



UNIT-1

An Introduction to Event Planning

Learning Outcomes

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

Unit 1

An Introduction to Event Planning

The word 'event' is derived from the Latin word 'eventus' and was originally used to describe big happenings out of the ordinary. It can be defined as 'any organised presentation or activity that is consciously planned and conducted to achieve specific goals or objectives'. Events include a large variety of social gatherings, meetings, sports, shows, and performances. Events have become popular as means of entertainment and social interaction. In rural towns, they are a means of generating pride and a sense of place.

Events have long played an important role in human society. Special events cover all kinds of human activity, not only sporting and family activities, but also cultural and commercial or organisational activities. The events range from first-birthday parties to political fundraisers, anniversaries, fashion shows, product launches, conferences, graduations, and reunions etc.

What Is Event Planning?

Events include:

- Celebrations (fairs, festivals, parades, weddings, reunions, birthdays, anniversaries)
- Education (conferences, conventions, meetings, graduations)
- Promotions (product launches, political rallies, fashion shows, conventions)
- Commemorations (memorials, civic events)

The above list is not an exhaustive one, but as the examples illustrate, special events may be business related, purely social, or somewhere in between. This course deals with the planning of both business and social events.

Who Hires Event Planners

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

The Corporate Market

We will use the term corporate to include not only companies but also charities and non-profit organisations. All these entities use special events to reach their target markets and to increase their visibility in the community. In fact, special events have become increasingly important, as competition forces organisations to look for new ways to get their messages across to consumers or contributors. Charities and non-profit organisations host gala fundraisers, receptions, and athletic competitions, and many other types of events, to expand their public support base and raise the funds they require. Such

organisations find that special events are cost-effective and have a high impact. Companies host trade shows, conventions, company picnics, holiday parties, and meetings for staff members, board members, or stockholders. There is a huge market for these types of events. Whether you plan meetings, fundraisers, or receptions, there are opportunities available in corporate event planning.

Planning corporate events can provide you with a steady, profitable amount of business, but in the beginning it is better for an event planner, to begin by planning social events.

Different organisations stage events for a variety of reasons:

- Main Street and similar organisations may hold events to engender pride in the local community, attract visitors, generate income, create employment opportunities, brand their area and possibly attract new residents.
- Community groups stage events to promote their interests, eg an art society putting on an exhibition, or a car club staging a rally
- Sporting groups stage competitions to test the sporting prowess of their members
- Promoters stage events to make a profit, eg rock festivals or concerts
- Businesses stage events to increase sales and promote products
- Governments stage events to promote special occasions or to serve specific groups and issues
- Tourism organisations stage events to attract visitors, extend their length of stay and generate return visitation
- Charities stage events to raise funds and profile.

Social Events

Social events include: weddings, birthdays, anniversary parties, children's parties, reunions, etc. You may decide to handle all these events or to specialise in one or more of them. Most people who employ event planners for these types of parties are in the middle- to upper-income levels and have some spare income but no spare time.

Main Tasks Involved in Events Planning

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

- Conducting research
- Creating an event design
- Finding a site
- Arranging for food, decor, and entertainment
- Planning transportation to and from the event
- Sending invitations to attendees
- Arranging any necessary accommodations for attendees
- Coordinating the activities of event personnel

- Hiring employees to work the event
- Supervising at the site
- Conducting evaluations of the event

Skills Required for an Event Planner

In addition to a formal educational background, planners possess a unique combination of skills that enhance their professional success. Because planning is a dynamic and diverse profession, individual skills vary depending on a planner's role and area of specialisation. Successful planners possess a combination of these skills:

- Verbal and written communications
- Organisation and time management
- Project management and multi-tasking
- Self-starter and team player
- Understand Microsoft Office applications
- Detail and deadline-oriented
- Calm and personable under pressure
- Negotiation
- Budget management
- Staff management
- Marketing and public relations
- Interpersonal skills with all levels of management
- Knowledge of urban spatial structure or physical design and the way in which cities work.
- Ability to analyse demographic information to discern trends in population, employment, and health.
- Knowledge of plan-making and project evaluation.
- Mastery of techniques for involving a wide range of people in making decisions.
- Understanding of local, state, and federal government programmes and processes.
- Understanding of the social and environmental impact of planning decisions on communities.
- Ability to work with the public and articulate planning issues to a wide variety of audiences.
- Understanding of the interaction among the economy, transportation, health and human services, and land-use regulation.
- Ability to solve problems using a balance of technical competence, creativity, and hard-headed practicality.
- Ability to envision alternatives to the physical and social environments in which we live.
- Mastery of geographic information systems and office software.

