



International Literary Event Organisation

– Best Practice Guidelines

A Report Produced by PEN International in Cooperation with the
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Introduction – PEN’s International Festivals

Established in 1921, PEN International is the leading worldwide community of writers, with centres in over 100 countries. Since 2007 we have been working with PEN centres around the world to create an international network of Free the Word! literary events and festivals, with festivals taking place in Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Spain, Turkey, Georgia, Jamaica, Mexico, Colombia, South Africa and Morocco and the UK. Free the Word! celebrates the best in contemporary writing from around the world; each festival is rooted in its local culture but is international in outlook. The aims of Free the Word! are:

- To bring writers together to share and explore ideas and experiences across cultures
- To open conversations about how literature can transform, influence and excite
- To contribute to the flow of literature around the world, through translation and promotion of writing
- To introduce readers to established and emerging voices
- To provide space for debate and dialogue between readers and writers



Best Practice Guidelines

In 2011 we sought to conduct a major review of our Free the Word! organisational strategy with the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. This involved analyzing the success of our literary programmes to date and assessing how, particularly in times of budgetary constraints, we can improve how we work with our PEN Centres and other partner organizations to ensure that Free the Word! continues to represent the best in contemporary world literature.

In addition to the reports on the individual festivals, PEN International also created festival organisation guidelines and a publicity campaign planning checklist. This report contains both of these documents, as well as identifying some general principles which we feel would be beneficial to PEN Centres and other organisation organising international literary events.

All of these documents were designed to be adaptable to the given context in which the festival was being organised, and to be made available in the three official working languages of PEN International (English, Spanish and French).

General Principles in Organising International Literary Events

From our ongoing evaluation of the success of Free the Word! Festivals in London, Austria, Turkey and elsewhere we have drawn together a list of general guidelines which may help inform PEN Centres and other organisations interested in organising international literary festivals.

- **Partnering with other major literary festivals and events**

PEN Centres have benefited enormously from organising literary events parallel to, or in partnership with, other major international literary festivals from the Istanbul Book Fair, to the Cultural Olympiad's Poetry Parnassus. Such partnerships have been particularly beneficial in addressing budgetary and logistical constraints.

- **Collaboration between PEN International and Centres**

In all three festivals evaluated in 2011- Free the Word! Austria, Turkey and London - it was reported that strong collaboration between the host Centre, PEN International and other PEN Centres greatly assisted in the organisation of the festival.

Working in collaboration with other PEN Centres can improve access to writers and other participants through PEN's network of members worldwide. Collaboration with PEN International also allows for effective sharing of both expertise and materials. Collaboration between different PEN Centres has been successful both at an international level and regionally, through our PEN regional networks.

- **Use of Best Practice Guidelines to Outline Preparations Timeline**

Outlining from the outset a clear preparation timeline for the festival is essential to effective preparation. PEN's Guide to festival organisation found here can be used to prepare a timeline for organising budgetary issues, author invitations and other practical issues such as booking venues, arranging travel and accommodation, beginning publicity campaigns and organising volunteers.

- **Use of PEN International's Publicity Planning checklist**

Publicity planning should be carried out from the outset in tandem with festival organisation planning. PEN's publicity planning checklist is designed to help organisers begin to think about the variety of important issues in this area, and draw up an effective publicity planning timeline.

- **Develop clear objectives and goals for the festival in advance of preparation.**

Previous Free the Word! festivals have benefitted hugely from drafting clearly their goals and objectives before continuing with other organisation. Identifying clearly such objectives also helps with subsequent evaluation and future planning.

