missing child*, reported to a crowd monitor by a parent or other adult, is an emergency and must be treated accordingly. It is possible that the child has been abducted or has wandered into a dangerous area. The monitor must notify the central command point immediately, and must obtain from the parent the following information:

? The child's name (and gender, if not apparent)
? Child's age

- ? Child's height and hair color
- ? Description of child's clothing
- ? Where the child was last seen (and direction of travel, if appropriate)

This information should then be broadcast to all staff, volunteers, and crowd management personnel. A search for the child should begin immediately at the place where the child was last seen. Volunteers near the event's entrances and exits should be particularly alerted.

It is generally not a good idea to broadcast the description of a missing child over a public address system. Children rarely are abducted from public places, but it does happen, and broadcasting such an announcement could cause an abductor to act rashly and dangerously.

The parent or other adult who reported the missing child should remain with the crowd monitor, or should be taken or directed to the central command point. It is not helpful for the parent to go off searching (often in the wrong direction) and not be present when the child is found.

In general, missing adults should not be considered an emergency, and in fact do not require the attention of crowd monitors. If people become separated in a crowd, they should return to the last place where they were together, or should go to some obvious gathering place such as the exit from the event site.

An exception should be made for elderly or mentally handicapped adults, who may become disoriented and could be in some danger. Such cases should be treated in much the same way as an unattended or missing child.

Money

Community events often involve admission fees, sales of food and merchandise, and other transactions in which money is present. Regardless of the nature of the event, the presence of any large amount of money should be considered a security concern.

The best way to deal with money is to avoid having large amounts of it at the event site.

If there are many vendors selling food and small items, such as souvenirs and knick-knacks, it may be possible to establish a ticket system. When people enter the event site, they buy a quantity of tickets that can be used to purchase food and other items. At the end of the event, the vendors turn in the tickets they have collected and redeem them for cash, or better yet a check from the event organizer. Meanwhile, the cash can be collected periodically from the ticket booths and removed to a safe place, either on or off the site.

The ticket system doesn't work as well if the vendors are selling expensive items or if there is a wide range of prices for vendors' goods. In that case, the vendors' cash should be collected periodically, in exchange for a receipt signed by a member of the event staff. Again, the cash should be removed to a safe location, and at the end of the day the receipts should be turned in and exchanged for cash or a check.

Naturally, in either system, vendors should be left with enough cash after each collection to make change and continue their business.

Cash removal should be handled as unobtrusively as possible, but it is a reasonable precaution to have a uniformed *REACT* member or a law enforcement officer accompany the person collecting the cash. If possible, cash should be deposited at the nearest ATM or branch bank.

Major Emergencies

Any event involving a large number of people, especially if they are concentrated in a fairly limited area, has the potential for a major emergency. Plans for the event always should address this possibility, and some thought should be given to the kinds of emergencies that *could* occur even if they are considered unlikely.

If an event is likely to attract more than 1,000 participants or spectators, even if it is only for an hour or two, it is possible for people to get into a dispute. The presence of alcohol, team rivalries, and large amounts of money increase the possibility of serious problems. Nearly all law enforcement agencies have established policies under which off-duty personnel can be employed to provide security for such events; if for some reason local police officers or sheriff's deputies are not available, there are licensed private security firms that can provide comparable services. Either law enforcement officers or private security officers should be present. *REACT* members generally are neither trained nor licensed or certified to perform such services, and should not agree to do so.

Similarly, as stated earlier, provision should be made for emergency medical services at any event involving a substantial number of people for a substantial period. If there is any reasonable possibility of a fire, structural collapse, or other incident that would require firefighters or a rescue squad, arrangements should be made to have those personnel present as well.

REACT's role in most events is to monitor and *report* any problems. However, sometimes it is preferable for crowd monitors not to report the details of a major emergency. The reason is that if monitors and other personnel are scattered about the event site, all with their radios turned on, a report of a major emergency will be heard by the public and people will be drawn to the location of the emergency or, what is even worse, the public might panic

and create a second emergency situation.

If a major emergency incident occurs, crowd monitors and other personnel should be instructed to use a simple coded message. My team uses “Code One” for this purpose. If a crowd monitor calls the central command and reports, “Code One,” the command personnel know that there is a major emergency at the monitor’s location; all available assistance is sent immediately. Nothing further about the incident is said over the radio. The monitor is instructed to take immediate action to move participants or spectators away from the site of the emergency, and to assist emergency personnel when they arrive.