The Basics of Event Planning

Pre-Planning

The earliest stage of event planning is pre-planning or event development. In this stage you will need to create a vision for what the event will look like. In pre-planning you should:

- Be clear what the purpose of the event is (board meeting, wedding, etc.).
- Consider the size of the group, gender mix, ages of attendees, and any special needs.
- Create an outline for each session or activity, including expected attendance, seating arrangements, required setup times, starting and ending times, and audiovisual and production needs.
- List food and beverage requirements for each occasion, including meals, receptions and breaks.
- Consider air and ground transportation needs.
- Plan entertainment and recreation needs, group activities and/or team-building exercises.
- Prepare a timeline for producing invitations, event promotion, registration and production of meeting materials.
- Decide who will be involved and assign specific responsibilities to each committee member.
- Determine the amount of available funds and the amount you are willing to spend (i.e.: develop a budget).
- Develop a realistic timeline for beginning and completing the various components of the planning process.
- Determine the date and times for your event, while considering each school's calendar
- Get written confirmation that the event locations you want are available for you to use
- Research and select potential speakers, facilitators and entertainers

These are just some of the many considerations you should make prior to planning an event. There are '5 W's' of event creation - Why? Who? When? Where? and What?

a) Why are we Putting on the Event?

This is the first and most important question that must be asked from the client.

b) Who do we want to come to the Event?

The event may be targeted at local residents and/or visitors. The event might be specifically for young people, families or a more general audience. The event organisers must know who they are targeting, as this will drive the marketing and promotion of the event.

c) When Is The Best Time To Stage The Event?

Whether the event will be indoor or outdoor will in part determine the ideal time of day and ideal time of year for the event. The target market is also a strong determining factor. For example family events may need to take place at weekends or school holidays, whereas events for seniors may be better held on a weekday. It is important to avoid other events in the local area and to take into account holiday periods and competing big events such as elections and the football grand final.

d) Where Is The Best Place To Stage The Event?

The venue should not only accommodate the needs of the event it should give it a unique character and atmosphere as well. Other key issues to consider will include availability, cost, transport, parking and facilities.

e) What Concept Or Idea Will Best Serve The Purposes Of The Event?

In cases where the event concept has not been identified, one way of developing ideas is a collective 'brainstorming' session. A useful technique is to use a whiteboard or butchers' paper to record ideas, encouraging team members to say whatever first comes into their minds. With a lively group of people, coming up with a wide range of ideas will be easy. Once this process has been exhausted, it will be useful to make a second list, this time prioritising ideas in terms of their quality and attractiveness. Some ideas may be able to be blended or combined. Through this process, you will end up with a shortlist from which the group must choose the idea, or combination of ideas, that best serves the event. This can be developed and refined to create the event concept.

Once you have spent time thinking about who, what, when, where, why and how's of your event, you are ready to begin working on the logistics.

Logistics

Logistics is the discipline of planning and organising the flow of goods, equipment and people to their point of use. Logistics are important to events because of the need to concentrate resources on a particular location for a particular time (even if that event is multi-site and taking place over a fairly long period). Without careful planning of this activity, the supplies needed to undertake the event may not arrive correctly.

In logistics terms, our supplies are not simply products and services; they also include the flow of customers and customer services. For example, when we choose a venue we must ensure that our potential customers, visitors or participants are able to get to it easily, using their typical mode of transport, and also that there is suitable and adequate access, both for them and for goods, and in case of emergency.

In logistics terms, services that have a long lead time must be considered early on. The event may have special power requirement, it might need additional utilities laid on (e.g. telecoms, gas, water, sewerage, waste removal), all of which have typically long lead times to arrange, especially if groundwork has to be undertaken to put them in.

a) Supplies, Transport and Distribution

We have said that logistics is the discipline of planning and organising the flow of goods, equipment and people to their point of use. Therefore logistics in events terms includes activities such as ticketing and enquiries (in co-operation with the marketing department), arrival and departure of visitors, the flow of people, equipment, suppliers, artists and crew around the venue. Within this, the preparation, opening and running of an event (whether it is a wedding reception or a coronation) depends on getting all the elements to the right place in time for a range of deadlines.

b) Technical Facilities

The technical services that events co-ordinators and venues are expected to provide are becoming increasingly sophisticated, to the extent that events coordinators may choose to outsource the hi-tech needs of clients to production or multimedia companies. The larger and more important the event, the greater the likelihood of a need for specialists, although a contributory difficulty is that some venue managers may not be sufficiently knowledgeable about the capabilities of production companies and of the latest developments in contemporary technology

Multimedia can include video, computer-generated text and graphics, transfer of pictures from digital sources and the insertion of sound or video into presentations. Similarly, rapid development in communications has seen some use of video conferencing and, at large-scale events, satellite links from one continent to another, enabling the presentation of a speaker in, say Frankfurt, to be made on a video wall in London.