- Use of 'Free the Word!' branding as a powerful promotion tool**

Over a number of years Free the Word! festivals have developed a strong reputation for excellence in addressing issues related to defending freedom of expression and promoting literature. Pen Centres are encouraged to use the Free the Word! branding as a way of linking their own festivals to these global debates and benefitting from PEN International's reputation in this field.
- International festivals rooted in local cultures**

Free the Word! festivals have always sought to be local in character, international in outlook. A perfect example of this was the Haiti Free the Word festival, presented as a tribute to murdered Haitian writer and activist Jacques Stephen Alexis. PEN Haiti used the case of Alexis as a point of departure from which to explore wider freedom of expression issues, both in Haiti and internationally. Using such local anchors as ways to begin to address international issues has proved highly successful in the past, and should be encouraged in organising any similar events.
- Diversity of writers**

Organisers are encouraged to always try to bring together new and emerging talents with established and prominent writers. During London Free the Word! it was found that, by including unpublished writers from our educational outreach programmes, PEN was able to bring together writers at different stages of their careers, offering inspiration to the writers of the future. By programming relatively unknown writers alongside better-known we were able to achieve good audiences and introduce readers to writers whose work would not otherwise have been encountered.
- Promoting literature/ Defending freedom of expression**

International festivals should not overly differentiate between the goals of promoting literature and defending freedom of expression. Many of our festivals to date have benefitted from an integrated approach, which have addressed diverse topics under the same umbrella.
- "Self-reflective" festivals**

International literary festivals should serve as the ideal opportunity to learn more and reflect on current challenges in organising such events. London Free the Word! used the festival to address the issue of Cultural Boycotting which had affected the events preparation during the closing session Terms of Engagement. During Poetry Parnassus festival there will be a focus on how expectations that international writers will act as spokespeople for their nations during the Am Not my Country session. PEN has found

that such self-reflective sessions can have an enormously beneficial effect for both organisers and audiences and should be strongly encouraged.

- **Translation issues**

Translation costs remain a significant challenge in organising international literary events. Organisers may wish to consider partnering with external organisation or partnering with other PEN Centres to address these issues.

- **Final evaluation**

Conducting a thorough final evaluation of the success of the festival in addressing its goals and objective is vital, and allows organisers to learn from the experience and deliver even better results in future years.

Guide to Festival Organisation

1. Budgets

1.i Maintaining Records

- Set up a budget for the festival at the start of any fundraising. Create a spreadsheet with as many of the estimated costs of the festival as possible on it, so you have an idea of the financial restraints you are working to.
- As soon as a payment has been made, add it into your spreadsheet so that you can see how much you are spending as you go. This will enable you to keep control of finances all the time.
- If you are getting any kind of funding from outside organisations, they will require you to keep strict accounts such as these for their records.

TIMELINE: From the outset, until all invoices are paid and all incoming money is in.

1.ii Keeping Receipts

- All receipts for all payments (including cash transactions) made for the festival will need to be kept for auditing purposes and for funders.

TIMELINE: From the outset, until all payments are made.

1.iii Invoices

- Invoices should be paid as quickly as possible for any festival costs as this will help to keep you on track in terms of spending.
- Writers should be encouraged to submit invoices for their payments well before the events (around one month beforehand at the latest). However, it is usually the case that writers do not do this, so it is best to type up two copies of an invoice for each writer, one for them to keep and one for them to sign which the organisers will keep as their proof of payment. Writers should be paid upon arrival at the festival if in cash or by cheque or, if by bank transfer, to be sent over to arrive by the start of the festival.
- If you have to invoice venues etc for payment, this needs to be done as promptly as possible after the festival to ensure that the festival accounts are finished as soon as possible.

TIMELINE: From the outset, until all invoices (incoming and outgoing) have been dealt with.

2. Venue

2.i Booking Venues

- All venues should be booked around six months in advance of the festival, when funding is confirmed.

TIMELINE: Six months in advance.

2.ii Ticket Office Agreement

- An agreement with the ticket office for the venue(s) should be put in place about four months in advance. It should include the percentages of the takings that the organiser and the venue each take; the date that tickets will be on sale (two months in advance of

- the festival); if possible, a date for receiving ticket sale figures and any payments to be made to the organiser.
- Remember that the ticket office will also need a brief outline of each event in order to give information to anyone who wants to purchase tickets.

