

HOW TO PLAN A

Great

Catholic

Event



Help for Volunteer Event Planners

Charlotte Ostermann



MotherheartPress

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Note to Readers:

Future editions of ***How to Plan a Great Catholic Event*** can include your comments, suggestions, new resource links, and other improvements. To contribute to the work of helping your fellow Catholic event planners, contact the author at:

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This is a non-profit project, and no compensation is paid to the author or other contributors.

Thanks!

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Introduction

“Help! I’ve been tapped to plan an event...what next??”

Thanks to volunteers like you, many Catholic events occur each year to edify the Body of Christ. This guide has been written as a thank-you gift for all who labor to bring about the retreats, conferences, forums, lecture series, catechetical programs, days of reflection, panel discussions, and other events where Catholics are strengthened and challenged.

An event planner is a juggler of sorts, with several balls in the air at once: team management, concept design, marketing and promotion, logistics and support, technology, speaker recruitment, budget, venue, and more. Planning is not a linear process, but a circular one, in which the rough elements are gradually smoothed into one, coherent whole we call “A Great Event!”

A great event delights, informs, inspires, connects and challenges attendees without over-burdening planners and volunteers, or costing too much. Your group or organization is enlivened by events experienced together.

Members' sense of intimacy and community is enhanced by sharing in planning and offering an event. Events stimulate great conversations, laughter and tears, lifelong learning, and boldness in living the Faith.

"An event is great when it changes the lives of participants and creates momentum for further ministry initiatives."

I've interviewed a bunch of your fellow-Catholic event planners and speakers (by phone, online, in person, and via questionnaires) to bring you a wealth of insights and tips. Quotes sprinkled here and there are from these respondents, who've donated ideas and wisdom gained from planning many different kinds of great Catholic events.

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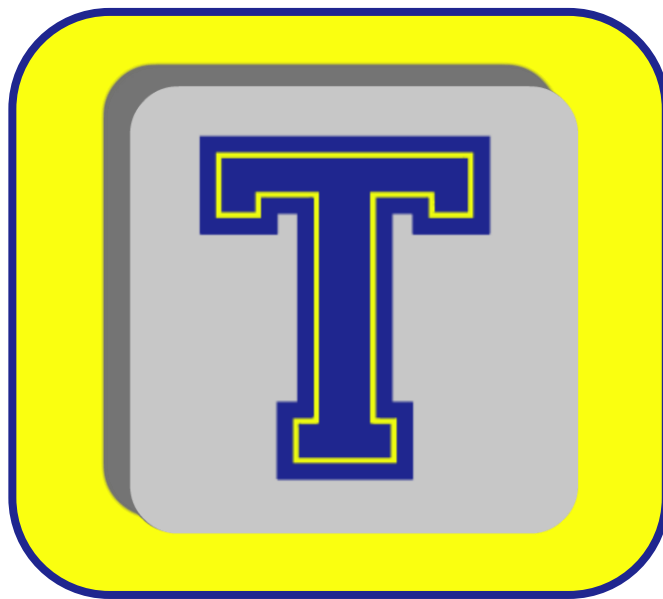
"The event must have substance! It must speak to the intellect..."

"...we have done the work ahead of time to make space for the Lord to do the real work."

"...relevance to the audience's needs...significant support during the event...a thorough debrief after ..."

"Participants are enthusiastic when they leave, excited about the faith, feeling connected...eager to apply what they've learned."

"...watch the Holy Spirit weave all the elements into a profound experience of the Living God."



The Team

You've got to have a team! Even for a small event, don't be a lone leader. With just one prayer partner, your event planning becomes a collaboration and less burdensome. If there is no team, you must ask yourself if there is a real need for this event, or if this is really the right time for it.

The goal of all the work you're about to undertake is not just the event itself, but also the Body of Christ – you and your team are building community by working and being creative together.

Gather everyone, start with prayer, and dig in! If you tiptoe in ahead of time to map the territory (or send out polls or survey questions to team members) in advance of the first planning meeting, so much the better.

Get a binder and/or computer file ready with sections/documents for Notes from Prior Events (if you have any), Team Info, Concept Design, Logistics, Budget, Venue, etc... You'll have some of the information filled in right away, and the rest will emerge during the planning process.

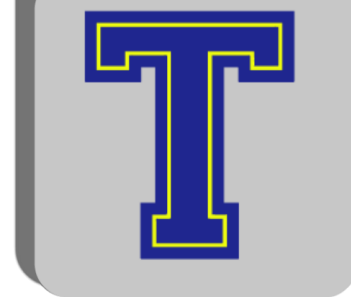
Questions to Answer

Who is on board to help? Particular areas of interest, experience, skill? Contact phone numbers, email and physical addresses (yes, we still send real thank-you notes at the end of this process!), best time of day for phone calls.

How often will meetings be scheduled, and when? Will sub-committees need to have separate meetings? Will the team work together online via shared documents, a website, conferencing software, or other means?

Who is responsible for what? Roles may include:

- Prayer Support
- Primary Leadership
- Volunteer and Staff Management
- Team Communications
- Media and Social Media Interface
- Event Design and Scheduling
- Accounting and Financial Management
- Marketing and Promotion



“Take a professional event planner or experienced Church worker out to coffee and ask them about best practices. Always plan farther ahead than you think you need (don’t procrastinate) and always plan for contingencies for the major aspects of the event.”