If venues have suitable equipment available, venue management and technical staff should request that presenters come and test their material at least a week prior to the event.

c) Lighting

The lighting of venues has a number of purposes. In terms of function rooms themselves the main purposes are to provide ambient lighting, to highlight artists or speakers, to light backdrops and to enhance the atmosphere. In the other areas of venues the lighting has to provide adequate background illumination in both public and support areas, and some decorative illumination, particularly in VIP rooms, dining areas and foyers. The final lighting issue is one of provision for safety, and to help people feel secure, particularly in terms of exits and traffic routes in and around the venue or site.

Diffused illumination is necessary in the public areas of a building. Corridors, toilets, foyers and reception areas should be well-lit, although not harshly so. This is necessary to enable the proper functioning of these areas, to ensure safety and security, and to maintain a pleasant general ambience. Consideration must also be given to lighting control systems, dimmers and sensor switches.

Emergency lighting is essential, and a legal requirement, in public buildings. This is usually provided by secondary battery-powered lights lasting up to three hours, activated by the fire alarm system or a power failure. Exits should be clearly illuminated and the emergency lighting sufficient to allow adequate means of escape. In some modern buildings, floor lighting strips are provided along exit routes, similar to those provided on aircraft floors to direct people to emergency exits. Security lighting is also necessary for areas containing expensive equipment, such as computers. Externally, particularly in car parks and around the building, good lighting is needed to ensure visitors feel secure. Lighting should be provided, throughout the venue from the various public areas to the place of final exit.

d) Sound and Communications

Historically, the sound system at venues was, at best, a microphone and a couple of loudspeakers, and if you were lucky, an amplifier and a mixer. This tends to be inadequate for current needs. Consequently, provision of professional sound systems is often necessary. Companies providing equipment are able to provide equipment packages that will include not only public address (PA) systems, but also complete music systems.

Budgeting

When making budget for an event; _____

- Create a balance sheet listing expenses for all functional areas of your event, such as staff time, marketing expenses, air and ground transportation, accommodations, food and beverage, entertainment and recreation, taxes and gratuities, service charges, audiovisual equipment and production costs.
- Build in a contingency fund for unanticipated, last minute expenses.
- Don't forget expenses for licenses (music, written materials) and insurance (general liability, business cancellation and interruption).
- Check budgets from similar meetings and events to gauge cost.
- Make sure funds are allocated to pay all suppliers. Establish a holding account for accrued programme expenses.
- Secure the signature of a client, for any expenditures above what you have budgeted.

Schedule of Events

Schedule of events is probably the most important document you will produce. The cue-to-cue outlines what happens when, who does what and where everything happens. This schedule should include: Transportation, Food Deliveries and pickups, arrival of guests, setup information, venue information and cleanup. Basically everything that is going to happen before, during and immediately after the day of event should be included in the cue-to-cue. The more information you can put into the cue-to-cue the better informed everyone will be and the smoother the event will flow.

To produce a schedule of event you must walk through every aspect of the event from start to finish with all the key people involved in the planning. Put yourself in the shoes of a participant: What do you see? Where do you go? How do you get there? What does it look like? Now think about all the things that go into making that experience happen. The document will go through many drafts and will be changed and updated many times before the event. Once the final plan is developed, review the document with all the key people.

Venue

Give serious thoughts to the venue you are using for your Event .Think about what kind of space you require and what kind of atmosphere you would like to create.

- Do you need a large room, breakout spaces or both?
- How will your chairs be set-up? Theatre style, circles, with tables?
- Where are the toilets located?
- Is there room for a stage, sounds equipment? Is there power nearby?
- Do you need signs in the location to direct people to breakout rooms or toilets?
- Can you access the rooms during all the times required? If not, who do you contact?
- What are the rules of the facility? Are those rules posted anywhere? Smoking etc.

