Ridgecrest Conference Center
NORTH CAROLINA

EVENT PLANNING 101

HELPFUL TIPS WHEN PLANNING YOUR UPCOMING MEETING OR EVENT:

PREPLANNING

- Determine the meeting or event purpose.
- Consider the size of the group, gender mix, ages of attendees, and special needs.
- Determine meeting dates.
- Are the dates and/or days of the week firm or flexible?
- Plan the meeting or event in advance to secure the most desirable space.
- 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, including meals, receptions and breaks.
- Consider air and ground transportation needs.
- Plan recreation needs, group activities and/or team-building exercises.
- Prepare a timeline for producing event promotion, registration and meeting material.
- Designate an administrative person to create name badges and coordinate written material.
- Budget for all sponsor(s) expenses and calculate expenses for meeting participants.
- Schedule speaker(s), if required.

BUDGETING

- Determine which expenses will be assumed by the sponsor(s) and by the attendees.
- Create a balance sheet listing expenses for all functional areas of your meeting or event, such as staff time, marketing expenses, air and ground transportation, accommodations, food and beverage, recreation, 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.
- Check budgets from similar meetings or events to gauge costs.
- Make sure funds are allocated to pay all suppliers.

INSPECTING THE SITE

- Accessibility: Ease and cost, proximity to the airport, parking, shuttles, etc.
- Environment: Safety, appearance, restaurants, attractions, shopping, recreation, weather, etc.
- Facility: Cleanliness, friendly/helpful staff, lighting, meeting space, food and beverage, guest rooms, services, policies, etc.

No facility will look the same in person as it will on paper, nor will you be able to get a sense of service without going to the site. If your budget or time does not allow you to visit the site, the following options are available to you:

- Check with other people, including other planners, to see what they recommend.
- Use the Internet to view site, including facility descriptions, city maps, transportation information, etc.

BOOKING

- Determine the type and number of guest rooms needed (singles, doubles, suites, specially equipped business rooms or rooms accessible for people with special needs).
- Determine the number and size of meeting rooms needed; use past programs as a benchmark.
- Submit a Request for Proposal (RFP). This allows a property to see, in writing, the information about your group. Preparing the specifications is a valuable process because it requires you to think about all the needs of the group. Be sure to document all site requirements, including:
  - Preferred dates and optional dates (if available)
  - Number and types of guest rooms
  - Number, size and usage of meeting rooms and the times they are needed
  - Range of acceptable rates
  - Dates and types of meal functions and breaks
  - Exhibits and any other special events or activities
  - Any related information such as complimentary requirements

CONTRACTS

- Make sure you have a binding contract. To be enforceable, a contract must specify definite terms, be accepted by both sides and be signed by people with authority to enter into the agreement.
- Check into any additional costs that may occur due to attrition or shortfall in revenue. Attrition, sometimes referred to as "slippage," can be applied to sleeping rooms and to food and beverage events. Having protected space for your meeting, Ridgecrest may be due financial remuneration if your group does not perform as expected.
- Look for termination clauses, often referred to as "Acts of God" clauses that apply when a meeting is stopped because of forces beyond the control of the group or the facility. Generally, there are no penalties assessed to either party in these circumstances.

MEETING ROOM SETUP/CONFIGURATIONS

- *Conference and Hollow Square*: Appropriate for interactive discussions and note-taking sessions for fewer than 25 people.
- *U-shape*: Appropriate for groups of fewer than 40 people. These are best for interaction with a leader seated at the head of the setup. Audiovisual equipment is usually set up at the open end of the seating.
- *Rounds*: Generally used for meals and sessions involving small group discussions. A five-foot-round table seats eight people comfortably. A six-foot-round table seats 10 people comfortably.
- *Theater*: Appropriate for large sessions and short lectures that do not require extensive note taking. This is a convenient setup to use before breaking into discussion or role-playing groups because chairs can be moved.
- *Classroom*: The most desirable setup for medium to large-size lectures. This configuration requires a relatively large room. Tables provide attendees with space for spreading out materials and taking notes.

AUDIOVISUAL EQUIPMENT

- Be aware of factors that can directly affect the quality and cost of an AV presentation: ceiling height, walls, floors, obstructions, windows, lighting, mirrors, doors, air conditioning, and fire exits.
- Ask the AV representative to walk through the space with you. This person will be able to explain how to best use the meeting or event space.
- Communicate with speakers/presenters to confirm AV needs.
- Be aware that all rooms are not equipped with sound systems, nor do all sessions need sound. Determine which rooms need sound and which can be used with the systems in place.
- Consider that screen height generally should be the distance from the screen to the back wall divided by eight; chairs should be no closer to the screen than 1.5 times the screen's height; ceilings should be at least 10 feet high. Rely on your AV technician for assistance.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

- Write out the due dates for guarantees.
- Specify the "overset" in the contract. An overset is the number of people beyond the guaranteed number for which the facility will set tables and places. This amount varies from 0 to 5%; the industry average is 3%.
- You will usually be billed for the guaranteed number or the number served, whichever is greater.
- Make sure you are aware of the tax and service charge that will be added to your bill.
- Don't compromise on quality.
- Consider flowers, decorations and entertainment.
- At events offering food and beverage service, allow enough time for guests to eat leisurely, network or socialize, 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.

PRE-MEETING/PREPARING

- Send your rooming list well in advance, at least seven to 30 days prior to arrival.
- Inform guests of facilitly location and amenities.
- Send your meeting specifications three to four weeks before a meeting. List every meeting requirement, day by day, hour by hour.
- Don't forget to reserve space for your meeting office, press room, speaker-ready room. Remember to make preparation for all food and beverage activities and events held off-site. Include billing instructions and lists of VIPs.
- Check the Event Orders (EOs) from the facility. Check against your specifications and advise the event manager promptly of any changes or of your approval.
- Hold a pre-convention meeting 24 to 48 hours in advance of the meeting to review event expectations, procedures and to provide an opportunity to meet staff contacts who will help you with any problems.
- Never assume that a request has been taken care of - always double check.
- Work with facility to resolve any last-minute changes.

POST-MEETING/FOLLOW-UP

- Hold a post-convention meeting with the same people who attended the pre-convention meeting. Evaluate what worked and what did not; review the bills and solicit feedback immediately.
- Ask your attendees to provide feedback about the program content and format, meeting facility, speakers, meal functions and other special activities.
- Administer evaluations immediately after the meeting while opinions are still fresh and your staff can be present to collect the information.
- Solicit feedback from the meeting sponsor. Determine whether the meeting goals were met. Evaluate the financial implications of the meeting. Identify next steps.
- Write a meeting report and file it away with contracts for future meetings.
- Write thank-you letters to staff, speakers and other vendors.

For even more information to assist you with your planning, visit our blog at ministryservingministry.com.