



The Bicycle Valet

**A toolkit for starting
your own bike valet**



Table of Contents

1 What is a bicycle valet and why are they important?
Page 1

2 Who are we?
Page 2

3 Getting Started
Page 3

4 Taking it to the next level
Page 5

1

What is a bicycle valet and why are they important?

A bicycle valet is free and safe bicycle parking for events. It operates just like a coat check, but for bikes (or any mode of active transportation).

Bicycle valets encourage and enable cycling to events where parking for bikes is scarce, non-existent, and prone to theft. A bicycle valet is a necessary tool in getting people to ride to events.

Whether you're a non-profit organization looking to promote cycling in your area and generate revenue for your organization, a municipality looking to encourage cycling to your events, or a university looking to convince students and faculty to ride to campus, this toolkit is for you.



2 Who are we?

Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST) started The Bicycle Valet in 2006, inspired by the success of the San Francisco Cycling Coalition's valet bike parking program. For the first few years we grew pretty much organically, picking up a few new events per year, parking between 300 and 1200 bikes per year. In 2009 we were suddenly parking over 7000 bikes per year. We began investing in business and marketing plans. In 2010 we landed a contract with the City of Vancouver to provide 9 stations for two weeks across the City. This experience tested our limits and organizational skills, and ultimately, proved invaluable. In 2011, we parked 21,000 bikes, and haven't looked back. We also parked 4500 bikes over 3 days at one event, a large free outdoor concert in Stanley Park, along with smaller events.

We have handled 7 events on one day, regularly park over 1000 bikes in a day, are an expected service at every major festival in the City and surrounding regions, employ a full time staff of two year round, four seasonally, and provide further casual employment for thirty individuals every summer. We have two vehicles we own and enough equipment to park 2000 bikes at one time. We have weekly and daily contracts during the summer. And we make a profit off the program, used to support our other programs in the organization. We have never turned down an event due to capacity issues.

We have had a lot of success in the last eleven years, but it hasn't been without trial and error. As more and more places are realizing the value of bicycle valets, and more organizations are reaching out to us for advice, we decided to synthesize the basics of the principles of setting up your own successful bike valet enterprise. If you would like individualized consulting advice over the phone, contact us to set up a time and discuss rates. An introductory phone call to discuss your main issues is complimentary.

3

Getting started

First, check to see if there any other groups providing bike valets in your area. If there are, maybe you can team up to make the operation that much better! Typically, bike valets are operated by non-profits promoting cycling. Such organizations are able to make use of their existing reputation, capacity and networks.

3.1 Find a champion

Ideally you can find someone to champion the program who is able to commit for a couple of years. Initially, your champion will be the person coordinating events, sponsors, staff, volunteers, social media and other communications, as well as being the one on site training, managing and supervising, as well as parking, bikes. If you can find more than one champion, all the better!

Qualifications for this person

- passionate about bike valet.
- Hard working.
- Reasonably fit- Moving and setting up equipment (fencing, bike racks, tents, tables etc), along with bikes, walking or running if it's busy, and standing for long periods of times, are all realities of the job.
- Driver's license- some valets start with a bike and trailer to haul all their equipment, but as soon as you get to another level of turn-key professionalism where you provide everything you need to operate a valet for more than 50 bikes at a time, the weight and size of the fencing and bike racks will not be manageable with a bike trailer.
- Doesn't mind working an irregular schedule- most events take place on weekends, and often start early and end late
- Organized- there are many components to juggle with bike valet. You need someone organized and who doesn't mind multi tasking

