

United Way of Baroda: Enabling Charity by World's Largest Dancing Festival

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Abstract

This article describes the context, content and management of a cultural festival organized by United Way of Baroda (UWB) an affiliate of United Way, a reputed charitable organization in the USA. This paper discusses the operational challenges associated in managing this cultural festival. The revenue surplus generated from the cultural festival is used to provide financial support to improve health, education, and empowerment of the needy population in the geographical area where UWB is located. We record our experience in conducting a management audit for this activity by (a) detailing the planning and execution of critical activities, (b) risk associated with critical resources, activities, and the processes and (c) opportunities for enhancing revenue. The possibility of scaling up this activity is also discussed.

Keywords: Garba festival, Resources, Activities & Processes, Community Empowerment

United Way of Baroda

The United Way was a collaborative initiative taken by Frances Wisebert Jacobs, Myron W. Reed, William J.O'Ryan, H. Martyn Hart and Rabbi William S. Friedman about 125 years ago in Denver, USA (United Way, 2018). Since then, United Way International has witnessed 2.9 million volunteers and has risen about \$5.2 billion funds for community welfare. With 1800 United Ways in 41 countries, United Way International is a global organization. United Way has chosen their intervention in education for under privileged, income generation activities and access to healthcare to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) population. The interventions are managed by active cooperation of local government, non-governmental organization, and Business partners.

In 1986, United Way commenced its operations in India by establishing its first local setup at Baroda (a city located in the state of Gujarat, 417 kms North-West of Mumbai), named United Way of Baroda (UWB). This initiative was supported by Baroda Citizen's Council, United Way International and The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). UWB envisioned creating a sustainable initiative to improve quality of life for the less privileged in the geographical area of Baroda (Annexure 1). As of 2016, United Way has presence in seven major cities in India namely Baroda, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Mumbai.

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Navratri³ festival which lasts for 9 days is organized every year in the month of September – October. UWB organized the first Navratri celebration in the year 1981. 250 participants and 50 spectators participated. Over a period of time, this celebration has become significantly important and attracts a large gathering in Baroda and the Non-Resident Gujaratis (NRGs). In the year 2017, 40,000 dancers participated in the Garba festival every day for nine days making it as the largest cultural dancing festival in the world. 2/3 of the dancers were women. The majority of the participants are in the age group of 21 to 30 years. In 2017, revenue crossed 88 million Indian rupees resulting in a margin of 52 million Indian rupees.

The UWB Navratri Festival is organized with a fund-raising perspective for community welfare. Generating surplus is an important objective. The design, planning, execution, monitoring of the festival is managed by various committees of volunteers in a Project Management mode. The organizing committee consists of a Chair, a Vice Chair, an honorary Treasurer, two well-known industrialist of Baroda as permanent invitees, eight independent Trustees and Chairs representing three sub committees related to public education, Resource development and Community Impact. The organizing members are well known industrialist located in Baroda. They provide their time generously for this important socio-cultural initiative. Annexure 2 provides the description of major activities and sub-activities related to organizing of the Navratri festival. The religious, social and cultural connotation makes this festival and associated celebrations more impactful. This is also an opportunity for the youth to network in a festive atmosphere.

According to **Shivinder Singh Chawla, Chairman, UWB**

“In India, charity, Donation and giving is not institutionalized. Even high net worth individuals do not necessarily donate funds unless a specific cause emotionally closer to them is identified. UWB has been able to successfully appeal to the sentiments of the people of Baroda, Gujarat and Non-Resident Gujaratis (NRGs) in generating funds for charitable activities by using a religious-cultural platform. Navaratri, spread over a period of nine days, is a major festival in the Western part of India. During this time, men and women come together in a

³ *Navratri* is a Hindi term comprising of ‘*nava*’ meaning nine and ‘*ratri*’ meaning night, thus embarking the celebration of nine consecutive nights in the praise of Goddess Durga. The festival of Navaratri holds a historical significance where Goddess Durga annihilated the demon Mahi-shasura after a relentless battle of nine days and nights. Also, it represents the worshipping of Devi by Lord Rama for nine days before killing Ravana; thus, the Navaratri is marked by nine days of fast and feast followed by ‘*Dussehra*’ or ‘*Vijaydashmi*’ on the tenth day. The festival is celebrated pompously in all the regions across India followed by varied ceremonies.

