

# Pumpkinfest Sustainability Plan

This comprehensive plan outlines the strategic steps necessary to secure the long-term viability of Port Elgin Pumpkinfest. By strengthening our leadership, optimizing our budget, re-evaluating revenue streams, and securing our perimeter, we ensure that this beloved autumn tradition continues to thrive for decades to come.

## 1. Recruitment of Directors and Committee Chairs

Securing passionate and qualified leadership is the cornerstone of a sustainable festival. We need individuals who not only love Pumpkinfest but bring specific skills to the table.

### Strategic Recruitment Goals:

- **Targeted Outreach:** Move beyond general calls for volunteers. We will actively approach local business leaders, event management professionals, and community influencers who have demonstrated logistical or financial expertise.
- **Role Clarity:** Develop clear, one-page job descriptions for every Director and Chair position. These will outline time commitments (e.g., 5 hours/month pre-season, full availability festival weekend) and specific deliverables, reducing the fear of the unknown for potential candidates.
- **Succession Planning:** Implement a "Vice-Chair" system where incoming leaders shadow current Chairs for one year. This ensures institutional memory is preserved and burnout is reduced.

### Value Proposition for Leaders:

- Highlight the professional development opportunities: "Manage a \$X budget" or "Lead a team of 50 volunteers."
- Emphasize the community impact: "Be the architect behind the region's largest tourist attraction."

## 2. Optimizing Spending: "Sharpening Our Pencils"

To maintain our high-quality programming—from the giant vegetable weigh-offs to the classic car show—we must ensure every dollar works harder.

### Expense Reduction Strategies:

- **Vendor Audits:** Conduct a line-by-line review of all vendor contracts from the last three years. We will issue RFPs (Request for Proposals) for major services like sanitation, tents, and audio-visual equipment to ensure competitive pricing.
- **Sponsorship In-Kind:** Shift focus from purely cash sponsorships to value-in-kind partnerships. For example, trading sponsorship recognition for free equipment rentals, printing services, or volunteer catering.
- **Zero-Based Budgeting:** Committees will start their budget planning from zero rather than using last year's figures as a baseline. Every expense must be justified anew based on current needs and ROI.

#### **Resource Allocation:**

- Consolidate purchasing across committees (e.g., bulk ordering t-shirts and signage) to leverage volume discounts.
- Eliminate low-impact activities that have high overhead but low attendee engagement scores.

### **3. Adjusting Admission Prices**

While Pumpkinfest remains one of the best value events in Ontario, rising operational costs necessitate a review of our pricing structure to ensure financial health.

#### **Strategic Pricing Adjustment:**

- **Market Analysis:** Comparative data shows similar large-scale regional festivals charge 15-20% more than our current rates. A moderate increase is justifiable given the breadth of entertainment provided (live music, midway, weigh-off access).
- **Tiered Pricing Model:** Continue the "Early Bird" ticket option at the old price to reward early commitment, while applying the price increase primarily to "Day-Of" gate sales. This encourages pre-sales and improves cash flow.
- **Family Value:** Maintain the "Family Pass" at a deeply discounted rate to ensure affordability for our core demographic, while slightly increasing individual adult admission.

#### **Communication Plan:**

- Frame the increase positively: "investing in local entertainment" and "sustaining the festival for future generations."
- Transparency is key. We will clearly communicate that the adjustment covers increased security, insurance, and infrastructure costs.

### **4. Improving Venue Security**

Protecting our revenue stream means ensuring that every person inside the grounds has contributed to the festival's success by purchasing a ticket.

#### **Perimeter and Entry Control:**

- **Fencing Upgrades:** monitor and evaluate low-barrier fencing in vulnerable "blind spots" (e.g., near wooded areas or rear parking lots).
- **Choke Point Elimination:** Conduct a site walk-through to identify and close informal shortcuts often used by locals. Limit the number of "Official Entrances" to ensure staffing is concentrated and effective.

#### **Operational Enhancements:**

- **Volunteer Training:** Empower gate volunteers with specific training on spotting unauthorized entry and handling difficult interactions. Equip them with radios for immediate backup from professional security.
- **Wristband Policy:** Enforce a strict "No Wristband, No Entry" policy. Roaming "Ambassadors" will spot-check attendees inside the grounds. Anyone without a wristband will be escorted to the ticket booth to purchase one.

- **Visual Deterrents:** Increase signage along the perimeter stating "Ticketed Area Only" and position uniformed security personnel at high-risk breach points during peak hours.

## 5. Staffing Sustainability and Financial Stability

- The honorariums for the Coordinator and Assistant are included in the budget every year. We understand that these funds must be raised annually to sustain operations. The town investment is essential to support our transition year in 2026 to a long-term sustainable plan for 2027, when the current Coordinator will step down after spending a year mentoring and training the new full-time Executive Director.

## 6. Risk management considerations

- **Weather** - We have been extremely fortunate with the weather for three consecutive years. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that this luck will continue into a fourth year, and weather remains one of our greatest uncontrollable risks.
- The 2026 board will revisit and update both our **Risk Management** document and our **Emergency Plan**.