TIMELINE: Four months in advance. The briefings for the ticket office **MUST** be done by the date that tickets go on sale, two months in advance of the festival.

2.iii Technical Requirements of Authors

- All authors should let you know on their performance agreements if they have any technical requirements for their readings etc. (see below).

TIMELINE: This information should be in two months before the start of the festival at the latest, in order to be able to alert the venue to getting in any equipment they may need

2.iv Staging of Events

- The way that the stage is set up for each event and what equipment will be needed should be decided three months in advance. This is both to alert the venue as to what equipment may be needed and to be able to brief the chair and authors for each event. For example, there may be a combination of readings (at a lectern) and a discussion (all seated), so you may need to make sure that the venue knows you will need all of this equipment and have it laid out well before each event on the day to check that there is enough room for the authors to walk to the lectern from their seats etc.
- You may also need/want to think about the lighting needs and give the venue a plan for this if any special lighting is needed.
- All of this staging means you will need to confirm with the venue if they have any technicians to take care of this, as well as the audio technician for microphones etc. You should also make sure at this stage that you are able to record events (audio recording and video recording) and where this equipment can be placed during the actual event.

TIMELINE: This information will be needed by the venue as soon as you can provide it, in order to make sure that they have enough time to get in any equipment etc. that is needed (or that you have enough time to order it). Discuss these technical needs three months in advance and confirm with the venue two months in advance.

2.v 'Green Room' Space for Authors

- Make sure that you have agreed with the venue to provide a secure private space for the authors to relax in . a green roomq You will also need to make sure you know who is providing refreshments for the green room (if it is the venue or if you will need to find someone to go shopping before each event to do this).
- It is a good idea to make sure you have also appointed someone to tidy up the green room after each event.

TIMELINE: The green room space needs to be allocated at the same time as you make your arrangement with the venue, three months in advance. You need to organise who is providing refreshments (you or the venue) a month or two beforehand and, if it is you, you should appoint someone to do this, with enough cash to buy refreshments, a couple of weeks before the start of

the festival. Make sure someone is also appointed to tidy up the green room a week or so before the start of the festival.

2.vi Staff Needs at Venues

- If you are going to have staff and volunteers at the festival, there should be a private room where they can leave their belongings etc.
- Also, it is a good idea to talk to staff who are going to be working at the events to give them some background to the festival and to your PEN centre in case they are asked any questions.

TIMELINE: Organise the staff room at the same time as the green room so that you can provide maps or give a tour on where things are to the staff before the festival. You should organise a staff talk if possible a week or two before the festival starts.

3. Authors

3.i Invitations

- All invitations should have been sent six months in advance. If there are any cancellations, replacements need to be organised as soon as possible.

TIMELINE: as soon as possible.

3.ii Fees

- These should be agreed when writers first accept the invitation.
- You will need to ask the writers how they want payment.
- If it is by bank transfer, you will need them to send you their bank transfer details including the sort code, bank account number and name of bank, name the account is in, BIC and IBAN numbers (and Swift code).
- If it is a cash payment they want, you will need to get all the cash ready to give to them upon arrival.
- Any payments that are given to authors (by cheque or cash) should be signed for by them so that you have a copy for your accounting records.

TIMELINE: Agree all fees at the outset. You will need to get in all the authors preferred methods of payment a month before the festival, to give yourself time to organise all the methods of payment. If you are giving authors their payments at the festival, you need to do this as soon as they arrive . it creates goodwill and the authors then feel very valued.

3.iii Travel

- All international travel needs to be booked when funding is confirmed, as early as possible in order to get the best fares.
- You will need to arrange travel for the writers from the airport to the hotel. This needs to be done two months in advance so that you can tell the writers on their schedules who will be meeting them.
- For local writers, if you are booking any travel for them, this also needs to be finalised well in advance.

