At least six weeks before
- Establish who will be taking the lead on the event and establish an organising sub-committee.
- Book the date and time with the school. Announce the date to parents and put out a request for volunteers. If running non-uniform days in exchange for contributions (such as sweets or hamper contents), schedule the timing for this and let parents know.
- Start discussing ideas for a theme – Winter Wonderland, Christmas Market, etc – and consider whether you want any headline attractions such as a Rodeo Reindeer, synthetic ice rink or pantomime. Book third party suppliers early – go to pta.co.uk/suppliers.
- If possible, review last year’s event, looking at which stalls were most popular and which ones generated the most money. Need some inspiration? We have lots of ideas for games and stalls as well as testimonials online at pta.co.uk/fairs/autumnwinter.
- Your theme may dictate your choice of stalls and the type of food and refreshments you decide to serve – work out when food needs to be bought and whose task this is. Do you also need large bags of sweets for prizes for stalls? To minimize waste and maximize profits, order from Booker cash and carry (they offer a sale or return option on complete, unopened packs). We can fast-track your registration, simply email us at booker@pta.co.uk.
- If planning to sell any personalised items at your event, such as calendars, recipe books or Christmas puddings (ultimateplumpudding.co.uk) you will need to source a supplier and get the process started. Create a schedule for your project, working back from the date of the fair. Allow time for pupils to create artwork, to send letters home inviting parents to pre-order, finalising your order and collating items/monies.
- If running a secret present room, where children choose and wrap gifts for loved-ones, consider ordering a ready-made pack rather than relying on donations of a dubious quality! Your Fundraising Gift Shop sell specialist packs, either wrapped or unwrapped. Go to yourfundraisinggiftshop.com.
- Get the children involved! Discuss with the school any ideas you have that teachers might need to do in class, such as making wrapping paper or tree decorations to be sold at the fair. Ask the school to appoint one teacher who you can liaise with throughout.
- Start contacting local businesses to source sponsorship (of your grotto for example), raffle prizes, etc. To improve your chances of success, do this before other local schools start asking!
- Aim to start publicising the event about six weeks before, with posters in libraries, leisure centres and local playgroups. Plan a leaflet drop to local residents inviting them to attend the event. Get editable posters and flyers from ptaprintshop.co.uk.

Four weeks before
- If serving alcohol you will need to submit a TEN (at least 10 days before your event).
- If using street banners, make sure you seek permission from your local authority – contact them early. TIP: Use ‘this Saturday’ rather than a specific date so you could use the banner again next Christmas! 😊

Need ideas?
Discover a huge range of Christmas fair inspiration in the ‘Fairs’ section of our website, including:
- Christmas fair themes
- Game stall ideas
- Mulled wine: advice from PTAs

Need advice?
Discover a huge range of event-planning advice on our website, including:
- Event-planning checklist
- FAQs: Data protection
- FAQs: Catering at events
- FAQs: Raffles and lotteries
- FAQs: Temporary Event Notices (TENs)

Find a supplier
Search for local or national suppliers that can help you get the best from your event. These include companies offering:
- Raffle ticket printing
- Pocket-money toys
- Complete, ready-made stall sets

Download templates
At PTA+, we aim to make life as easy as possible, therefore, we have a few templates you can download, including:
- Volunteer rota
- Sample letters from Santa
- Post-event ‘knowledge capsule’

Promote your event...
Get 10 high-quality A3 posters from PTA Print Shop, for just £9.95 (plus p&p). Simply choose a design, add your event details and your order will arrive within three working days. Go to ptaprintshop.co.uk.
Running a raffle? Make sure your lottery licence is up to date if you are selling raffle tickets prior to the event itself. Hopefully you have already secured your prizes. If you haven’t already had raffle tickets printed, get this done as soon as possible to send home with pupils.

Create a list of stalls with time slots and consider how many volunteers you will need for each stall and for how long. Begin slotting in those who have already agreed to help against each stall/attraction to help identify gaps.

