

Seven Steps for Planning the Perfect Event

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Every event—from the smallest birthday party to the grandest wedding—requires some planning and organization. How well you manage the details determines whether you have an outstanding event or just an average one. Whether you're planning a party around your kitchen table or are part of a team of seasoned experts organizing the wedding of the century, the fundamental process for planning a successful event is more or less the same. Regardless of the type of event you are planning, here are seven steps to help ensure your event is successful and your planning process is fun and stress-free.

1. Create Your Event Wish List

Before you start finalizing any arrangements for your event, it's always a good idea to have a concrete sense of what kind of event you want to have and, most important, how much you want it to cost.

The first step is to do some brainstorming to create an Event Wish List. On a blank sheet of paper write down every idea that you've ever had for your event, no matter how ridiculous it may seem. As you do this, it's a good idea to include other people (such as your fiancé or mother!) who have a stake in the outcome.

As your Wish List starts to take shape, be sure to answer the following questions:

- When do you want your event to take place? If you can, try to identify 2 or 3 dates that will work for your event—especially if you need to coordinate schedules with other people.
- Where do you want to hold your event? Indoors or outdoors?
- How many people do you want to have at your event?
- How much do you expect it to cost?
- What kind of atmosphere do you want to create? Are you going to have a theme?
- How do you expect your guests to dress for the occasion?
- What memories do you want to have as you look back on the event a few years from now?

Once you've gotten all of your ideas down on paper, go back and prioritize everything on your Event Wish List in terms of their importance to you. For example, if you can only hold your event on a particular date, make sure that date is at the very top of your Wish List. Or if it's important to have a larger event, give a high rank to the number of attendees, and so forth. Sometimes it's a good idea to take a break and go back to your Wish List after sleeping on it overnight.

2. Create a Vendor List

The next step is to identify items on your Wish List that you will need—or would prefer—to outsource to an event vendor. Completing a Vendor List makes getting quotes and creating a budget much, much easier.

[Eventective](http://www.eventective.com) has listings for vendors in the following categories. To identify the services you'll need, print out this list and use it to create a Vendor List customized to your event. Remember that you can eliminate some vendors later if you need to reduce costs.

- Audio Visual (lighting and sound systems, etc.)
- Bakeries
- Bridal Wear
- Caterers

- DJs
- Entertainers (clowns, comedians, magicians, etc.)
- Event Staffing & Services (bartenders, wait staff, on-site managers, etc.)
- Florists
- Formal Wear
- Gifts & Favors
- Health & Beauty (hair styling, make-up, etc.)
- Invitations
- Limousines
- Live Musicians
- Officiants (priests, rabbis, etc.)
- Party Equipment Rentals (tables and chairs, etc.)
- Photographers
- Videographers
- Web Site (create a web site for your event, see Step 6)

3. Create A Budget

The budgeting process is where the rubber starts to hit the road. For many people, this is the most difficult phase because we all tend to want to do more than we can afford. In this step you will start to get a sense of how much of your Vendor List you'll be able to afford. (You won't book any vendors until you have a venue reserved in Step 4, however.)

To start, check out the budgeting information on the Eventective web site, which provides per-person pricing for all of the services in the above vendor list. You only need to get approximate figures at this stage. For most events, the venue and catering represent the largest costs, and you will get quotes for those services in Steps 4 and 5. If you're handy with programs like Excel, you can easily create a spreadsheet that calculates total costs for each category based on the number of attendees, but you can also do this by hand or using a calculator. Either way, you'll need to come up with an approximate total cost for your event. How does it compare to the figure you had in mind in Step 1? Can you afford to do everything you want?

4. Book a Venue

Finding a venue for your event is the most critical task in your planning process. Without a confirmed venue, it's impossible to continue planning your event.

To make your process more efficient, it's a good idea to create a short list of 3-5 venues that would be a good fit. To develop your list, ask friends and families for their recommendations. Be sure to also include venues where you've attended events that you enjoyed. [Eventective](#) can be a great resource, too: you can search for venues by location, which allows you to learn about venues you may not have known existed. As you create your shortlist, keep your Wish List handy to ensure that the venue will meet your needs.

Then contact the most interesting venues on your short list to arrange an on-site meeting and inspection. Contacting venues by telephone allows you to conduct preliminary interviews and potentially eliminate any venues that you might have been unsure about.

When you visit venues, be sure to take your time. Bring your Wish List with you, and thoroughly check out the facility, including the bathrooms, entrances, parking, and public areas. Does the venue provide the ambiance that you are looking for?

In addition, it is critically important to find out what services the venue provides and whether it allows outside vendors on its premises. For example, some venues have in-house caterers and don't allow outside catering companies to serve events on their premises. The venue might also have preferred relationships with caterers and other vendors and can coordinate details with those companies, making your job easier.

If the venue is a good fit for your event, be sure to check its availability for your date(s). Having alternate dates already makes it easier if you fall in love with a venue that is booked on your first choice of date.

Once you've selected a venue, be sure to review the contracts carefully and ask a lot of questions. What happens if you have to cancel? What is included and not included in the price? Don't be scared to negotiate, especially if you have some flexibility with your dates.

5. Hire Vendors

Once you've booked a venue, the rest of your planning gets easier. At this point you know when and where your event will be held, and the venue will have told you which services it can provide and which you will need to arrange on your own.

Using the Vendor List you created in Step 3, you now need to start getting concrete quotes for your event date. Start by asking friends and family if they have any recommendations for you, and then contact those vendors for a price quote. You can save time by using Eventective's Event Agent service, which allows you to get competitive quotes for all of the vendors you need by filling out just one online form.

Be sure to interview any finalists before signing a contract. Ask for references or, where appropriate, a sample of their work. (For caterers, this can include a tasting or a sample menu. DJs, musicians and entertainers can provide a demo CD. And so forth.)

6. Create A Web Site for Your Event

Having a private web site for your event can be a tremendous time-saver for you, and is also a great way to build buzz about your event among your friends and family. Rather than answering the same questions over and over, you can direct guests to the web site for updates and important planning details. You can even send tweets to guests who use Twitter, and can post photos to the site after your event is over. Best of all, setting up a site is inexpensive and very easy. Just go to: www.myevent.com.

7. Send Invitations

When you need to send invitations to your event depends on how far in advance you start your planning. In some cases invitations are mailed well after all of the planning is complete, while in others you could still be looking for a caterer after invitations are in the mail. For larger events like weddings, invitations are typically sent about 8 weeks in advance. If you are planning your event at a popular time of year such as a holiday weekend, it is a good idea to send a "Save the Date" reminder in advance (i.e. more than 8 weeks before your event) to let your friends and family know about your event. And with your own event web site, you can even send invitations and get RSVPs electronically.

After you've completed this seven-step process, you are ready for a truly memorable event! Be sure to get some rest before the event so you can have a great time!