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# Summer fairs: a back-to-basics guide



Whether you're a first-timer or in need of a refresher course, here's our guide to the biggest, most complex event in the PTA calendar.

## 1 Why hold a fair?

Before you embark on any big event such as a fair, take a moment to define your objectives.

**Fairs bring the community together:** As well as being fun for the children, fairs are an opportunity for parents to meet, new families to settle in and for those who've drifted away to re-connect.

**Fairs raise money:** You can't hope to enrich the children's education in a meaningful way without an income. Balance the need to top up the PTA's funds with an understanding of supporters' financial circumstances.

**Fairs encourage volunteering:** Watching friends help makes it easier to imagine ourselves doing likewise.

**Fairs enable the PTA to tell its story:** Show visitors the outdoor classroom you funded or school garden you maintain. Set up a PTA stall with photos or a video. Ask the children to comment on what they loved about the things you bought or the experiences they had.

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**Fairs help us reach out:** Whether it's for sponsorship or raffle prizes, fairs are the perfect excuse to contact local businesses and build relationships outside the school gates.

**Fairs raise the profile of your PTA within the school and wider community:** People are more likely to support your organisation if they feel included by its activities and aware of its aims.

- Visit [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk) to learn how to **raise your PTA's profile**.

## 2 Fix the date and time

If you haven't yet set a date, speak to the school as soon as possible. Avoid dates already set for school activities such as exams and sports day, and check for clashes with local events, national holidays and sporting fixtures.

Allow a couple of hours each side for setting up and clearing away. If you plan to serve food, open at a time when visitors will be hungry and remember small children often eat early.

Once the date is set, use every opportunity to publicise it to parents. Having a date to work towards will get the team focused and make it feel real.

## 3 Assemble your team

A summer fair can't happen without people. If possible, appoint a fair sub-committee to leave some committee members free to concentrate on running the PTA and any other fundraisers. Draw up a list of jobs and work out what skills are needed. If there are gaps, put out a call for specific roles – you might be surprised at who offers to help.

### Key roles

**Event lead:** Oversees the whole thing. A good planner, organiser and decision-maker.

**Volunteer coordinator:** Someone well connected within the school community who can drum up volunteers and assign roles.

**School liaison:** A main contact from the school staff who can relay enough detail without overwhelming anyone.

**Logistics:** In charge of following the site plan on the day. May work alongside the school caretaker or facilities manager. Someone with practical experience who can help with shifting and lifting. May help with or conduct the risk assessment.

**Money:** Check your treasurer is available to be in charge of the money and appoint an independent observer to check it's counted and stored correctly on the day.

**Eco officer:** Identifies ways to do better for the environment.

**Entertainment lead:** An organised individual who's happy to book attractions and acts. Should be good on the phone.

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**Food and drink:** Put someone experienced in charge of the barbecue and bar. Appoint a primary contact for external food vendors.

**Raffle/sponsorship coordinator:** Someone well-connected who's not afraid to ask local businesses to give items or money in return for publicity.

**Publicity:** Someone to get the message out and entice people to your event. Task this person with publicising the fair through the PTA's own channels, making sure school communications include a mention and making it known in the local area. May also write press releases.

**Graphic designer:** If you have a design professional on your team, ask them to get started on some simple creative ideas as soon as possible. May produce posters, flyers, social graphics, banners and event signage.

**Announcer:** A confident public speaker who can make everyone laugh. Make sure this person knows what's happening on the day and who they need to mention and thank. If there's no obvious volunteer, book a professional for this role.

**First aiders:** The PTA is legally bound to keep people safe and should make sure it can respond to potential incidents. If no one suitably qualified comes forward, the Red Cross or St John Ambulance may provide first aiders in return for a donation.

**General volunteers:** Once a basic plan is in place, contact all your supporters. Ask for their help clearly and directly and make it easy for them to reply. Offer short slots, so everyone has plenty of time to enjoy the fair. Nearer the date, post on social media, put a sign-up sheet in the playground and ask the class reps to post on WhatsApp groups. Ensure volunteers know when they are needed and where they should report to on the day. Ask them to check if their employer offers match funding.

- Visit [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk) to find out how to **encourage people to sign up**.

## 4 Make an outline plan

Get your team together. With the overall objectives in mind, decide what's essential, what would be nice to have and what you would rather avoid.

**Budget:** A budget provides a starting point and will help you stay on track. Pull together some topline figures based on income and expenditure. Consider the cost if you have to revert to a contingency plan.

**Size:** Specify the ideal number of visitors. If it's your first fair, or the school are concerned about numbers because of Covid, keep to the school community. Otherwise, go all out for a big day anyone can attend.

