

THE FIRST-EVER JP MUSIC FESTIVAL WAS HELD ON AUGUST 20, 2011.



The one-day festival was put together by a group of residents of **Jamaica Plain** (or JP, as most of us in Boston call it), a neighborhood in **Boston, Massachusetts**.

Our first festival was a tremendous success, with **22 music artists** performing over a six hour period to more than 1,200 attendees. The festival featured artists who all live or work in JP, ranging from Americana to blues, classical to folk, hip-hop to rock, jazz to pop.

With two stages, we kept the music going all day long, rotating back and forth with never a dull moment.

The festival was started when musician Rick Berlin and booking agent Shamus Moynihan realized that both Cambridge and Somerville (two great cities close to Boston) had music festivals, but Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood known for its diverse music community and musicians, did not. It was a very good question...



Gordon Gano joins Rick Berlin and The Nickle & Dime Band on stage at the first-ever JP Music Festival. Photo by Sean Hafferty/5342Studios

During and since our first festival, a lot of people have asked us how we produced such a great festival during such a bad economy. With a very lean budget we put together an amazing day of free music and community. JP is already buzzing about the 2012 festival.

Of course, your city or town or neighborhood might be different, but since JP's music community is now (and has often been) supportive of locale and, of necessity, savvy about getting the most bang for every buck (there is blood in the rock as we found out), we wanted to share our model for a local music festival, so we created this short guide...

15 Steps to Starting a Local Music Festival (during a *bad* economy)

1. Form a small, strong, determined committee who want to see local music get the attention and respect it deserves. The JP Music Festival was organized by **Rick Berlin**, the acclaimed songwriter and musician, Randace Moore, Executive Director of **JP Centre/South Main Streets** a "shop local" organizer, and Shamus Moynihan, local promoter and booking agent, including for **The Midway Café**, the live music venue which has presented local

and national acts since 1987. Other key members included **Justin McCarthy** (graphic design), **Charles McEnerney** (marketing), **David "Ferris" Mueller** (finance), and Margie Nicoll (stage design).

Choose people you know you can rely on to do what they say they'll do. People who are talented in a specific area that you know will be essential to having the event work. There were no "egos" in our group. As Ferris

said, "It's amazing what you can accomplish when nobody cares about taking the credit."

We met every week for nearly a year. The constancy and regularity of these meetings proved inspirational, constructive, and kept our eyes on the prize. They were also great fun! We aimed high, but not out of reach: keep your vision do-able.

2. Become a non-profit. It takes a bit of paperwork and

time, but ultimately will help you with donations, sponsorships, and fund-raising. Here are some **tips on how to start a non-profit**.

3. Organize small fund raisers leading up to the big day. They need to be often; ours were about one per month. They need not be overly ambitious, but creative and fun. It's helpful for each fund-raiser to have an emphasis on local music. We held one at **Video Underground**

where we charged \$5 and we all watched JP-made movies at the store, sold food and drinks, met new musicians, and received donations. At each of these we asked all participants (including ourselves) to pay the door fee.

Ask local retailers and merchants to donate small items that can be used at fund-raisers. We held silent auctions and raffles at **Doyle's Café** and **James's Gate** and raised over \$2,000 each time.

4. Create some buzz. We modeled our squirrel logo (right) on a mysterious, white squirrel that some have seen near Jamaica Pond. We made stickers and got them up all over town. For five months people were asking, "what's the hipster squirrel all about?"

5. Organize regular events at local music venues. We held events at The Midway Café where we organized tribute nights: everyone had to cover songs by Neil Young and Bob Dylan. These regular events also kept the festival fresh in everyone's mind.



Photos by Adam Wells

6. Organize a Kickstarter campaign. We raised \$1,500 and rewards included a custom song from Rick, Shamus' homemade chili, etc. We also let people donate via PayPal to give directly.

7. Ask a local music retailer to donate back line drums and amps for use during the festival in exchange for a prime sponsorship of the festival. This alleviates the need for confusing and time consuming change-overs as well as chewing up musicians personal gear. We had a safe

house – a volunteer-staffed truck – where guitars could be stashed when artists weren't performing.

8. Keep the production costs low. We paid \$6,000 to rent the stages and sound equipment (and they were also one of our sponsors). The sound crew donated their time. Other fixed costs included electric generator (\$900), Porta-Johns (\$500 for three), police detail (\$800), tents and tables (\$600), bike racks (\$150), backstage food (\$250), posters and banners (\$1,200), permits (\$200), city inspectors (\$500), insurance (\$500), and on site electrician (\$400).