The following types of incidents have been defined as “Code One incidents”:

- Any loss of life
- A fight involving weapons or more than two people
- A fire in a structure (building or free-standing) that endangers the public
- An unidentifiable object or package that could be explosive or otherwise dangerous
- Any other condition that poses an immediate and serious threat to the public

For certain events, local law enforcement, emergency medical, or firefighting and rescue officials may ask that other codes, or additional ones, be used. As a general rule, it is better to use the fewest codes possible, to avoid confusion, especially when non-*REACT* volunteers are used as crowd monitors.

“Code Ten”

Another code that our team has adopted serves a different purpose. When volunteers are scattered about an event site, they sometimes need help as soon as it is available, but they don’t always want to broadcast the reason for the request. They may simply need to take a bathroom break, or they may not feel well. Sometimes a spectator or participant has become obstreperous and the volunteer is unable to defuse the situation.

Whenever a volunteer calls the control operator and reports, “Code Ten,” the meaning is simply, “I need some help as soon as it is available.” The reason for the request does not need to be stated. The control operator’s response should be to send a rover, team officer, or event staff member to see what the problem is and provide whatever assistance is needed.

Communications

REACT is the only international volunteer organization whose members provide communications for service to their communities using various forms of two-way radio. Our members' expertise with a variety of radio systems is one of the most important reasons our "customers" value our services.

Most community events depend heavily on efficient and effective communications, and on our ability to deliver the communication service that is most appropriate to the task.

In this section, we will consider the appropriate uses, advantages, and disadvantages of several types of communications services.

Telephone

Both fixed and wireless (cellular or PCS) telephones are most useful for communications between the event organizer's staff and off-site locations. For example, telephone can be used to order supplies and arrange for their delivery, remind volunteers of their schedule, report the results of athletic events to the news media, and so forth.

Telephones also are essential to notify the appropriate authorities if there is an emergency at the event site, especially if law enforcement and emergency medical personnel are not present for the event.

Wireless telephones are sometimes used by event staff for communications during the event. If there are more than three or four staff members present, especially if they are scattered over a large site, this is an unwieldy arrangement. An accurate list of phone numbers must be carried by every staff member, and when information or assistance is needed, a call must be placed. The called number may be busy or the wireless service may be temporarily unavailable (since a number of phones may be accessing the same cellular tower). Furthermore, even though telephone rates have fallen over the years, each call involves a charge to both the caller and the called party, and those charges can add up to a significant expense.

Citizens Band (CB) Radios

REACT originally was devoted entirely to the use of CB radio, and many teams still use this system. Both handheld and base/mobile radios are available and comparatively inexpensive. For some events, CB is a reasonable choice for a two-way radio system.

CB radios operate in the 11-meter (27 MHz) band in AM mode only. The band is subject to a great deal of natural interference, and the AM mode is inherently "noisy." As a

result, the effective operating range for handhelds is less than 1/4 mile; even mobile or base radios rarely can be used reliably over a range of more than half a mile. However, CB radios can be used indoors with reasonably good effectiveness, especially in large steel and concrete structures that shut out interference from the outside.

VHF and UHF Radios

Most *REACT* teams have adopted one of the several services under FCC regulations for VHF or UHF frequency bands using FM mode. The services and their particular characteristics include:

MURS (Multi-Use Radio Service) – This is a relatively new service established by the FCC; it operates in the VHF band (140 MHz) in FM. A single license can be used by all members of an organization, such as a *REACT* team. The band should be reasonably free of interference, and modest power should be sufficient for an operating range of 2 to 5 miles. We have had little experience with this particular service, but it should be similar to the VHF commercial service in the same frequency band.

GMRS (General Mobile Radio Service) – This service operates in the UHF-low band at 462/467 MHz. Handheld, mobile, and base radios are readily available in a wide variety of models; some models are essentially the same as UHF Amateur radios. Range for handheld under good conditions of terrain and atmosphere is about 1 mile; for mobile and base radios, range can be 2 to 5 miles. More importantly, a repeater can be used, extending the useful range for handhelds and mobiles up to 10 miles or more. The major disadvantage to GMRS is the limited number of channels (8 simplex shared with 8 duplex, plus 7 low-power, “portable”-only interstitial channels) and the requirement that each user have an individual license; this requirement imposes a considerable financial burden on an organization such as a *REACT* team.