**Space:** Ask the school what's available both outside and in. Can you access the field and playground? Will the toilets be open or should you hire portable toilets? Can the PTA use the kitchens? Which classrooms might be used as changing rooms, to count and store money or for indoor attractions? Can the fair be held inside if the weather's bad?

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**Theme:** A good starting point for attractions, stalls and games, a theme can be based around a main attraction such as a circus, a national holiday, sporting event or famous book. Or opt for a classic theme, for example the great British seaside or Wild West.

**Equipment:** Does the PTA own a shed full of games and tents or can you borrow them? Has the person who previously lent their marquee now left the school? Make a list of what you've got and the things you need then decide how to best obtain them.

**Main attractions:** Hiring impressive attractions such as inflatables, slides or fairground rides is sure to get people talking about your fair – even outside the school gates. Check the benefits outweigh the costs, and book them early.

**Arena:** Gymnastics displays, school bands, pet shows and the like are fun ways to add value to the fair without high upfront costs. Or put up a stage and host live bands. Decide who to approach and give them one point of contact.

**Food:** PTA-run food stalls can be big moneymakers. Base your offering on the time of day and preferences of your crowd. Sell snacks such as crisps and cake for when tummies start to rumble.

**Sponsorship:** Set a target of how much you hope to make. Be clear about what you'll offer in return and fulfil those obligations.

**Raffle:** It's more work than it may appear at first, but a raffle is an excellent way to raise money and build relationships with prize-givers.

**Eco policy:** More PTAs than ever are keen to reduce the environmental impact of their events. An eco-friendly event doesn't necessarily create more work and can bring everyone together. Write down what's achievable for you and stick to it.

**Create a schedule and set deadlines:** Use the plan to help people visualise the event and get key stakeholders on board.

- Visit [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk) to find out all about **fair main attractions**
- Download our template and start **writing letters to businesses**.

## 5 Stay safe and legal

Check with the local authority to make sure your fair will meet their health and safety requirements. Be aware of best practices, which activities require a licence and when to apply. Find out more at [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk).

**Insurance:** The PTA has a duty of care to protect visitors. Public liability insurance will help cover members and volunteers should there be an injury to a third party ie, a member of the public. Insurance may also cover fire damage and theft of property and money. Make sure any external stallholders or activity providers are covered, either by your insurance or their own.

**Temporary Event Notice (TEN):** To sell alcohol at the fair, you'll need a TEN. Apply to your local

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authority with ten working days' notice to cover processing.

**Raffle licence:** If you want to sell raffle tickets in advance, you'll need a small lottery licence from the local authority. No licence is required for a raffle where all tickets are sold at the event.

**Music licence:** To play music, you'll probably need a licence. Ask if the school has TheMusicLicence as this will most likely cover you. Not all streaming services allow the use of a personal account to stream music for the public, so check their terms and conditions too.

**DBS checks:** General volunteers don't need a DBS check in order to help at your summer fair. However, it may make everyone feel more comfortable to avoid situations where an unchecked volunteer is left in sole charge of children.

**Health and safety:** Ask yourself how safe the event is, who's coming and what will they be doing? Perform a needs assessment to decide how many first aiders you need and make sure they are trained. Plan what you'll do in an emergency. Who will be in charge of decision making? Nominate a contact for emergency services and consider how you'll clear the site if necessary.

**Risk assessment:** Record anything you identify as being capable of creating a genuine risk to health and safety, and which a reasonable person would take steps to guard against. Then record the measures taken to mitigate these risks. Include any actions taken against Covid infection. Download a risk assessment template at [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk). Obtain risk assessments from third-party activity providers and append or incorporate them into your own so that everyone can see the risks that have been identified and how they are being managed.

- Visit [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk) for answers to your questions on **risk assessments**.
- Get the right licence – see our **licensing guide**.

## 6 Fill in the detail

Once the basic structure is in place, start working on the finer points.

**Main attractions and arena:** Ask external contractors and community groups what they will need on the day and make sure you can accommodate them. Confirm bookings and swap contact details. Prepare a timetable and circulate to all. Ensure all external providers have their own public liability insurance.

**Stalls and games:** Work out what to include and offer options for all ages – Y6 won't be so keen on hook a duck or face painting. Incorporate a mix of stalls with up front costs and those that can be run for free. Research what was done previously and look at what you own, what can be borrowed or hired, and what might be made. Offer arty parents a 'makers' stall or ask if they might run creative workshops. Ask the school about Y6 enterprise stalls. List the requirements for each stall and allocate someone to take charge of it.

**Equipment:** Check any PTA-owned games are in good order. Put up tents and marquees to make sure they aren't damaged, particularly if you haven't used them for a while.

