

Event Planning

Student organizations provide many events and programs for the campus community. This section is intended as a first step in planning a program. Many events or activities will have special regulations and policies to follow. Student organizations are strongly encouraged to seek programming expertise and advice as early as possible in the planning process. The first step in program planning involves brainstorming among group members. Once the best-brainstormed idea has been identified and refined, it is time to give life to your ideas.

Getting started.

This year, who is organizing your organization's big event? Is it you? Are you involved in the big event in any way?

If so, there are some definite steps you need to take in order to ensure that your event goes off without a hitch. Now, we're not talking about a spur of the moment cookout or social gathering, we're talking about the sorority formal, the club's awards banquet, officer elections; these are the type of events we are talking about. This event may or may not be scripted by tradition, but the organization and planning will always take effort and attention to detail in order to achieved the desired results. The two most important things to remember when planning the big event are,

1. Allow yourself enough time to prepare, and
2. Don't procrastinate!

First, ask your group some questions:

- What goals do we want to achieve from this project -- fun, attendance, money, publicity, group cohesiveness or some combination of these?
- Do we have any money to pay the performer(s) and advertise the event or will we need to do fundraising beforehand?
- How many people will get involved and help; where and how?
- What kind of experience organizing events do our members have?
- Is an event the best way to achieve our goals?

If you still see encouraging signs after thinking about these things, then you are probably ready to decide on the type of event -- dance, sports or social activity, performance, lecture, concert, etc.

Purpose

The first thing to do when planning an event is to ask yourself and the organization some questions:

- Why are you putting on the event?
- Is there a need/interest for it on campus or in the community?
- What do you want to achieve by having this program?
- Do you have enough people and resources to organize the event?
- Does this event help you meet your group's goals?
- Are your members enthusiastic about organizing this event?
- Is there enough time to organize the event and for publicity items to be created and distributed so that it will be effective?

Here are some other questions that you can prepare for when you are in charge of the big event.

- What is going to be the date of the event?
- What is the name of the event going to be?
- What is the purpose of the event?
- When will the event begin and end?
- How many people are anticipated to participate?
- What is your budget for the event?
- Who needs to be the contact person for the event?
- What will be the schedule of the event?
- Are there any special equipment needs (lighting/sound)?

Get people involved.

These are just a few of the important issues you will confront when organizing your event. These responsibilities can stack up very quickly if you aren't paying attention them, so remember this very important rule, *YOU CANT DO IT ALL BY YOURSELF*. If you try to handle very aspect of your organization's big event, there is good chance you will go crazy trying to accomplish everything on your own. It's very important to delegate responsibilities to other members of your organization. By giving other people responsibilities concerning the event, it helps develop their leadership skills in your organization. After all, it might be their job to coordinate this same event next year! When you assign different tasks to other members of your organization, it is important that you do more than simply tell them what to do. How you like it if someone said to you, "Bob, take care of the food for the 19th." Not only is it vague, but it also sounds like a direct order instead of a request. Try to explain the importance of their task and how it relates to the success of the event. By doing this, you are making their task personally important to them. It's also crucial to be specific as possible.

Be sure to explain concerns such as the budget, scheduling, and logistics to others when you assign them tasks. You don't want Suzie to spend \$400 on decorations when your budget for the entire event is \$500. Chances are that the \$100 remaining in the budget will not cover the rest of the event's expenses.

What's going on?

One of the biggest enemies you will face when organizing your event will be miscommunication and the confusion resulting from it. There is a simple way to reduce your chances for mistakes caused by miscommunication. At the outset of the project, set up two or three meetings for those members involved in your event planning and preparation.

These meetings should be spaced according to the time frame you are working in and should allow the member to provide a "Sit-Rep," or situation report, concerning their responsibilities. These meetings will allow you to monitor the progress your group is making and whether or not alternative actions need to be taken. Your team may have additional questions that went un-addressed when they were assigned their responsibilities. These "Sit-Reps" will give you the opportunity to work out the fine details that have arisen since the beginning of the project.

Be flexible.

When you are in charge of organizing your organization's big event, don't forget to be flexible. Chances are that everything will not go according to the vision you have in your mind. Don't let

these “obstacles” ruin the experience for everyone. Most of the time, uncompromising people make lousy bosses. The times when things don’t work out exactly according to your plan can be the times when members of your team step up to the plate, and hit one out of the park.

