

Leadersheet

Planning a Program

So, you're going to plan a big event, but you don't know where to start. Don't panic. This handout is designed to help you through this process and smooth out the rough spots of planning and preparing for a successful and memorable event.

The first step is to determine why you are putting on the event. Some questions that may help you clarify what you are doing and why include:

- What do you want to achieve by having this program?
- What are your organizational goals and how will this event help you meet them?
- What do you, as the planners, want to get out of this experience?
- Is there a current need or an interest in this program area?
- Are other similar programs being offered?
- Has a similar event been held in the past?
- What was the response?
- Are your members enthusiastic about organizing this event?
- Is organizing this program worth your members' time?
- Is there enough time to thoroughly organize, publicize and promote the program so that it will be successful?

Once you have satisfactorily answered these questions, planning the program is quite easy if you follow these five simple steps:

1. Identify Needs
2. Develop Program Goals and Objectives
3. Organize Program Plans
4. Implement Plans
5. Evaluate the Event

Identify Needs

Who is the audience and what does the audience want to see or experience with this kind of program? What are the audience's needs? What method of assessment will you use to determine this (e.g., word-of-mouth, surveys, or a suggestion box)? How big do you want this program to be? Does the type of event you're planning limit the audience size? If so, how will you determine who can attend?

Develop Program Goals and Objectives

After you have identified your program's audience and needs, which ones do you want to have your event address? Define specifically what you want the participants to learn or experience from the program. This will be the goal of your program or event.

Be clear about the kind of program you are planning, i.e., social, cultural, educational or a fundraiser. Identify other resources to help you when and where necessary.

Organize Your Plans

What do you specifically need to do to accomplish your objectives? When do you want to hold this event? Be sure to consider whether you have enough time to make all the necessary arrangements and complete all tasks. Many program planners find it helpful to make a time line working in reverse; start at the day of the event and fill in publicity deadlines, facility agreements, etc. This can help you see if you are being realistic or if you are setting yourself up to be unable to meet your obligations. An SAL Coordinator can assist you with the process.

Scheduling Facilities

Where you hold your program is very important. Facilities can determine audience size, date, and time. It can set the mood for formal, informal, workshop or auditorium style.

Establish a Budget

How much money do you have to work with? Will revenues need to be generated? What kind of resources do you have at your disposal to raise money and or cover costs? If you plan to charge admission, it is important to consider what costs you anticipate this fee will cover as well as how much you can reasonably expect participants to pay.

Methods and Resources

Another thing to consider is that often speakers and entertainers will want you to sign a contract. Be sure to read it thoroughly and have your advisor review the contract. If you have questions, make a notation and ask for clarification. (Check with a staff member if you have any questions or concerns about a contract, they will refer you to the appropriate person.)

Publicity

There are many different ways to publicize an event - posters, flyers, banners, public boards, public service announcements, etc. Campus newspapers and web sites can also publicize your event at no charge.

Program Details, Follow-Up and Clean Up

Be sure to make a list of what needs to be done before, during and after the event. What are your equipment needs? Do you need registration tables? Special power hook-ups for speakers, computers, telephones? Be sure to ask your speakers what materials or equipment they need in order to do their part.

Implement Plans

Be very clear in the beginning who will perform what tasks and what roles and expectations everyone has of each other. Be realistic when delegating tasks and responsibilities. Give people enough time to complete their work and assign to them things that are within their capabilities--set people up to succeed.

Evaluate the Event

The evaluation process is three fold: 1) the audience's feedback, 2) the presenter's experience and recommendations, and 3) the planner's thoughts and recommendations. Each group should be asked whether they feel the program accomplished what it was intended to. What went well? What could have been better?

There are several different methods of obtaining this information but the most often used one is a written evaluation distributed following the program. When the program planners evaluate the event be sure to find out whether there was sufficient time allowed for planning and implementation. Did the program reach the goals and objectives? What should be done next time that wasn't this time? Did the anticipated audience attend?

A well thought out and thorough evaluation is an educational aspect of programming. It allows you to learn from your successes and learn what is to be improved. Evaluations can also serve in a historical file for the organization and can be a useful reference for future programmers.