

Burning Man

Burning Man is a weeklong gathering in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada. The event encourages attendees (who call themselves “Burners”) to bring art and music, and essentially relies on the efforts of volunteer attendees to create Black Rock City. The company that runs the event does not provide any of the entertainment, but does organize volunteers, acquires land-use permits, and collects ticket revenue from the approximately 50,000 attendees. The company, Black Rock City, LLC is a for-profit organization. This is a little surprising considering that the founding principles focus heavily on a communal, gift-based economy. It is also surprising that the event is largely a success due to the efforts of the attendees and not necessarily due to the work of the LLC. People spend millions of dollars, not to mention substantial investments of time and effort, building art installations for the event. Black Rock City, LLC undeniably benefits from the efforts of people who pay for the privilege of sharing their art with the Burner community.

The founder of Black Rock City, LLC, Larry Harvey, addressed this paradox in 2011 when he announced plans to shift the company to a nonprofit¹. The plan was for the six owners to liquidate their interests in the company and then assume new roles as directors on the board of the new nonprofit. According to the Bylaws of the organization, each Director would receive \$20,000 upon selling their stake in the company. Harvey said that this process would be gradual and over the course of three years, Black Rock City and the Burning Man festival would be run by a new nonprofit called The Burning Man Project.

¹ Jessica Bruder, *The Changing Face of the Burning Man Festival*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 27, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/28/business/growing-pains-for-burning-man-festival.html?pagewanted=all>.

Harvey's promise "to gift the event back to the community" rings a little hollow today, nearly two years after the announcement to transfer ownership to the nonprofit organization. Now, Harvey and fellow Black Rock City, LLC board member, Marian Goodell, are resisting abdicating power to a board of directors of a nonprofit, on which they would represent only a minority vote. The nonprofit, The Burning Man Project, was created and will continue to assist with the production of the event. Harvey and Goodell are concerned that the original purpose and mission of Burning Man may be altered in an unsatisfactory way if the nonprofit takes control.²

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² Steven T. Jones, *Burning Man event will benefit its new nonprofit whose future role is still murky*, San Francisco Bay Guardian Online, Jul. 24, 2013, <http://www.sfbg.com/politics/2013/07/24/burning-man-event-will-benefit-its-new-nonprofit-whose-future-role-still-murky>