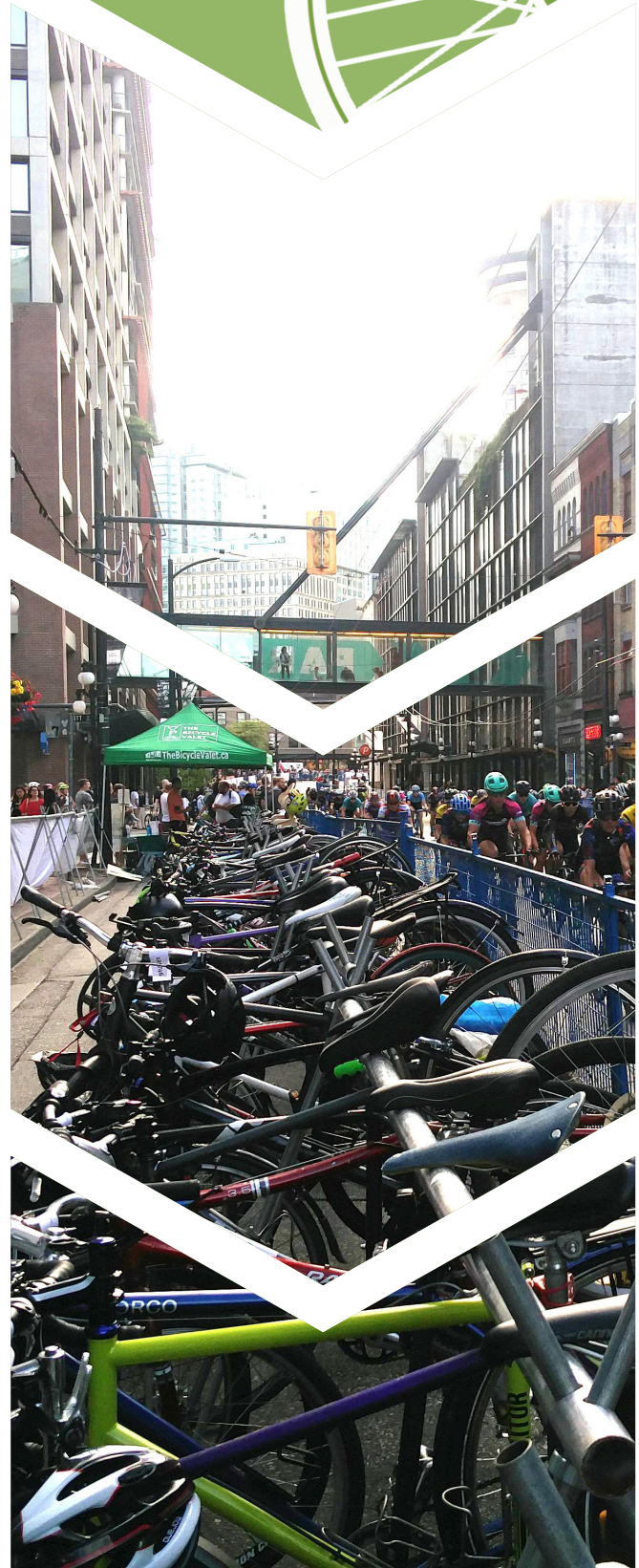
3.2 Vehicles

Depending on your access to vehicles, and what type of bike racks and fencing you are using, here's what we suggest for starting out:

- Rent a cargo van (check the length of the back to make sure it will allow racks to fit in)
- Buy or rent a trailer
- Borrow or use a pick up truck with canopy

3.3 Tickets

A low cost, easy option is to purchase tear off raffle tickets, and tape one part to the bike and hand the other one to the customer. Customized tickets discussed below.



4 Taking it to the next level

4.1 Custom Tickets	6
4.2 Bike racks	8
4.3 Transportation of materials	9
Advantages	
Disadvantages	
Things to think about when choosing a vehicle	
4.4 Drivers	11
4.5 Parking	11
4.6 Organizing your vehicle	12
4.7 Other supplies	12
Tents	
Tables	
Chairs	
Bins	
Banners	
Other banners	
Directional signage	
T-shirts	
4.8 Storage	16
4.9 Staffing	16
Recruitment	
4.10 Volunteers	17
Recruitment	
4.11 Revenue	18
Pricing for events	
How to determine how many staff per event	
Multi-day events	
Tips/donations	
Sponsors	
Non-financial sponsors	
4.12 Marketing	21
When to talk to events	
4.13 Promoting the service	22
Photos	
4.14 Other policies	23
Parking non-bikes	
Spacing/location	
Bikes leftover at the end of the event	
Events which serve alcohol	
Insurance	
If someone loses their ticket	

When you reach a critical mass of events booked or size of events or revenue generated, it will be time to invest in new equipment and increase the professionalization of your operation. How will you know when it will be time? Do some cost benefit analysis. How much are you spending renting racks per year, and how much extra time in pick up and coordination does this take? Now work out how much purchasing racks or making them will cost. And do you have the capital cost? How much will professional racks bring you in increased revenue just by the look of them? Further on we give a full picture of what the early days of the service looked like for us, before we invested in our own equipment, and outline the advantages and disadvantages of each.

When you're ready, here is what you should invest in:

4.1 Custom Tickets

Ditch the raffle tickets and get professional. Tickets are prime opportunities to showcase your marketing and sponsorship. Because of this, you might even be able to get your sponsor to cover the cost of the tickets. Your options are either printing custom tickets for each event if you have different event sponsors, or keep it simple and showcase your program title sponsor with tickets for the whole year.

Size

This is very important. Tickets are essentially two parts as soon as you rip them apart. The large part will be stapled to the bike, preferably between the handlebars but not on the wires so the ticket cannot fall off. This part needs to be large enough to be stapled easily, and wide enough to ensure the number is extremely legible. Too wide makes it hard to find space on the bike and is a waste of paper. The small part of the ticket is the claim stub. This needs to be small enough to fit into someone's pocket or wallet, but not too small that it's easily lost. Using the ticket stub to collect email addresses and names is a really powerful tool to cultivate a newsletter list, conduct surveys, collect feedback from users and promote other events the service will be at. Linking it to a contest with prizes works really well. Ask patrons if they want to enter while you collect their bike for them. Therefore make the claim stub big enough to give patrons sufficient room to write down their email address.



We have proofs of our tickets ready for print. We also have contest rules and regulations guidelines.

Material

The paper on which the tickets is printed is very important. The material must be relatively waterproof. If it's not, the ticket may disintegrate or the ink may run, making it illegible. It also must be easy to tear apart, so the perforation is important.

Colour

Make sure the number on both ends of the ticket are legible and stand out from a distance, even in dim light for night events.

For really large events where everyone is collecting their bike at one time, such as a concert, having a ticket with three parts can be great. Staple the large part to the bike, and hand the other two parts (intact) to the patron. For pick up, collect the ticket from the patron, rip the two parts, hand one back to the patron and one to a bike runner. When the bike runner returns with the bike, he calls out the number and matches the ticket parts together. This prevents multiple people all waiting for their bike without stubs at the same time, when handing back a bike to the wrong person is possible.

Electronic tickets

Some bike valets are now using apps and other technology instead of paper tickets. This has its benefits, but also drawbacks. Benefits include texting people when they haven't picked up their bike and you don't have to worry about lost tickets. However, sometimes simple is best. Reasons for not relying on electronic tickets:

- You need power, which is not normal at events and can be a hassle
- You need a backup if something goes wrong
- Costly
- You need to give everyone an electronic card, which may be lost and are costly to replace
- If it goes on their phone, they have to have a phone with data or wifi
- It can be time consuming to do at the moment, it just seems unnecessary



4.2 Bike racks

Virtually all professional bike valets use the A-frame metal racks. This design allows you to hang bikes from the seat, making it very easy to park them, and hard to scratch the bikes. This parking method does not work for bikes that are weighed down too much in the back, for cargo bikes, or bikes without seats. But they will work for 95% of the bikes you park.

