



Planning for Effective Gatherings

September, 2001

Planning an event, a gathering, a retreat, a conference or a workshop is very rewarding but often requires a lot of work. The anticipation and excitement at the prospect of a group getting together for a purpose is invigorating for those involved in the planning. To gain the most from these events, follow these helpful tips and strategies:

1. Begin with the end in mind.
 - A. First of all, identify why this event is important.
 - B. Justify how the need for this gathering was identified.
 - C. Write down what you expect to happen as a result of this gathering – specifically what outcomes you hope to accomplish.
2. Plan ahead.
 - A. Who are the “workers” who will make this effort happen?
 - B. Select a date and site. Are you offering this gathering only once, in a centrally located place? Or in multiple sites, closer to where families live? Is the date convenient? Have you utilized feedback from families in choosing the time?
3. Promote and market the event.
 - A. How will you let people know about this opportunity? Allow ample advance notice (3 weeks minimum) and use multiple strategies (i.e., brightly colored flyer, newspaper notice, personal invitation, radio promotions, etc.)
 - B. Consider the use of incentives to increase attendance. Will there be a door prize for participants? Is there free childcare offered? Is a meal provided? Will CEUs or a certificate of attendance be offered?
 - C. Include the purpose of this event, provide good directions to the site and specify starting and ending times.
 - D. Are participants expected to pre-register? Is that clear in the directions?
4. Match the environment with the event.
 - A. Consider where the event will be held. Small groups get lost in large rooms. It may be difficult to hear. Does the size of the room match the size of the anticipate group? Is the parking free and easily accessible? Is the place easy to find?
 - B. Are children to be included? Will children be cared for in a separate room? If so, have arrangements for developmentally appropriate toys, supervised childcare, safe equipment, snacks, changing facilities, etc. been made?

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- C. How will the room be arranged? If participants are sitting, how are the chairs arranged? Sitting at round tables promotes more interaction than sitting in rows. Offering a table is preferable if there are refreshments.
 - D. Determine what refreshments will be provided. Always offer something.
 - E. Planners arrive early and have equipment, refreshments and room ready prior to participants arriving.
 - F. If a presenter or speaker is used, be sure to ask what audiovisual materials they might need (microphone, overhead projector, TV/VCR) and allow time to set up.
5. Welcome!
- A. Designate someone as “greeter”. Welcome everyone as they enter; talk to them! Indicate where coats may be hung, where children can go; offer refreshments, etc.
 - B. Have nametags available for everyone. Encourage them to write their first names in large print.
 - C. Introductions. Depending on the size of the group, encourage introductions up front. Always introduce planners and sponsors.
 - D. Designate a host/hostess to answer questions.
 - E. Share expectations for the gathering. Offer a brief synopsis of goals and outcomes of the event.
6. Remember adult learning techniques.
- A. Start and end on time.
 - B. Have paper and pencils/pens available for use.
 - C. Vary the pace of the event — some quiet listening time, some active interaction time.
 - D. Be sure content is practical, applicable to participants and pertinent
 - E. Don’t go longer than an hour and a half without a stretch break.
7. Closing and Follow-up.
- A. Always ask for participant feedback in writing. (What did they gain from coming? What was not important? What would they like to learn in the future? What are important topics or issues?)
 - B. Thank participants for coming.
 - C. Ask if they would be interested in getting notices of future trainings, events, etc., and offer a chance to sign up for a database.

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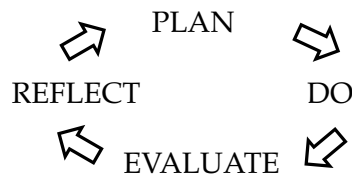




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- D. Determine a time for the planning team to debrief. (Go over feedback sheets, evaluate who participants were, who was missing, plan next steps, etc.)



This process is invaluable in setting the stage for effective gatherings. Planning and evaluating the effectiveness of an event are equally important as the event itself. Remember to allow adequate time and energy for it!!