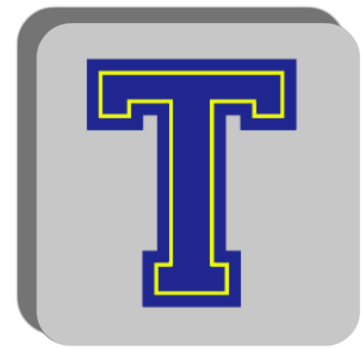
- Registration and Ticketing
- Sponsor Relations
- Vendor Relations
- VIP Guest Relations
- Housing Management
- Attendee Concierge
- Tech Support
- Program MC or Moderator
- Set-up Team
- Strike Team
- Food Service Management
- Website Design and Update
- Secretary or Documents Coordinator
- Priests and/or Spiritual Directors
- Altar Servers, Lectors, Musicians
- Graphic Designer
- Liturgy Coordinator

"People love working on a committee that has clear job descriptions for different positions. I can recruit so much better when I know that I need this person's particular skills for a particular role. Nobody wants to become responsible for more than they can handle."

Not all these roles will be needed for every event, and not all will be filled by planning team members. The more complex your event, the more you're going to appreciate professional event planners!

As specific tasks are assigned, you may want to add them to a shared spreadsheet, such as Google Sheets, so that everyone can follow progress in every aspect of event planning.

As team leader, you set the tone from the beginning for unity, professionalism, organization and clear communication. Your best team players will be most attracted to working on well-run projects. Remember that this team may work together again and again for years to come. Don't alienate potentially life-long teammates by inattention to these crucial factors!



Task	Owner	Depends On	Due Date	Status

Unity

Our first responsibility, as Catholic event planners, is to maintain unity in the Body of Christ during our work together. Every member of your team should know that this unity – which requires love, patience, grace, forgiveness, self-control – is even more important than the Great Event. No even – no matter how great – is worth broken relationships.

Working together will strain these relationships, will test us and expose our weaknesses, will exercise our virtues. That's why we need to work together, and why our efforts must emerge from this essential unity made possible by Christ's headship and His Church.

"I really appreciate a committee chairperson who respects my time and treats volunteer projects with as much professionalism as you'd expect in a paying job."

"My worst experiences could have been avoided by laying better groundwork for communications among the planning committee members."

Professionalism

“But we’re not professionals, we’re volunteers!”

I know, but volunteers can learn a lot from pros about best practices. Our events may still look ‘homespun,’ and there’s no shame in being amateurs (after all, that actually means “doing it for love”!) but we’ll get and keep the best volunteers by taking their time seriously (as if they were pros), and turning out high-quality results they can be proud of.

Who wants to be on the team that turns out shoddy work, a news release with typos, or a program that makes you feel embarrassed for the presenter?

Organization

It feels wonderful to be part of a well-organized team! Conversely, disorganization means we’ll find ourselves re-doing work, interfering with one another’s work, frustrating and maddening each other, and stepping on somebody’s toes.

If I can see a clear path to the Great Event goal, and evidence that our team is working together effectively to get ‘there’ from ‘here,’ I’ll contribute my efforts more willingly and in timelier fashion. Transparency – showing the progress, who’s responsible, what’s next, what’s holding things up – keeps us honest about organization.

Communication

Nothing shouts ‘disorganized’ ‘lack of unity,’ and ‘unprofessional’ as loudly as poor team communications. Here are a few areas for improvement:

Triangulation

If I tell you what, really, someone else should be hearing, I'm 'triangulating.' Say it directly to the person who should hear it, and don't snarl up the team works by a) hoping someone else will get the message to them, b) involving others unnecessarily in your conflict with one person, or c) broadcasting to everyone what only one or two need to discuss.

Team Leader: Make it clear who needs to hear what.

Email

Email is, possibly, the greatest and the worst thing that ever happened to communication! Did they get it, or not? Is she not responding because she hasn't opened it, she's mad at me, or she's dis-organized? How long should I wait before re-sending? If I follow up, will I seem pushy?

Should we hit 'reply,' or 'reply all'? Who should be copied on sub-committee emails? Can we agree on a subject line format to identify all team emails easily in crowded in-boxes? What kinds of communications need to be confidential? Will we or won't we add texting to the communications mix?

Discuss your individual email patterns, and decide as a group how you'll prevent these mail-fails.

Unofficial Communication

We may see members of the team in non-meeting situations, and discuss with them the event we're planning. This is natural, and only causes trouble when:

- a) Decisions are made without input from other members,
- b) Solutions that have ramifications for others' work are not shared with them,
- c) We use 'informal' paths to avoid particular team members,
- d) Unofficial communication short circuits the process of team collaboration and creativity,
- e) One person is more distant, and so is often informed after the fact about the content of unofficial 'meetings,'
- f) Members don't come to team meetings because they expect to work out problems, or get informed via private conversations, etc..., etc...

