EVENT PLANNING GUIDE: TIPS & TRICKS

Learn from the pros! Below is a list of suggestions compiled by veteran event planners.

ASSESS RESOURCES

Know what you have to work with before planning. Faculty and staff members, students, clubs and organizations, and community groups are all resources.

ASSESS NEEDS & INTERESTS

Who will attend? What are their interests? What are your goals? What needs are you trying to meet?

BRAINSTORM IDEAS

Think of every type of event that might fulfill the goals. Don't evaluate ideas at this point, just list all suggestions. Once this is done, review each idea and assess it for feasibility.

DEVELOP A TIMELINE

Make a list of everything that needs to be done to plan the event. Sometimes it's easier to work backwards from the date of the event to the present. Make a schedule that shows when each task needs to be completed.

PROPOSALS, PERMITS, & PAPERWORK

Everything requires paperwork - no really, everything. With the Director of Programs & Leadership or Programs Coordinator, complete all the necessary paperwork including the Program Proposal, CSULA Use of Facilities Space Request, University-Student Union Space Reservation Request, Temporary Food Permit, Parking Services Request, UAS Hospitality & Service Request, Housing Services Space Reservation, etc.

CORRESPONDENCE

Contact all the persons necessary for a successful event; performers, speakers, volunteers, and campus departments. Campus Police, Parking, Risk Management, Environmental Health & Safety, and Facilities may require staff members to be present at your event, and must have advance notice to schedule these individuals to work.

If corresponding with a certain person, group, or company often, create a folder in your inbox and set up a filter for their emails - it'll be much easier to track messages than scrolling in your inbox to find some specific one. Keep all emails/copies of paperwork for reference.

BUDGET

Everything costs money. Most likely you have a set amount of money available to spend on the event. List all associated costs, and allocate the available funds. You may have to contact various departments or vendors for cost estimates associated with their services. Remember, even before you reserve a room, you need to know the budget - the budget will control everything else.

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ROOM RESERVATIONS

With the Director of Programs & Leadership or Programs Coordinator, check room availability before reserving rooms. Over 300 organizations plus university departments compete for limited campus space for events. Reserve your space as early as possible.

Reserve your room with a cushion of time around the actual event start time (especially before). If you don't, your event may be delayed because the event or meeting that is taking place before your program may go longer than it was scheduled to. This is especially important if you have anything to set up - it's awkward to be hanging signs, moving chairs, and putting out materials in front of the participants who have arrived on time.

Know if the room has a projector and wireless internet access available. When picking a room, decide if you want attendees to have wireless internet access - sometimes it is a life-saver, sometimes it means no one is paying attention to the speaker.

If an event is cancelled, notify all affected parties (your room reservation contact, food services, etc.) as soon as possible. Don't forget to 'un-reserve' your room, in case another event planner is in need of the space.

AUDIO/VISUAL

In conjunction with the Director of Programs & Leadership or Programs Coordinator, provide the building's media services a layout of the room and meet with them prior to your event to discuss where you want the equipment setup in the room.

Have your own extension cord on hand with a power strip. If you are lucky enough to have an "extra" laptop in the office, keep it for event use. The Director of Programs & Leadership or Programs Coordinator can reserve technology for your event as well.

Unless the meeting is small (20 or less) get a microphone. There are people who cannot speak loudly and there are those who are comfortable with a microphone.

Unless requested media services does NOT provide extension cords, easels, notepads, laptops, laser pointers, Mac adapters, podiums, whiteboards or whiteboard markers.

FOOD SERVICE

Always have something to drink, no matter the time of day or event. Someone always wants a drink of something. You can always request pitchers of ice water and cups. This saves on bottled water expense.

Most people do not eat breakfast. You can usually reduce the amount of food needed at early programs, but always have enough juices and caffeine.

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If on a food budget, host an event not at a normal mealtime. For example, cookies and coke at 3:30 p.m. is always a good combo. Still, think veggie friendly.

Since you can never get attendance numbers perfectly, it is best to go a bit small - catering is prepared for a 5% increase in attendance (in most cases) so it is better to take advantage of that than to waste.

Always turn in a catering request 14 business days prior to the event. When UAS or outside food vendor provides a copy of the contract, look it over carefully. Make corrections if necessary. Sign it and fax back. UAS Catering will have your food and drinks set up 30-45 minutes prior to your event time. So, if you stated event start time is 3 p.m., they will already have set up by 2:30 p.m. If you are going with an outside vendor or are purchasing items from an off campus location, a Temporary Food Permit is required.

