

GETTING YOUR EVENT STARTED

So, you're going to plan an 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 edges of planning and preparing for a successful and memorable event. Planning a program is really quite easy if you follow these five simple steps.

1. Identify Needs

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

Questions regarding you and your co-organizers:

1. What do you want to achieve by having this program?
2. What are your organizational goals and how will this event help you reach them?
3. What do you, as the planners, want to get out of this experience?
4. Is there enough time to thoroughly organize, publicize and promote the program so that it will be successful? Is organizing this program worth your members' time and energy?
5. Why would students want to go to this event?

Questions regarding past and current programs on campus:

1. Is there a current need or interest in this type of program?
2. Does the program focus on a current "hot topic?" Is it timely?
3. Are other similar programs being offered?
4. Has a similar event been held in the recent past? If yes, what was the response? What could you have done to make it better?

Questions regarding your audience:

1. Who is the target audience and large is the potential audience?
2. What does the audience want to see or experience with this kind of program?
3. What method of assessment will you use to determine this (word-or-mouth, web surveys, and/or suggestion box)?

2. 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? How big do you want and can you afford this program to be? 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.

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3. Organize Your Plans

Getting everything down on paper can be an arduous process, but it also can be very rewarding and a great learning experience. For many, this process is as rewarding as the program itself. Any Student Activities staff member can help you during this process.

Questions to ask:

1. What do you specifically need to do to accomplish your objectives?
2. When and where do you want to hold this event?
3. If your location limits your audience, how will you determine who can attend (i.e. is it off campus, expensive, exclusive, limited space, etc)?
4. What is your budget? Consider all aspects of your program (performer, sound, decorations, food, etc).

4. Implement Plans

Be very clear in the beginning: determine as a group and write down who will perform what tasks and what the roles and expectations are of everyone. Be realistic when delegating tasks and responsibilities. Give people enough time to complete their work and assign them tasks that are within their capabilities – set people up to succeed.

5. Evaluate the Event

- Get feedback from the audience.
- Did the presenter/performer have a positive experience? Do they have any recommendations for future events?
- What are the planner's thoughts and recommendations? Make sure to write them down.
- Typically an evaluation is given to the program planners following the program:

Questions that should be asked of the program planners are:

1. Was sufficient time allowed for planning and implementation?
2. Did the program achieve the goals and objectives?
3. What went well? What went poorly? What were the challenges?
4. What should be done next time that wasn't this time?
5. Did the anticipated audience attend? If no, why not? Who did attend?
6. What did the audience think about this program?
7. What was the cost per head? Was it worth the money for the amount of people who attended?

General Tips on Program Planning

- In the ideal program, everything runs so smoothly that the participants may see little evidence of pre-planning or behind the scenes work. If problems arise, try to fix them without your audience becoming aware of the issue.
- Do not compromise on details or settle for second best.
- Do not assume anything. Check every detail before the event.
- Do not allow situations to continue that make you uncertain or nervous.
- People support what they help create, so involve as many people as possible in the planning process.
- Usually something goes wrong, but if you are properly prepared and avoid panicking, almost any problem can be solved.

This is one of many handouts available to you. Feel free to meet with any Student Activities staff member for more details about this topic or any others related to leadership or your student organization. We also have open advising hours every Wednesday from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. The Office of Student Activities is located in the University Center, on the 2nd floor, or by telephone at (503) 370-6463. Visit our website at www.willamette.edu/dept/osa or email us at wustudentinvolvement@gmail.com. Adapted from the Office of Student Activities and Leadership, University of Michigan.

