



# An Introduction to Event Planning

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Understand what Event Planning is.
- ✓ Understand main tasks involved in event planning.
- ✓ List the five 'Ws of event creation.

## An Introduction to Event Planning

The origin of the word event can be traced to the Latin word 'eventus,' which refers to extraordinary occasions or occurrences. An event can, therefore, be defined as a well-planned and organised occasion with the view of meeting or achieving specific objectives for the benefit of person, group of people or an organization. The most popular reasons for undertaking events include entertaining people and promoting social interactions. Typical events include conferences, sports events, family gatherings, parties, school graduations, and fundraising, etc.

### What Is Event Planning?

Events may be categorised in the following way:

- Celebrations (festivals, weddings, birthdays, and anniversaries)
- Education (conferences, graduations)
- Promotions (product launches, fashion shows, and conventions)
- Commemorations (memorials, civic events)

### Who Hires Event Planners

Broadly speaking, there are two markets for event planning services:

- Corporate Market
- Social Event

### The Corporate Market

The corporate market includes companies, charities, and non-governmental firms which makes use of events to get in touch with their target markets. Their goal is mainly to increase their visibility and improve their competitive edge in the market. They use events as a tool to get their messages across to target markets. Organisations such as charities and non-profit organisations may win more public support and also raise funds through events such as sports competitions, fundraising galas, and receptions; these events are less expensive and of high impact in nature. Companies on the other hand may make do with events such as picnics, parties, conventions, trade shows, and meetings for all stakeholders to take advantage of the larger markets guaranteed by these events. The key to becoming a successful corporate planner is to begin with planning social events to build up enormous experience and know-how and contacts.

## Reasons for Staging Events

- Corporate organisations stage events to create a sense of pride in communities, generate income, brand image, and generate employment
- Community groups such as clubs and other societies stage events to promote their interests
- Events are also undertaken for profit-making purposes
- Governments use events to promote ideas, discuss national issues, etc.
- To encourage tourisms
- To enable charity groups to raise funds

## Social Events

They include activities such as birthdays, weddings, reunions, parties, and so on. The social event planner has the option to choose one or more events to specialize in. These events are really popular with middle and upper income level groups who have spare cash but limited time to organize their own events.

## Main Tasks Involved in Events Planning

Planners of an event may handle any or all of the following tasks related to that event:

- Undertaking research activities
- Creating a unique design for the event
- Selecting an ideal site and venue
- Catering arrangements
- Making arrangements for transportation
- Creating unique invitation cards and dispatching them to guests
- Coordinating and supervising workers
- Making provision for accommodation
- Evaluation of the event

## Skills Required for an Event Planner

The prerequisite to becoming a successful event planner is to have formal education and a range of industrial-specific skills.

Skills required for a successful career as an event planner include the following:

- Ability to work in a team or independently
- Interpersonal and social skills
- Analytical ability
- Communication skill
- High organisational skills
- Good time management
- Ability to work to deadlines
- Able to pay attention to details
- Understanding of government regulations, political, social and economic issues
- High computer literacy, e.g. understanding of Microsoft office applications
- Understanding of project management software
- Negotiating skills
- Ability to deal with pressure situations
- Problem-solving skills
- Creativity
- Marketing and public relations

## The Basics of Event Planning

### Pre-planning

The first stage of event planning requires the planner to undertake pre-planning activities which requires visualizing how the planner would like events to unfold. It involves taking into account the number of people and their characteristics in terms of gender, age groups, and their specific needs.

When pre-planning events, you need to:

Understand the purpose of the event

- Clearly list all activities including the seating arrangement, number of staff, the responsibilities of staff, and scheduling time for activities, etc.
- Outline food and drink requirements
- Consider transportation to and from the event
- Determine the budget requirements
- Specify dates for holding events

- Create timeline for planning phases
- Obtain written evidence of availability of venues
- Conduct research to determine the best performers and speakers you need to invite

The above list is not exhaustive but it should provide you with a head start to planning a successful event. The 5Ws of event creation: why, who, when, where, and what

**i. Why are we putting on the event?**

This is the first question you need to ask when planning an event. You need to discover the purpose for staging the event.

**ii. Who do we want to come to the event**

Knowledge of the target audience which will attend the event is a must know as this will form the basis of your marketing plan

**iii. When is the best time to stage the event?**

This is very important to determine to avoid conflicts with other events

**iv. Where is the best place to stage the events?**

The most suitable and convenient venue should be chosen to facilitate easy access and also to create the an enjoyable atmosphere

**v. What concept or idea will best serve the purposes of the event?**

It is generally recommended for event planners to engage in 'brainstorming sessions' to come up with a concept for the event if one has not been developed or proposed already. This brainstorming session requires each participant to voice out ideas that first appears in his/her mind. These are noted on a whiteboard. Another list comprising of ideas based on their 'quality' or 'attractiveness' may be compiled. These two lists can then be fused to arrive at a combination of ideas which serves as the event concept.

