



LEEDSBID



IDA Downtown Achievement Awards 2018: Events & Programming Category

Entry: Leeds International Festival (LIF) – Leeds Business Improvement District (LeedsBID), UK

Background

In 2014, Yorkshire (England) gained global recognition after hosting the Tour de France. The first two stages of the Tour - dubbed 'Le Tour de Yorkshire' - were held across the region with the city of Leeds a major route stop. Leeds has a diverse population of 751,500 and is the third largest city in the United Kingdom. The event boosted the standing of Leeds, however the spotlight was fleeting. Leeds needed to build on the success of the Tour and maintain its profile as a truly international destination.

The following year, on April 1st 2015, Leeds Business Improvement District (LeedsBID) was created as the 200th BID in the UK. It represents over 1,000 businesses and adheres to three primary objectives: to enhance the city's welcome, visitor experience, and business voice. As such, LeedsBID was ideally placed to facilitate something new and innovative downtown.

As a partnership-led organization, LeedsBID focused on consultation to agree on business priorities for the city. Out of this grew a shared ambition for an event run by sector specialists. The city already has a vibrant cultural scene and as such hosts some established annual events, i.e. *Live at Leeds* (the North's leading metropolitan new-music festival). However, although well-respected, these niche events were scattered across the calendar at venues inside and outside of the city. The LeedsBID vision was to create an aspirational, overarching festival that would promote the vitality of downtown as a world-class destination.

Aims & Objectives

In September 2016, a proposal was presented to the LeedsBID Board (business representatives in the city) using stakeholder feedback. The plan was approved and had ambitious targets:

- To create the most important annual cultural event in Leeds.
- To partner with existing events to form one umbrella city-takeover festival.
- To be **about** the city, produced **by** the city, with LeedsBID acting as catalyst and funder.
- To launch swiftly in Spring 2017 (with funding only released January 2017!).
- To work with 5/6 major partners on approximately 30 program events.
- To showcase the best of Leeds to the world and enhance visitor welcome/experience.

Planning & Execution

As the vision for 'Leeds International Festival (LIF)' took shape, city ownership was essential. A working group was therefore formed with voluntary directors overseeing three key festival themes: Music, Moving Image, and Technology. Together, a strategy was drawn up and a budget of £300,000 (\$424,000) allocated to LIF by LeedsBID.

A third of the budget was spent on marketing promotions: digital/print advertising and content driven through social media. The rest was reinvested back in the city (i.e. using Leeds-based suppliers and levy payers) or for logistics, venue costs, and performers. In order to concentrate attention on the city, LeedsBID worked with some event organizers to relocate them to the heart of Leeds using their network of venue contacts.

Leeds is home to over 75 ethnic groups with a mixed socio-economic demographic, and so inclusivity was vital. It was agreed that the festival had to appeal to young professionals, teens and families alike, without appearing elitist. The LeedsBID team worked closely with partners to schedule an impressive and eclectic program of home-grown talent and "show-stopping" events.

On February 27th, LeedsBID hosted a press conference for 120 media (see 2017 LIF trailer: <https://youtu.be/DiM-wr-0rCU>). A LIF-logo teaser campaign revealed the festival identity around the city. This was followed by regional/national newspaper advertising, alongside promotions on digital screens and outdoor media from buses to billboards. LeedsBID Street Rangers deep-cleaned the city and LeedsBID Welcome Ambassadors distributed 10,000 programs. Retail, hospitality, and community partners - from nightclubs to hotels and bars - helped to circulate the information.

Outcomes

Leeds International Festival was unleashed on the city, April 22nd-30th 2017, and smashed all targets. It transformed the city to a place where creativity thrived and where locals and visitors came together to exchange ideas. A digital jobs fair, music festival, and fashion shows were just a handful of the vibrant events that took place; 5,000 tote bags were handed out to attendees (see after-movie: <https://youtu.be/SZjKunq7gtA>)

LeedsBID worked with 81 partner and community organizations to create LIF, a festival of 35 events over 8 days. In total, 95% of activities were held downtown to enhance place shaping, with only two outside the BID zone. Overall 17,000 visitors attended the LIF festival (image gallery: <http://lif.ilikepress.co.uk/2017/gallery/>). The LIF media coverage was phenomenal:

- Online audience reach: 831,949,000
- Print audience reach: 1,878,000
- Broadcast audience reach: 6,400,000
- Outdoor media reach: 45,350,000
- Social media audience (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) built from scratch: 2 million impressions.

'Live Art' family activities through to an 'Empowering Women in Science & Technology' conference demonstrated the inclusivity of the LIF program. International stars secured for the festival included singer Rag'n'Bone Man and BBC DJ, Lauren Laverne. Actor Vinnie Jones attended a Leeds United football movie premiere. Using Facebook Live, 22,000 views, 286 likes, 178 comments and 98 shares were achieved.

Leader of Leeds City Council, Councillor Judith Blake, said:

"The exciting [LIF...] programme is wide and varied and demonstrates the strong collaboration between the private sector, public sector and creative communities. Leeds City Council is proud to have been able to support this event practically with resource and expertise as this festival grows."

Moving Forwards

The impact of LIF 2017 positioned LeedsBID as a pivotal and well-respected organization in the city. As a result, more partners have come on-board for 2018: Thought Bubble (the UK's biggest Comic Art festival), Transform (a Performing Arts Festival), and Live Arts Bistro (a Leeds-based arts company).

An extra week was added to the program in 2018 (April 28th – May 12th) to accommodate the exciting new additions. There are now 52 events happening over 15 days (see 2018 schedule: <https://leedsinternationalfestival.com>). The scope of the Festival has also evolved; where sector strands dictated the inaugural event, "New Ideas and Innovation" is now the thread that runs through the festival (see 2018 LIF trailer: <https://youtu.be/IWkwPeA42ys>). This year, in partnership with the returning Tour de Yorkshire, LIF is hosting "The Village." This cultural hub will be located in a central square using a "Spiegeltent" venue.

The equality agenda of LIF has been enhanced further in 2018. The program includes a talk by Astronaut Helen Sharman OBE (the first Briton in Space), a performance by Inner Vision Orchestra (blind and visually-impaired musicians), a talk on technology in indigenous Brazilian communities, a House-music Gospel Choir, and a "Queer Culture" celebration with performance artist David Hoyle and transgender rapper, Mykki Blanco, to name a few.

In 2018, sponsors Sky, Allied London, Slingsby Gin, Trinity Leeds, and Leeds Beckett University have increased the budget by nearly £100,000. Discussions around funding for 2019 are also underway with Arts Council England; LeedsBID will remain a principal funder, but this will reduce as sponsorship increases in the coming years.

The key to the success of LIF is stakeholder collaboration, something that can be replicated elsewhere on any scale. The model that LeedsBID has created – of enabling others to generate ideas and then act as the catalyst to make them happen without restriction – has been crucial for sustainability and the international success achieved.