The states in Western Indian such as Gujarat celebrate Navratri by performing folk dance known as Garba dance. *Garba* is the traditional folk dance of Gujarat which in Hindi refers to ‘earthen pot’. *Garba* derives its significance from ‘*garbha*’ (mother’s womb/ fetus in womb). During the dance form the mother’s womb is symbolically represented by a decorated earthen pot with a lightened *diya* (lamp), placed within. The *Garba* dancers move in circles through the dance signifying the never-ending cycle of life (birth-life-death-rebirth).

socially harmonious environment to experience devotion and participate in dance. UWB has used this opportunity to generate funds to support community improvement. This activity provides an opportunity for young men and women to experience the joy of giving to a social purpose”.

Resources, Activities and Processes

The conduct of the Navratri festival requires deployment of certain key resources, managing a set of critical activities by appropriate processes. The essence of the managerial contribution is leveraging the resources by an appropriate process to execute the activities related to this festival. To start with we identify the key resources related to this festival and the challenges in acquiring / assessing / utilizing them for the smooth conduct of this festival.

Venue

The first and foremost critical decision is to identify an appropriate venue for the festival. Since the number of participants is growing on a yearly basis, there is a need to identify a venue which can accommodate (dancing) participation of 40,000 people and 20,000 spectators (in 2017). The venue is used only for 9 days in a year. The venue should be available at least one month before the commencement of the festival. It is economically unattractive to dedicate a venue for this festival throughout the year. Given the pressures on the land requirement and usage (due to growing population in major cities) in India, it is challenging to find a suitable place for festival in the city. A trade-off between space availability and accessibility to the venue is necessary. So far, UWB has been able to manage a suitable venue free of cost. However, there is no guarantee that the same or similar location may be available year after year, with the same economic conditions.

Venue Architecture

The architecture of the venue is functionally important and aesthetically relevant. UWB has been engaging a reputed young architect to conceptualize and implement relevant venue architecture since 2010. Since the architect may legitimately focus on her career growth options, it is not clear whether the association with the same architect will continue in future. While it is possible to hire another architect, the learning associated with the festival and its consequent impact on the design is not easy to replicate. So far, UWB has retained the structural design intact, but customized the décor on a year-to-year basis.

Music System and the Singer

Another critical element of UWB Navratri dancing festival is the music system. This consists of a vocal singer and his accomplishments. The associated light and sound systems in the venue are equally important. Shri Atul Purohit (Joshi, 2018) and his music group Rutambara have been associated with UWB Since 2000. Shri Atul Purohit is considered to be a living legend in Gujarati folk music and Garba songs. He is a well-known classical singer and has a great reputation in rendering devotional songs. He routinely hosts both national and international music shows. He has extensive followers in countries like, Australia, Canada, London, New Zealand and USA. Shri Purohit and his troop is one of the major attractions of UWB's Annual Fundraising Festival.

Permissions and Approvals

Approvals from various Government agencies like Municipal Corporation, Departments of Fire & Safety, Health, Police and Public Works, Electrical inspectors needs to be obtained before the commencement of the festival. In addition, the venue owner's permission for the conduct of the festival needs to be formalized by a contract. Access to a medical facilities and emergency care should be provisioned for. Insurance coverage of the festival from unexpected natural calamities is required.

Infrastructure preparation

The Garba ground (venue) needs to be leveled. Adequate quantity of mud and sand needs to be organized. There is an extensive need for electrification and lighting arrangements. Fabrication work needs to be executed for the stage erection and modular seating arrangements for the spectators.

Purchase System

For the smooth conduct of the festival, a large number of items need to be purchased. A separate department under the supervision of the organizing committee addresses issues related to items to be purchased, specifications, potential vendors, purchase agreement with various vendors, contract finalization, terms of payment, receipt and inspection of the material and the usage. This is a significant administrative activity, the effectiveness of which would impact the surplus generated from the festival.