These racks are also modular, so they take up very little space for storage and are easy to transport. They are also exceptionally easy to put together, and very lightweight for both storing and setting up (although when you get enough of them, they do add up in weight- see carrying capacity of vehicles below). The only disadvantage is that because they come apart, they don't work for locking bikes to them (and thus can only be used in a staffed valet system).

Obviously, this will be at a higher price point than if you sourced everything yourself and built them yourself. Things to keep in mind: metal is expensive. You want the racks as lightweight as possible to make them easy to carry and set up, but strong enough to hold the weight of the bikes. The Moved by Bikes ones save even more space than ours do with the small poles fitting inside the big poles, but take more time to fit them inside. Fast tear down and pack up is important. Triathlon bike racks are cheaper but still more expensive than doing it yourself. As well, they seem more designed for lightweight road bikes than heavy mountain bikes or city cruisers. Keep in mind shipping costs.

Most racks hold 7-9 bikes, depending on the type of racks and the type of bikes. This usually means a length of about 9 feet for the long pole, long enough to hold that many bikes, but not too long to buckle in the middle. It's also important to take into consideration transportation of the racks. If you're using an extended cargo van, the length we've found for GMC, Chevy and Ford are 9-9.5 feet in the back. So we made our racks 9 feet to fit.

We have full guidelines for making your own racks, including the type of metal to use, the collar requirements, the cut angles and the size templates.

There are a few places that sell these types of racks:

<http://triathlonbikerack.com/>

<http://www.movedbybikes.com/mb-bvaletrack/>



4.3 Transportation of materials

Some valets start with a bike and trailer to haul all their equipment, but as soon as you get to another level of turn-key professionalism where you provide everything you need to operate a valet for more than 50 bikes at a time, the weight and size of the fencing and bike racks will not be manageable with a bike trailer. We started out renting (and borrowing) vehicles to get all of our equipment to events.

Advantages

- Different vehicle options available
- No capital commitment on purchasing a vehicle and getting insurance
- Can test out what works for you
- No dealing with maintenance

When it's financially feasible and advantageous, purchasing your own vehicle will allow much greater efficiency of the whole system. The vehicle can act as storage for your equipment, allowing you to have everything ready to go when you pull up to an event. You can have a driver pick up the vehicle and drive it to the event ready to go. Our recommendation is to have one person spend a few hours a week during the busy season to go through the van, removing tips and log forms and contest entries, and cleaning and organizing the van. As much as you may try and get staff to keep it organized after an event, it's inevitably going to get messy, especially with volunteers helping and late night events.

We un insure our vehicle(s) during the off season, or any long stretches we don't have events.

Disadvantages

- Takes a lot of coordination to book vehicles
- Need to ensure you have someone old enough to rent vehicles
- Might need to use personal credit cards to rent often needs to be the same person booking as on the name of the credit card
- Possibility of reserving wrong time, or wrong vehicle, or the rental place screwing up
- Have to pick up vehicle, load equipment, go to event, unload equipment then return vehicle
- Rental locations for large trucks can be inconvenient
- Pick up and drop off times can be inconvenient
- Driving unfamiliar vehicles
- High cost per rental
- Greater chance you will forget to bring something to an event

Things to think about when choosing a vehicle

- **Weight capacity of vehicle**
racks and fencing are heavy
- **Age of vehicle**
how much money and time will you spend on fixing it up. You can't afford a vehicle breaking down en route to an event. But new cargo vehicles are extremely expensive. Also, the more fuel efficient the better, obviously. We recently purchased a second vehicle that runs on natural gas. We use this one for the more urban events, and the gas one for further away events. This has let us save a considerable amount on fuel, and hopefully reduce our impact on the environment.
- **Size of vehicle**
is it easy to drive for most people? How many passengers can you hold? It's nice to have an extra seat for staff to carpool, but extra room beyond that should probably be devoted to equipment. Are there blind spots? Windows in the back? Windows are great for backing up, but too many windows might mean it's easier for others to see if you have equipment worth stealing in the back. Keep this in mind if you plan to store your vehicle on the street when not at an event. If you have amateur drivers, costs of accidents will add up. How tall is the vehicle? We find this really important for underground parking, which we need to use for downtown events. We have the height clearance requirement posted in the van for everyone to see.
- **Tires**
we have a cargo van and recently got truck tires meant for vehicles carrying heavier loads, and they have helped a lot with stability and grip. We also invested in better suspension on the vehicle.
- **Security**
metal is expensive. Make sure the vehicle is properly secured and not a target for theft. Check that either your vehicle or liability insurance covers your equipment in a movable storage site like a vehicle.



4.4 Drivers

When starting out, your coordinator will probably be the one driving the vehicle to and from events. Once you hit a critical mass of events, you will need others to be able to drive the vehicle. We currently have a pool of at least 10 drivers who can drive the vehicles. We give full driver training to everyone before they start, pointing out the quirks in each vehicle, proper vehicle handling, etc, as well as getting a photocopy of their drivers license before they start.

Because of the added responsibility of driving the vehicle, and making sure they get to the event on time, etc, we pay all driving shifts \$2 more an hour. This also provides incentives for staff to sign up for these shifts, rather than non-driving shifts, which are easier and involve less responsibility. We schedule lots of ample time for drivers to get to and from events, and tell staff to round up to the nearest half an hour, as realistically, casual staff hours are not a huge cost in the grand scheme of things. Drivers are generally the first point of contact for events, so beyond the ability to drive the vehicle, drivers need to be friendly, professional and organized. Drivers are the site supervisors if coordinators are not on site.