- You should put into place at least a month before the festival your arrangements for transport from the authors' hotel to the venue so that you are able to put this information on the writers' schedules.

TIMELINE: All bookings (international and within the country) for transporting authors to the festival should be booked when authors confirm, ideally around five months in advance. The arrangements for getting authors from the hotel to the venue should be done around two months before the festival (two weeks before at the very latest).

3.iv Hotel

- All hotel accommodation for all the writers needs to be booked when funding is confirmed and writers have accepted.
- Welcome packs for the authors need to be organised with a festival brochure, some local information on restaurants etc and another copy of their individual schedule.

TIMELINE: Hotel bookings need to be finalised at least a month in advance of the festival. Welcome packs to be ready one week before the start of the festival and should be delivered to the hotel reception the day before authors start to arrive to be collected when they do.

3.v Provision of meals for authors

- You should decide on your provision of meals for authors (subsistence policy) two months in advance so that the individual schedules can include this information.
- If writers are being given vouchers or some system like this for their meals, you need to plan this two months in advance and have the vouchers organised in time to put into each writer's welcome pack.

TIMELINE: Finalise subsistence policy two months in advance. If using vouchers, organise printing of these to be done for two weeks before festival, to insert into welcome packs.

3.vi Translation

- If you are commissioning pieces in translation for the brochure, commission them when you book the writers, with a deadline allowing for editing before the brochure is finalised and sent out
- When making arrangements with writers you should check which authors need interpreters, depending on what language each event will be held in.
- You will then need to book translators and interpreters, and agree their rates of payment in advance so that you keep within budget.
- If you are going to translate in advance any passages that the writers might read during their event, they will need to provide you with these two months in advance so that you can get them finished and edited a month in advance.
- You need to decide how to disseminate any translated material . eg will you photocopy them or project the translations on a screen etc? This needs to be organised.

TIMELINE: Commission any pieces for the brochure when you book the writers, and get in any passages to be translated four months in advance so that those translations can be ready for editing three months before the festival. Finalise translation and interpretation needs for events three months in advance and book translators. Organise photocopying of translations to be ready

one week before the festival. If projecting translations on screen, talk to the venues when booking about this and what technical set-up is needed. You may also want to organise a test session two weeks before the festival in order to make sure everything runs OK.

3.vii Performance Agreement

- Each writer will need a performance agreement. This is the contract setting out what they will do, the date, time and duration of the event, what fee they will be paid, who is paying for the hotel and travel etc.
- It should be stated in the performance agreement that you will only be paying for the authors' international travel, their travel to and from the airport and to and from the venue.
- It should also include the provision of complimentary tickets.
- There should also be a clause that permits recording of the event for your archive purposes or to use on the website.
- The writers will need to send you a biography, photo and their publishers' details.
- Print out two copies for each writer, sign both and send out. They should sign one and send that back to you.

TIMELINE: When booking writers, so that all agreements can be in around two months before the start of the festival.

3.viii Individual Schedules

- Each writer will need an individual schedule done on a day-by-day basis with lots of specific times put in for their travel, their events etc. This needs to be as detailed as possible in order to make sure that they have all the information they need. Include the hotel address, telephone number and the same for the venue, plus contact numbers of two or three people who they can call during the festival if they need to.

TIMELINE: These should go out to each writer about a month before the festival (by email or by post). Also, print out each schedule again to be included in the writers' welcome packs.

4. Leading Up to the Festival

4.i Briefings for Chairs

- You should have all your chairs in place as early as possible, and at least two months in advance for each event.
- Each chair should be sent the books of the authors for their event as soon as they have agreed to participate, so that they can familiarise themselves with the work.
- You should think of possible topics/ questions that you might want to give to the chairs as suggestions for the discussion, although your briefing notes to each chair should make clear that these are suggestions only. You will need to have a phone call with each chair in the first instance, then write the briefing notes to send out to them.