Registration of the Participants

Adequate advertisement should be made about the festival to attract dancing participation of young men and women in and around Baroda. Newspaper advertisement, FM Radio and other social media channels are routinely used to reach out to the potential participants as well as donors. Female participants deposit a refundable sum of Rs.500 per person. At the end of the festival, the female participant has an option of donating the deposit to UWB. In the past, 1/3 of the women participants opted for donating the deposit in the past. A male participant is required to pay Rs. 3000/- (non-refundable) to participate in the festival. Every participant is required to register for the festival. Entry to the venue (to participate) in the dance would require a photo identification. This is an area where UWB has done significant innovation. Earlier the process of registering was manual. Photo identification cards for registered participants was either sent by courier or delivered in person at designated locations. The participants were required to go to a designated bank to pay the registration fee. Over a period of time, this entire process has been re-engineered and automated. Now registration fee payment is by electronic banking. Photo identification card can be downloaded electronically. The re-engineered process is participant friendly and deploys less manpower from UWB.

Festival Closure

At the end of the festival, the management committee reviews the conduct of the entire festival to understand what has been done well and what can be improved. The financial performance in terms of revenue and expenses are critically analyzed. Opportunities to reduce the cost of operations are explored for implementation in the next edition.

Venue Management

The daily operational management of the venue is the responsibility of about 100 volunteers. They are responsible in regulating the entry of participants and the spectators. The volunteers oversee the parking

arrangements of 1500 four wheelers and 15000 two wheelers on a daily basis for the entire festival. To provide adequate safety and security about 350+ security personnel are deployed in the venue. They need to be briefed every day.

Support Services

Services like food stalls and beverages are organized during the festival. Operationally this requires selecting the vendors by providing equal opportunity, collecting the appropriate license fee and ensuring uninterrupted supply of their services without compromising quality and hygiene. The volunteers work with Food inspectors from the local government to strictly monitor the hygiene, public health and housekeeping activities of the eateries.

The Daily Program

The daily routine consists of two parts. The first part is preparation of the ground, and the second part is the actual conduct of the festival. The preparation part includes routine maintenance of the Garba stage, water sprinkling on the ground (to reduce dust), fogging (to repel mosquitoes), surveillance by a dog squad of the entire venue (for security reasons) and briefing 350+ security personal. The participants enter the Garba ground at 8 pm. The initial prayer is at 8.30 pm. Between 8.30-9.30 pm, performance of the players who want to participate in the dance competition is accessed (100+ participants compete on a daily basis). Between 9.30-10.00 pm, Aarti⁴ is performed and prizes are distributed for the winners in the competition. Garba dancing continues until 12.00 midnight. It is important that the religious and the ritual aspects of the festival are also adhered to on a daily basis.

Risk Management

Several risk elements can be identified in the management of the dancing festival. They are classified under the headings related to the festival, resources, business and environment. The nature of the risk is amplified in the next few paragraphs.

Festival related risk

The day-to-day conduct can be disturbed by a number of factors like un-anticipated law and order situations, stampede, medical emergencies, security lapses, power outage and challenges related to traffic management of the participants, spectators, and visiting dignitaries which are not under the control of management committee. While every attempt is being made by the management committee to provide an authentic, clean divine dancing experience, the chances of untoward situations can only be minimized.

Resources related risk

The location and the venue for Garba are critical. They need to be secured early. Since there are no monetary consequences involved, to some extent the management committee needs to exercise its goodwill, brand positioning and cultural aspects with potential donor to influence the decision in favor of UWB.

The musician is legendary and travels extensively. He is an important differentiator of the festival. Any delay or deviations in his schedule would have serious implications to the reputation of the festival.

⁴ Aarti also spelled arti, arati, arathi, aarhi is a Hindu religious ritual of worship, a part of puja, in which light from wicks soaked in ghee (purified butter) or camphor is offered to one or more deities

The architect has been providing services to UWB for several years. Being a professional, they may look at other professional options and they may not be available forever. A backup option is necessary. The same observation is applicable to decorators, even though they can be easily outsourced. However, a decorator who has been associated with UWB for several years would be able to provide an appropriate expression to the religious, spiritual, and cultural sentiments of the festival.