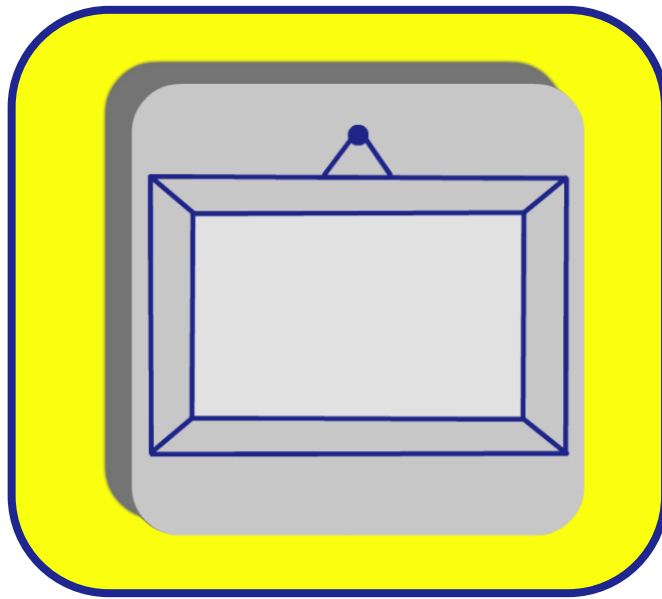
In other words, this can only cause a lot of trouble! Try to avoid un-communication, or at least to update everyone else by official channels as soon as possible.

["FYI: I just wanted everyone to know I had a problem with 'x,' ran into 'y' at the grocery store, and we agreed on solution 'z' together."]

Now, you've got your team together, your meeting schedule, a start on collecting pertinent information and filling in the duty roster, and a firm commitment to one another as members of the Body of Christ.

You're ready to create your Great Event!

Notes



The Frame

Before your team can design the Great Event, you've got to gather up the basic information about what you want to accomplish, and for whom. You may have been handed a boilerplate, "This is what we do every year," event, or be creating an entirely new one from a design brief with sketchy parameters. Either way, stop to note carefully what your 'givens' are, so you can enjoy designing this new event within that framework.

Questions to Answer

- Who is offering this event?
- Why? What is the reason, need, or goal?
- Who will attend?
- When?
- Where?
- Do we have a budget, or any other limitations?

What is Our Goal?

You can certainly have multiple goals for your event, but an event can't accomplish all things for all people. "To build community in our business owner's group while discussing the implications of *Caritas et Veritate*" is more do-able than "To build awareness of twenty different charity groups, while learning all the principles of Catholic social justice and raising money for scholarships to send women on foreign mission trips, where they will develop lasting friendships with one another and fair trade partnerships with native crafts-women"!

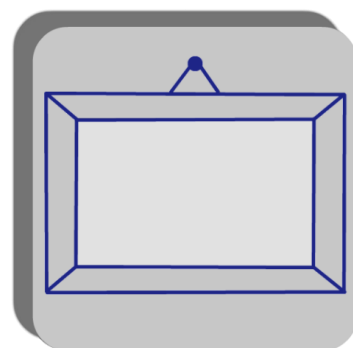
You might inform, or educate; inspire or motivate; serve or collaborate or create; build awareness of an issue or need or group effort; socialize or network; relax and have fun together. Consult your desires and your team, and begin wherever you are with the 'knowns' as your frame for the creation of a Great Event.

Who Will Attend?

Dig deeper than, "Women," or "Catholics." What are the characteristics of the group you hope to attract? Even if the attendees are "our small, homogenous club," they still have characteristics that help you frame your offering for them.

What of the age, gender, vocation, profession, education level, interests, needs, home location, personal goals and issues, marital status of your attendees?

"The more you know about what you must do and what you can't do and what your limitations are, the more creative you can be!"



"I'd rather start planning an event with a list of things we have to include, have to avoid, have to deal with, than to find out later on we've failed to live up to some body's unspoken expectation, or assumption."

Will they bring nursing babies, or need childcare provided at the event?

Might any of them need physical assistance, financial aid, language translation, or other help to attend? What about their hopes and expectations? Will they bring non-Catholic friends?

You might decide you don't know enough about them, and send out a survey, or poll to help you design an event that's great for them. This doesn't mean all attendees need to fit one mold. The fact, if it's the case, that you have huge variation in any of these factors, is a part of what your design team needs to take into consideration.

When?

You've got to have a timeline with at least two points on it: Today and Event Date! The length of that line, and the details you have time to attend to in the span between them may be 'givens,' or still be wide open, for you to decide. Whatever you know now helps frame your event now, and the rest will come into focus as you proceed.

To establish some ballpark to work with, consider the scope of your work from several angles. From small to large: more time is needed for planning larger events. From local to national: time line must lengthen as geographical scope widens. From homogenous to diverse crowd: it's going to take more time to plan well for a group that has less automatic coherence based on similarities. From 'boilerplate' to 'new, from scratch': make that line longer the less 'been there, done that' you have to work with.

Leave blanks on your Framework page for Day/Date, Time of Day, Length of Event/Number of Hours or Days, and pencil in something for a WEEKS TO GO countdown, which you'll lower every Monday morning and adjust again when the event date is firmed up.

Consider possible conflicts: holy days, sports events, local/regional/national events, weather conditions, etc... Naturally, the date – estimated or known – has implications for the choice of venue, the recruitment of speakers, the marketing possibilities and vendor or sponsor relationships.

Where?

Again, this may be clear already, or come into focus as you proceed. For now, 'where' may be your town, or church. Details will emerge as you consider venue, date, and creative design.

Other 'Givens'?

Anything you know is a factor before you begin to design your event should be listed here, and on the appropriate page of your Execution section in the planning notebook/document. Is the budget already in stone? Has a speaker already committed? Has your group chosen a topic, or theme? Once your framework is build, your team is free to play with the design of your Great Event.