TIMELINE: Start to get all chairs in place four months in advance and send out all the books as soon as they are available. Two months before the festival call all chairs and have a brief chat, then follow up one week later with the briefing notes on suggestions for discussion topics etc.

4.ii Master Schedule

- You should collate all the information you have about all the writers's travel etc, plus all the event timings and any other necessary info, into one master schedule that plans out everything that is going on each day. This document can be handed out to all those involved in the work of running the festival so that everyone knows what should be happening at any time. It is a useful reference guide.

TIMELINE: Get the master schedule done one week before the festival at the latest and hand out a day or two beforehand.

4.iii Contact Lists

- Similarly, collate all the important and relevant phone numbers that are needed (hotel, venue, technical people, taxi firms, staff etc) into one list and print out copies for all those helping at the festival.

TIMELINE: To be done one week before the festival at the latest and handed out a day or two beforehand.

4.iv Volunteer Help

- If you are using volunteers, you should put out a call for them three months in advance.
- Get all your volunteers together for a meeting prior to the festival, appoint a person to be in charge of them and explain what jobs will need to be done.
- Ask which areas they are interested in, which days and times they are available etc and then put together a volunteer schedule of jobs for each day of the festival, making sure that you give volunteers breaks.
- Stress to volunteers that they need to make sure they sign in and out with the person in charge (Volunteer Co-ordinator) and also make sure that they know who else they can approach if they need to ask questions at the festival (for example, other staff members etc).
- Volunteer T-shirts are a good idea to make them stand out from the crowd.
- Arrange a volunteer walk-through the venue well in advance of the first event.
- Arrange for volunteers to get some subsistence and travel money (either given out each day or paid in total after the festival).

TIMELINE: Call for volunteers three months in advance and get them organised two months in advance. Have volunteer meeting a month in advance. Get the volunteer schedule two weeks in advance. Get volunteer T-shirts printed two weeks in advance. Arrange the volunteer walk-through of the venue at least two hours before the first event. Sort out arrangements for volunteer money a week before the festival so that they can be told about when to get payment.

4.v Venue Visits

- You should have initial venue visits when booking venues. You should schedule in another three months in advance to make certain where everything is (green room for writers, staff room, ticket office, comps desk, book stall, PEN stall etc).
- Arrange to take staff to the venue beforehand. If that can't be done, at least make sure that staff get to the venue at least a couple of hours before the first event so that they can have a walk-through.

TIMELINE: Organise venue visits three months in advance. Organise volunteer and staff walk-through times a couple of weeks before the festival.

4.vi Feedback forms

- You should design feedback forms for audience members and think of questions that will be helpful for your future festival work.
- Once the questions are done, design and photocopy the form, making sure that you have enough for each event.
- You may need to allocate volunteers to give these forms to audience members after each event and also to ensure that they get collected back in.

TIMELINE: Get feedback questions ready and form organised by two weeks before the festival. Organise distribution and collection of feedback forms between then and the festival start.

4.vii Complimentary tickets

- You should organise with the venue how many complimentary tickets are available for each event.
- Each author taking part in the festival needs to be offered two complimentary tickets for their own event. This should be put into the performance agreement. You will need to find out if the authors will be making use of their tickets and put those aside for their guests.
- You need to organise with the venue whether you or the ticket office are taking care of the comp tickets. If you are, you need to organise someone to take care of the comp ticket desk for each day of the festival (get someone who can be firm and polite).
- If you are allocating extra comp tickets beyond those for the authors etc, you need to get these invitations out well in advance so that you know how many of the comps will be used. These will also be held at the comp desk for every event.
- You need to set aside a set number of comps for press.

TIMELINE: Agree your comp ticket allocation with the ticket office three months in advance. Also organise with the venue who is taking care of the comp tickets at each event. If you have to, organise a couple of months in advance where your comp desk will be and who is taking care of it. Tell the authors about their comp allocations when booking them and get in their guest names a month in advance. Send out comp invitations and set aside a set number of comps for press two months in advance so you are ready for any requests.