Compile a database of helpers’ email addresses so you can keep in touch with them instantly if needs be. For our FAQs feature on data protection go to pta.co.uk/running-a-pta.

Don’t forget to explore match funding opportunities. There are hundreds of organisations in the UK offering their employees the chance to have their fundraising efforts matched. If any of your volunteers work for companies offering match funding, be sure to put them on your most lucrative stalls!

Are you providing a programme? If so, appoint someone to compile this and consider selling advertising into it for around £10-20 per A5 page.

Decide whether to charge an entrance fee to your fair. If there are any outside attractions attending your event that you will be charging separately for, start pre-selling tickets.

Which stalls need prizes or stock? Make a list, agree what is needed (and how many) and start sourcing these. Avoid anything too festive so that prizes can be used again at future events. Assign someone to do the shopping.

Finalise your volunteer rota, establishing who will help on each stall, as well as who is setting up and tidying away (download a template from pta.co.uk/planning). Determine who will ‘play’ Santa (and his elves) and make sure you have outfits which fit!

Find a few qualified first aiders and make sure you know where they are at all times. If your event is quite big, inform the local ambulance service.

Complete risk assessments for each element of your fair (ask each stallholder to help complete these) as well as for the event as a whole. For more information, go to HSE.gov.uk.

Make sure the treasurer has established float amounts for each stall and has ordered the cash from the bank.

Create signs for the fair – toilets, first aid, refreshments, stall names (and prices). If you have time, put together running notes for each stall, to help volunteers. Include details of prices, any rules and advice. Laminate your signs.

Your grotto is likely to take some setting up, so speak to your head to determine whether this can be done the day before. There’s never enough time on the day, so can other stalls be set up beforehand too?

On the day

Prepare a box of essentials – marker pens, sticky tape, scissors, string, drawing pins, paper, etc.

Make sure you have a list of jobs ready for those volunteers who are helping to set up, after all, they have dragged them on your most lucrative stalls!

Treat your volunteers to a free mince pie just before the fair opens!

Check that stallholders have everything they need, that they all have enough volunteers, and offer to take them a snack if they don’t get to take a break.

Safe collection and storage of cash is essential during the fair. Appoint two volunteers to be responsible for floats, collection and counting of cash. Have a book listing each stall, with details of their starting float and each time cash is collected and how much.

After the event

Have plenty of bin bags at the ready and try to get as many volunteers to help clear up afterwards as you can!

Take the time to thank everyone who helped, including parents, businesses and school staff. Writing thank you notes for those who donated prizes always goes down well!

Hold a post-fair debrief to establish what went well and what didn’t – this will make next year’s planning so much easier! Download a ‘knowledge capsule’ template for each stallholder to complete – go to pta.co.uk/fairs/general-advice.

Need craft ideas?
Craft stalls keep children busy for longer, which in turn encourages everyone to spend more time (and therefore money) at your event. We have compiled a Pinterest board packed with our favourite quick and simple seasonal craft ideas – pta.co.uk/ptaplus.

Find out how other PTAs run their events
Our Facebook page is proving to be an invaluable place to canvas opinion and seek the finer details of running a fundraiser. Join our community on facebook.com/PTAplus. Either post your query or send us a message – we’ll provide an answer or repost it on our wall for you (ensuring it comes up in newsfeeds). We aim to respond within 24 hours. Recent threads include:

How to decorate your grotto
What to charge for your grotto (and what this includes)
What Christmas fair food PTAs serve

Sign up to receive our newsletters?
Are you missing out on the latest advice and offers? Sign up to our website to start receiving our fortnightly emails – packed with seasonal fundraising ideas, exclusive giveaways and much more. For more information, go to pta.co.uk and click on the ‘sign-up’ bar at the top of the home page.

Share your successes with other PTAs?
No one has more expertise than you. Had success with a new stall? Any tips for sourcing tombola prizes? Give us the wisdom of your experience – drop us an email at editorial@pta.co.uk so we can share your advice.