

Building a Booster Group

By John Rutherford



Why It Matters

As theatre educators we often are also responsible for after-school productions. These productions have many layers, some of which are beyond our experience, training, and interest. Teaching theatre and producing a quality theatre production is something that we expect to do and are likely skilled at. There are, however, other important tasks that are important to mounting a production, such as the program, photographs of the cast and crew, fundraising, lobby displays, providing meals for long rehearsals, concessions, and the list goes on and on.

Beyond the added responsibilities associated with the production, it's equally important to promote and advocate on behalf of your program in the school and district. Much of that work can be put into the hands of a parent booster organization. School athletic departments and band/orchestra programs are known for having strong parent booster associations. Any viable theatre program must create a similar parent group in order to keep the program strong and running effectively.

Things to Consider

Your first step is to consider what role you would like the parents associated with your program to assume. The question you should ask yourself is what do you want to manage and what would you like the parents to manage? Make a list of items associated with your production and your program that you probably want to own: likely script selection, casting decisions, design considerations, and the learning opportunities for the students. Then make a list of the aspects that you would like to delegate to parents: perhaps fundraising, concession sales, publicity, and advocacy. Once you have clearly defined these responsibilities, you can begin to plan for how you will want to proceed with setting up a booster's organization or clarifying the roles and responsibilities of a booster group that you may have already established.

Make sure that you meet with the staff person in your building or district responsible for clubs and activities to determine if there are any specific legal requirements, documentation requests or reporting expectations associated with having a booster group. Each district may handle booster groups differently, so it would be wise to ascertain the expectations and responsibilities surrounding your particular district's regulations before you proceed.

Once you have that information you will want to meet with an interested group of current and alumni parents, as well as alumni students. Work together to create a mission statement for the group; in other words, what are the overall guiding principles and plans for this organization, and what is its purpose as it relates to your theatre department?

The mission statement will be your guiding document as you move through the process. A clear understanding of the mission statement will help you begin to articulate the goals of the booster organization and the roles and responsibilities you would like to have accomplished by the group. You will need to establish policies and guidelines on how the organization will be managed. Most importantly, you must decide who will be responsible for which aspects of the mission and what the theatre teacher/director's role is in the organization. You will also need to choose officers who will be empowered to make decisions and delegate tasks. This can be through an election or simply through a voluntary system in which parents sign up for different offices and responsibilities.

Work to build a solid working relationship with the booster organization that creates a sense of community and mutual trust. This time is crucial to your maintaining the working relationship that you have begun to foster. You will need to continue to assert your role and establish boundaries while at the same time learning how to work side by side with the boosters so that your program will continue to grow and expand in the manner in which you would like it to develop.

An important next step would be to have the organization become a 501C3 non-profit organization. There is information available from many sources on how to gain this tax status, including the Internal Revenue Service (<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4220.pdf>) that can help you through the process. With this status you can further your fundraising opportunities and provide for a more systematic and defined booster organization.

Recommended Actions

Getting started

- Create a list of the areas of responsibility you do and do not want to manage.
- Meet with a small group to share your vision and plans.
- Include alumni parents, former parents and non-parents in the group.
- Establish a mission.
- Articulate the goals and responsibilities of the organization
- Set up policies and guidelines for how the organization is managed.
- Consider the election of officers and your role in that process.

Booster responsibilities, some examples

- Mandatory parent meeting (cast & crew associated with production)
- Bi-weekly newsletter (Eblast)
- Parent volunteer form
- Fundraising
- Finances
- Alumni night party and closing night party

Links and Resources

The Educational Theatre Association

www.schooltheatre.org

Theatre Educator Pro online learning center

<http://learn.schooltheatre.org>

Parent Booster USA

<https://parentbooster.org/501c3>

What is the role of a Parent Booster Organization? Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=54&v=3SxSrqF8MzM

How to write "Articles of Incorporation" for a non-profit

<https://form1023.org/how-to-draft-articles-of-incorporation>

Example of a Parent Booster website: Tiger STAGE

<https://www.tigerdrama.com/stage>

About the Author

John W. Rutherford is a theatre educator and director of theatre at W.E. Groves High School, in Birmingham, Alabama. He has been teaching for 28 years and successfully created the Groves Performing Arts Company Booster group in 2004 with the cooperation of several key parents associated with the students in his theatre program.

Mr. Rutherford has received several awards, including: WDIV Outstanding Teacher of the Year, Michigan Interscholastic Forensic Association Theatre Teacher of the Year, ArtServe Michigan's Governor's Award for Arts Educator and has been inducted into the Michigan Educational Theatre Association Hall of Fame and the Michigan Speech Coaches, Inc Hall of Fame. In addition, he has been recognized as a Theatre Coach of the Year, Forensic Coach of the Year and Creative Writing Teacher of the Year. He has presented at several conventions and professional development workshops on various subjects. He most recently he presented his workshop: "The Parent Factor: Friend or Foe" at the 2019 Educational Theatre Association Conference in New York City.

Additional Credits

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