

marketshare [mahr-kit shair] -noun

1. Is a program of marketumbrella.org, which works to cultivate the field of public markets for public good.
2. These free documents (called "shares") are the best of "lessons learned" from public markets everywhere.
3. Employ as needed, & please feel free to tell us about your results, so that we can share those with other markets.



Market preparation: recruiting vendors

If you've read our other starter pages you know that we consider "curating" the market—by careful selection of vendors and by balancing supply and demand—one of the most valuable additions management can make to a market.

Identifying vendors

How do you identify and recruit your first vendors? That depends, of course, on your market, mission, and by-laws. The Crescent City Farmers Market, with a mission to support sustainable local food producers by giving them direct access to urban consumers, found our first vendors through phone calls and emails to our local Agricultural Extension office, then by making an appointment and going to see them in person. In some cases, we had to contact the agents at several offices to reach producers to the north, south, east, and west of us—even into neighboring Mississippi. Vendor lists can also be acquired from agricultural and seafood boards, grain growers, industry and cultural associations

(we contacted the Alliance Francaise for brioche; the Hellenic Association for baklava; the Gulf Coast Latin American Association for vendors of tamales); herb growers, nut growers, flower growers, cheese makers, candy makers, brewers, vintners, and so on. (Don't forget that, having recruited vendors from these organizations, you'll want to follow up by recruiting shoppers from them, too—that means marketing to their membership, whether through email, flyers, or by getting the organization to include mention of the market in their own marketing efforts.) We would recommend that, if you are going to other markets to talk to vendors, that you do not show up at peak selling time, and that you give the market manager a courtesy hello when you arrive. They might not like the idea of you coming to their market, but if you are respectful and are careful about offering farmers another time or a second market for their wife or son to work, it is more likely that they will understand as it increases the reasons for those farmers to come into the city.

Vendors who are interested in participating in your market must complete an application (see our Sample Vendor Applications), which should include a signature confirming their agreement to abide by the market's rules and regulations of the market (include a copy with the application) and to maintain liability insurance and all necessary permits and licenses. We would recommend a yearly renewal of the application, to make sure you have all signatures on file and updated insurance.

Balancing supply and demand

As you consider which vendors to recruit and accept, keep in mind what consumers want to buy; even using partners like business associations to survey shoppers ahead of time also helps, and gets the word out ahead of time. A diverse group of vendors, with diverse product offerings, creates a more attractive, useful, and sustainable market—able to fill more of your shoppers' needs. Ultimately, no one (you, shoppers, OR vendors) wants a market filled with too much of only a few types of items. Lack of variety will discourage shoppers, and too much competition will reduce vendor income below sustainable levels.

Building the triple bottom line

To increase shopper interest, build cross-cultural social capital, and assist diverse groups of growers, it's important to cross socioeconomic lines to include new farmers, ethnic farmers, and

even farmers who might not speak the language. These food producers may need special help to participate successfully in your market—including translation services, or even product signage and recipes written in English—but are likely to be well-worth including for additions to your triple bottom line.

The vendor site visit

A visit to your vendor's farm or production facility is the surest way to honor your vendor and to confirm compliance with market standards and mission. (Are the products grown organically? Does the vendor produce what he or she sells?) Visiting a producer on his or her "turf," where the vendor is the expert, also helps to build trust between vendors and market management. Market managers often balk at this suggestion because they don't have the time; but market managers don't have to do the site visit themselves. Urban board members and volunteers are often delighted to visit farms or fishers—for them it's a novelty. County extension agents and even chefs may be willing to do it for the opposite reason—they're going there anyway.

You can maximize the mileage of your site visits by taking photographs, using them as the basis for press release, website, or newsletter articles, and by following up with a thank-you note to the vendor. (Don't forget!)

Adding or limiting new vendors

New vendors can be recruited through the same channels as existing ones—plus current vendors may suggest new additions to their ranks. More likely, however, you’ll have the opposite problem: turning away vendors that don’t add anything new to your market. If space is available, try encouraging them to offer a different product—particularly one that shoppers have asked for; adding value by preserving, pickling, cooking, or bottling an existing offering; expanding the

market to another neighborhood or day of the week; or, when all else fails, adding them to the market waiting list and encouraging them to be patient.

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mission | management | marketing | measurement

Thank you for using a share document. This 4M worksheet below is to help you think through what you just read and how to apply it to your situation. Read the share titled “The Strategy of the 4Ms” to learn more about this marketumbrella.org teaching tool.

Is this issue or strategy covered in your current mission (or values)? _____

Does your management structure allow you time to handle this, or is there another organizational partner to help?

How will you communicate to others about this issue or strategy (marketing)? _____

When and how will you measure the impact of this resolution of this issue or the completion of this strategy?



cultivating the field of public markets for public good