## Logistics

Another key to hosting a successful event is having a good logistic arrangement. Logistics has to do with 'planning, organizing and coordinating the movement of goods, equipment, services, and people to their point of need.' The significance of logistics to events cannot be overemphasised because haphazardly planned logistics may result in supplies not arriving at the right time. Logistics planning presupposes that the most ideal venue is chosen by the planners to ensure customers, visitors, goods, and services have adequate access to and from the venue. Adequate provision is also made to evacuate participants during emergencies.

To ensure logistic activities are successful, planners need to consider items which require long lead times and substantial work and arrange for these at the earliest opportunity so that they can be provided ahead of time.

**i. Supplies, transport, and distribution**

Planning and coordinating of movement of goods, equipment and people form the foundation of logistical operations. Logistics therefore involves managing transportation of people and items to and from the venue of an event. The opening, running and closing of events also fall under logistics. Other aspect of logistics include moving suppliers, performers, and equipment, as well as, ticket distribution and answering queries relating to the event by the marketing department of an event management firm.

**ii. Technical facilities**

Nowadays, due to the sophisticated nature of technical services required at event venues, event planners, and coordinators tend to outsource these requirements to production or multimedia firms. This move sometimes presents uncertainties to the event manager who is usually not familiar with the quality of service of the hired firm in the face of rapidly changing technology.

With the advent of a diversity of multimedia and communication technologies, it is now common for people to receive live feed from another country far away at an event in for example, London, via video conferencing. It is recommended that venues having such advanced technology ask parties who will be making presentations to undertake test with the system at least a week before the commencement of the event.

**iii. Lighting**

Adequate lighting should be provided at the venue to give ambient light in the main function hall and to illuminate the speaker(s) or performers. Lighting creates a good setting for people attending events. All public and support areas should also be adequately illuminated.

To make the event even more enjoyable, decorative lighting should be used throughout the venue where appropriate. Safety is also enhanced by providing lighting at exits, entrances, along stairways and routes leading to emergency exits. In general, lighting should be provided all around at sections of the venue for the participants. Energy saving could be achieved using lighting control systems and automatic switching devices. The law requires emergency lighting to be provided in public building with standby auxiliary batteries that can last for at least three hours. Finally, car parks and areas surrounding the venue should be well illuminated to make people feel safe.

#### iv. Sound and communications

Professional sounds systems are now commonly used at venues hosting special events unlike previous year where a simple set up made up of an amplifier, a mixer, and microphones were more fashionable. It is not just sound systems that are provided by equipment companies but also, public address systems are part of the whole set - up.

## Budgeting

Event budget should consist of the following aspects:

- Balance sheet showing a list of all expenses relating to accommodation, transportation, catering services, and marketing, etc.
- Sufficient funds must be available to pay for all expenses and a separate account opened for accrued expenses during the event
- Get client to approve all expenses beyond the budgeted amount
- Estimate costs using records of budget for similar events held previously
- Make budget provision for licences and insurance for all potential liabilities such as cancellation/postponing the event or a fire.
- Have some emergency funds available to take care of unexpected expenses

## Schedule of Events

The schedule of event is a critical document that has to be prepared by the planner of events. This important document breaks down activities into bits and highlights the time for performing activities, the details of activities and the person responsible for ensuring the objectives of a particular activity are achieved. This cue-to-cue document takes into account activities such as the arrival of guests, transportation plans, hospitality arrangements, security, information about the venue, clean up, and equipment set - up procedures. Having adequate detailed information in this document makes for a smooth and organized overall event experience for all concerned.

The ideal approach to putting together an effective schedule of event is to engage all stakeholders in the planning process encompassing all activities from the start of the event to its completion. One gets a better perspective by viewing all aspects of the event through the eyes of the participants; how things will appear to them how they would feel about the atmosphere, what the overall experience would be like.

Before choosing the venue for the event, the event planner needs to consider carefully the exact specification of space required for the particular event he is organizing and the atmosphere he wants to create during the event.

## Venue

The event planner should also consider the following:

- The size of the room
- The arrangement of chairs
- The location for toilets, sound systems, and the stage, etc.
- Where to put signs to direct people to specific locations throughout the venue
- How would rooms be accessed; at all times or at specific times only?
- Providing information about the rules for using facilities at the venue.

## How to Evaluate Each Venue

The venue sales manager is expected to provide guidelines to the planner wishing to secure the venue to host an event. When making arrangement with the venue owners, it is vital to find out to what extent promotional activities can be carried out at the venue in terms of:

- Provision for displaying banners, signage and directional signs
- Information on restrictions concerning display of event information
- The availability of concierge or information desks
- On-site business centre and office services
- Shipping and receiving services
- The availability of telephones in meeting rooms

## View the Facility

Ideally, potential venues should be up-to-date with latest development in event hosting concepts as well as flexible enough to adapt to new situations. When choosing venues for events, you may want to consider the following:

- The physical state of all facilities; they should be attractive, safe, and well-maintained
- Adequate lighting and mean to control natural light
- Adequate capacity of venue
- Flexibility of layout to enable easy configuration of tables and chair

- Availability of restroom and medical facilities

## Inquire About Audio/Visual and Equipment

The planner should also find out whether or not the following audio-visual systems are available:

- Fast internet facilities including wireless networks
- Projectors, remote control, and draping
- Suitable projector screen
- TV monitors for video
- Whiteboard and easel

## Explore all Catering Options

Planners should also enquire about catering provisions such as:

- Adequate kitchen facilities
- Availability of menu details
- Tasting of dishes to ensure they meet expectation

## Document your Budget

A document containing details of all expenses should be prepared and may include all services and equipment costs (i.e., the cost of office equipment and services, catering costs, facility costs, and guarantees and cancellation policies, etc.)