4.5 Parking

At events, there is sometimes designated parking for event vendors. This should always be asked in advance of events, as there are often parking passes you will need to be issued, or certain streets or spaces you are allowed to park in. Occasionally, we find we can just park right next to the valet, which makes unloading pretty easy. If you are parking away from the valet, unload everything (use a checklist- we have one available) you'll need, and drive the van away well before the event starts, then come back and set up (if only one person working). If you have two people working, have the other(s) start setting up while the driver parks the vehicle to save time.

If there is no designated parking at the event, it is up to the driver to find parking that is legal, accessible and hopefully free. We keep change in the vehicle in case a driver needs to pay for parking. We also reimburse drivers if they choose to put the fee on their credit card, or they can take the money out of tips (and record it as such). We leave it up to the judgement of the driver as to what type of parking they can find. Sometimes it makes more sense to pay for parking, and save time. Keep parking costs in mind when pricing the event.

Parking after the event. Our office is centrally located, so we have created a map of possible on street parking locations that is kept in the van for reference. Once a driver has found a spot, they update our central database so anyone can find the van when they need it. Depending on schedules, we let our drivers take vehicles to their place of residence if they are using the van the next day, and no one needs it before then. Or we request certain drop off locations if the van is needed early the next day, such as at another driver or coordinator's house. We have considered paying for a parking spot near the office for the summer months, but haven't found it worth it quite yet.



4.6 Organizing your vehicle

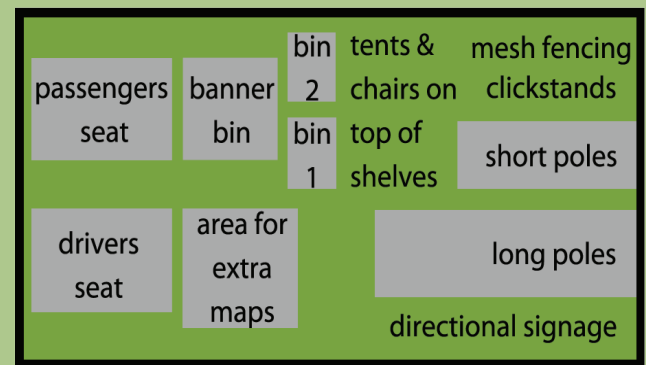
Immediately upon purchase, we build customized storage shelves in the van, which store our bike racks in two different compartments, which is a necessity for organization and using space efficiently. On top (above) the shelving compartments we store the tents, chairs etc. Using the side door, we store tables and t-shirts. In the front we keep the tickets. We require all employees to return supplies to their spots, although inevitably, the van gets messy. As mentioned, we recommend paying someone a few hours a week to clean out the van and re-stock supplies, at least during busy season. This will probably be the coordinator, at least at first, as they can then get the needed supplies. Our database allows employees to add to our list of needed supplies on their phone (we use Trello currently as our database).

4.7 Other supplies

Tents

For years, we used standard 10x10 pop up tents that cost approximately \$100-130 each. These tend to last one season of use, and the parts cannot be replaced. They can be purchased from most outdoor stores (Canadian Tire for us).

Recently, thanks to our generous sponsors, we were able to purchase two branded tents, with our logo and sponsor logo on the roof of the tent. This increases our visibility dramatically, which is great for marketing, but also for cyclists trying to find the service once they reach the event. The cost of these tents are quite high (\$1000-1500), but the parts are replaceable, and they have warranties. The other downside is they are quite heavy, although they do come with a rolling bag to make it easier. We find them extremely difficult to put up by yourself, so we don't use them for smaller events where we only have one person working (visibility is probably not so important in this case anyway). Also, with only two of them, we keep one in each van, supplemented by other normal cheap tents, and use the branded ones on the biggest events we have, or ones in which we really want our sponsors showcased.



van layout



Tables

We use folding plastic 6ft. tables with handles for super easy carrying and storage. We recently added non branded tablecloths (we just bought sheets from a thrift store and sewed them to appropriate dimensions), which makes everything look better, and hides whatever you're storing under the table at the event. We use one table per event, holding the tickets, staplers, contest boxes, maps etc. On really large events, we often have two tables, one to hold staff's personal items, such as waterbottles (kept back to keep safe). Large events often offer tables and chairs, and sometimes even tents, as they're providing them to their other vendors anyway. We often accept, but have our own available for backup, in case the event runs out of tables before they get to us.

Chairs

We have cheap, small chairs that work pretty well and don't take up a lot of room to store, as they fold.

Bins

We keep all loose items such as pens, staplers, etc in small bins, that we then put in rubbermaid bins, that then get labelled for specific events and put in the van on the side door.

Banners

These are designed to fit perfectly on to the bike racks as described above, which then becomes our fencing. Note: for events in which we are parking more than 200 bikes at one time, we generally require events to provide us with a minimum of 4 foot (6-8 foot preferable) event (moduloc) fencing. If it's a big enough event, they are probably ordering fencing anyway. This frees up equipment for actually parking the events, and reduces labour time when setting up and tearing down. We put our banners on this event fencing, although they won't fit quite as well as on the customized fencing.

We have a few different banners. Size and material templates are available. Our main banners are the ones that say "free and safe bicycle parking", include our logo, our sponsors logos, and our social media networks. These we used to make green, with white writing, but have recently changed to white material in order to incorporate colour in our sponsors' logos. But obviously white gets dirtier fast. In our experience, we've had to update our banners every two to three years, to make them look better, and to reflect sponsor changes. If you can get a volunteer graphic designer to design the banners, awesome. These banners are "one panel" in size, meaning they fit one bike rack, and thus cover about 10 feet of space.

We also have one panel banners that reflect different messages, such as sponsor messages, or a call out for volunteers, or our mission and vision as an organization. We have fewer of these, as they are not as important.