FRS (Family Radio Service) – An unlicensed low-power portable-only service operating on the same frequencies as the GMRS interstitial channels. Range under good conditions is about 1/2 mile. Handhelds are readily available at costs comparable to CB radios. Interference to and from GMRS radios is a problem.

Commercial bands – There are several frequency bands in both VHF and UHF that are available to commercial licensees, generally requiring frequency coordination to reduce channel congestion in a given area. The licenses are relatively inexpensive and cover all members of the licensed organization. Operating characteristics are essentially the same as stated above for MURS in the VHF band and for GMRS and FRS in the UHF band, but allowable power output for commercial-band radios usually is much higher, and thus much greater range is attainable. Many programmable handheld and mobile radios intended for GMRS use can be programmed for the commercial frequencies as well (and vice versa). In some communities, there are commercially-operated repeaters that may be used (with the

owner's permission, of course!) by other licensees. The FCC usually discounts the license fee for nonprofit organizations such as *REACT* teams.

Amateur Radio

Many *REACT* members are licensed amateur radio operators, and in general amateur radio frequencies and equipment can be used for communications support of community events. The main limitation is that amateur radio cannot be used in support of any commercial enterprise. If the event is sponsored by a commercial entity, even though some charity is the beneficiary, the use of amateur radio may be in a "gray area"; at a minimum, the sponsors' name should not be used on the air. Amateur radio equipment is available in a wide range of styles, capabilities, features, and prices.

Pagers

Pagers can be used to alert event staff members or to send brief, usually coded, messages. The limited amount of information that can be sent makes pagers impractical for most other event communications purposes.

Packet Radio (Computer Data)

Computer data can be transmitted over the air using a packet radio system on some amateur radio frequencies and certain commercial frequencies. This form of communication can be extremely valuable when a large amount of data, such as the results of various athletic events, needs to be transmitted from one site or several sites to a central location.

The system requires both a radio and a computer with a packet-forming program at each location. The computer program codes the data (generally text) into *packets*, strings of text of a pre-determined length with additional codes to identify the source and destination. The packets are then transmitted by the radio to a receiver, transferred to another computer, and decoded and displayed.

The operating characteristics of the packet system depend mainly on the type of radio used. There are various packet radio programs, designed for different computers and with different features.

Setting up an effective packet radio system requires some expertise, and if amateur radio is used, a licensed amateur operator must be in control of the radios used to transmit messages. However, the usefulness of this system for some community events is so great that many *REACT* teams should consider developing the necessary equipment and expertise.

Radio Networks

The type of radio network required depends on the nature of the event and its scale, and on the number and expertise of the people using the network.

An “open” network is one in which all users are free to communicate with one another directly at any time. A “controlled” network is one in which there is a central control operator, usually at a base station, to whom all communications are directed; the control operator is the only person allowed to transmit “broadcast” messages to everyone.

A single-channel open network is appropriate if not more than four or five radios are being used with fairly frequent messages, or as many as ten or twelve if the traffic is light or sporadic. If there are more than half a dozen radios in use, especially if the amount of traffic is fairly heavy, a controlled network is more effective. In some cases, a controlled network is preferable even for a small number of users and light traffic, if the users are scattered over a large area or if there is a reasonable likelihood that some traffic will involve an emergency. Usually the control operator has immediate access to a telephone or other means of obtaining emergency assistance.

A multi-channel network should be used if there are some functions of the event that will involve a great deal of traffic or that require immediate access without interference. When several channels are being used, some may operate as open networks while others operate as controlled networks, but the control operator should be able to monitor all of the channels to keep informed of what is going on.

Volunteer Management

REACT members are, by definition, volunteers, but they are rarely the only volunteers involved in conducting a community event. Almost always, the event organizer requires and recruits a number of volunteers to carry out various tasks. The basic principles of volunteer management in this section apply to both *REACT* and non-*REACT* volunteers.

Coordination

There must always be someone specifically responsible for recruiting, scheduling, assigning, training, and supervising the volunteers involved in a community event.