Logistics

Facilities

What facility is best matched to the purpose of the event? A theater production is best suited in the Student Center Center Theater or, if special permission is granted, in the Fine Arts Guignol Theater. A dance or party would be best in the Student Center Grand Ballroom. A dinner could be done in the Student Center Small Ballroom or in one of the larger Student Center meeting rooms. Think of the requirements of what you are sponsoring, and match them to the proper facility. Distance may be a big factor for students when choosing whether to attend an event or not. Is the proposed location convenient to a large concentration of classes? Will people see the location as being too far to walk or drive to, especially if parking is scarce? Do people know where the facility is located? Just because you know where the Worsham Theater is located does not mean others will know.

Funding

Funding for a program should be secured before committing to the event. Funding sources may include applying for a grant from Student Government, co-sponsorship with another University group, or co-sponsorship with a non-university group. Please note that it takes several weeks to get Student Government grants. It also could take weeks, sometimes a couple of months to purchase goods and services, process contracts for speaker fees, or to reimburse individuals for program costs. Your program planning needs to include a time-line sufficient for funding requests, fund raising, and processing of paperwork.

Performers/Speakers

Any persons or group providing information or entertainment for your group’s event will require some type of contract or letter of agreement. Even if the person being paid is a friend and does not want any formal contract, a letter of agreement is highly recommended. For proper bookkeeping procedures, an agreement is necessary. The letter of agreement or contract will serve as proof of a legitimate expense if the organization is ever audited.

Publicity

There are two major components when considering publicity for an event:

1. Who am I trying to reach?
2. How can I best reach them?

Timing is critical when developing publicity. Make sure you start at least 30 days before the event. Any less time will be rushing things and will be less effective. The most effective publicity allows the reader to grasp all the important facts of the program quickly. Accordingly, promotional materials should bear a clearly printed message that is designed to evoke a response from the viewer. They do not necessarily have to be extremely artistic, but your message should be clear and understandable to the reader.

Room Reservations, Setup and Equipment Needs

Many programs fail due to a lack of planning in this area. Reserve rooms for events early, before seeking funding if possible. Check to make sure that the room size and furnishings are adequate for your event. Find out the cost for any equipment that you need, such as a sound system, microphone or special lighting instruments.

Timing

Office of Student Activities, Leadership, & Involvement ~ Leadership Development ~ 106 Student Center
University of Kentucky ~ Lexington, KY 40506-0060 ~ (859) 257-1109 ~ www.uky.edu/studentactivities/leadership

Begin planning as early as possible. Two to three months is not too early and is probably a good minimum. If you begin early enough, you will have time to pay attention to all those details and may even come up with details you hadn't thought of before! Spend some time planning for contingencies. Try to think of what could possibly go wrong, and then build in problem-solving time into your plans. When scheduling a date and time for a program, consider the following:

- Avoid weeks when there are large numbers of tests and exams in classes. People may be too concerned with academic matters to attend an event
- Avoid periods of time when a large number of other events are planned. As more events are scheduled into a limited time period, students will become very selective in choosing which events to attend. Especially avoid coinciding with popular athletic events; competition may hurt all sponsors. Be sure to think about what is happening in and around Lexington that will compete with any event you are planning.
- If your event involves an admission fee or sale of an item, remember the times that students generally have more money at their disposal. The beginning of the fall semester is a particularly excellent time, closely followed by the beginning of spring semester. A student's money supply is sometimes replenished immediately after a break or holiday. However, the last weeks of a semester and immediately after spring break are times when money is tight.
- Avoid days just before a three-day weekend, breaks, or religious holidays. Students' concentration and time is divided between preparations for going home or away, finishing up last minute projects or assignments and last minute socializing. Time to attend your event may be what is sacrificed. Weekends are also not a prime time.
- Choose a time of day to present the program that will be "right" or convenient for your audience. Take into account night classes and times of day that are popular for taking classes. Faculty and staff often prefer to attend events between 8:00 am and 5:00 p.m. but will occasionally return at night.

Delegating Responsibilities

Once your organization has made decisions on basic program logistics (funding, time, facility, etc.), the next step is to develop an action plan for the event. Think through the program from start to finish. In what areas are you going to need key people to coordinate aspects of an event or program. A written checklist should be drawn up for each area of responsibility. Develop the four W's (Who, What, Where, and When) as part of the checklist. Deadlines and important items should be negotiated with the individuals responsible so that they have a clear understanding of what is needed.

