

PRSA Student Classics

3. Community Relations/Special Events



Operation Black Book at the Uptown Art Fair Presented by The Uptown Association

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Summary: Operation Black Book at the Uptown Art Fair

In 2008, the Uptown Art Fair — a nationally respected and award winning fine arts festival, held annually in Minneapolis — took on the issue of illegal graffiti. A growing concern from Uptown business owners and residents, the producers of the art fair decided to do something about it. The Uptown Association, a non profit business association located at Hennepin Avenue and Lake Street in the heart of Uptown, was awarded a graffiti prevention grant from the City of Minneapolis. The organization coordinated a community-wide graffiti cleanup and an event intended to raise awareness about graffiti prevention: Operation Black Book.

Operation Black Book was coordinated with the help of other Uptown businesses. Two professional graffiti artists were hired to teach a series of classes to young participants about how to create works of art in graffiti style and provided an outlet for their creative energy. A few participants were selected from the classes and invited to participate in Operation Black Book at the Uptown Art Fair, in which the artists would create personalized works of art in graffiti lettering style for art fair attendees in exchange for a fee.

Research

- A questionnaire distributed following the 2007 Uptown Art Fair to Uptown businesses and residents indicated that respondents were extremely concerned about illegal graffiti in their neighborhoods.
- Graffiti was not an issue that was important to Uptown Association in the past.

Planning

- Plan put together by Uptown Association staff, board of directors, interns and Art Fair steering committee members.
- The plan was to hold a graffiti cleanup as well as an event during the art fair (Operation Black Book) to raise awareness about graffiti prevention.
- Target audiences include Uptown business owners and residents.
- The budget for the event and the cleanup was \$4900.

Objectives

- To raise awareness about graffiti prevention within the Uptown community and to educate young people about the negative ramifications of illegal graffiti
- To demonstrate to Uptown business owners and residents that the Uptown Association is tackling the issue of illegal graffiti

Execution

- Activities throughout the event flowed relatively smoothly, with minor, last-minute problems being resolved promptly.
- Other organizations involved included Intermedia Arts, Juxtaposition Arts, YWCA Uptown and Calhoun Square.
- Advertising methods were employed to draw visitors to the event during the art fair.

Evaluation

- The event was a huge success: Participants in the event were satisfied with their sales and word of mouth feedback from attendees was positive.
- Operation Black Book was awarded two Pinnacle Awards from the International Festivals and Events Association: Silver in Best Educational Program and Silver in Best Community Outreach Program.
- 8,000 people attended the event.

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Research

Following the execution of the 2007 Uptown Art Fair, the Uptown Association, producers of the art fair, administered a questionnaire to neighboring Uptown business owners and residents. The questionnaire asked respondents their opinions regarding the art fair, the success of community outreach efforts of the organization and other questions regarding the Uptown community. Among other patterns, the results of the survey showed there was a distinct concern among residents and business owners about graffiti. They feared Uptown was becoming saturated with graffiti, stickers and other vandalism on public and private property throughout the neighborhood and that nobody was doing anything about it.

The survey results helped the organization to identify a distinct audience for a graffiti prevention event. Residents in specific Uptown areas and particular business owners expressed willingness to participate in a graffiti cleanup effort and reported that they would support an event to raise awareness about graffiti prevention.

The incidence of graffiti was not a problem that Uptown Association was concerned with in the past. Research findings helped shape possible ideas and strategies by making the demands of the audience known. The organization worked with local businesses, neighborhood associations and members of the Uptown Association Board of Directors to create a plan to address the problem.

Planning

The planning of Operation Black Book was done primarily by the Uptown Association staff, made up of Executive Director Maude Lovelle, Assistant Director Megan Orr and association interns. The Uptown Association Board of Directors and the Uptown Art Fair Steering Committee also assisted in the planning process for an event to raise awareness about graffiti prevention.

The plan for Operation Black Book began with Uptown Association being awarded a graffiti prevention grant from the City of Minneapolis. The grant money, however, would not be awarded to the Uptown Association until after they followed through with the graffiti prevention methods outlined in the grant proposal. Also, the organization had to allot money to the graffiti cleanup effort taking place later in August, in which volunteers would physically remove graffiti from public property in the Uptown community. Consequently, the budget was tight. The budget for the Operation Black Book event and classes included costs for art supplies, table rental for the event and compensating the artists who taught the classes. The total budget was about \$4,900. Uptown Association managed to get food for participating artists, space for the event and classes, signage used for the event and parking during the event donated in-kind from participating businesses.

In order to fully utilize the grant from the City of Minneapolis, the plan included two components: a community-wide graffiti cleanup of the Uptown neighborhood and an event held during the 2008 Uptown Art Fair to raise awareness about graffiti prevention. The plan was designed with the needs of community members in mind in order to properly address the problem of illegal graffiti, as reported by the survey performed in the previous year.

The event was titled Operation Black Book and was held in conjunction with YWCA Uptown, Calhoun Square, Intermedia Arts and Juxtaposition Arts. The plan was to recruit young people with the help of Intermedia Arts and Juxtaposition Arts, local community organizations that focus on youth arts in the Twin Cities. Three classes would be held, free of charge, at the YWCA in Uptown. During these classes, youth would learn to sketch in a typical graffiti style from experienced artists. Each participant would be provided with a “black book,” a sketchbook used in the legal graffiti community by artists to share collections of their sketches and other artwork. The title of the event was derived from this term.

