

Fall is certainly in the air - Or for those in the Upper Peninsula, then winter is already here! The brisk air means many of us 'festival organizers' are in our off-season, unless of course you are my co-board member, Linda Kelly, who organizes the [Zehnder's Snowfest](#), happening in mid-January. Well, to lead us into fall, we will be discussing festivals and charities.

Festivals typically are not-for-profit, charitable organizations under the [IRS 501\(c\)3](#) tax-exempt designation. These organizations can receive charitable donations and their donors can receive charitable tax deductions. The question we are tackling is, how can festivals be charitable, or as Merriam-Webster defines it, how can festivals be "designed to help people?" I believe festivals can be charitable to their community, employees, board members, and volunteers.

Festivals can be charitable to their communities in various ways, but I am going to give a few examples of Michigan festivals that have given to their communities through scholarships, educational opportunities, and public art.

In May 2015, [Chelsea Area Festivals & Events](#) (CAFE) awarded their first **annual scholarship** to a graduating Chelsea High School senior pursuing a fine arts degree. The \$500 scholarship was awarded to Katie LaRoy, who is currently attending Western Michigan University pursuing a degree in Music Therapy. CAFE plans to continue this scholarship and increase the dollar amount over the next few years.

The [Irving S. Gilmore International Keyboard Festival](#) is internationally recognized as America's most prestigious piano music festival and is presented biennially. The Gilmore Keyboard Festival provides **master classes**, led by some of the most respected pianists in the world. College and university piano students from throughout the Midwest are nominated by their professors to participate as a Gilmore Festival master class student. These master classes are not only free to the chosen students, but the Gilmore provides housing and transportation to students that are not from West Michigan, and the classes are free and open to the public to observe.

[ArtPrize](#) not only impacts Grand Rapids economy by \$15 million, the organization also contributes to the quality of life in Grand Rapids through permanent public art. ArtPrize is a 19-day event within 3 square miles of Grand Rapids, providing free, high quality art to the public. In addition to the pop up art throughout the town, selected pieces become permanent public art. These pieces of public art improve the quality of life of local citizens, adding value and uniqueness to the city. Two places you can visit pieces in the permanent collection are [Lambert Edwards & Associates](#) and [Gerald R. Ford Federal Building US Courthouse](#).

How can your festival contribute to your community? All of the organizations I highlighted focus on the arts, due to my arts background, but not all contributions need to be related to art. Providing scholarships, educational opportunities, and improving quality of life in your town can be done in so many ways!

Festivals can also be charitable to their own employees, volunteers, and board members by providing professional development opportunities. Organizations can truly contribute to themselves and directly to board members by providing board member training. Board member training can be done directly within the organization, but only if the organization has a truly strong and educated board, which is not always the case. There are board member training programs across the Midwest and online – an excellent resource is www.councilofnonprofits.org.

As board members need guidance to understand their role in the organization, our festival employees and lead volunteers can improve their success by continual learning and collaboration. Programs regarding event planning, non-profit management, and volunteer management can all be found through online

programs and at local community colleges and education centers. Thankfully, Michigan holds the largest festival membership organization in the country, our own Michigan Festivals & Events Association, which holds an annual convention every fall. I'm sure you have already registered, but in case you have yet to, check out all of the opportunities to connect with other festival professionals and learn more about everything we do and should be doing! Please come find me and introduce yourself at the [Annual Convention](#) in Boyne, beginning on November 5.

Lastly, it might make sense for your festival to work together with a local charity. With that said, it is very important that the missions of the festival and charity organization match or complement one another. If the missions are not cohesive, the purpose of the partnership will be unclear to your donors, community, and patrons, which in turn can seriously injure the organizations. Also, the organizations need to be prepared to give up some of the glory and work truly as partners. Once it is determined that the event is mutually advantageous, then the partnership can become very powerful. The co-marketing strategies can allow the organizations to reach broader populations, hopefully bringing new people to each organization. These new people can include volunteers, donors, and supporters!

If you would like to share any information on how your festival has contributed to your community, employees, or board members, please email media@mfea.org and maybe your story will be mentioned at the Convention or in our November newsletter!