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The Texas Teen Book Festival Turns 10, Part 1



Meghan Dietsche Goel -- October 5th, 2018



As I write this, we are about 34 hours away from the 10th annual [Texas Teen Book Festival](#). Planned in partnership between BookPeople, the Texas Book Festival, and several amazing librarians who do this in their free time, TTBF has grown from an experiment launched in a high school theater to an event that takes over St. Edwards University campus with 35+ authors and 4,000 readers every year.

At this point, the truck has been packed with books, giveaways, banners, props, and all kinds of miscellany. Final emails have been sent out to authors, publishers, and moderators; announcements are getting a final polish; and signage has been printed.

Festivals are whirlwinds of energy and activity. Every year is different, so there's always a new wrinkle to adapt to and learn from. But here are a few things I've learned over the last decade in the trenches as TTBF Programming Director.

COMMUNICATION IS HARD: You can't plan a festival without a lot of communication. But as the planning committee got larger and our festival more complex, managing the email threads became impossible. Festival Director Shawn Mauser brought us into the world of Trello (an online project management tool) 3-4 years ago, and it has made a huge difference. We still send plenty of emails, but Trello serves as a holding place for decisions made, tasks assigned, and progress tracked across all aspects of the festival.

SPREADSHEETS RULE: Often less is more, but when you're talking about tracking docs, I'm here to say that more is actually more. Yes, I'm blogging about spreadsheets! (Exciting stuff, I know.) But, every year we add more tracking grids, and every year our handle on what's going on gets that much better. TTBF has learned from the Texas Book Festival in that respect, with all their experience putting on an even larger program. The list of shared documents I've referenced in the last 6 hours includes:

- The festival's Run of Show broken down in 30 minute increments
- A color-coded schedule of where each committee member will be from Friday morning load in to Saturday evening pack out
- Author questionnaire responses, with author party attendance, food restrictions, fun facts for introductions, and pre-signing times
- Saturday morning's shuttle schedule for the festival hotel

- The book order grid sorted by panel for easy unloading
- Roundtable RSVPs from We Need Diverse Books essay contest winners
- A full script of remarks committee members have planned for each event stage

MISTAKES HAPPEN: In an event with this many moving parts, there will always be surprises, and even mistakes (like the year all the signing tables were in direct Texas sun). We plan as much as we can, and then we have to embrace the unpredictable. All we can do is to respond quickly and nimbly and keep pushing everything forward. I personally keep a running list of notes for next time on me at all times. By Sunday morning, it's a mental blur, so every note helps me remember what to do better the next time. Maybe we need another spreadsheet.

IT'S NOT REALLY ABOUT THE SPREADSHEETS: All our planning just builds a solid structure around which the festival can come to life, and then it's our job to keep everything on track as the teens arrive and take center stage. The truth is that the more we've amplified teen voices in our festival, the more it feels like it's theirs. Over time we've started passing the mic to booktubers and bookstagrammers and added writing contests, roundtables, interactive sessions, and workshops. This year we're adding TTBF themed trivia and a StudioCreate tent where exhibitors and partners can offer creative activities. And, of course, our Teen Press Corps will be interviewing authors and live blogging everything all day long.

I plan to be right in the middle of it all, enjoying the moment, because it'll be over before we even know it. Stay tuned for a full report on our big birthday event. I'll see you on the other side...



Color-coded by panel and ready to go.



The truck is packed. We'll see you soon! (With Eugenia and Abby from BookPeople's marketing team.)

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