STEP 9: Planning The Event

Category: Class Reunion Planning Center
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When, Where and What

When
In the North-eastern and Midwestern United States, Summer is the most popular time of year for reunions, and the main reason is the weather. If you want to leave the possibility for picnics and other outdoor events at the reunion, then choose June, July or August. If you are in the southern states you may actually prefer non - summer months to avoid the extreme heat. Thanksgiving Weekend is also popular, as it coincides with trips back home for many alumni.

When selecting a date for the reunion, you will need to weigh the convenience of a holiday weekend (people may already be planning a trip home) against the inflated costs of a hotel's high season. Holiday weekends also tend to be booked earlier in advance (venue, entertainment, accommodations, flights), so if you do decide Thanksgiving is the right time for you, be prepared to book early! A reunion is typically scheduled on a Saturday night.



Where
If you are choosing a popular location on a holiday week-end you will need to book your venue at least 12 months in advance. So, where you have the reunion may be a function of what is available.

But what place do you want? In our estimation, hotels are the way to go. They provide you with support and supplies that would otherwise be your responsibility. Need a microphone? No problem! Need an easel for your registration sign? They've got it! They have done this before and have the experience that you lack. Our next choice would be a restaurant, but make sure you have sufficient room for a registration area before you commit.

If you decide to choose a road-less-travelled (a gallery, or museum for instance), budget accordingly, and make sure that you have thought through the following list before signing on the dotted line: caterer, waiters and bartenders, tables, chairs, linens and dinnerware rentals, liquor licence, audiovisual equipment, a screen for the slide show, registration tables, dance floor, washroom supplies, and liability insurance. You can learn a lot about a venue by visiting while an event is in progress, so take the time to see a live event if you can. When you check out a possible venue, walk through it slowly. Imagine how you will divide the space for reception, registration, dining and dancing. Discuss decorating the walls, hanging a banner, and the equipment you might need: projector, screen, microphone, podium, easels, bulletin boards, and registration tables.

Choose a middle-of-the-road menu when looking at prices. Ask the hotel to give you a per-person rate including cash bar, and a per person rate without it. Find out the details of the cash bar option. How do they handle special meal requirements for those with allergies or special dietary requirements? Once you have made your venue selection, try and negotiate the best price you can. If you are flexible with your dates, see if there is a quiet time for them that will reduce the costs significantly. Keep in mind though that the priority is to get a well attended reunion, so give them dates that you have already determined will work for the majority of the class. Position your reunion as a non-profit event and you may get a favourable rate. Verify what perks come included (if it is a hotel you may receive a complimentary suite for the evening, which comes in handy.) Find out the cancellation policy, liability insurance, hidden costs, overtime implications, etc. If the reunion is at a hotel, approach the hotel to arrange a special accommodations rate for out-of-town participants. If the venue is not a hotel, choose one nearby. Inform alumni about the special offer and any reservation deadlines that may be in place.

What

As you discuss the kind of ambience you want for your reunion, don't just think in terms of decorations. Many elements contribute to the overall mood of the night.

- **Theme**
  When setting the tone for your reunion, you do not need to plan a theme. Your event comes with a built-in theme! Help classmates reminisce about their school days by including graduation-year memorabilia as well as news-makers from that era in the decorations.

- **Dress Code**
  A popular choice is casual-chic, which is pretty much what your classmates would wear when

going out for dinner with friends.

- **Entertainment**
  Book your band or DJ as soon as you have confirmed the date of your reunion. See them perform before you sign an agreement or contract. If you are working with a very small budget, consider asking a family member to DJ. We suggest that you use the website to solicit music requests from classmates. Some committees rent karaoke machines, but don't rely on this as your only source of music.

- **Eating & Seating**
  Buffet is by far the wisest choice for most reunions. Aside from significant savings, it gives people the opportunity to mingle during the meal. Pre-arranged seating keeps the room static and limits each person's connections to only nine other people for a significant portion of the evening. Assigning the seating also becomes quite touchy and is best avoided. Many caterers and hotels now offer small food stations throughout the room, instead of the traditional one long row of food. This minimizes line-ups and congestion at the buffet table, and makes it feel more like a chic event than a soup kitchen.



Top 5 Decorating Ideas

Decorations provide an opportunity for creating a nostalgic mood, and you need not spend a fortune. Keep it simple.

1. See if you can borrow a banner from the school or from other classes that have had reunions.
2. Enlarge old school photos and post them on the walls and tables.
3. Assemble collages from pictures that have been submitted.
4. Post Top 10 lists from your graduating year: movies, music, news stories.
5. Go to thrift shops and buy memorabilia from your high school years.

Top 7 Display Ideas

Every class creates a few unique displays for the reunion. Here are a few ideas:

1. Enlarge your graduating class photo. You can ask everyone to sign it for a true piece of memorabilia. You can then copy that image and make it available to everyone or just give it away in an auction or as a prize.
2. Pay tribute to deceased classmates by creating a memorial display. Post photos, short bios, and memories that you have collected. You can even initiate a tribute book where people can share comments and memories, and this book can be presented to the family following the event.
3. Post a US, North American or world map that indicates all the cities where classmates now reside.
4. Display the school mascot, school trophies, etc.
5. Post comments, memories and photos sent in by classmates who could not attend the event.
6. Post the Sponsor Honor Roll, listing all sponsors that gave donations or paid for space in advertising.

7. Have a photo collage of your teachers that can also be signed by everyone.

- **Program Booklet**
  Some committees choose to have simple booklets that detail the order of events for the evening. You can also list the menu, contests and draws, award categories and recipients, as well as a quick word of welcome. Be sure to thank all sponsors and donors in the program. This can be as simple as one page folded in half or a few pages depending on how much content and advertising you have.

- **Satellite Events**
  Depending on the number of out-of-town guests you have, you may consider organizing additional events. The nature of the events depends on how long it has been since you graduated. A 10-year reunion might benefit from an informal 'Ice-Breaker' at a bar on Friday night, and a pick-up football game or pool party on Sunday. 20-year reunions often include a family picnic on Saturday or a Sunday pancake breakfast. Many reunion-goers also enjoy a round of golf on Sunday.

- **Out of town guests**
  If you have the resources, arrange welcome packages for classmates who are guests at the hotel. Be sure to include a list of all the classmates checking in. Deliver the packages to the front desk. When people check in, they are handed the package!