How to Evaluate Each Venue

a) Ask About Amenities

When meeting with a venue sales manager, it's important to make sure that the property allows you to incorporate some on-site promotion for your event. The sales manager should explain limitations or availability of the following:

- Ability to display banners/signage/directional signs.
- Any restrictions to displaying event information.
- Availability of concierge/information desks.
- On-site business centre and office services (request list & prices).
- Shipping and receiving services requirements.
- House phones in meeting rooms.

b) View the Facilities

The venue should be updated and its facilities manager should anticipate any situation. Consider the following:

- Condition of the grounds and parking.
- Condition of carpet, paint, and decor.
- Condition and appropriately sized draperies/skirting.
- Adequate room size and capacity to hold event.
- Flexibility to adjust room layout/tables.
- No visual obstructions within room.
- Indoor lighting (flexibility to adjust/dim sections).
- Ability to control natural light.
- Limited noise distractions in hallways/behind walls.
- Event room away from kitchen.
- Nearby restroom access.
- Nearby medical access.

c) Inquire About Audio/Visual & Equipment

Nearly every event incorporates one or more elements of A/V. Confirm the availability of each of the following:

- High speed Internet access (wired/wireless).
- Microphones: lavalier system and standing (needed).
- LCD projectors and hand-held remotes.
- Appropriate screen sizes and draping options.
- Flat screen monitors, TV screens for video needs.
- Easels, white boards and supplies.

d) Explore All Catering Options

Event planners should make sure they know the full range of choices. Confirm the following:

- Full service on-site kitchen operation.
- Detailed menu & serving options.
- Meet the executive chef if possible.
- Taste/ test the menu you're considering.

e) Document Your Budget

Compile all expense items, including the following:

- Meeting facility costs.
- Catering costs.
- A/V & equipment rental costs.
- Office services costs.
- Guarantee policy.
- Complimentary services.
- Payment options.

Staffing

No one can run an event alone. Make sure you are clear on who will set-up, run, and clean up after the event is over. Each individual should know when and where to show up, what they will be doing, and how long you will need them.

You will save a lot of time and energy if you staff everything well and with the right person. Think about the number of people you will need to successfully run this event. The best way to do this is to develop a list of the jobs/tasks that need to be accomplished. This list can be easily developed using your management plan. In dividing up responsibilities, think about who needs to be in each position - does it need to be a committee member who knows a lot of information or can it be someone with limited information?

Safety

In small events you should always have a person who knows what to do in case of any emergency at every event and everyone working the event should know who that person is. For larger events the arrangements will be done accordingly, keeping in view the number of attendees. The person identified should have instant access to a phone and a vehicle and they should have a basic first aid kit. In advance, you should identify the nearest hospital and you should make sure you have the local emergency phone numbers.

Catering

The organisation of catering varies considerably according to the type of venue, but as a generality there is a choice between in-house catering as practised by the banqueting departments of hotel-type venues, and contracted-out catering as practised by the other types of venue, ranging from public halls to sports stadiums.

Planning the Meals

- At events offering food and beverage service, allow enough time for guests to eat leisurely, network or socialise with colleagues or friends and family, and enjoy all presentations or ceremonies, if there are any involved.
- Generally allow 30 to 40 minutes for breakfast, 45 to 60 minutes for lunch, and 20 minutes per course for dinner. For refreshment breaks, allow a minimum of 15 minutes for up to 100 people, 30 minutes for up to 1,000 people and 30 to 45 minutes for groups larger than 1,000.
- Plan on two cups of coffee or tea per person for a morning break and one cup of coffee/tea or one soda per person during an afternoon break.
- Consider a luncheon buffet for small group working sessions. Buffets offer variety and faster service.
- Consider requesting one server for each table, for more formal meals and/or VIP tables.
- Most facilities allow one server for every two tables, for standard, three- or four-course meals. Check with the facility to determine if there will be additional labour charges for the extra servers.
- Always plan to serve a variety of foods during cocktail receptions. The food should be healthy, appetising and visually appealing.
- Consider donating leftover food to homeless shelters or distribution organisations for the needy.

Accessibility

Under the Disabilities Act, event planners have responsibility for providing access and support to participants or guests who have special needs. Review these issues with the facilities to make sure that your event is accessible. You will specifically want to think about wheelchair accessible 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?

Comprehensive planning and the completion of an Event Management Plan will provide the best chance to conduct a safe and successful event and create extra benefits for the event manager.

The benefits are as follows:

- Efficient movement of consumers, staff and equipment throughout the venue thus making the event more enjoyable for all involved.
- Happy and contented crowds leading to fewer incidents, such as assaults and property damage. This will in turn reduce the costs of security, cleaning and repairs.
- Quick responses to unplanned incidents thereby creating a more secure environment for consumers.
- Long term sustainability from the widespread support of consumers, staff and the local community.
- Increased opportunities for long term sponsorship from the corporate and community sectors.
- Reduction in accidents and injury which significantly reduces the risk of public liability claims and subsequent first aid and insurance costs.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Event Planning 2nd Edition ,(2012) By Laurence Carte*
- ✓ *Management of Event Operations, (2006) By Julia Tum, Philippa Norton, J. Nevan Wrigh*
- ✓ *The Everything Guide to Being an Event Planner: Insider Advice on Turning, (2008) By Jennifer Mancuso*