The visiting dignitaries should be handled carefully to avoid any reputational risk. The spectators are of two kinds. They participate in the festival based on free passes or they buy tickets. Unless the brand of the festival is nurtured, there may not be many takers for the festival as spectators.

Business related risks

The success of UWB Garba has enthused a number of competitors who imitate this idea for fund generation with or without charity purpose. While many of them are not successful so far, a potential threat cannot be ruled out.

There is a pressure for complimentary passes from various government agencies. The source for this pressure is the need for the Organizers (UWB) to obtain several regulatory approvals for the conduct of the festival. Certain obligations arising out of this needs to be entertained. The other stream of request for complimentary passes from government agencies is due to the yearlong interface of the members of the management committee with these agencies in their respective business activities. Since this festival has become very popular, it is nothing but natural for the government agencies to approach members of the management committee for complimentary passes.

The brand of UWB hinges on the fact that the revenue surplus would be used for charity purpose. UWB should make sure that it selects projects that are visible and impactful to retain and nurture this reputation. It is important that the members of the managing committee are not involved in any controversy (financial or otherwise) to retain and strengthen the reputation of the UWB. Towards this purpose UWB does not entertain any cash-based transactions. The webpage provides adequate information on revenue, expenses, statistics related to the festival (in terms of participants, visitors, dignitaries) to promote transparency.

Environmental Risk

In the history of last 30 years, the Garba festival has not been interrupted but for a year. In a particular year, due to unexpected rains the festival has to be stopped for a day. There should be adequate mechanism to respond to such unexpected natural calamities.

Managerial Challenges

UWB Garba festival is organized to generate surplus which can be deployed for charitable, socially relevant, and impactful activities. The economic surplus is obviously a function of the difference between the revenue and the associated expenses. Over a period of time, there is a steady increase in the revenue and the surplus. However, several opportunities can be considered to increase revenue and control expenses.

The price ratio of participation tickets between men and women is 6:1. This is probably a stretch. There may be a need to revise the registration fee of women participants.

Another area of revenue opportunity is to increase the number of spectators. An appropriate pricing structure should be designed for the spectator's entry passes. Options like 9-day pass, multiple day pass and single day pass with different pricing may be considered.

As of now, the parking of vehicles is free at the venue. A modest parking fee should be considered. The food and beverage stalls are now auctioned for space. This brings a fixed revenue during the entire festival. There is an opportunity to negotiate a revenue sharing model (based on a base level pricing contract plus revenue sharing model based on volume) with the food and beverage vendors to augment UWB revenue.

Commercial revenue opportunity based on advertisement at the venue should be aggressively explored. The UWB website attracts significant traffic. Commercial electronic advertisement is an opportunity. Navratri Garba participation requires investments by dancers on several accessories. The potential opportunity to sell related merchandise either at the venue or on the portal should be explored.

An innovative approach may be needed to minimize complementary passes. Any reduction in the complementary passes would increase the number of seats available for sale in spectators' category. But this requires a careful consideration and a pragmatic approach to not to damage the reputation of UWB.

To maximize surplus, managerial efforts may be needed to control cost. There may be need to simplify administrative processes. Purchases may be based on competitive bidding. ABC analysis of major expenses and efforts necessary to optimize them should be the central agenda in the post festival meetings. UWB may explore innovative methods to reduce cost.

UWB has a spectacular growth history and has an enviable brand reputation. It has demonstrated year after year, its ability to conduct the festivals without any hiccups. The managerial expertise and the learning curve available in UWB should be leveraged.

UWB may consider franchising its expertise in conducting Garba Mahotsav in various other cities in Gujarat. The challenge here will include finding an appropriate local partner, ability to scale up operations, devise a fool proof standard operating procedures towards the conduct of the festival.

Conclusion

The conduct of a cultural festival is reviewed. The purpose of the cultural festival to generate surplus to invest in community improvement activities is contextually positioned. The anatomy of the cultural festival in terms of resources, activities and processes is articulated. The risk elements associated with the event are identified and discussed. The commercial opportunities to expand revenue and hence surplus are identified.