We also spent \$3,000 on items to help manage and market our fund raisers. The whole festival's budget was under \$15,000.

9. Ask musicians and performers to play for free to help get the festival off the ground. We



began as labor of love, not profit. JP has a rich music landscape to choose from. We had more than 100 submissions from musicians who live and work here. We were also lucky to have **Gordon Gano** of **The Violent Femmes**, whose sister lives in JP, to sit in on several songs, which added to the excitement.

Be very specific with the artists about what is expected in terms of set length, when and where they show up, and with what gear. Ask them to promote the event. Be in clear and constant communication. Your stage managers will need their cell phone numbers for the point person in each band in case of emergency.

You will also need the performers to check in one hour ahead of their slot time so you know that they're there and can be located.

Have them check in once they arrive. Put clocks on stage so that each act knows precisely when their time is up. Overlaps can hurt subsequent performers, so strict adherence to set times is essential. What really helped make this happen in our 'hood was keeping it local. With every act having a local angle, it brought a greater sense of pride of community. We were all in this together.

We designed a show that had a lot of bands and a lot of genres, gender and ethnic variety, but we kept the sets short (15-20 minutes at most) so that we could fit in more acts and attract a broader crowd. We did have two stages so that we could alternate between acts quickly. While one band was playing the next band was setting up

10. Find an outdoor space that you can utilize for free. We obtained a permit from the City of Boston to hold the JP Music Festival near **Jamaica Pond**, a beloved (and famous) park designed by **Frederick Law Olmsted**. The Parks Department was a great help and we left the park cleaner than when we arrived.

Choose a location that excites the crowd and the bands. You'll also need a plan in case of rain. Either a secure rain date or an indoor location that can work.



Understand all the restrictions as far as your city or town is concerned. It's a learning curve, but worth the trouble. One misstep and the game's over. If you earn a good reputation the first time it will be that much easier next year.

Note: Dealing with multiple and essential permits can be a pain in the ass. Seek out any city representative contacts you might know personally. Have them on board (or on your board). They get fired up about what you're doing and want to help advise and smooth the complicated path

to realizing those permits.

11. Seek sponsor dollars from local restaurants, cafes, retailers, education outlets, etc. We raised more than \$8,000 from 15 sponsors! Many more are asking about how to get involved for our next festival.

12. Do strategic, inexpensive marketing. Without a marketing budget, the JP Music Festival focused on using social media to the maximum (mainly Twitter and Facebook) along with media outreach to the **Boston Globe**, local community newspapers and web sites like **Bostonist**, **JP Gazette**, **Patch**, **Universal Hub**, local music blogs (some of whom generously donated advertising space), including **Boston Band Crush**, **Bradley's Almanac**, **Dyson Sound**, **Ryan's Smashing Life**, and **MusicSavage**. Word of mouth got the word out across Boston. We also hung flyers around town (see attached) and made a **75 minute mix-tape** to hear before the festival.

13. Keep it free. We held the JP Music Festival in a big open field where people could come and sit, stand, or dance and was free for all to attend. We had every age group at the event and a wide diversity of attendees. Have games and stuff for kids to do. We had 2 volunteers from The Boy's and Girl's Club setting up games and activities all day.

14. Have food available on-site for sale. We brought a local food truck to feed the satisfied masses. We also had t-shirts and posters for sale and gave shirts for free



to our volunteers, so the secret squirrel was everywhere!

15. Document the event. We had videographers, photographers, reviewers, and bloggers on hand to document the event. Naturally, you can find **video** and **photography** from our event online...

We hope these ideas help you create an amazing local music festival in *your* corner of the universe. Please let us know how your event goes at info@jpmusicfestival.com or via [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#)!

The Nickel
Dime Band
with
Rick Berlin

The
Angelic Slugs
Coyote Kolb

Jenny
Lashley

Fallchassee

Fimminandi

The Old Edison

Chris North
Dream Quartet

H. Marie Fox
Friends

Opposite
People

Sweatshop

JPM
MUSIC
FEST

Mr. Sister

The Delta
Swingers

Delta Saloway

Brief Awakening

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The Needy
Visions

The
Model Planes

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James Merenda
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Molly Pope
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