My team uses an Event Coordinator (EC) for each community event the team works. Any member may volunteer to be an EC; the assignment is made by the Vice President for Community Events. Whenever possible, the same person serves as EC for the same event each year, so that he or she becomes familiar with the event organizer's staff and other key volunteers.

The EC is responsible for all aspects of our team's participation in an event, and usually is involved in planning the event itself. The EC works with the organizer's staff to determine what services are needed, how many people will be needed, how they will be trained and supervised, and all the other details. The EC then is responsible for recruiting our team's members to work the event, scheduling them, setting up necessary equipment such as a base station, arranging to borrow radios if that is needed, instructing members as to their duties and the "ground rules," and ensuring that amenities such as food and beverages are provided.

In the following discussion, I will assume that the *REACT* team is represented by an Event Coordinator or someone with similar responsibility.

Planning

The EC should be involved in planning as early as possible; for a large-scale event, that may mean a full year before the event takes place. The EC should provide input to the event organizer concerning all of the matters discussed in this handbook: parking and traffic control, crowd management, communications, and volunteer management (the latter specifically with regard to *REACT* volunteers).

Scheduling

The EC, in consultation with the event organizer, determines the number of *REACT* volunteers that will be needed and, for a large-scale event, the number of non-*REACT*

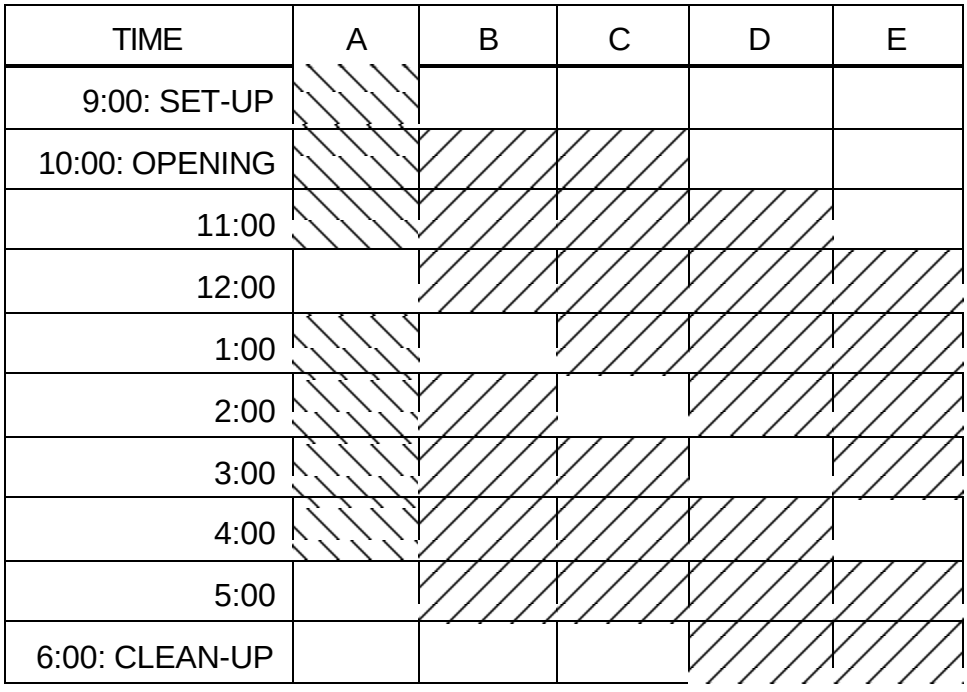
volunteers that are needed to assist with the specific functions assigned to *REACT*.

The minimum number of people needed is based on the number of access points that must be controlled, the number of traffic control personnel needed, and the number of crowd management personnel needed, all of which depend on the nature of the event and the event site. To this minimum number must be added one or more network control operators, if required. Finally, it is important to add one extra person for every five people with specific assignments; the extra person, or "rover," then can serve as a backup and relief volunteer.

Volunteers ordinarily should be scheduled in shifts of reasonable length, depending on the nature of the tasks they are assigned. The scheduling should allow for every volunteer to have a minimum of a 15-minute rest break every two hours, and at least a 30-minute meal break after four hours. Either a "rover" should relieve volunteers for their breaks, or a shift change should take place and a different set of volunteers should take over.