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Annexure 1 - Key Initiatives and Projects of UWB

UWB has been addressing the issues of Health, Education and Livelihood Generation of the less privileged communities of Gujarat since the past 30 years. About 45000+ lives were impacted in the year 2015-16 through various initiatives undertaken by UWB. The same was made possible through the widespread supported extended by of 30,000+ donors, 100+ volunteers and 15+ NGOs.

1. Health:

- 8000+ children provided with safe drinking water
- 1200+ children provided with nutritional support
- 1700 children benefitted from up gradation of eye clinic
- 3500 children provided with sanitation facility
- 700+ senior citizens received health checkups and home maintenance services
- 5000 needy patients received medical aid

2. Education:

- 2500+ students developed leadership skills
- 400 children provided quality school education
- 800+ orphan and destitute children supported for primary education
- 400+ municipal corporation school children benefitted from non-formal education

3. Environment:

- 236 special children provided with vocational training
- 45 mentally challenged children supported for comprehensive development
- 150 hearing impaired children motivated for physical activity through playground construction

Table 1

Use of funds (Unit – Indian Rupees)

S.No.	Description	2015	2016	2017
1	Medical Relief	69,81,615	68,66,615	67,48,6680
2	Education for Economically Poor	76,74,930	76,74,930	1,08,54,350
3	Empowerment of vulnerable members of the society	61,93,430	61,93,430	34,25,000

Source: (United Way Baroda, 2018)

Annexure 2 -Tasks for Annual Fund-Raising Festival – Garba Mahotsav

1. Outsourcing Contracts:

Leasing of Garba ground, Singer Group, Sound System, Commercial Purchase, Electrical works, Light Emitting Diode (LED) Lights, Security, Modular seating arrangements, Architect, Publicity Partners, Courier, Bank, Anchoring and Pujari.

Observations:

These contracts are to be finalized before the festival. The administrative action can start early. There is no dependency among the activities. With adequate planning, it is possible to complete this activity before due date.

2. Permissions

Approval from District Administrative authorities, Departments of Police, Public Health, Public Works Department (P.W.D), Food and Beverages, Fire and Safety and Entertainment Tax.

Observations:

These approvals are to be obtained before the festival. The administrative action can start early. There is no dependency among the activities. The coordination and follow up efforts are significant. The organizers have to leverage the brand of UWB.

3. Passes

Two types of passes are made, one for visitors / viewers and other for the participants. The activities include designing the passes, printing UWB and sponsors' logo, installation of appropriate IT systems (bar code reader, software installation, pass preparation as per the approved list, purchase of dories (lanyards), logistics arrangements related to delivery of passes either by courier or across the counters.

Observations:

These activities are volume driven and time bound. They are guided by the approved list of participants and viewers. The sub-activities are under the complete control of the Management. If need be, more manpower and data processing capacity can be added to cope up with the volume. By proper planning it is possible to complete these activities within stipulated time.

4. Volunteer management

Calling the volunteers from database, Confirmation of the volunteers, Form filling and necessary documentation, short listing and finalizing volunteers, Allocation of work, Daily monitoring, Identity cards of volunteers, food for volunteers and staff.

Observations:

These activities and their outcomes are completely under the control of the management. There is no dependency on external agency in completing this activity. No difficulties are envisaged in completing the activity as per the schedule.

5. Food and Beverages Services

Finalization of application forms, regulating permission and deposit collection, Service tax compliance for food stalls collection, Receipt for food stall collection, stall for monopoly items like Ice-creams, soft drinks, mineral water, Stall holder meeting, Photo Identity cards for food stall vendors.

Observations:

These activities and their outcomes are completely under the control of the management. There is no dependency on external agency in completing this activity. No difficulties are envisaged in completing the activity as per the schedule.

6. Sponsorship

Gathering information about sponsorship, Sponsorship letters, Receipt for sponsorship received and Service tax compliance for sponsorship collection.

Observations:

These activities and their outcomes are completely under the control of the management. There is no dependency on external agency in completing this activity. A specific sub-committee of the organizing committee is in charge of this activity. No difficulties are envisaged in completing the activity as per the schedule.

