

How to Plan an Event on Campus

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Planning an event on a college campus has many perks. For on-campus groups there is the benefit of hosting an event in familiar facilities as well as showcasing the resources that the university has to offer. For off-campus groups there is a benefit of costs that are typically lower than hotels as well as the connection to an academic setting. As college and university event planners we get to re-imagine meeting and classroom space in new and creative ways as well as introduce guests of all ages to our universities. But, what do you do when you are working with a planner that is planning an event as an additional duty or as a volunteer? Here is a short guide that can be shared with clients to assist them in the event planning process.

This list is intended to give meeting planners tips for reserving meeting space, housing and dining/catering on a university campus for indoor events. Many of these tips can be applied to any venue and any event.

Getting Started:

- Before contacting a venue be aware of what you cannot compromise on.
 - For instance, if you need a space on a certain date that can seat 100 guests banquet style for a buffet meal with a stage and podium for a speaker be sure to include these must haves when contacting venues. These details will help you find a venue that will work best for your event as well as rule out venues that cannot accommodate the event.

Definitions:

- AV – Audio Visual: referring to sound, projection, and technology available in a meeting space.
- Event – Your meeting, seminar, conference, symposium.
- Set up types:
 - Banquet style: round tables with chairs around the table. Capacity per table depends on the venue but is typically around 8 people.
 - Classroom style: tables in rows with chairs on one side facing a presenter.
 - Theater style: chairs in rows with or without an aisle depending on the capacity.
- Venue – The building, hotel, classroom, etc. where the event will be held.

Safety:

- Ask the venue about building access.
 - How will your guests access the building? How will you access the building for set up and clean up? Is the building unlocked?
- Insurance – ask the venue if insurance is required or recommended for your event. Special Event Insurance can be purchased through most insurance agents.

Meeting Space:

- Reserve meeting space for times that include your set up and tear down (not just the time of your event). The reserved space will likely be ready at the start time of your reservation and not earlier. Other groups may have reservations after your event that require a set up change. If you plan to store items in the room overnight be sure to ask if that is possible.
- Be sure to ask if table linens are included in your reservation (if linen is needed) – in some instances linen is provided/sold by the Caterer and not the venue.
- Consider accessibility when reserving meeting spaces and requesting the room set up.
- Keep the deadline for set up information in mind when setting the registration deadline.
- Consider the meeting room capacity when setting the registration cap or consider the reservation cap when choosing a meeting space. If possible, keep track of participants who register after the event is full. Having a wait-list will assist you if someone cancels their attendance.
 - The meeting space capacity is impacted by the setup. When asking about capacity be sure that the venue is aware of your set up needs. For instance, if you need theater style for 100 make sure that the venue knows that you also need a stage, two buffet lines, and a registration table inside the room. These factors will impact the capacity of the room.
- Ask about food policies. Some venues have a dedicated caterer or a list of approved vendors.
- If you will be selling items during your event be sure to share this with the venue. Some venues don't allow sales in their space while others require that they be paid a percentage.

Technology:

- Ask about Audio Visual (AV) capabilities when reserving a space. In some cases, there is a fee for AV. In rare cases laptops are provided but many venues only provide projectors and screens as well as some audio.
 - Be specific. Every meeting space is different even between rooms in the same building. One room may have a sound system that can accommodate microphones while another space may not.
 - Be sure to include the type of laptop/tablet that the presenters will use. You will need to know if the laptop/tablet has an HDMI, VGA, or other hook up capacity.
 - Also, be sure to ask if a cord is provided or if you need to bring your own.
 - Find out if you can come in a few days in advance to test your laptop/tablet with the system. Often times there is no charge for this test as long as there is a time available when the room isn't in use.
- Ask about internet access for presenters. Is it wired or wireless? Is it complimentary or is there a fee? How do they connect (user name etc.)?
- Ask about wireless access for participants. Is it complimentary or is there a fee? How do they connect (user name etc.)?
 - If your event uses an app or requires participants to be on their laptops/tablets/smart devices consider asking about the wireless load.
- Many venues have digital signs. If you want a welcome note or other information on a digital sign ask the venue about this in advance. There may or may not be a fee for using the digital signs.

Dining/Catering:

- Consider food allergies and special dietary needs when planning your menu. Vegan and vegetarian options are available with most Caterers.
 - Depending on your event you might consider asking guests to indicate their dietary needs during registration. It is a good practice to offer vegetarian options.
 - Caterers will be able to suggest vegan and vegetarian options for snack breaks, buffets, plated meals, etc.
- Be mindful of Dining/Catering deadlines in relation to registration deadlines. Setting the registration deadline prior to, instead of on the Dining/Catering deadline, allows you time to compile numbers and make a final decision on the guarantee number to send to Catering.
 - Confirm what the policy is for adding people to the Dining/Catering number after the deadline. In some cases, there is an additional fee for adding participants after the deadline. There is always a fee for reducing the number of participants after a deadline.
- Some caterers can modify their standard menus or create special dishes for your event. If you want something that you don't see on their menu it doesn't hurt to ask.
 - Some Caterers offer tastings in advanced for large, full meal events. If you want a tasting be sure to ask in advance as there may or may not be a fee or a limit to the number of people that can attend a tasting.

Housing:

- Consider whether single occupancy or shared rooms are needed when requesting sleeping rooms.
- When working with Residence Halls ask about the bathroom style. Bathroom style can vary greatly from building to building.
- Determine check in times and a check in plan
 - Is there a window of time on a certain day that people will arrive?
- Determine a check out time.
- Ask if bed linen is provided. Sometimes in Residence Halls linen is included in the room price and sometimes there is an additional fee.
- Ask for the hours of the area desk or hours the onsite building staff are present.

Registration:

- If participants will be asked to register for your event consider asking for all information you will need at once. Doing so will help you avoid needing to contact participants several times.
Questions to consider:
 - Accessibility needs
 - Dietary needs (allergies, vegan, vegetarian, religious, etc.)
 - Plans to attend additional activities

Day of Logistics:

- Be sure to find out who your contact is for the day of your event if the person you have been working with won't be present.
- If you will not be on site for the event, inform the venue of who they can contact.
- Be sure to bring materials that you need for your event or ask in advance if they are available from the venue. Many venues do not have office supplies to share. Examples include:
 - Paper including handouts
 - Dry Erase Markers
 - Markers
 - Pens
 - Tape (if you are allowed to post items)
 - Easels for signs/way to hang signs

If you have questions, or need further assistance, please contact the Association of Collegiate Conference and Events Directors-International (ACCED-I) at (970) 449-4960 or info@acced-i.org.