"The essence of all art is the frame."
G.K. Chesterton



Concept Design

Even if you're recreating a standard event, you have room for creativity somewhere! After all, God is known for making all things new, so He can bring new life into the stalest old event. Do question your assumptions, though, about what has always been 'done that way' for a reason, and what's stayed the same because nobody bothered to consider changing it.

Here are few discussion points to consider with your team. Allow time for this conversation, if you possibly can, so that team members feel their thoughts and ideas are actually valued. This kind of attention to what actually motivates volunteers will pay off in a more satisfying event for everybody.

General Questions

- How like/unlike past events (done by us) should this event be?
- How like/unlike similar events (done by others) should this event be?
- How like/unlike other means to reaching the same goals should this event be? (Ex: I could read a book, or come to your conference or take a college class. What makes your event the one to choose?)
- What information is available from evaluations of our previous events, and what do we learn from that?
- What do we wish we could give, or give away to our attendees?
- What are our favorite elements from other events we've planned, or attended?
- What are our least favorite elements?

Catholic Considerations

- Prayer support before and during event?
- Might someone write a novena, or prayer for all to share?
- Does the event &/or team have a patron saint?
- Will we include Mass(es)? Confessions? Adoration? Divine Office?
- Can attendees sign up for spiritual direction?
- Might priests, or religious be VIP guests?
- If there is to be childcare, what diocesan policies or training are required for caretakers?



Invite participants to experience four dimensions of the Christian life:

“...some teaching, sacraments if possible, or para-liturgy if sacraments are not possible, communal life (meals together, fellowship, relaxation and/or recreation together, and prayer life.”

Narrative, or Dramatic Considerations

Think of your Great Event as a story. From start to finish, your team, attendees, speakers enact the story of a movement toward accomplishing your goals.

Setting: What will your room décor, lighting and music say about, or contribute to your overall story? Are there colors, a logo, a title or theme or Scripture that can help unify the various 'scenes' of your narrative? What qualities do you imagine in your setting (quietude or exuberant interaction; young & edgy or mature & sedate; feminine or masculine; fun or serious; fancy or frugal; elegant or sporty)? Is there one 'stage' that needs several 'set changes,' or do you have several areas available for different 'acts' and 'scenes'? Will the audience move to the appropriate space, or will they remain in one place for transitions?

Characters: Who will be 'on stage' during each 'act'? Will they need badges, uniforms, costumes, or other signs that identify their roles? Do your lighting and sound ideas require tech support people behind the scenes? Do your 'sets' require set-up, take-down, equipment, signage, furniture, or transport of 'props' from storage?

Action: Block the main activities you want to include. As your event comes into clearer focus, move between the Big Picture and the logistics details to be prepared for everything you plan to include. Consider the 'sets' and 'characters' involved in 'acts' like these:

- Fun and Games
- Concerts, Singalongs
- Welcome and Registration

- Exhibitors/Vendors
- Art Shows or Activities
- Exercise, Sports, Outdoor Time
- Presentations
- Breakout Sessions
- Mass, Adoration, Confessions
- Banquet, Snacks, Box Lunch
- Food Concessions
- Sales area for helpful resources
- Skits, Movies, Storytelling
- Late-night Conversation
- Spiritual Direction, Counseling Sessions

Another way to look at your 'narrative arc' is to imagine moving attendees up to the high point of the event through rising action with intervals for pause, suspense, moments of surprise and humor, etc... How do you prepare the 'audience' to get the most from, and then to retain the most from your event?

Is your 'final scene' a call to action, a blessing, a take-home reminder or memento, a lovely visual or musical memory, a promise, a last supper?

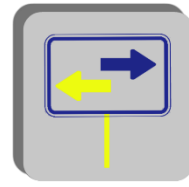
Props: See a partial list to consider within the logistics details. Build out this list for each new action, character, scene, or intermission/transition you plan.

As you move on to further detail the unfolding event (in the Execution stage), your process becomes more of a back-and-forth movement. Each choice in one area has implications for the other details. Make a page for each 'scene' you imagine, behind your logistics tab, or in that file/document. Look at your event through this lens to identify what props, people, technical support, seating arrangements, movement of bodies and supplies are needed.

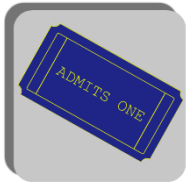
'Logistics' is the final, most-detailed level, where your 'givens,' design choices, venue specifics, food service requirements, etc... all contribute to the mix. You might think of yourself as the parent, in the Preparation phase, whose new child begins to make incessant demands, in the Execution phase!

"People just laughed at the level of detail I wanted. But when we were done, what came across was how smoothly everything ran and fit together. It's like a great dinner party sort of: you want your guests to feel it was almost effortless. And the more work you put in on the planning end is what makes the most complex event have that wonderful feeling of ease...like it couldn't have been any other way!"

Notes



Execution



Execution is moving your ideas and wish list into reality – from ‘conceptual design’ to ‘actuality.’ Making ideas real is hard work, but it’s also exhilarating when the Holy Spirit gets involved. He takes the actuality you offer for the glory of God, and infuses it with supernatural grace.