Then we have "three panel" banners, banners that cover three bike racks, or approximately 30 feet of space. These are unbranded, because they are cheaper, and are used in the less visible spots to complete the fencing. These are also far faster to put up as they cover more area. Try to avoid using them around corners though; they bunch up.

We attach our banners to the bike racks using reusable zap straps (best thing ever invented), which we then loop around the ends of the bike racks. Zap straps allow you to get the banners tight and straight, ensuring they look good. We keep them on the banners for the next event.

The material we go for is lightweight, with small holes, to allow the wind to blow through and for faster drying after rainy days. Because the bike racks are so lightweight, if it's a windy day, there is a real concern about the fencing blowing over. To combat this we use sandbags, draping them on the inside of the fencing to weigh it down without detracting from the look on the outside. Sandbags are also used to keep the tents grounded. We find this more necessary for the fencing when you're doing a valet on concrete, rather than grass.

Other banners

Recently we've added bow flag banners, which stand up independently (sometimes need a sandbag), and are great in the wind. We place these outside the entrance of the valet to increase the visibility of our presence (and our sponsors). We keep two in each vehicle.

Directional signage

This is really important, particularly for events at which the Valet is not right at the main entrance (always a goal!). We use green corrugated plastic with white paint to incorporate our logo, free and safe bicycle parking, and arrows. **Directional signage templates available.** We have different size signage (some horizontal, most vertical), to be used on street posts, trees etc, attached with removable zap straps. We post these on the most obvious cycle routes, leading toward the valet. Depending on the size of the event, we allocate up to an hour to do this for one person, marking the places we put them on pre printed google maps, to be handed to the person responsible for taking them down at the end of the night. For multi day events, we often leave them up. Occasionally, they get stolen, but they're not super expensive. Make sure you get a type of paint that does not come off easily, especially if you use tape on the sign.



Also make sure you get a variety of arrow directions. We have clear arrows to paste over the signs if we need to change the direction, although obviously this doesn't look quite as good. Make sure the signs are waterproof. We find we have to restock our supply every few years, as they get damaged or stolen or lost.

Some larger events get additional signage made up to complement ours, which is great. If they don't mind us using this after the event, we use this as back up (as it doesn't have our branding, but still does the job).

T-shirts

We use t-shirts that we require all staff, and encourage volunteers to wear, while on site. These denote who is allowed in the valet, and adds to our branding. We recently purchased lightweight t-shirts that have proven very popular, as it's hot parking bikes in the summer. We probably go through about a hundred shirts a year, covered by our generous sponsors. These look great in photos!

Other than the t-shirts, we allow staff and volunteers to wear what they want, encouraging them to cover up from the sun, and wear clothes they don't mind getting a bit dirty. Good running shoes make for happier feet, and closed toed shoes are certainly essential. **Full policies on this available in our staffing and volunteer manual.**



4.8 Storage

Beyond our vehicles, we have an offsite storage facility that holds our overflow equipment in the summer, and all of our equipment in the winter or off season. Our storage is available 24 hours a day, with access information provided to coordinators and occasionally shift leaders. Due to the ebb and flow of events, we find it is only during our busiest weekends that we need all of our equipment, and don't like to keep our vehicles loaded down, so keep the excess equipment in storage.

4.9 Staffing

No matter how small your operation is, make sure you always have one person able to respond to event booking requests and questions. When you're starting out, during the off season, this could be your office administration position, or someone running another program. Just make sure someone is available and is able to explain how the Valet works and knows how to make a quote for an event (in a reasonable amount of time- quick response time is important).

We have always had one main coordinator responsible for the day to day operations, reporting to a manager or Executive Director. **Job descriptions for Assistant Coordinators are available.**

As our program has expanded, we've moved this coordinator position from a few months over the busy summer month, to a full time position. Currently we have one coordinator year round, supplemented by three assistant coordinators for four months over the summer. Other than high level strategic partnerships, the coordinator runs the program, being the primary person responsible for event coordination, marketing, volunteer and staff recruitment, management, appreciation (parties and prizes), and social media. During the summer, she/he assigns individual event tasks to the assistant coordinators.

While initially our coordinator would be present at most events, now she is busy enough that she only attends our busiest, most complex events. Or if we really can't find enough staff on that particular day, or someone calls in sick. There is enough work in the office to justify a full time position. This also makes it easier to ensure that the coordinator is available 9-5 Monday to Friday, which is really helpful for coordination and communicating with events. In our experience, event organizers tend to work about 24/7 for at least a month, and expect you to do the same. We now get around this burden on one individual by having the coordinator available during regular office hours (plus usually a little later in the busy summer), and then assigning assistant coordinators or site supervisors as the designated reps for the event on the day of the event. We generally establish a chain of command: if a volunteer doesn't know what to do, they ask a staff member, who asks the lead staff, who asks the assistant coordinator, who asks the coordinator, who finally asks the manager or ED if it is a very unusual issue.

Responsibilities and expectations of staff members are outlined in our staffing manual, which is available to use as a template.

Our staffing requirements per event are calculated when we quote the price. Quotes and pricing discussed below. Once the event is confirmed, we schedule the open slots in an excel format of a master schedule. While ideally we would schedule the appropriate staff as soon as we book an event, this isn't practical when you have multiple events in one day, and some events only booking at the last minute. Our coordinator and assistant coordinators are flexible because this is their full time job, and we often finalize their schedules a few days before the actual event. The coordinator and assistant coordinators know roughly what to expect before this time, but often there is information needed to create the final schedule which is only available a few days before the event. For other staff shifts (for our casual staff), we post open shifts on our online scheduling software (we use When I Work), advertising the length of the shift, the location, the type of shift (driver or not), and the type of event, allowing anyone available to take the shift as soon as it is posted. We try to post a couple of weeks in advance, but that isn't always realistic.