**Eco-friendly event:** Look at every area of the fair and plan to reduce energy, waste and landfill.

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- Find alternatives to plastic plates, cups and cutlery.
  - Buy local, seasonal, organic food.
  - Ask external stallholders about their sustainability practices.
  - Donate any leftovers to a local food bank or shelter.
  - Avoid unnecessary printouts.
  - Ask visitors to bring cloth bags and refillable water bottles.
  - Signpost the recycling area and mark bins clearly.
  - Ask visitors to walk or cycle to the event or to carpool.
  - Use a token system or award free turns on attractions and stalls to avoid cheap plastic prizes.

**Sponsorship and raffle prizes:** Confirm sponsorship packages and contact previous sponsors, parents who run their own businesses and any businesses new to the area. Speak face to face or on the phone if possible. Bigger companies may ask for a request in writing.

**Covid:** Be realistic about how developments may affect your plans. New variants of concern might still cause things to change.

**PTA-run food stalls:** To maximise profits, offer something substantial at lunchtime. Plan your offering to appeal to as many people as possible based on your school's demographic and include vegetarian and vegan options if possible. Buy good quality food and be mindful of food safety, including storage and cooking temperatures. Check you have the necessary equipment to cook it on and that you can make enough in a short time to stop long queues from forming. Work out how much to buy and decide where to get it from. Look at previous fairs: what was on offer? How many were sold? What was the profit? Can you improve on this without sacrificing quality?

**External food stalls:** Make sure your choice of external food sellers complements the PTA's offering. Draw up contracts and confirm bookings on time.

**Drinks:** A bar can give you a good income but may be inappropriate at some schools for cultural or religious reasons. Offer staple summer drinks such as beer, wine, gin and tonic or jugs of Pimm's. In addition, cocktails and mocktails provide a potentially profit-making twist. Check with the school whether glass bottles or glasses are allowed and plan accordingly.

Offer hot beverages as well as soft drinks that will appeal to children and adults. Provide access to water for everyone.

**Prizes:** For the children, games are all about winning prizes. Decide what to offer, where to source them and how many you'll need. Buy from a reputable seller and make sure items are labelled with the importer's contact details and carry the UKCA mark (formerly CE mark). For tombola and stall prizes, minimise outlay by holding a non-uniform day and ask parents to donate good quality, used items in return.

A token system allows for quality over quantity. Rather than winning lots of small prizes, children win multiple tokens, which can be exchanged for a selection of larger prizes. It's a great way to encourage them to participate as they try to win enough tokens for their favourite prize – just make sure you don't run out.

Award some experience-based prizes such as a free turn on the bouncy castle or a voucher for another game.

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**Add-ons:** An art competition, bake-off, silent auction or 100-square grid will help add extra interest and excitement to your fair. Make sure you have the resources to organise them properly.

**Inclusive PTA:** Is the fair accessible to those with special needs or disabilities? Have you considered allergies? Can you help families in difficult financial circumstances?

**General volunteers:** Ask supporters for their help and make it easy for them to reply. Offer short slots so everyone has time to enjoy the fair. Ensure people know when they are needed and where they should report to on the day. Ask them to check if their employer offers match funding.

**Budget:** Revisit the budget and modify where necessary.

- For stall and game ideas, visit our [always-updated guide](#).
- Visit [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk) to discover all about [fair prizes](#).
- For more add-ons, find out how to [add more to your summer fair](#).

## 7 Promotion

Getting the right information to the right people at the right time will make sure people remember your event. Don't be shy – shout about the fair to the people you want to attract.

**Target audience:** Who are your potential visitors, and where do they go for information. The school newsletter and PTA social channels are a good start for the parents, but think of ways to get the children excited too – will the teachers or the head mention the fair in lessons or assembly? If you're hoping to attract the local community, find out about local listings magazines and websites. Remember, not everyone uses social media or even the internet.

**Draw up a promotions calendar:** If you're juggling multiple messages across different media, a calendar will help you stay on track and meet deadlines. As all good marketers know, messages are more effective when repeated, so schedule regular updates. Start with the essential information. Potential visitors need to know when and where the fair is happening along with details of the most exciting attractions. As time goes by, flag up additional items of interest and news to keep up the momentum.

**Be realistic about how much time is available:** Spread most of your promotions across the six weeks before the event with a big push at the end. Research deadlines for local newsletters, listings websites and press, and add those to your calendar too.

**Posters:** The most important thing about a poster is the information it conveys, not how pretty it looks. Create a simple design and keep font sizes big enough to be read from a distance. Use it on social media or print on A3 for the greatest impact.

**Banners:** Ask permission from your local authority at least a month before putting up any banners outside the school. Use generic wording, such as 'summer fair this Saturday', so the banners can be used every year.