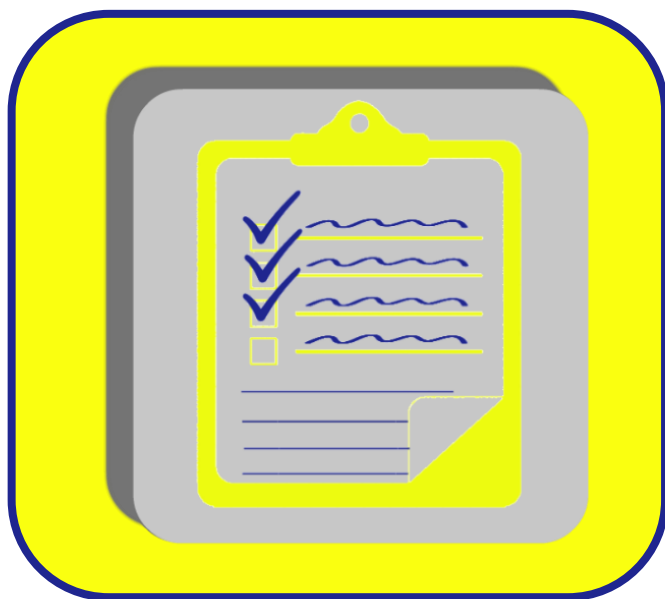
Your Great Event will be full of little ‘perfections’ – moments of beauty and just-right-ness and ‘coincidence’ that reveal the Spirit’s brooding presence and creative concern for the work you do. Be sure to keep yourself and your teammates from growing too overwhelmed by the details of the logistics that follow.



It’s going to be hard work, but done in good companionship as a gift of love for others. I hope your Great Event will be a joy for all the volunteers, staff and participants who come together to make it happen.



Notes



Logistics

Think through the event from start to finish from an attendee's perspective, and then through the eyes of caterers, technicians, volunteers, VIP guests, speakers, vendors, the planning team, and the building/custodial staff. What actions do they take, and how do you need to prepare to facilitate that action?

In addition to the areas I'll address specifically (Budget, Venue, Food Service, Speakers, Vendors, Marketing, Registration, Follow-up), you'll want to consider:

Possible Needs of Attendees

First aid kit, notecards and stamps, ladies room toiletries baskets, facility maps, volunteers to help carry in luggage, late-night snacks, spaces for quiet reflection, charging stations, etc...

Seating Options for Presentations, Meals, Free Time, Small Group Activities

U-tables, 4-square-tables, concentric circles, classroom-style, Video/TV feed for overflow rooms, couches/soft chairs, single circle, private seating, outdoor seating, assigned or open seating, place cards, labels, "Reserved" signs, seating maps for hostess/ushers/concierge, etc...

Tech Failure Scenarios

Loss of power, location of circuit breakers or generator, loss of wi-fi, sound and lighting equipment malfunction, presentation and recording equipment malfunction such as an incompatibility between the speaker's software and the computer or display hardware, internet access problems such as guest passwords or bandwidth issues, 4G access problems.

Have a backup master list of attendees (in case of tech failure at check-in) and a hard copy list of volunteers/staff cell phone numbers. Assign a specific person to equipment, unless the venue provides staff. (Have teens available to help! 😊)

Team Communication During Event

Each member should have timed, detailed agendas, cell phone numbers for all other members, and specific times to check in with a specific person about where they are and how things are going on their end.

You might set up alerts on phones as reminders about check-ins and other critical times.



"A lady had an asthma attack and while someone raced for her inhaler, I grabbed the phone to call 911 and found there was no cell service in the basement. I raced upstairs for a signal, and to meet the ambulance at the front door, which would be locked. When it was over, we discovered an emergency phone on the wall just beyond the room we were in! Who knew?"

Each team member should have a facility map, and the number for building-related emergency staff.

Emergencies and Dangers

Fire, Tornado, Medical Emergency, Intruder, Ice on Roads or Sidewalks, Earthquake...be prepared with a plan, or know the plan provided by your venue. Security personnel may be needed if vendor/speaker/volunteer/staff purses and possessions will be stored during the event. It should be quite clear who is to take charge and what they're to do if this happens, whether it turns out to be an accident, a hoax, or a real emergency. If any attendees are medical professionals, ask if their cell phone numbers may be added to your staff's list for emergencies.

Timeline

The closer you come to your event date, update your timeline with more detailed logistics. A year to go, and you may be thinking in monthly blocks. When the event is three months away, you should probably be thinking in weekly blocks. In the last month, make it daily blocks. Then be sure each member of the team has a final hour-by-hour planner for the pre-event day, event duration, and strike time. Next, try to schedule a relaxed debrief meeting together while the event is still fresh on the minds of all your team members - within a week or two afterward if possible. Your shared Google Sheet or event management software should make it easy to add this increasing level of detail.

"Some attendees can be very demanding."