Recruitment

Initially, we recruited through our own personal networks. Now, we post employment opportunities on our website, through our newsletter and social media. For summer assistant coordinator positions, we advertise through our local university co-op programs.

4.10 Volunteers

Recruitment

Our first pool of volunteers seemed to just be friends of the Coordinator. If you have volunteers from other programs of the organization, helping at bike valet is a great further volunteer opportunity. If you don't, try asking other organizations for support in getting out the message that you have opportunities available for a new program. If you have Board Members, get them to help out. With limited volunteers, we pretty much staffed most of our events for the first few years. This cost us more per event, but also minimized training time, as most staff members would work multiple events.

Today, our primary recruitment tool is through users or patrons of the service. As mentioned, we collect email addresses from the ticket stub contest entries. Ideally once a week we enter in all of the contest entries, and send an initial email confirming their entry and asking them to subscribe to our newsletter. Using this database, we send out a volunteer recruitment request once or twice a year, with details on our upcoming volunteer training sessions. We have an online form volunteers can fill out on our website to sign up which is linked to our management software. Once signed up volunteers can schedule themselves for any open shift, up to a year in advance to one day in advance, or depending on when we post the shifts. We tend to post volunteer shifts as soon as the event is booked, as unlike staff, these shifts won't change depending on us booking more events. During our busy season, we send out weekly email reminders to everyone, notifying them of the upcoming available shifts that still need to be filled. We use the online volunteer software Volgistics to coordinate and schedule volunteers.

If a volunteer wants to help out without having attended a training session, we email them the **volunteer manual (template available)**. We also make sure to notify our lead staff at the event, making sure basic appropriate training is provided on site. Volunteers that attend a training session are also emailed the volunteer manuals for reference.

Another option, particularly before you have built up a good volunteer pool, is to use volunteers an event may offer you (usually in conjunction with a price discount on your part). This can work out pretty well. However, in our experience, these volunteers can be of varying quality, at worst not showing up, or just not wanting to be there. If you recruit your own volunteers, they will actually want to be there, and probably understand the service and its importance. Be cautious with overly relying on event volunteers. Another problem with big events is volunteers drop out, and the event ends up with fewer volunteer than they need, inevitably reducing the number they give to you.

4.11 Revenue

Our revenue comes from a combination of three sources: fees charged to events for us providing the service, tips generated from being at events and parking bikes, and sponsorship dollars from organizations looking to support the service and gain recognition.

Pricing for events

We charge almost every event we provide our service for. It's easy to want to provide it for free for charitable events you want to support, but doing so costs you money in coordination, travel and staffing, and undervalues your service. Currently, we have a formula for quoting each event, based on the number of hours we will spend at an event (including set up and take down), the number of staff at one time, and the location of the event. The first two factors are the most important. We charge more for very far away events, such as a music festival out of town, to cover our staff time in driving, and gas. Volunteers that you provide give you some flexibility on pricing. You can make the call if you charge for them or not. Remember, volunteers still cost you money in recruitment, appreciation, coordination and management. **Our quote chart and calculations for events are available as a template.**



Currently, no matter how short the event is, we charge \$400 minimum daily fee.

There are two ways to get to a price point you feel is reasonable for your service. The first is by attracting customers by initially undercharging. Once they see the value in the service, you can increase the fees. If you do this, remember that it will be hard to increase the fees per year, so make sure the customer knows that they are getting a deal the first year, and to expect a significant increase the next year. Also make sure part of the agreement for the reduced cost is maximum exposure, both in terms of advertisement and promotion and in terms of location of the Valet itself. You need to get a lot of bikes out to prove the worth of your service, so you need the event to market the valet everywhere they can. You also need an extremely visible and accessible location to ensure high uptake. Use the discount as leverage to get such a location.

The second option is charge what you think is fair, straight off the bat. This way you don't have to worry about increasing the price every year, beyond inflation of course. It will be harder to attract customers, but you won't be underpricing for your services.

How to determine how many staff per event

While this might take some trial and error, for a standard event where bikes are coming and going throughout the day, for a capacity of around 30 bikes a day, we just put one staff on. For 30-70, we try to get a volunteer to help the staff person. For 70-100 bikes, two staff people. For 150, three staff people. Events where everyone is dropping off their bike at one time and leaving at one time, such as a soccer match, it's different. For 30 bikes, two people (staff or volunteer, but at least one staff), for 70 bikes, three people, for 100 bikes, four people, 150, five, 200-250, six. The most people we've had picking up bikes at one time was 20 people, when we had nearly 1000 bikes still left at the end of a music concert. That was pretty efficient with some very good organization and clearly laid out roles (explained in our staffing manual template).

Multi-day events

these are tricky. Generally, the concept of a staffed bicycle valet works really well for short events. The longer an event is, the higher the cost is, especially on a per bicycle ratio, as you have to pay your staff for the whole time, even when only a few bicycles (or none) are trickling in. This makes it quite expensive for events which are more than one day in length. For music festivals and other paid events that have large budgets, this can be fine. For markets or fairs that are weekly, it can be prohibitive. Currently, we are paid to do a weekly food cart festival, and are contracted out to do three days a week for two months in the summer at a popular tourist and local destination where bicycle theft is rampant. So it can work, but the profit margin on these events per day is considerably lower than one off or annual events.

Ideally, you can leave all your equipment up overnight during multi day events, eliminating take down time for one day, and set up the other. To do this, you'll need tall enough fencing (we would recommend 8 feet, but 6 feet may do), and overnight security for the event. Keep in mind that it is still a risk leaving your equipment overnight, particularly at large events where security is not stationed right in front, and there are a large groups roaming around (such as at music festivals). We have had minor incidences of vandalism/theft in the past, but nothing really to worry about.