The following chart illustrates the schedule for a relatively small event that lasts from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Community Event Planning
Scheduling Volunteers



Four people are needed to staff access points during the day (except that only three are needed during the first hour when the crowd is expected to be minimal). For this small a crew, no control operator is needed. Five volunteers are scheduled, with one of them arriving early

to help the organizers set up; two more arrive when the event begins; one arrives at 11 a.m., and one arrives at noon just in time to relieve the first volunteer. The relief person moves from post to post over the next four hours so that no one is required to remain at his or her post for more than four hours. In this case, we assume that the volunteers are able to sit down at their posts; otherwise, short breaks every two hours would be necessary. When the event ends, two of the volunteers remain to help clean up. (Note that this schedule would work equally well if a different shift of volunteers arrived, one each hour beginning at 1 p.m.)

Non-*REACT* Volunteers

For many large-scale events, the *REACT* team may not have enough members to handle all of the tasks required. Whenever feasible, members of adjacent teams may be called upon to assist (and should do so under the direction of the host team's EC). When even that isn't enough, non-*REACT* volunteers may be needed.

My team generally requires the event organizer to recruit and schedule non-*REACT* volunteers for such assignments as access control and off-street traffic control. For more sensitive assignments such as traffic control on a public street, or crowd management, we prefer to recruit our own non-member volunteers when possible.

In either case, if *REACT* is responsible for specific functions, the team's EC should be responsible for training and supervising non-member volunteers. The training usually will be somewhat more extensive than it would be for *REACT* members, who typically are already trained and experienced in community-event services. Unfortunately, in most cases there is very little time or opportunity to train the non-member volunteers beyond showing them how to operate a radio and giving them general instructions about their duties.

Whenever a large number of non-*REACT* members are needed, my team prefers to use its own members mainly to supervise the non-members. For example, for one community event that requires some 75 or 80 volunteers for crowd management, the non-member volunteers are divided into five or six groups; a *REACT* member is then assigned as a captain to supervise each group. One or two additional *REACT* members operate as "rovers," providing additional supervision and relief for breaks.

Volunteer Amenities

When people volunteer to help conduct a community event, they expect and deserve to be treated well; that includes consideration of their personal comfort and well-being.

If at all possible, volunteers who are required to be at a specific post for any length of time should be provided a chair and some protection from the weather, such as an umbrella or other cover if it is likely to rain or is likely to be sunny and hot.

Volunteers who are scheduled to work more than two hours should be provided appropriate beverages; those who are scheduled to work more than four hours should be provided an appropriate meal. If the event involves food vendors, a ticket system is the simplest way to provide these necessities: the volunteers should be given tickets or coupons that can be redeemed at any of the vendors' booths. If food and beverages are to be provided directly by the event organizer, the food should be served at a special location, away from the crowd, and should be reserved for the use of the volunteers.

Event organizers often provide T-shirts, caps, or other items of apparel for volunteers. Since *REACT* members generally are in uniform, these items serve mainly as souvenirs. In some cases, the organizer intends all volunteers to wear a distinctive T-shirt or cap; if this is to be the case, the EC should inform the members not to wear their uniforms.

The forms shown on the following pages are intended
as samples; they may be reproduced and used
as shown, or adapted to your Team's needs.

Community Event Planning Guide

Name of Event:_____

Organizer:_____Contact Person:_____

Date(s) of Event:_____Hours:_____to _____

Location:_____ Open [ ] Closed [ ]

Purpose:_____Goal: $_____

Estimated Number of:	Total	Static	Contin.	Peak
Participants: Adults				
Children				
Vendors				
Performers				
Staff				
Volunteers				
Spectators				
People				
Vehicles				