Props

For every 'scene,' 'set,' 'character,' and 'action,' consider what 'props' are needed in your event narrative. This is just one more lens to look through to make sure you are seeing your own event from every possible angle, and considering as fully as possible the impact of each choice on a number of different aspects of your logistics. A few props you may need:

- Gifts and goodies for attendees
- Awards or certificates to be presented
- Welcome table: nametags, attendee list, welcome folders, tissues, first aid kit, bottled water, snacks
- Helpful resources – free and/or for purchase
- Sign-up sheets for spiritual direction, field trips, limited-seating, child care, adoration, etc... (Clipboard, paper, pen attached...Sign/Label)
- Art supplies, markers, poster board, hanging supplies
- Signage, sign stands, sticky-tack, tape
- Office supplies: pens, paper clips, clip boards, notepads, scissors, desk lamp
- Facility maps, seating charts, set-up diagrams
- Programs, liturgy guides, agendas
- Hymnals, spiritual reading, missals, blessings, prayer cards, songbooks, sheet music, Bibles, Divine Office
- Vestments, costumes, MC top hat, uniforms, badges
- Candles, table cloths, drapery, decorations, baskets
- Toiletries, sewing kit, phone chargers, manicure kit
- Handouts, cough drops, chalk or dry erase markers
- Life-size cardboard Pope for photo booth
- Timers for session timekeepers
- Speaker/Priest Thank-you cards with fees/honoraria



Budget

If your budget was a 'given,' it has already shaped your other choices and decisions to some extent. Even so, you need a specific location in your planner for notes about all decisions that have financial implications. First, just start a list to be filled in as-and-if details emerge. You may have a ball-park estimate from prior years to begin with. You'll move back and forth between the specific execution details and 'Budget,' just as you do with 'Logistics.' Consider:

Venue

- Rental
- Permits
- Insurance
- Staff
- Food service
- Equipment rental
- Security
- Flowers, Decoration, Signage
- Housing/Accommodations

Speakers

- Fees/Honoraria
- Travel expenses
- Accommodation and Food
- Thank-you gift
- Airport shuttle, or Car rental
- Speakers Lounge:
Refreshments/Amenities/Flowers
- Drivers (salary, gas, mileage)

Vendors

- Extra space rental
- Table/Equipment/Tablecloth rental
- Security staff
- Event bags
- Signage
- Vendor Lounge:
Refreshments/Amenities/Flowers

Marketing and Promotion

- Video or Audio recording, Photography
- Website development
- Contest prizes
- Early Bird ticket purchase incentives
- Participant Goodies, Event Bags
- Graphic Artist Services
- Copy/Print – fliers, brochures, resources, posters, save-the-date cards
- Event 'brand' merchandise
- Postage
- Advertisements
- Registration processing, software, apps

Follow-up

- Debrief meeting food and drink
- Copy/print handouts, questionnaires
- Sponsor thank-you gifts and notes



“Figure out what you really want, first, then figure out how to fund it. If you start planning with cost-cutting, you’ll get no creativity. Once you know what you want, you can figure out what cuts to make and work-arounds that are best for the event as a whole. You can’t know whether your admission price is good without knowing what value you’re offering.”

Possible Sources of Funds

The bigger the gap between money needed and money available for this event, the more lead time you'd better build into your timeline. Fundraising is beyond the scope of this book, but a few possibilities to consider are:

- Ask for an allowance from the sponsoring organization, church, or diocese.
- Ticket sales / Registration fees
- Sell vendor/exhibitor spaces.
- Ask for donations and donations-in-kind from business owners, previous donors, and organization members.
- Seek out sponsorship relationships with like-minded organizations and businesses.
- Crowdfunding may be an option.
- Sell ad space on the event website, in event programs and bags, on event signage, in event promotional newsletters, or on event team t-shirts. (Or, these may be part of your 'value proposal' to potential sponsors.)
- Speakers might donate copies of their books for sale at your resource table.
- Food concessions might be sold, or run by your own organization (not the planning team members, please!) to support the event.

Accounting

I assume your event is to be produced either by a non-profit organization, or a group that may operate under the 'umbrella' of such a group.

If you need to establish non-profit status for your organization, and your total receipts will be less than \$50,000 per year, you may send in the 1023EZ form to the IRS and get that ball rolling. Add six months to your event lead time.

Otherwise, if you are working under a non-profit organization, they should have very clear accounting guidelines for you to follow. Be sure you know in advance whether they take any overhead fees off the top of your event receipts. You'll need to be sure there is clarity about the separation of their funds from yours, especially if your receipts (electronic ticketing systems, for example) will flow directly into their bank accounts. What access will you have to the funds, or what system is in place for you to authorize payments and to reimburse your team for expenses they front.

If any cash will be received (a donation jar beside helpful resources, or a collection taken up at Mass), there should be two people processing and protecting that money, who count it and either bank it, or at least report the amount collected right away. Your first thought may be that nobody in your team could possibly be tempted to snitch, and you are wrong. Anyone could be tempted, but – more important – everyone needs to be protected against any accusation of wrong-doing. Hence, the companion policy.

If your event takes in more than you spend, you will be glad you considered the possibility in advance, and already know exactly what the policy is of the umbrella, or sponsoring organization about whether this overage may be kept on hand for the next event, accrues to your group for other group uses, or is a donation to them.

If you purchase any durable goods (i.e. not thrown away at the event's closure), such as microphones, display stands, cloth tablecloths, office and art supplies, do these become the property of the organization, go home with the team leader, disappear on a first-come, first-serve basis, or what?

Will you need a separate checking account? How many signatures will be needed on a check, and who will sign? To whom must you submit a final accounting for event revenues and expenses, and in what format? Are there any restrictions about purchasing ads, alcohol, contract services that you need to understand in advance?

If you don't have good accounting procedures in place, this is a good time to establish them!

"You can't underestimate the work it takes to pull off a flawless event of any size. The devil truly is in the details! A flawless event takes more time and money than you might think."