If leaving equipment on site overnight, we collapse the tent over the table and chairs and bin, and make sure no money is left on site (the last staff member takes it home and returns it to the event the next day, to the vehicle, or to the office). If you can leave things set up, rather than on-site but disassembled, you can then reduce the price accordingly to take into account staff time saved setting up and taking down again. We also usually offer about a 10% discount for multi day bookings, and much further discounts for regular events, as our coordination is reduced significantly, and we want the price to be affordable. In general, it's much easier working with returning events than new ones, justifying discounts for returning events.

Tips/donations

Our service is free. Many events have asked us if we can either charge patrons for the service so events can offload the cost, but we refuse. We are promoting cycling to events, and charging for the service does not encourage cycling. We did experiment with a suggested donation for a weekly event that could not afford our service, and found that fewer people used the service, and the revenue generated by the suggested \$2 did not even cover our staff time at the event. As well, it harmed our reputation as a valuable, free service. The exception to the rule is when we've accepted donations on behalf of another charity.

We do accept tips. We put a tip box out, but do not solicit tips, and all of our team members are aware it is a completely free service. We pool all of the tips and use the revenue to throw 2-3 appreciation parties for all team members (volunteers and staff), treating them to free food, drinks and prizes. The rest of the revenue goes to the organization. In general, we find tips add up to about \$0.10 a bicycle.

Sponsors

Our third source of revenue is through sponsorships. Like most events and programs, we offer different levels of sponsorship opportunities, with different amounts of recognition. **We have sponsorship templates available.** Obviously, the more events you attend, and the more bikes you park, the more your sponsorship opportunity is worth. Because of this, it is important to note not only the number of events you do, and how many bikes you park at each, but the total number of attendees at each event, as that is the potential number of people who have seen the sponsor's logo. We outline these numbers in the final reports which we provide to all of our financial sponsors. The reports include sponsor recognition and exposure, but also outlines how we grow each year and make a difference to cycling in the community.

Finding sponsors is not an easy task. While a bicycle valet is unique and stands out from the crowd, it can also be difficult to explain. Having a sales script is important. First, compile a list of potential sponsors. In our experience, organizations and companies that share the values of your organization will be your best bet, rather than large financial institutions who typically give to children's and hospital charities. Next, you have to find the right person to speak to (using sales script). Then, you need to be able to speak to the service and why it's a good sponsorship opportunity for them. Be prepared to negotiate between the different sponsorship levels. Ideally, you can keep good relationships with sponsors and have them for multiple years, offering financial stability, cost savings on printing, and savings on sponsorship development time. Our sponsors have become real partners, working with us to get the service at more events to increase our impact.

Non-financial sponsors

We often have companies interested in partnering with us, but unwilling to give up cash. The only real partnership we've made work is for a significant discount (in-kind sponsorship) with a print shop. They give us the discount and we in turn recognize them as a print sponsor. Other partnerships we are considering are tune ups by donation and registering bikes in an online database to help combat bike theft. In other words, free services that we feel create value for our patrons and events which hire us (with the event's permission of course).

4.12 Marketing

In the startup phase, the key will be selling the concept of a bicycle valet, and convincing event organizers of the value it offers (and the value you offer, by doing it for them). While it will always be difficult to convince some event organizers, you will find organic growth happens by word of mouth. The best marketing you can do is offer the service at other events where people will see you. Once an event has seen your service at their event and received positive feedback, it will be fairly easy to re-book them the following year.

When to talk to events

You want to talk to events as early as possible, to get in the door when they are planning their budgets. They might tell you it's too early, but if that's the case, ask when you should get back in touch, and plan to do so according to their planning schedule.

When we started out, we contacted every event we felt would be a good fit, using a **sales script (template available)**. Finding the right person to talk to is half the battle. In our experience, sometimes it is the marketing person, and sometimes it is the logistics/traffic person. Large events will have multiple options, while small ones may only have one volunteer coordinator.

Now in our 10th year, we only reach out to events which we really feel should have a Valet, or ones that are special one time events (such as a World Cup). We find we book enough new events without spending too much time soliciting new ones by cold calling.

4.13 Promoting the service

Once an event is booked, you want to ensure as many people ride their bikes as possible, to ensure an event will re-book with you, and because you want to promote cycling! While you should promote the fact that you will be offering a bicycle valet service at each event through your own channels, realistically it is up to the event to really get the word out. As soon as we book an event, we send them a marketing sheet and ask them to send it to their marketer. **Template for this available.**

On our end, we have a website dedicated solely to the service (www.thebicyclevalet.ca). On the website, we have an integrated google calendar where we display basic information about all events we will be at, including opening and closing hours, specific valet location, and basic event information. We also tweet every time we book an event, and send out multiple tweets before and during the event to gain exposure. We have too many events to clutter our organization's Facebook feed, but often post photos of events we've done. Finally, we have an instagram account we use to promote the service, before, during and after events. Finding the relevant accounts for each event is extremely important, as is passing the information on to whomever is working the event. The team leader is responsible for social media during the event (see Staffing). Our Coordinator is responsible for responding to interactions on social media, in real time if possible. We also monitor relevant hashtags on Twitter and Instagram (using Hootsuite) to see if we have been mentioned without actually being tagged (if people don't realize we have specific handles). We advertise our social media on our banners and fencing. **We have developed a social media best practices document, available as a template.**

Photos

Team leaders are responsible for taking photos, although we encourage anyone and everyone to take photos, including volunteers and patrons. We use photos for marketing, social media, final reports, planning for future years (photos of the set up is super helpful both internally and working with events again). You can really never take enough photos. Photos of people interacting with the service are particularly important, rather than just static bike shots that all start to look the same.