Organize your committee to work on production details. Don't attempt to do all the work yourself, you'll never be able to attend to all the necessary details. If you don't already have a committee to work with, organize one. Keep the work committee small enough to facilitate communication, but large enough to do the job without overburdening anyone. If you already have a committee, identify or select reliable people to put in charge of each major responsibility.

Tips for Organizing a Successful Event

Remember, one person can't do it alone!

- Make sure the members of the organization are invested in sponsoring the event. They will be more likely to follow through and participate in all the planning details if they feel

a sense of ownership for the event. In addition you may want to ask your advisor to become a working member of the planning group.

- Make sure to fill out all the proper forms, get signatures and generally be nice to the people you need to work with.
- Confirm all arrangements with critical people. Make sure there has been clear communication with everyone (especially a performer whose talents is crucial to the event).
- Phone call reminders to volunteers are useful so they know where to be, when and what to do.
- Plan far enough in advance (at least five weeks). Leave plenty of time to develop, produce and distribute your publicity materials. Use banners, flyers, press releases, ads and especially word of mouth. Create excitement, not just an event!

Program Planning Action Steps:

1. Define your audience, including type of audience, number of people, age of attendees
2. Determine a title and theme if applicable
3. Identify potential locations for the program
4. Brainstorm possible dates for the program. Avoid dates that have already been set for other large campus events. Allow enough time to complete all necessary program planning tasks
5. Determine the location, date, and time, and provide other members with rationale for decision
6. Establish a timeline for tasks to be completed
7. List the resources you will need (i.e. people, services, equipment)
8. Specify the specific resources you plan to utilize

Create a Plan of Action

- First, select the date, as it's one of the most important decisions. Choose one and an alternative, then check to see if there are any conflicts on those dates. Are there any conflicts with other events planned for the same day or week? Are there religious or cultural holidays, midterms, finals, semester breaks? Check the school calendar (www.uky.edu/campuscalendar), community calendar, athletic schedules and holidays. Be sure to take weather into consideration if the club is planning an outdoor event.
- Reserve a venue as soon as you have chosen a date. The few rooms and performance spaces at UK are in extremely high demand, contact the Student Center Directors Office (257-5781). You may need to reschedule the event depending on space availability.
- Brainstorm all the specific tasks that need to be accomplished before, during and after the event. Create a checklist of jobs, including getting the needed supplies (such as media equipment, cash boxes, decorations), accounting and bill paying, event coordination, etc. Actually check off each item as things get done.
- Develop a timeline detailing what needs to be done when and by whom (if you can, permanently post this and the checklist where club members can see them). Base the schedule on what works best for your volunteer crew. Count back from the selected date to set deadlines. This tells you whether there is enough time to do all that has to be accomplished prior to the event.

- Do all the necessary paperwork (for space reservations, permits, etc.), get signatures, and permit forms for adherence to campus policy guidelines. Some events that appeal to the organization may be prohibited by university policies or have very specific guidelines for implementation. Timely advice on campus policy and procedures and completion of necessary paperwork for approvals and permits will help you avoid frustration and delays later on.
- Get the word out! Publicize your event, starting at least five weeks before your event, develop, produce and distribute your publicity materials. Cover all the bases (radio, print media, flyers, banners, the Kernel, newsletters, etc.). Also, ask club members to tell friends about the event -- word of mouth is important!
- Don't try to do it all yourself! Delegate, delegate, delegate! Recruit volunteers early so you won't be scrambling as the event date looms. Be sure you have enough people to fill specific assignments without over-assigning any one person. Create subcommittees, involve talented individuals and motivated members to become involved in the event. Consider joining with another campus organization to co-sponsor the event and spread out the work.
- Start a file with copies of your timeline/schedule, publicity, financial records, correspondence, policy guidelines, important contacts, etc.; so future club members can use them in planning. The final addition to this file will be your evaluation of the event, listing those things that worked well and those that could be improved next time.

After identifying your actions steps, it is important to take some time to organize and delegate tasks.

Delegating Responsibility for Program Implementation:

1. Identify all tasks that need to be completed
2. Group similar tasks
3. Decide who will be responsible for each group of tasks and clarify what the responsibility entails. Explain the rationale behind the delegated tasks
4. Determine a timeline for completion of specific tasks

It might be helpful to develop your budget while planning other components of your program.