"It helps me to constantly remind myself that I can't do everything and that God is asking me to use the gifts He's given me, but He hasn't given me every single gift. You also have to go into the weekend expecting that someone will get sick at the last minute, or one of your plans will fall through, and that's ok! God will provide!"

Notes



Venue

Unless your venue is a ‘given,’ you’ve got some serious leg-work to do. For a huge event, you could put out a Request for Proposals, detailing the space, equipment, catering, security, and other requirements you need for your event. Vendors – hotels and conference centers – would respond to your RFP with proposals of service, and fee arrangements. But then, you’d probably be a professional and not a volunteer event planner, right?

So, once you do have some idea (from the framing and design phase) when you need what accommodations, and for how many, you must go forth and ask lots of questions, keep detailed notes (and, just maybe, get to sample some great catering!)

Consider:

Can the whole event fit here, or will housing be a separate issue? Will all our event areas be close together within the facility? Will the bathrooms be just for the use of our group, or more public? Is there a good location for a welcome desk? Is the facility handicapped accessible?

What are the limits to growth (if our number of attendees is still way up in the air)? Is there adequate parking? Is our event area sheltered to some degree from public traffic and guests from other events? Is the vendor area secure, easily accessible for loading/unloading, attractive and spacious?

Will the facility provide tables, chairs, screens, sound equipment, projection equipment, set-up and take-down help, free wi-fi access, and whatever else we need? Will we have some control over the temperature in our area?

Do we need to purchase insurance? Do we need an alcohol permit? What are the rules on putting up signs for our participants? Can the facility help us create a map customized for our event? If housing is not on-site, what hotels, motels and B&Bs are nearby? If housing is provided, what are the policies about letting go of unsold rooms without penalty before our event? Are all the rooms the same, or is there variety and different pricing?



"The battle is always won in the prayer. Gather a team of prayer warriors to bathe the conference in prayer months in advance. If you aren't praying, the enemy will minimize the impact."

"Keep it simple. Give people time for quiet/down time to visit, reflect, etc... Busy-busy can be too much like the frenetic world we live in."

What are the rules about our decorations – flowers, candles, glitter, on-wall elements? Do we need a stage in the keynote speech area? Podiums? Dollies for moving chairs, displays, luggage, or supplies around our event area?

What dates does each facility have open, or when are their conflicts (if our date is not yet firm)? What other events will be hosted at each facility during ours. (Hint: avoid the all-state kids' hockey conference, and the statewide cheerleading championships and the huge fraternity graduation or bachelor parties if you can. ☺)

Are there any potentially distracting elements, such as a loud pool area just outside, windows at street level without curtains, trains and traffic, construction going on in/around the facility. Consider food, next, as a separate issue, but one that is usually a part of your venue decision.

“...who wants to sleep in a room with three other women?!”

“A lot more people expect private rooms these days.”

“She wanted a private room at the same price as one shared with two others.”

“All of our events are at different parishes. Over the years we have had to transition to caterers as many parishes don't have groups set up for parish food service and events anymore.”

“Our conference space was great, but the hotel did nothing to stop the partiers and kids hollering in the halls. They kept us up all night, made it hard to enjoy the whole event.”

Notes



Food Service

Food is a great and potentially complex addition to your event. If your event lasts more than three hours, you should probably at least have coffee, tea, water and snacks available. If it runs longer, participants may need a break period to run out for a bite to eat if you don't provide it. This can a) interrupt the flow of your event, b) cause frustrating staggered re-entries as everyone wanders back into the meeting in progress, or c) be a great chance for them to fellowship before coming back energized and ready to listen again.

Thus, there is no one-size-fits-all food rule that event planners can count on. If your event includes a banquet, or meals with speakers, or work sessions that might run over into meal times, then your venue must be chosen with an eye to their catering potential.

A facility usually accepts only its own, or a handful of chosen caterers, and may have strict rules about whether your volunteers can sub for their paid staff.

They may have meal options at several price levels, snacks that you pay for only if they are eaten, and different ways of handling alcohol service for low- to high-budget events. Preparing the food yourself adds a large burden to an already large job, but perhaps you can round up a whole separate team of food service people from your organization, who will minister in this way to your event attendees.

Caterers, or the facility's representative, can help you figure out a food plan that fits your budget, if you have one. If you are working in reverse – choosing a menu and then considering the bill – just be sure you don't make any binding commitments until your budget people agree that it works within the price-structure you've chosen for admissions to the event. If you can give a per-person amount that needs to be shaved off the bill, the caterer can help you make cheaper substitutions that still give a nice, coherent result.

The bar tab might be something a sponsor would donate, with your promise to use napkins with his company logo, give him a rousing thank-you at the high-point of cocktail hour, and place a thank-you/advertisement in your conference newsletters or event bags. Be sure to ask whether you must pay extra for an alcohol permit.



“Food is of paramount importance with young people. Always make sure there is more than plenty and if any group of people is going to be late to a meal (e.g. musicians practicing), hold food back for them.”

“Make your tables beautiful!”

“You’ve got to have coffee and water, at a minimum.”

Once you have your per-person ballpark figures, don't forget to add in the volunteers, speakers, musicians and VIP guests who were promised a meal. Consider all the different 'sets' where you'll want duplicates of the coffee service, snack baskets, cookie-and-muffin trays, or bowls of candy: volunteer or staff lounge, speaker lounge, vendor support area, late-night snacks near bedrooms, welcome area.