4.14 Other policies

Parking non-bikes

We will generally park most forms of sustainable transportation, including skateboards, rollerblades, strollers and push scooters. We've also been known to park kayaks, stand up paddleboards, and snowboards. These generally aren't an issue, provided there is ample space. If there isn't enough space, priority needs to go to bicycles. E-scooters in particular can take up a lot of room. We leave it up to the team leader to make the decision on an individual basis.

Spacing/location

As mentioned with under the pricing section, finding a location that is both accessible and visible is extremely important for people to be able to find you (even with directional signage). But you also need to make sure you have enough space. We have a spacing chart available that tells you how much space you need per bicycle parked, using our rack system.

Bikes leftover at the end of the event

This is not as big of an issue as you might think. Parking 25,000 bikes a year, we typically have about 5 instances of bikes leftover at an event throughout the entire season. To try and avoid this happening, we first set a posted pick up time, generally half an hour after an event ends to give patrons time to get back to the Valet. We display this in two visible places at the Valet. If patrons drop off their bike towards the end of the event, we verbally tell them when the latest pickup time is. We do not collect phone numbers and names, as we find this for the most part unnecessary, and time-consuming, reducing the efficiency and ease of service. Beyond this half an hour window, it generally takes us another half an hour to an hour to completely clean up, giving a larger buffer for patrons to pick up their bikes.

If there is still a leftover bike by the time we are ready to leave an event, the driver considers the following options, before confirming with the Coordinator:



- transporting the bike to a secure offsite location (in practical terms this usually means fitting it into the vehicle and taking it to the office, but we have had staff walk/ride the bike back to their house). If this happens, the patron will generally call the office (contact information for BEST being available online and on their claim stub), at which point they will receive a message providing the cell phone number of the Coordinator to use in emergencies, or cases such as these. A pick up time can then be arranged, for a fee of \$20 to cover additional staff time. We still expect the claim stub to be shown when the bike is picked up.
- leaving the bike with the event- we do this only when we are comfortable doing so. For example, when the event is sure it is the bike of a volunteer who is still cleaning up, and they are going to be onsite until the volunteer leaves. Or when there will be onsite security, such as at a music festival that needs to clean up for a few days.
- leaving the bike overnight if we have a safe place at the event to store it. For example, at a large multi day music festival we park bikes in an arena, where we have exclusive access, and can lock it up at night. We still tell patrons that we don't take responsibility for bikes left overnight, but realistically the bikes are completely secure.
 - for a couple of large multi day music festivals where many bikes are leftover at the end of the festival, the festival brings the bikes to the police for pick up. We encourage the police to still use the ticket system.
- on one occasion we have left a bike locked up inside a compound that is not completely secure, as a last resort. If none of the above options work, we have done this, leaving a phone number for the patron to call if they return to find their bike locked, at which point they can call the number and get the combination to the lock.
- Keep in mind that our policy for taking responsibility for bikes only extends to the end of our posted service hours. While we still want to keep bikes safe beyond this time, if something did happen after we shut our service, the patron would need to take responsibility for not abiding by the terms of the service. However, we have never actually run into this situation.

Events which serve alcohol

Generally speaking, we have not found this to be an issue. Events which serve alcohol also offer car parking. Not everyone who attends the event drinks. In cases where we notice a patron is intoxicated, we advise them to walk their bicycle home, put their bike on the bus, in a cab, or get someone not intoxicated to ride it home. Occasionally, such as at a music festival, intoxicated patrons have left their bicycles with us overnight and picked them up the next day (see leftover bike section above).

Insurance

We take full responsibility for every bike that is checked into our service. We do not officially take responsibility for other articles checked, but in practice we do. We have had the odd occasion where a helmet (supposedly attached to the bike) has gone missing, in which case we have offered to cover the cost of replacing it. Even if we don't officially take responsibility for the missing article, it makes more sense to maintain a professional level of service and apologize and offer to cover the cost. We keep business cards of our Coordinator on site so lower level staff can give them out for this purpose.

In order to guarantee a return of every patron's bicycle, we carry liability insurance. While we have never used this, it would cover us if we needed to make a claim to replace multiple bicycles or a really expensive bike (taking into consideration the cost of a deductible and how much the rate would increase following a claim). Liability insurance is also often a requirement of the events which hire us. Occasionally, we have to add third parties (events) to our insurance policy for the days at which we are offering the service at events. The insurance is a blanket policy, also covering us if a staff member or volunteer is injured, or we do harm to the event or venue.

If someone loses their ticket

This does happen, although probably not as often as you might think. It's important to remind someone as you are parking their bike that they need to hold on to the ticket, as they will need it to get their bike back. While we've never had someone find a ticket on the ground, and use it to claim someone else's bike, theoretically it could happen. If someone returns saying they've lost their ticket, the first question to ask is whether or not they have a lock on their bike and have the key with them. If they do, get them to point to the bike and then bring it to them and get them to unlock the lock so you are sure it is their bike.

If they don't have a lock and matching key, you need to use your judgement. If it's a large valet, ask them what time they came in to locate the approximate place of their bike. Get them to describe their bike as much as possible, with particular attention to defining stickers, helmet colour, style of bike, colour of bike, etc. If they came in with someone else, check if the bike they described is right next to their friend's bike, who still has a ticket. Ultimately, it's up to you (we usually put this on the supervisor on site) to determine whether or not you feel comfortable returning a bike without a ticket. We have had instances where we have refused and told the person to come back at the end of the event to see if anyone else claims the bike, but have also returned many bikes without tickets, using the techniques described above.

Better Environmentally Sound Transportation

204 – 175 East Broadway
Vancouver BC Canada V5T 1W2

☎ 604-669-2860 | ✉ bicyclevalet@best.bc.ca | 🌐 thebicyclevalet.ca

Content by: Stephanie Williams

Design by: Chiara M. Rieser