

FLOAT BUILDING ≥101≤

The most important thing about building your float is to have fun doing it.

Volunteer float-building can be a great bonding experience.

The Float Committee

Parades generally have a theme. Keep this in mind when you are brainstorming with your committee.

Get input from everyone involved in building the float on how it should look. Creativity is at its best when everyone has a say at what the float will look like. Write down all of the ideas on a chalk-board or large presentation paper and agree to a design. Creativity is sometimes the most difficult part of building the float, but can also be the most fun!

Make a list of resources you have available to you and how they could be best utilized for your float. Know the monetary budget you have for your float and don't be afraid to ask for donated or borrowed items from neighbors and or community businesses.

Read all of the information concerning the parade route, judging times, rules and requirements.

Determine the message you want to convey, staying within the parameters of your chosen theme. You can compete for many different trophies or awards and each has its own parameters.

Music requires a good sound system and should be determined at the onset.

Be sure to have tools handy for your volunteer workers, ie. power circular saws, electric jigsaws, screw guns, screwdrivers, electric drills, staple guns, hammers, screws, nails, tape, and stepladders.

The Base of the Float

Determine a base structure upon which your float will be constructed. Most floats are built on trailers, small trucks, cars, wagons, or anything motorized. (Just keep the towing capacity and the danger of overheating in mind. Do not try to pull the Titanic with a moped!) A full-sized pick-up truck with a good towing capacity is best. Be sure to wash the vehicle before you connect to the float. Sometimes you can get a car dealer in town to lend a car or truck to pull the float.

Try to find a trailer with a wood bed. A hay trailer is ideal for float building.

If you have electrical requirements, consult a qualified electrician. Animations and prop movements can also be human-powered. Simple pulleys and rope can be used to make props rotate and move.

Float Design

1. When you decide on a concept, draw a rough pencil sketch. Most floats use a stair step effect with the most height at the rear of the float. After you have worked out the details, a drawing done to scale is very helpful.
2. All entries must adhere to height, width, and length restrictions, and all must be able to navigate the parade route and make all turns required by the parade route.
3. Other important design considerations are your equipment and the capabilities of your float builders. If you plan to include elaborate props or woodwork, make sure that you have access to a capable technician who has the proper tools and equipment.

Float Materials:

The next step is to gather the materials needed to execute your plan.

A few items to have on hand before beginning:

- Ä Chicken-wire 1" X 1" (if needed)
- Ä 2" X 2" construction grade wood
- Ä Plywood (to save \$\$\$ heavy cardboard may be substituted for side walls but your lettering can be harder to adhere to it) Often times you can get good cardboard free from appliance stores.

These items can be purchased at your local hardware store.

Vinyl Floral Sheeting

This takes the place of old fashioned napkins and other types of cloth inserted into the chicken wire in days gone by. Vinyl floral sheeting is much nicer but comes with a price tag of approximately \$75 per roll. It comes in rolls of 3 feet wide by 10 yards long and is available in dozens of colors.

Festooning

This is a petal type rope that is 4" wide and 25 feet long and is used to trim the float around the edges and seams. Again, it comes in dozens of colors.

The Fringe Skirting

This hangs along the bottom sides of the float and sweeps along the street. It moves with the breeze and adds to the overall effect.

The floral sheeting and skirting are the most important items as they dress up the float with very little work and time creating great eye appeal.

Construction Site:

Pick an appropriate spot for constructing your float. There should be enough room for both your float and off-float work areas. Make sure you can use a nearby garage or another covered space. After you put in a lot of work, the last thing you want is to have your float ruined by a quick and unexpected five-minute rainstorm.

Beginning Construction

First, build a skirt frame from 2" X 2" pieces of wood and fasten the frame to the trailer bed. The skirt frame is used to hide the wheels and undercarriage. Allow 16" from the ground to the skirt frame to allow for tongue movement at the front of the float.

Lettering:

The lettering of your float is a very crucial part of your design. Often we see a great float and then the lettering is made on computer paper. We suggest cutting your own letters from thick cardboard or using a band saw and cutting 1/4 inch masonite or plywood letters. This gives your letters a 3D effect. Cover the letters with a nice metallic floral paper or spray paint to match your design. Styrofoam letters can be purchased or made to your specifications. Plan ahead as they may require extra production time.

Low-boy trailers are great for float building!

Low-boy type trailers usually have rails around the perimeter. The instructions below will show you how you can create a great looking basic float.

Pallets can be used to build a partial or full sub-structure to elevate the platform of the float.

It is a good idea to build a partial deck that will be even with the top rail of the float. Use good quality pallets to make a platform. Make sure the pallets are firmly fastened to the bed of the float. Lay sheet plywood over the pallets. Now you will have a platform for your props and an area in the bed where float riders can stand or sit. If your float riders will be standing, make a stanchion or rails and secure it to the trailer bed so that they have something to hold onto while traveling the parade route. Remember...[Safety first!](#)

Tips:

1. Make sure the objects on your float are secure.
2. If you will be having people riding on your float, be sure that they have something stable to hold onto.

Attachment of skirt frame and sheet plywood

After the plywood is laid over the pallets, build a skirt frame using 1" X 1" or 2" X 2" pieces of wood and fasten the frame to the trailer rails and the plywood. The skirt frame is used to hide the wheels and undercarriage. Any number of items can be used to fasten the skirt frame to the rails such as plumbers tape or construction U-shaped brackets. Again, be sure to terminate the skirt frame approximately 16" from the ground and allow for tongue movement at the front of the float.

Decorating the Float

Deck and side skirts: Calculate the floral sheeting requirements in square yards by multiplying the length times the width of each differently colored area. Cut the floral sheeting as needed and attach to the bottom of the skirt and staple to the deck of the trailer.

Attachment of floral sheeting to the skirt frame

Additionally, you can use floral sheeting to cover the deck-platform as well as on the bed of the float.

Attachment of fringe to the floral sheeting and wood skirt frame

Next staple "float fringe" into the wood skirt frame at the bottom of the frame. It is okay to staple through the decorating material and into the wood frame. This will give your float the "floating" appearance. Use Festooning to hide the seam between the floral sheeting and fringe. The festooning color you choose allows you to add even more color to your float. Festooning can be stapled through the fringe and floral sheeting materials and into the wood frame.

An alternative to using floral sheeting, you can also use "fringe panels"

The above sketch uses a longer fringe-skirt instead of a floral sheeting product. This skirt is approximately 30" tall and is designed to give the float a taller "floating" appearance. Many float builders like to use fringe-panels because of the ease of decorating.

Attachment of Festooning to top of Fringe Panels

No matter which you use, floral sheeting or fringe-panels on the sides of your float, it is a good idea to use festooning to finish the edges of the float. You can use festooning in a color other than your fringe panels to add more color to your float!

Dismantling

Floats come down much faster than they go up. Plan 30 to 60 minutes for dismantling. Some items are a one-time-use only. However lettering, festooning, vinyl sheeting and fringe drape can all be used several times if cared for and stored in a dry place.

***PLEASE NOTE: These materials will melt when left in a hot car.**