7. Donation

Appeal letters, donor detail forms, 80G (Tax exemption) receipts dispatch, viewer passes calculation.

Observations:

These activities and their outcomes are completely under the control of the management. There is no dependency on external agency in completing this activity. A specific sub-committee of the organizing committee is in charge of this activity. No difficulties are envisaged in completing the activity as per the schedule.

8. Groundwork – General

Center stage, Viewer's general sitting arrangements, Modular sitting arrangement.

VVIP (special) sitting arrangement, other enclosure for sponsors, CCTV arrangements, UWB office space planning, Photo Identity cards for all ground vendors.

Observations:

This is more of a civil work. There is adequate time to plan and execute once the venue is finalized. We do not see any scope for delay in this activity.

9. Groundwork – Electrification

High Tension power connection, Electricity Meter boxes for stalls, Parking and food stall lighting, Entrance and gate lighting & UWB office lightings.

Observations:

This is more of an electrical work. There is adequate time to plan and execute once the venue is finalized. We do not see any scope for delay in this activity.

10. Mataji Murti (Idol) and Pooja related

Purchase new Murti, Dress material to the Murti, coordination with Pujari, letter to Mandir Donor and flower vendor finalization.

Observations:

These activities are completely under the control of management. There is adequate time for completing this activity.

Annexure 3 - Financial Statements

Table 2

Income: (Unit: Rs in Million)

Sr. No	Description	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1	Donations	13.00	15.69	18.08	22.03	20.46
2	Male Passes	**21.03	**20.63	**26.39	**34.12	**41.39
3	Girls Passes	**2.92	**3.28	**5.98	**6.76	**12.35
4	Sponsorship	4.05	6.53	6.98	9.63	9.57
5	Food Stalls	***0.66	***1.28	***1.47	***2.50	***1.47
6	Daily Tickets	2.10	2.87	2.93	2.21	2.56
	Total	43.76	50.28	61.83	77.25	87.80
Notes:						
** Girls and Boys passes collection after bank charges deduction and Refund.						
*** Food Stall Income after deducting refund to Food Stall Holders.						

Table 3
Expenses: (Unit: Rs in Million)

Sr. No.	Description	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1	Singer Group Expenses	2.53	3.00	3.56	3.68	4.54
2	Sound System Service	0.35	0.64	0.71	0.86	0.83
3	Garba Insurance	0.08	0.13	0.22	0.16	0.15
4	Groundwork with Parking, Quire Dust, Firewood, Yellow Soil, Foundation	4.22	3.49	4.62	5.84	4.96
5	Decoration Expense	0.62	0.80	1.02	1.04	1.22
6	Security Agency	2.53	2.09	3.01	2.54	2.72
7	Smart Cards, Online Software, Punching, PC Readers	0.51	1.05	1.59	1.99	2.09
8	Faraskhana Services	7.07	6.63	7.41	7.82	8.26
9	Stadium, Seating	2.19	1.33	1.38	1.51	1.46
	Total	20.10	19.16	23.52	25.44	26.23

Table 4
Net Income: (Unit: Rs in Million)

Sr. No.	Description	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1	Income (After Refund)	43.76	50.28	61.14	77.25	87.80
2	Less: AFRE Expenditures	26.76	25.54	32.72	32.75	35.96
	Net Income	17.00	24.74	29.11	44.50	51.84

Source: (United Way Baroda, 2018)

Annexure 4 - UWB Garba: Important Statistics 2017

1. Total number of participants: 37,000
2. Parking Arrangements for 2-wheelers: 7,000
3. Parking arrangements for 4-wheelers: 2,000
4. Seating arrangement: 30,000 spectators
5. Total security staff: 380
6. Total interns involved in the Organizing Committee: 20+
7. Total Volunteers involved in Organizing Committee: 80+

Table 5
Number of participants

Sr. No.	Number of Participants	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1	Male	8323	8486	10555	12749	14348
2	Female	18202	21285	24609	25843	27215
	Total	26525	29771	35164	38592	41563