If you have food out in a public area, either a) guard the food from passers-by who think "Oh, free food!" or b) order more than enough food and acknowledge that you have fed the masses – consider non-perishable items in case you have leftovers.

SETUP

Make sure that the facilities have been cleaned or are scheduled to be cleaned prior to your event. Go as far as to request additional paper be stocked in the restrooms. This is especially important if you have a Saturday event. You should always check the cleanliness of the room prior to your event.

Have an "event kit" – additional flyers, calendars, scissors, tape, safety pins, paperclips, Band-Aids, etc. After a few events you learn what you need.

Find out who has used the space before for programming and see what their setup was. Your overall cost could be lowered by replicating a setup and design Operations/Facilities is comfortable with.

Remember that it is your responsibility to plan for individuals with disabilities - find out ahead of time if an interpreter or special access accommodations will be necessary.

SPEAKERS

Take the time to contact speakers about their needs - do they walk when they present (and therefore need a wireless microphone), do they bring a laptop or do they need one, do they use PowerPoint or do they use something else. If you assume, you might be wrong.

Although a speaker will rarely use a bottle of water if you put one by the lectern, s/he will be glad you left it.

You will have to keep the meeting on schedule - use a visual time system (there are plenty of them out there) for speakers and be ready to give the speaker the hook. It is not being rude - it is respecting the

time of the attendees and it is ensuring that each speaker has equal time. When developing an agenda, remember to pad. Events start late and speakers run long.

GETTING GUESTS & PARTICIPANTS TO THE EVENT

Call the Welcome Center and let them know about your event and secure parking. Provide a campus map to the driver. Mark the Welcome Center (where they will pick up their parking pass), closest parking lot, and event location. Also, ask for the driver's cell phone number and provide your own in case there are any "hiccups."

Re-record your office voice mail with pertinent info about your event in progress. When you are putting your event information on your voice mail message - make sure you do both your internal and external greetings.

Leave a copy of all event information with the front desk which is likely to get calls regarding the program. You cannot over inform regarding events - don't think "they must know," because much of the time, they don't.

NAME TAGS

Name tags are always a good idea – no really, always. Call before the event to confirm the spelling of names. Alphabetize them on the welcome table and have blank nametags and markers for unexpected guests. All nametags should be placed on the right shoulder and you should have a place to discard the backing of stick-on nametags.

PUBLICITY TIPS

Use variety when publicizing your event - send emails, flyers, hang posters, write a press release, get online, and anything else you can think of.

If you are inviting the general public to your event, think broadly about the potential audience: local colleges and universities, arts or political communities, professional groups, alumni, etc.

Develop an appropriate blurb and incorporate a dynamic image. Make any print publicity visually engaging so that it draws people in and presents the information in a concise manner. People should gain a clear picture of what your program is all about and should feel encouraged to attend.

The Director of Programs & Leadership or Programs Coordinator, in conjunction with CSULA Public Affairs can help you determine the news value of your event. Will you be featuring a headline making speaker? Will your event be the occasion to announce a major public policy or scientific discovery? Can you use your event to make the news?

Do not send e-mail spam to advertise your event. Use the A.S.I. Events Calendar, website and Facebook Profile. Also, you can submit information to CSULA Public Affairs. Depending on the nature of the event

relative to other current events, CSULA Public Affairs may highlight it the week of the event on the University's homepage. A website or online profile front page feature will achieve greater visibility with longer staying power than a campus-wide email. Plus, your content will have a home that makes it findable with a Google search. This is particularly helpful for those who would have inquiries about an event.

Consider whether you need a photographer for all or part of the event. The Director of Programs & Leadership or Programs Coordinator can assist you with finding a photographer.

Think about ways to record your event for other uses. A.S.I. can use photographs on our website or for fundraising or student recruitment publications. You may want to arrange to videotape an important speech and stream the video on our website for viewers who could not attend.

EVALUATE & ASSESS

Write a brief synopsis of the event, including participant and planner comments, attendance, suggestions for future events, and final costs.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

If it isn't an emergency, don't call it one. If you messed up, say so - most service people on campus will find it refreshing. Plus, it goes a long way to establishing good long-term relationships.

Find humor in everything that goes wrong or you'll go crazy. And most of all - try and have a little fun.