From these classes, Uptown Association would recruit any interested young artists to put their skills to use at Operation Black Book at the Uptown Art Fair. Participants would have a table in Calhoun Square during two days of the three-day art fair. They would be available to draw the name of an art fair attendee in graffiti-style lettering in exchange for a fee. Each piece would be truly personalized to fit the customer. The artist will ask the customer a few questions and use their answers to incorporate the customer’s interests, hobbies or personality traits in to the work of art. During the event, information would be available about graffiti prevention and the importance of reporting instances of illegal graffiti.

The target audience of the event was, generally, attendees of the Uptown Art Fair. Specifically, the target audiences of the event were Uptown business owners and residents. The strategy used to reach the target audience was to garner publicity for the event as well as draw the crowd of attendees browsing the Uptown Art Fair taking place outside on the street, in to Calhoun Square to participate in Operation Black Book.

The measurement criteria the organization employed to evaluate the success of the program were to evaluate the satisfaction of Operation Black Book participants with the event and the attendance of the event through questionnaires distributed to participants and attendees onsite at the art fair. The sales of the artists during the event were not reported to the Uptown Association.

Objectives

- To raise awareness about graffiti prevention within the Uptown community
- To educate young people about the negative ramifications of illegal graffiti
- To encourage the artistic element of legal graffiti
- To demonstrate to Uptown business owners and residents that the Uptown Association is tackling the issue of illegal graffiti
- To encourage Uptown community members to participate in the upcoming graffiti cleanup to rid their neighborhood of existing graffiti

Execution

The event was held in Calhoun Square on August 2 and August 3, 2008. Nine participants were present to create personalized pieces for art fair attendees, charging \$10 for a black and white drawing and \$20 for a color drawing. Although not all the people who filtered in to Calhoun Square during the event purchased a personalized drawing, most stopped to ask questions about the event and offered to help with the cause. The artists stayed busy creating works of art throughout the event.

During the Operation Black Book classes, held prior to the even at the art fair, in which artists taught young participants how to create works of art in graffiti style, the participants each required a hardcover sketchbook. The young artists shared a few sets of markers, hardcover books with images of graffiti, pens and pencils during the classes. They were held at the YWCA in Uptown, a business that agreed to donate the space in exchange for sponsorship naming on the event during the art fair.

During Operation Black Book at the Uptown Art Fair, in which artists created personalized sketched for art fair attendees, the artists used the sketchbooks and markers from the classes they attended. The event required tables, tablecloths and chairs for the artists to sit in while they did their work. Uptown Association also created numerous pieces of signage, used to draw art fair attendees inside Calhoun Square to visit the event, as well as signage containing information about the event and graffiti prevention in Uptown.

The Uptown Association encountered few difficulties throughout the event. Purchasing materials for participants in the Operation Black Book classes and during the Operation Black Book event at the Uptown Art Fair proved more complicated than planned. It was the original perception of the Uptown Association that the materials would be donated by a local art supply store. Although, the donation was significantly less than originally agreed upon and the Uptown Association was forced to adjust the budget in order to purchase more materials. Also, at the last minute, Uptown Association was informed that participants in the event were under the impression that food and beverages would be provided free of charge. They managed to get pizza and soda donated in-kind by Davanni's in Uptown for the participants.

Operation Black Book would not have been possible without the help of Uptown businesses and organizations. The YWCA Uptown donated the space used to execute the Operation Black Book classes. Intermedia Arts and Juxtaposition Arts provided the artists, Peyton Russell and Joe "Jojo" Hoffman, used to teach the classes and chaperone underage participants at the event, as well as provide information about graffiti to attendees of the event. Calhoun Square donated the space to execute the event during the art fair, as well as provided materials to display signage related to the event.

In addition to using public relations tactics to garner publicity for Operation Black Book, advertising was employed to draw visitors to the event. Print advertisements were designed by an Uptown Association intern and placed in Metro Transit bus shelters, newspapers such as the Star Tribune, the Southwest Journal, the Pioneer Press, the Onion, City Pages and the Minnesota Daily. The advertisements emphasized that attendees could purchase personalized works of art and learn more about graffiti prevention.

Evaluation

Operation Black Book was a huge success. A total of 8,000 people attended the event throughout the two days in which it was held. The participating artists reported good sales during the event, although specific sums were not reported. Representatives from Intermedia Arts and Juxtaposition Arts, Peyton Russell and Joe Hoffman, indicated that they would be interested in participating in the event if it were to be held the following year. A few attendees of the event later signed up for the graffiti cleanup held later in August.

The primary methods used to evaluate the results of Operation Black Book were surveys distributed to Art Fair attendees, surveys distributed to Operation Black Book participants and word-of-mouth feedback from Uptown business owners and residents. Although the surveys were plentiful and quantifiable, the phone calls and e-mails that poured in from Uptown community members about the art fair and Operation Black Book made a distinct impression. Reviews of the event were positive and attendees reported that they were happy to see a neighborhood organization finally doing something to eliminate graffiti.

How Objectives Were Met

- Attendees learned about graffiti prevention through signage at the event and through the participating artists
- The participants in the event learned how to do graffiti legally and found an outlet for the creative energy that drives illegal graffiti
- Attendees enjoyed personalized works of art, illustrating the artistic element of graffiti
- According to word-of-mouth feedback, Uptown business owners were happy that Uptown Association was doing something to tackle the problem of illegal graffiti in the neighborhood
- Some attendees signed up for the community graffiti cleanup held later in August.

