



## Venue Selection and Managing Contracts

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ✓ Discuss how to select suitable venue for your event.

## Venue Selection and Managing Contracts

Meeting venues are very important to the success of your event. You will need to consider several aspects to make your event a success. Perhaps you are looking for a place that has great technology for your high-tech event. Or maybe you've been asked to choose a venue that offers exceptional conference space and also has a hotel attached. Are you looking for somewhere quiet and reserved, or do you want something that can also offer great energy and excitement for an evening party?

One of our in-house trainers has many stories about meeting places that were less than remarkable. In each case she was invited to present at a particular event and did not look at the space ahead of time (since she was travelling from out of town). She also expected that the event planner would have done their due diligence.

Here are some things that she experienced and that you want to avoid:

- A conference room in the lower level of a hotel that had pillars throughout. All the chairs had to be moved so that delegates had an unobstructed view of the room.
- A meeting room that accommodated 20 people nicely, but the large screen and projector created an image that was so big it was a strain for people to look at for the two **day workshop**. A technician had to be called in to shrink the image being projected.

If you are using a meeting room, make sure that you go look at it. Things to consider:

- Look for the location of plugs and jacks.
- Check to see if there is space for people to have their materials.
- If you bring in refreshments and food, is there somewhere to put it, or do you need to have an extra table brought in?

### Test Your Knowledge

**What other things might you need to consider?**

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## Feeding the Masses

### Setting up the Menu

People love food. Gathering to share a meal is one of the most social, engaging times that we share. It is essential to choose the right menu for your event.

Whether you're planning a three-hour meeting or a three-day conference, food can become your biggest expense. Food is also an area where you can exercise some creativity and apply some flexibility. It is also helpful if you can plan with some empathy.

### Confused?

Allergies, food sensitivities, special diets, cultural norms, and what we wear all have to be considered when ordering food. People are much more aware of what they eat than ever before and there are also more people talking about what they need. At the same time, people want an experience when they attend an event, so the food had better be good.

Here is an example of some of the thinking an event planner goes through in terms of food arrangements. Sometimes **pizza** and **sodas** are enough for a short lunch meeting, but for diabetics it also contains a massive carbohydrate load. For anyone with gluten intolerance, wheat crust is on the no-no list. Toppings that are full of nitrates or salt can be a problem, too. But some people absolutely love pizza, and placing an order to the nearby pizza shop is easy enough to do.

**Soups and salads** can be ideal and healthy, but people worry because they tend to drip and can mark or stain the front of people's clothing.

**Sandwiches** can be tasty, healthy, and appealing, but they can also be uninspiring or downright boring. If left sitting for any amount of time, the bread dries out and the mayonnaise starts to go off. Some delegates will balk at sandwiches if they see people's hands reaching in and touching food that they do not take onto their own plate. Food allergies and cross-contamination are also a consideration.

**What about alcohol?** Although many North American functions do not include alcohol at lunch, it is often part of supper. In other places, there is no alcohol at all, and in other countries, a drink at lunch is perfectly acceptable.

**So the question remains: how do we offer food and refreshments that people will enjoy? How can you feed people in a way that helps them enjoy a meal, caters to everyone's needs, and respects your budget?**

- Always do the best you can.

- However, remember that you cannot please all of the people all of the time.
- Your best strategy is to offer a variety of selections so that everyone can choose what they'd like.
- Make sure to ask about allergies and preferences upon registration.
- Have a contingency plan to deal with unexpected issues.

## **Test Your Knowledge**

### **Finding Food Solutions**

**Brainstorm food arrangements for the following situations.**

#### **Your office**

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#### **Hotels and conference centers**

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#### **Parking lots on hot dog day**

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**Unique venues in your area**

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**The types of events that you will organize**

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**Business Etiquette Basics**

**Don't Be Afraid!**

This topic scares some people to death, but we wish it wouldn't. The essence of good etiquette is not actually related to knowing which fork to use and when (although those things are helpful), or how to shake hands when you are holding a plate of food. Etiquette is really about having some kind of baseline so that we can all share time together and enjoy ourselves without worrying that we are behaving badly.

Rules about not leaning across the table to reach the salt shaker are not so much about trying to avoid looking awkward and being excruciatingly polite: they stop you from knocking over a water glass or dropping your lint into someone else's meal. And, when you ask for someone to pass the salt (which should always be passed along with pepper, whether you want it or not), you get a chance to have a conversation or share a few comments.

If you are arranging an event that will be attended by delegates who might feel intimidated, you could arrange for a pre-meeting etiquette session. You might be surprised at how much interest there is and by how many people are freaked out when it comes to figuring out where their glass, bread plate, or forks are. If you think that they may be shy, you could also include a quick reference guide with the welcome materials to help them out.





When you are responsible for event planning, you must be inclusive to ensure that that everyone who attends will feel equally welcome.