4.viii Launch Party and/or closing reception

- If you are organising a launch party and/or closing reception, you should book the venue and set aside a budget for this three months in advance
- You will need to order the food and drink for this in advance. The order can usually be altered nearer the time depending on the number of people coming to the party, but it is good to give the caterers an indication as early as possible of the sort of size of the order.
- Make a guest list and get that number of invitations printed out.
- Invitations should be sent out around two months before the festival.
- Start and keep a list of responses to the invitations so that you can produce a guest list for the door on the night and also so that you can alter your catering order depending on numbers.
- Appoint someone friendly yet firm to be on the door to deter anyone coming in who has not been invited.

TIMELINE: Book the party venue three months in advance and finalise your budget. Get your initial catering order in at the same time. Get your guest list done three months in advance and your invitations printed two months in advance. Send the invitations out two months before the festival starts and then immediately start and keep an up-to-date list of responses. Print out the guest list for the door as late as possible so that it is as up to date as possible.

4.ix Transporting authors to and from events

- Make sure you put in place an organised method of getting writers to and from the venue.
- If you have to use a lot of taxis, get one person to co-ordinate this and to keep a record of all the journeys booked so that you can match this against the invoice.
- Make sure that the authors know well in advance that you will only take care of their trips to and from the venue and airport etc. and that any others are at their own expense.

TIMELINE: Get the venue transportation organised a month in advance and appoint the person to take care of this a couple of weeks before the festival. It should be stated in the performance agreement that you will only be paying for the authors' international travel, their travel to and from the airport and to and from the venue.

5. Post-Festival

Please refer to the festival guidelines for all the post-festival work that you should take on.

Publicity Campaign Planning - Checklist

- **General publicity campaign planning**
 - What is your publicity budget
 - Staffing
 - Do you need additional support?
 - Marketing, press, design, print, translation, photography

- **Audiences**
 - Who are they? How diverse are they? Where are they? Only the city in which the festival is taking place? Anywhere else? Online, for example?
 - Are there any specific groups that you want to target?

- **Publicity campaign ideas, research and creation**
 - Who could help us reach our audiences?
 - Arts venues: literature, theatres, museums
 - Cultural Institutes and Embassies
 - Other festivals
 - Bookshops
 - Libraries
 - Tourist information
 - Literature organisations
 - Human Rights groups
 - PEN membership
 - Are there any specific events between now and your event that you should have some presence at? I.e. Could you organise for leaflets to be handed out to audiences?
 - How are you going to carry out your publicity campaign?
 - Designer, printer, translation, marketing and press professionals
 - Media buyer or a company who organises advertising for you
 - Print distribution company
 - Student volunteers
 - Schedule of activity

- **Ticketing**
 - What are your ticket targets . in numbers and in money taken? How much do you hope to make from the events?
 - How much are tickets for each event? Will you offer any discounts or promotions?
 - Who is selling the tickets for you? Can they sell online as well as by telephone and in the venue? Can they provide you with regular sales reports?
 - What complimentary tickets will you need?

- **Design and print**
 - Design brief: how your print could look
 - What is the budget?
 - Will you focus your publicity campaign online or through print?
 - Print: What would you like to produce? What quantities will you need?

- **Publicity campaign**
 - Print distribution
 - Print mailings and inserts
 - Advertising
 - Online: your website, PEN International website, Facebook, Twitter
 - Press
 - Venue support and other support ie. Book festivals or other festivals
 - Bookshop partner

- **Publicity evaluation**
 - How do you intend to monitor audience feedback?
 - Ticket office data . how many people came to your event/s
 - Questionnaires
 - Discussion groups
 - Press evaluation
 - Free the Word! host venue feedback
 - Free the Word! staff feedback