## Staffing

The key to a successful staffing is assigning the right person to the right job. Be crystal clear about who is qualified to set up the event, run the event and pack up when the event is done.

The best approach to staffing is to prepare a list of activities from the management plan and assign each of these activities to the most qualified person.

## Safety

An individual, with expertise in dealing with emergency situations during events, may be appointed to manage the safety aspects of smaller events. Larger events would require the planners to select more than one expert, depending on the number of guests expected at the events. The selected persons are expected to have phones, first aid kits and vehicles close-by to deal with incidents. Planners also need to identify the nearest hospital and have knowledge of all local emergency phone numbers.

## Catering

There are two main options available to choose from depending on the type of venue (either the hotel-type or public building/stadium). The first option is in-house catering which is normally available at hotel-type venues and the second is the contracted catering service usually employed during events at public venue or stadia.

## Planning the Meals

Guests should not be rushed during events offering food services but they should rather be allowed to interact and to network with other participants while enjoying any presentation at the event. Eating times should consist of 30-40 minutes for breakfast. Lunch should last for 45-60 minutes and dinner for 20 minutes per course. The time for refreshment breaks is usually 15, 30, and 30-45 minutes for every 100, 1,000, or 1000 plus people, respectively. With regards to beverage arrangement for morning breaks, 2 cups of coffee or tea per person is recommended whilst one cup of tea, coffee, or soda is recommended for each person during the afternoon break. Buffet can be offered to small groups at working sessions during lunch time breaks as this tends to be faster and comes spiced up with variety of food. One server (attendant) would be ideal for each table to serve meals for VIPs, etc. The usual practice is to make available one server to take care of two tables when serving 3- or 4-course meal. The planner may need to enquire whether additional costs would be incurred for using extra labour to serve. It is recommended to serve a variety of food during cocktail reception while all leftover food is packaged for onward distribution to needy or homeless persons.

## Accessibility

The Disability Acts makes it a requirement for planners to create adequate accessibility and support to participants who have need of these facilities. Planners should ensure that facilities have provision for wheelchair accessibility at the venue.

## Cleaning Up

Once the event is over, it is your responsibility to return the facility back to its original condition. Make certain that you return all spaces used in the way you found them. Plan to have a crew to help clean up.

Cleaning and clearing are issues sometimes neglected in the servicing of venues, sites and events. It is essential that when there is a break in the programme, or at any other convenient point, the opportunity is taken for minor rubbish clearing, bin emptying, replenishment of consumables and other stock. This should be planned to happen at regular intervals and can be regarded as 'preventative' action. Cleaning equipment and materials must be available and accessible to the support staff.

In terms of the provision of amenities, the general rule is to provide one toilet for every 75 people (of each gender), which can be increased for VIP events. Portable toilets, for example, can be hired in blocks;

different standards of facility can be also hired, as well as shower blocks if required. It is essential to provide servicing for event toilets, and supervision to ensure that effective cleaning is done.

## Be Prepared

No matter how much you plan, a few unexpected problems may arise and you might discover that you have a few last-minute details to resolve. The only thing you can do is prepare for the unexpected. Make sure you have at your fingertips the tools to solve any problems that may occur.

## What are the Benefits of a Successful and Safe Event?

Since unexpected issues can crop up without warning, it is important to be prepared in advance to deal with all these issues by putting in place a contingency plan. With this in mind, it would be wise to have available all the necessary know-how to tackle these problems when they appear.

What are the Benefits of a Successful and Safe Events?

The key to hosting a successful event is to plan meticulously and have an event management plan to guide how the event should unfold. The benefits of having such a plan include:

- Efficient movement of people and equipment
- Reduction to the likelihood of issues or crises; there will be less cost resulting from security, repairs and cleaning activities
- The ability to swiftly respond to unexpected occurrences and which is good for maintaining a secured environment
- Securing long term support from clients, staff, stakeholders
- Corporate and community stakeholders will have confidence in the planners and endorse more sponsorship deals for them
- Reduction in liability arising from accidents and injuries and related insurance costs.

### Further Reading:

- ✓ *Events Management By Glenn Bowdin, Johnny Allen, Rob Harris, Ian McDonnell, William O'TooleInternational*
- ✓ *Event Management in Sport, Recreation and Tourism: Theoretical and Practical By Cheryl Mallen, Lorne Adams*