**Test Your Knowledge**

**Diversity Assessment**

**Diversity Attitudes**

Select yes or no for each of the statements below.

	Yes	No
I have visited at least one other country.		
I can fluently speak more than one language.		
I can read in more than one language.		
I use a second language regularly.		
At least one of my friends has an identified disability.		
My friends include people of different cultural backgrounds than my own.		
My friends include people of different ages.		
I would accept (or have already accepted) a work assignment in another country.		
I have art from different countries or cultures in my home.		
I have a valid passport.		
I keep tabs on news about countries other than my own.		
I volunteer or have volunteered with people-based organizations.		
I mentor new staff at work.		
I feel (or would feel) comfortable with a friend who is gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transsexual (GLBT).		
I read books from different countries or cultures.		

## Scoring

Number of Yes Responses: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of No Responses: \_\_\_\_\_

If you answered “yes” to 10 or more of the questions above, you most likely function very well in a diverse environment. If you answered “no” to 10 or more questions, we are going to challenge your thinking. You need to develop more diversity awareness and skills to function effectively in a diverse environment, and there are no shortcuts except to work to get you there. As the world becomes more globally engaged and you plan events that are meant to include people from different regions, as well as the diverse population within your own community, your self-development will have a huge impact on your own success.

## Creating an Atmosphere of Service

The events that you plan have to be memorable and meaningful to your delegates, particularly if you want them to use your service in the future. One way to create the ambience that you want is to build an atmosphere of service. Service puts your customers first. It must be a philosophy that is shared by you and every person who is involved in this event.

The best way to build a service culture is to create it. Provide committee members, volunteers, and especially your event day people with an orientation about how the energy of the event needs to be perceived by all participants.

## Selecting Speakers and a Master of Ceremonies

### People in Your Event

Selecting the people who will be the public face of your event requires some careful planning. If you are going to have an MC, you’ve got to make sure the budget allows for it. Your boss (or client) may have someone in mind, or they may want to perform this function themselves.

This can also lead to some challenges. What if the person they want is not a good public speaker? What if they never follow the agenda that you so carefully design?

### Special Guests and Dignitaries

If your mayor, a member of parliament or royalty, or a celebrity is attending your event, you need to have a serious security plan in place. You will probably also interact a lot with their staff, but not the dignitary themselves. Make sure you get briefed on how to address your Very Important Persons (VIPs) in any remarks by the MC and when you are introduced to them. Make sure that all event staff, volunteers, speakers, entertainers, hotel staff, and so on, are informed and that they agree to follow the rules.

VIPs can have a huge impact on rules for gifts, business cards, forms of address, use of gestures, and even the colors that decorate your event. You also need to know exactly what fees, accommodations, transportation, food, and special arrangements will be required. A celebrity may have one fee for their appearance and an additional fee for anything else that you ask.

## Speakers

Your manager or the client may know exactly who they want as speakers at your event, and they may not. If you can get a list from them, it will help your search tremendously. You'll need to make sure that the speaker has both the subject matter expertise and skill required. Don't expect a professional speaker to take part in your event for free, either. Check their website and then call to ask about their speaking fees, travel, accommodation, and so on. You can ask for references and many speakers will have a video that you can preview.

If you want to negotiate the fee, you can sometimes offer to allow them to sell copies of their books or promotional materials at the back of the room for a reduced fee.

To find speakers, check for referrals from other event planners and your local chapter of professional speakers. Some starting points:

- **In the United States:** National Speakers' Association ([www.nsaspeaker.org](http://www.nsaspeaker.org))
- **In Canada:** Canadian Association of Professional Speakers ([www.canadianspeakers.org](http://www.canadianspeakers.org))
- **Internationally:** Toastmasters ([www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)) and other organizations

## IMPORTANT

Websites can and do change.

## Test Your Knowledge

### People in Practice

Where you can resource speakers in your area?

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Working with contracts is an essential part of event planning. If you do not have a signed contract with your vendors, there is a good chance things will go wrong on event day, and that's the last thing that you want.

You can add a contract list to your event plan in order to keep track of the status of each contract. Experienced event planners recommend that you have your own contracts (although some vendors want to use their contract) and that you have the other party sign them first. As well, make certain that everyone has a signed copy.

Contracts need to be detailed properly to protect you and the vendor. Your company may already have draft contracts they want you to use. They may even have a department that looks after contracts for you. Make sure you check out the requirements before you start.

Speak with your manager or client to make sure that you and they understand the contract. As well, make sure that you read the fine print closely. If you are working with a small company that has not worked with a lot of contracts, check with your company's accountant, controller, or legal counsel.

If your event gets off track, the food is not delivered, the MC does not get paid, or the limos are not at the airport on time, your event will suffer, and as coordinator, you will be responsible. You are putting a lot of effort into creating a fantastic event, so don't get sunk on the details!

**Test Your Knowledge**

**Who are your current contract contacts?**

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**When will you reach out to them?**

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**Further Reading:**