

Section V Event Planning

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Programming 101:

Programming 101: Back to the Basics of Program Planning

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Campus programming runs the gamut from working with associate members to book acts, attractions and speakers to planning programs ourselves completely from scratch. No matter what route we take in producing a program, it is imperative to remember the basics of programming to make sure we are on the right track and take care of all essential details. Sometimes, though, we overlook the basics and that's where our events start to go awry.

What are the basics of programming and how can we be sure to stay on track? Journalists follow the "Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?" rule in constructing news articles. However, this fundamental concept also applies to programming.

Who?

It may seem obvious, but when planning an event it's important to determine your target audience. While this is apparent to many, sometimes we lose sight of exactly who our programming is designed to reach. This is the time the committee needs to figure out exactly who your programs are geared to attract. Are you offering a campus-wide program for students and the rest of the college community? Or, are you planning an event for seniors—perhaps a 21-plus event—or something that is designed to help students to prepare for life after graduation? Maybe your event is for first-year students who are trying to get adjusted to the new realities of living away from home? It could be a commuter-focused program, too. Who? is an important question to ask, as it will help determine what type of program you are planning, how to promote it and where to hold it.

What?

What is your program going to be? Now that you've decided who you are trying to reach, what are you going to program for them? Sometimes the What? can come before the Who? and often, they may be discovered simultaneously.

When? and Where?

If you are planning an event from scratch, you can probably schedule it on any available date. However, if you are booking an attraction through an agent, you might be tied to a specific date or range of dates.

When picking a date, consult your advisor and your campus calendar. Make sure you aren't putting your event up against another major campus event or that you aren't scheduling it during the height of midterms, when your attendance is not likely to be as large as you'd like.

Be sure to follow whatever procedure is in place on your campus pertaining to venue reservations to make sure you secure the facility you need on the date you have selected. One of the biggest blunders in event planning is scheduling a program and not having a place to hold it. Be sure to also consider your target audience when selecting a location. It wouldn't make much sense to plan a commuter program in a residence hall lounge at 10 pm, would it?

Why?

One of the most important aspects of programming events on campus that we sometimes fail to keep in mind is Why? Why are we planning this program? What is its purpose? I often discuss this with the students I advise. Why are we bringing the latest star from MTV's *The Real World* to campus? What added value does it bring? Are we having this event for pure entertainment or is there an educational value attached to it? Not every event we hold needs to have a deeper purpose than offering a few laughs and a good time, but wouldn't it behoove us to vary the Whys? of our programs? Wouldn't this broaden our audiences by appealing to different groups on campus?

How?

How are we going to pull this event off? We all know that budgets are slim and money is scarce. We have this great idea for a new program—now, how are we going to make sure we can afford it? Every school is different when it comes to student organization finances, but I'm sure we are all the same in the sense that we need to sometimes be a little creative with how we spend our money.

Co-sponsorship, co-sponsorship, co-sponsorship. That is a great way to ensure the money you need is available. If your program is educational, perhaps you can gain additional funding by co-sponsoring it with an academic department that supports the program topic. On the other hand, your program might be purely social and this approach won't work. These are all things you need to consider when determining How? you are going to have your event.

A Basic Programming Checklist

After working at several different schools with many diverse students and different systems of planning events, I've been able to develop a simple pre-event checklist that can be modified for almost every program. I encourage you to adapt it to the specific needs of your campus and to use it when planning your next event. It should help keep you and your committee organized, focused and on track in your planning.

Pre-Event Checklist

1. Brainstorm ideas that might work on your campus.
2. Call several agencies to find out availability/pricing—always find the best bang for your buck!
3. Create a budget and make sure there are funds to cover all production and performer expenses.
4. Pick a date and get approval from your organization advisor, as well as your office of student activities.
5. Choose a venue and reserve it through the appropriate campus office.
6. Make sure all pertinent offices have been contacted:
 - Student Activities
 - Facilities Management—Complete room set-up diagram two weeks in advance and make sure your facilities department has it.
 - Campus Police or Public Safety—Request parking passes (if needed) for performer and equipment vehicles through your campus police or security office. Also, request detail officers if your event requires them.
 - Residence Life
 - Student Affairs
 - Catering—Order catered meals or snacks early. Contact your food service provider to know how far in advance they need counts.
 - Media Services—Make sure you share any contract riders with your media services department to ensure you can provide what the artist is asking for.
7. Contract—Be careful not to verbally commit to any performer without first consulting with your organization's advisor. At most institutions, students are not authorized to sign contracts.
8. Contract Rider—Make sure everything on the rider is taken care of, including hotel rooms and transportation.
9. Publicity—Brainstorm creative publicity ideas. Printed materials need two weeks for design and production. Event advertisement should be posted at least two weeks in advance.
10. Check Requests—These should be made at least two weeks prior to the event if the performer's check is needed the night of the event. This will differ depending on the university.
11. Worker Lists—Prepare a sign-up list for workers to set up, usher and clean up.

12. Day Before the Event—Make sure you touch base with the agent or act to confirm arrival times and any last-minute needs.
13. Day of the Event—Bring copies of all pertinent information to the event.
14. Evaluation—Keep complete records of attendance, income, expenses, publicity used and future suggestions for your files.

Don't Forget to Plan Ahead

No matter what course you pursue in program planning, be sure to PLAN AHEAD. It's important to start program planning the moment your idea is formed. Don't brainstorm in a committee meeting, then put off program research and facility reservation until the last minute. Stay organized throughout your planning process and always keep in mind the Who, What, Where, When, How and Why of programming. They will keep you on track. Never forget the basics—they can serve as guidelines for all your campus programs.

Event Checklist

Event Name: _____

Event Date: _____ Event Time: _____

Event Location: _____

CHECKLIST

___ **Information Gathering-** Have we discussed this event with the organization? Have we spoken to our advisor about the event? Have we spoken to the Department of Student Activities regarding this event? Have all preliminary questions been answered?

___ **Budget-** Do we have a budget set for this event? Can we pay for it?

___ **Reservations-** Has the venue been reserved and confirmed?

___ **Work Orders-** Have all of the work orders and set-up requests been completed through Physical Plant? Is everyone clear on room/venue set-up needs? Does Physical Plant have room layouts (if necessary)?

___ **A/V Requests-** Are all of our A/V requests completed through Media Services? Is everyone clear on our needs with sound, lights, projection, etc.? Have we thought through and expressed how we want the event to run?

___ **Catering-** Has all catering been ordered and confirmed through Dining Services? Are they clear on head counts? If we are doing the catering ourselves has the food been ordered and confirmed? Do we have cups, plates, serving spoons, napkins, etc.?

___ **Checks-** Have all checks and bills been processed? Are the checks going to be ready for the event? Is everyone clear on when they will be paid?

___ **Contracts-** Have any performers or special guests been contracted? Do they need to be contracted?

___ **Marketing-** Has publicity been distributed for this event? Have we done a timeline for proper promotion of this event?

___ **Security-** Has campus Safety been contact (If Necessary)? Has proper security been arranged for?

___ **Evaluation-** Have we evaluated the event after the fact? How did things go? What worked? What didn't work? Do we do this event again? What might we change for the next time?