Parking Facilities: Staff _____ Volunteers_____ Vendors/Performers_____ VIP_____

Participants: Main lot_____ Secondary lot_____ At:_____

Spectators: Main lot_____ Secondary lot_____ At:_____

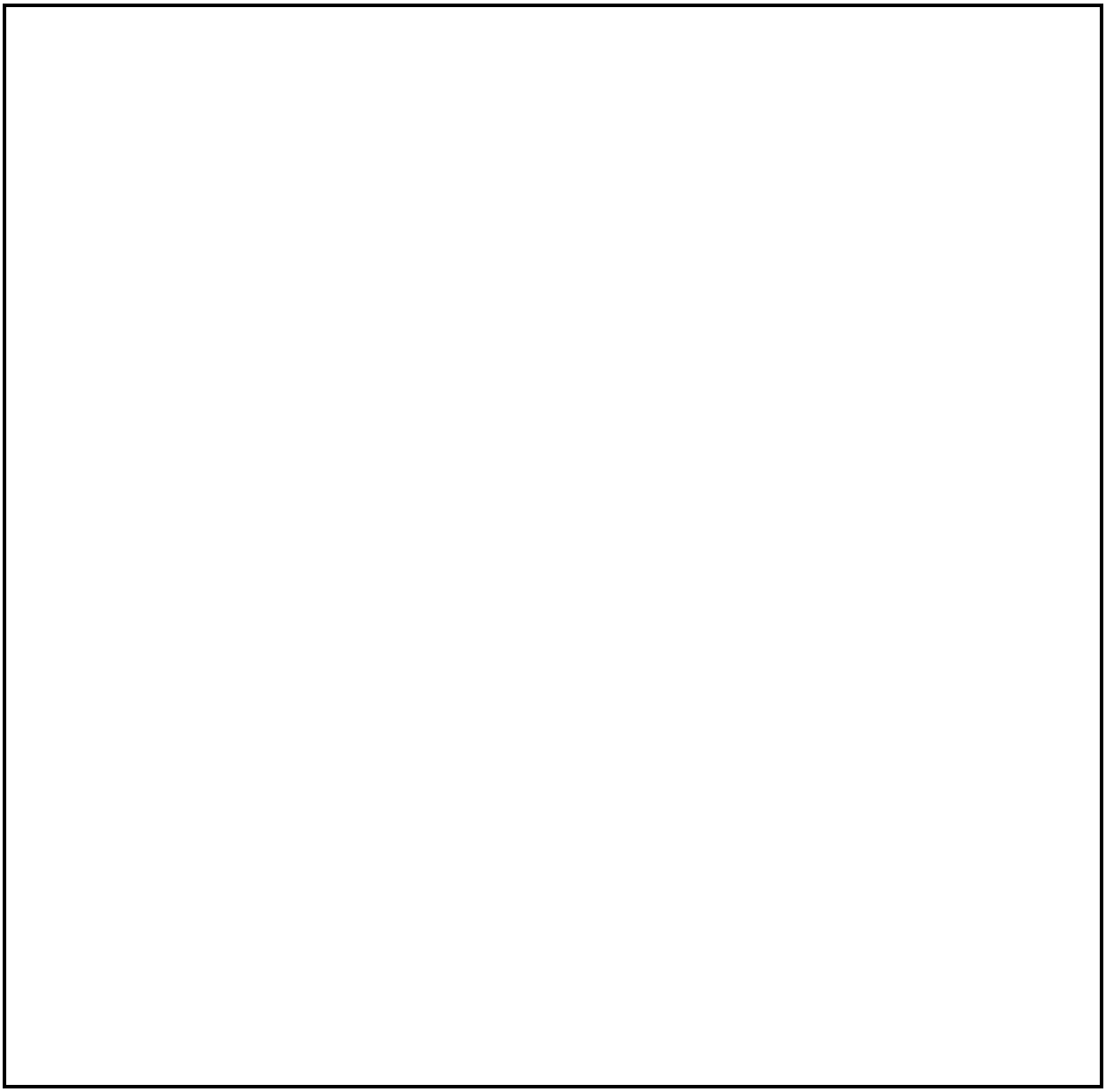
Shuttle Service: [ ] # Buses:_____

Traffic Control: On Street, # Sites_____ Off Street, # Sites_____ Police [ ]

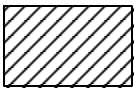
Other Security Required: Medical/EMS, # Sites/Personnel__/__ Vehicle Needed [ ]

Crowd Management, # Sites/Personnel_____/_____ Cash Control/Removal [ ]

Special Security Needs:_____



Event Site



Parking Lot

Barricade

Vendor Booth

Food, Beverage

Ticket Booth

First Aid Station

Rest Room

Restricted

Community Event Volunteer Schedule

Time	Assignments											
	Control		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Rover
6:00												
7:00												
8:00												
9:00												
10:00												
11:00												
Noon												
1:00												
2:00												
3:00												
4:00												
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9:00												