**Programme:** Include a timetable of events, site map, location of first aid, list of raffle prizes and

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information about the PTA. Leave space for any adverts or listings promised to sponsors.

**Other design jobs:** Ask your designer if they can supply simple A4 signs for toilets, recycling, first aid and refreshments as well as for each stall.

- Let everyone know about your fair. Go to [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk) for more about **summer fair publicity**.

## 8 Money

The price you charge for each element of the fair will directly affect the amount you raise, who attends, and the feedback you receive. Too much can exclude some families; too little, and you risk not covering your costs or wondering why you went to so much effort.

**Admission:** Set prices at round numbers ie, £2 admission or £5 for admission plus three raffle tickets, to save too much time giving change. A 'pay what you can' system feels inclusive, eliminates change altogether and may actually raise more.

**Games and stalls:** Make sure the price for each stall is clearly signposted. Offering activities at different price points and some for no charge will help everyone join in. Be practical – it's easier for parents and helpers if a game costs 20p or 50p as it only requires one coin. Or charge £1 for three turns. Aim to send every child home with a prize.

**Refreshments:** Check deals at local supermarkets or try wholesalers and ask about sale-or-return. Take into account the cost of items such as plates, cups, sauces and condiments and base the price on the total cost plus a realistic mark-up.

**Vendors:** Be transparent about money – agree on a fee or arrange for the PTA to receive a percentage of the takings. Get it in writing.

**Excess stock:** Hold a playground sale to dispose of leftover items that aren't suitable for the food bank or give unused items to volunteers or another PTA. Find a dry place to store non-perishables so they can be used another time.

**Cash:** Work out how much float each stall requires and order it from the bank in plenty of time.

**Cards:** Ideal places to put the PTA's card machine include the gate, the bar, profitable stalls and big attractions. Or sell tokens at the entrance that visitors can 'spend' to avoid handling cash.

- Go to [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk) to find out more about **better buying** for your PTA.

## 9 On the day

Prepare a bag containing practical essentials such as pens, paper, scissors and spare batteries. See our event survival kit at [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk).

Make sure everyone knows when the site opens to volunteers. When people arrive, direct them to a list of jobs. If they're new or not confident, partner them up with an old hand.

During set-up, keep everyone motivated by providing snacks and hot drinks.

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Light the barbecue with enough time for it to reach the right temperature. This means food will be cooked through quickly and help avoid long queues. Prevent queues by having buns at the ready and onions pre-chopped.

Look after cash in a transparent way. Appoint a minimum of two people to be responsible for floats, collecting and counting cash and storing it safely. Make a list of each stall with details of the float at the start. Note how much cash is collected from each stall and when.

Keep everything as tidy as you can during the event. Once it's over, it's all hands on deck to get everything back to normal. Agree with the school beforehand if you need the following day too! Remember, barbecues will be hot, so you may have to return the next day to clean them and tidy them away.

Bank cash as soon as possible.

### **Keep your team happy**

- Offer free tea and coffee or a voucher for a drink at the bar
  - Pop by from time to time to answer questions, provide help or give them a break
  - Give everyone a phone number in case of emergencies
  - Provide a play area for the children of anyone helping set up or clear away
  - Compile running notes for each stall with details of costs, rules and advice for helpers
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- Download our **event survival kit** at [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk).
  - Learn about **summer fair event logistics**.

## **10 Review and thank**

A little extra work now will save hours next year. Go back to the start and reflect on how you've achieved your objectives.

**Fairs bring the community together:** Use photos and video where possible to remind everyone of the great time they had. Thank everyone for coming along and supporting you. Use all your communications channels.

**Fairs raise money:** As soon as you've crunched the numbers, tell everyone how much the fair raised and what you plan to do with the money.

**Fairs encourage volunteering:** Don't let the trail go cold. Follow up on anyone interested in knowing more about your association.

**Fairs enable the PTA to tell its story:** You've persuaded people your work is valuable. Tell supporters about your future plans and their potential impact on the children.

**Fairs help us reach out:** Thank all your volunteers and write to the businesses who gave donations or supported your event. Tell them how much you raised and what you plan to do with the money. Make this the start, not the end, of the conversation. How can you build on these relationships?

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**Fairs raise the profile of your PTA within the school and wider community:** Include information about how supporters can help your cause or keep in touch in your event programme.

**Feedback:** Get the committee together to identify the most significant successes and greatest challenges. What worked, and what would you change next time? Write it all down and make sure it's stored somewhere central. Ask stallholders, volunteers and external contractors to complete a feedback form. Download our 'knowledge capsule' template at [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk). Seek constructive feedback from visitors too.

- **Thank volunteers** to show how much you value them.
- Visit [pta.co.uk](http://pta.co.uk) to download our **knowledge capsule**.