Other aspects to consider in your program planning include event promotion. Here are a few issues to take into account when planning promotion:

1. Clarify your "selling points." Is your program charitable, fun, educational?
2. Brainstorm types of publicity that will attract your intended audience, and decide which you plan to use
3. Determine your resources (money, campus services, talent) and list how they will be utilized
4. Create a timeline for publicity creation, printing, and distribution
5. Provide rough drafts of promotional material to membership to approve

Throughout your program planning, continue to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program and the process in order to make improvements now and in the future

Tips of Program Implementation:

1. List tasks that need to be completed the day before the event
2. List tasks that need to be completed the day of the event
3. List tasks that need to be completed after the event
4. Go back to each of the above lists and explain to whom the responsibility for each task is delegated and why

Event Planning Timeline

Throughout the time leading up to the event, continually evaluate whether things are getting done, so that trouble can be spotted and handled before it becomes serious. Be ready to readjust the plan as needed to accommodate the unexpected. Here is a suggested timeframe to follow - allowing six weeks advanced planning time.

Minimum number of days in advance to complete tasks:

- 45:
 - Check with appropriate office to reserve the venue.
 - Confirm availability of artist, lecturer or performer. Work with Club Advisor in determining contractual requirements.
 - Develop an advertising and marketing plan
 - Make appropriate contacts to determine availability of services such as tech, house management, box office and room setup.
- 30:
 - Hand in ticket request form to Ticket Office Manager, Student Center, 257-TICS (8427).
 - Be sure everyone necessary has signed off on all forms.
- 21:
 - If your event requires technical support (sound and lights) at this point make sure those arrangements are made. Contact University Sound and Lights at 257-6617.
 - Contact Ticket Office Manager in Student Center to see if student ticket sellers or ticket takers are required.
 - If catering is needed contact UK Catering at 257-1741.
- 14:
 - Determine need for additional publicity/promotion and implement, if required.
- 10:
 - Double check on all the above.

The Week Before The Event

- Confirm facility reservations and setup.
- Confirm all arrangements for speakers/performers, including transportation, hospitality and hotel.
- Confirm that all volunteers know what they should be doing.
- Make a checklist of last-minute details that must be taken care of (supplies, decorations, refreshments, etc.).

One Day Before Event

- Confirm all arrangements: setup, clean-up, food service, last minute publicity, technical services, security, schedules, staff duties, payment for artist -- Everything!

- Contact everyone involved (including volunteers, the performer, the technical crew) and make sure they know when to be where. Confirm all arrangements with critical people, once is not enough.

Day of the Event

- Arrive at least 1-1/2 hours before event begins.
- Make sure setup is going on schedule.
- Check equipment; make sure it works properly.
- Make sure you have necessary payment for performers. Obtain receipts.

Post Event

- If you are responsible for clean up, make sure it is done.
- Thank everyone involved. Write letters or notes to anyone who made a contribution to the event, including your advisor, donors and workers.
- Conduct post-event evaluation; communicate suggestions to future planners and sponsors.
- Pay all the bills promptly.
- If the event is canceled or rescheduled, the sponsor must notify all affected parties immediately. Failure to do so may result in incurred charges for facilities and/or services.

Backwards Planning

When your organization is planning an event, especially a big one, keeping track of all the necessary steps can be difficult. Backwards planning helps you make sure everything gets done on time.

- Make a list of tasks that must be completed before the program. Include:
 - Publicity and advertising pieces
 - Space reservations
 - Travel arrangements and accommodations
 - All other details
- Using a Calendar, start with the last task before the program. Write it on your planning calendar and consider its components.
 - If there are component tasks that need to be completed by specific dates, work backwards with them and plug them into the calendar.
- Proceed with the next to the last task to be completed, and so on
 - An example:
 - Assume that your program begins October 1. As you look through the list of tasks that need to be completed between now, August 1, and then, you decide that visitors' schedules should be completed and in the hands of those involved by September 29.
 - Since you know that there are ten schedules, you decide they must be ready for typing by September 23. You will need travel schedules, times and places of activities, accommodations, and volunteers to host each visitor by that date.
 - Perhaps you will decide that you will have:
 - Schedules mailed to visitors on September 26
 - Travel schedules by September 23
 - Volunteers committed by September 30

- Contracted activities decided by September 16
- Confirming letters or calls about activities and accommodations by September 9
- Contracts completed by September 2
- After this step, go back to your list and go through the same process with the next task.

By working backwards, before you ever start to go forwards, you run less chance of overlooking an important component or realizing that you have eight major tasks to complete by tomorrow. This process of careful pre-planning gives you a better chance for allowing time to complete the tasks efficiently and effectively.