Food service involves set-up, take-down, clearing, serving, cooking, cleaning up spills, dishwashing, keeping things hot or cold, providing options for various allergies and special diets, consideration of health and beauty and abundance, seating arrangements, trash handling, and even questions of social justice! (Do the leftovers get taken to the local homeless shelter? Do we recycle, use bottled water, serve non-fair-trade coffee?)

If you don't serve food, choose your venue with an eye to nearby restaurants, pubs, or coffee shops. If you do, add more team members and prayer support!

"Things really do go a bit better with beer and wine!"

"Everything goes downhill if people drink too much."



"Lots of people expect protein options at breakfast nowadays, so the continental does not satisfy everyone. We had to 'scramble' to round up a bunch of eggs quickly!"

"Food says love, gives people something comforting in a crowd, helps them enjoy the event more...they leave feeling we've taken good care of them."

Notes



Speakers

Your choice of speakers is definitely not solely a matter of how much money you have in your budget. There's a wide range of presenters to choose from, and a solution for every budget level.

Finding & Vetting Speakers

Here's a list of ways my respondents have found good speakers for their events:

- Google "Catholic Speaker" or try YouTube.
- Look at the speaker's bureau section of diocesan websites
- See if a Catholic special interest group has a list of speakers. (Ex: Catholic Writers Guild, Catholic business leaders group, American Chesterton Society)

- Look up a Catholic speaker's bureau.
- Check with a Catholic ministry, publisher, or philanthropic organization for referrals.
- Ask the diocesan Pro-life Office, Adult Education person, Missionary/Missions Trips Office, Communication Director, Social Justice spokesperson, liturgy director, Women's/Men's/Youth Ministry Office for referrals.
- Ask the diocesan or regional Catholic newspaper.
- Ask the bishop, a priest, or religious for ideas.
- Look at the author by-lines in Catholic magazines.
- Ask friends and other volunteer event planners.
- Try nearby Catholic colleges.
- Ask every speaker at this event to refer you to another speaker (do let 'B' know that 'A' recommended her).
- Ask for volunteers from your own organization.
- Sometimes speakers contact you.
- Look through other event websites for their past and current speakers.



“Pray and ask the Spirit who should present. Examine the pool of current speakers. See who others have used and get their feedback.”

“...we try to stick with folks we have seen in person. In some cases it's a personal recommendation from one of the friars who works with our ministry.”

“Spirit led, humble, docile, a heart for the Church, flexible.”

How to Choose Among Speakers

Ask for audio and video clips, or browse a speaker's website for these. Review them with your selection team. Look at their talk summaries to see if they speak about things that will interest your audience. Consider the other groups they've spoken for. Look at the testimonials they offer and ask for references you can call, if you need more information. Do phone interviews with the last few candidates.

Characters and Qualities

Basically, you want a speaker who is a good 'fit' for your audience and budget. I interviewed event planners and speakers so I could also let you know what your speakers are looking for when considering your event.

What Event Planners Want

1. Strong Catholic identity and faithfulness to the Church
2. Speaking from experience, use of stories and illustrations from everyday life, relevant topics
3. Energy and enthusiasm
4. Warmth, openness to people, an engaging persona

Style seems to be less important. A speaker's personal style shines through all these other characteristics, and he or she connects with the audience not by trying to put on some 'Professional Speaker Style,' but by being authentic. Humor is nice, but not a top consideration.



"Some dioceses require a letter of good standing from each speaker's home diocese. Otherwise, the word of someone who has heard the individual speak is the best reference."

"The best speakers are on time, on-point, speak from experience, from the heart."

"A speaker who reads their talk from PowerPoint is a great way to kill an event."

"They must be a right fit for the audience. An erudite speaker is great for certain groups...but not for the average parish evangelization effort. They must be orthodox, well formed, and engaging. Some speakers are overbooked and don't prepare well...You may love a person's book, but if they have too much going on or are not organized, they could fall flat."

"Will they promo their event well? It's not a deal-breaker, but it helps. Am I just filling in the blank, or are they genuinely excited about my coming, my connection, my message?"

"I look for venues in which there is a balance of informality yet laced with intensity of purpose....well-organized, meaty and yet a bit laid back."

What Speakers Want

1. Solidly Catholic events, no heresy, no Church-bashing
2. Responsive, interested audience
3. Good organization & communication
4. Genuine desire for the speaker's gifts, material, message
5. Intensity, serious purpose and content

"...remember that your speaker is going to have to write a custom talk (or several talks) for your event, practice and rehearse the material beforehand, travel, present the message, shake hands, spend quality time with your attendees, answer questions, sign books, and travel back. It's not just one hour at the podium."

Taylor Marshall, "5 Steps to Finding the Perfect Catholic Speaker for Your Event"

More From Event Planners

"Must have a warm, open, smiling persona and have a gift for engaging people."

"One speaker was way too academic...great credentials, but he wanted to read us his talk...yuk!"

"They speak Truth from the Magisterial teachings of the Church. We allow the keynote speaker to pick the topic, as that brings a better presentation."

"Negative speaker experiences mostly happen when we haven't discussed expectations thoroughly ahead of time: we had asked a young woman to give her 5-10 minute testimony...and she ended up speaking for 45 minutes."

"If they are energetic, use simple language, and employ illustrations from everyday life, speakers are usually effective."

"...relevant and interesting content, personable and appealing delivery..."

"We try to stick to speakers that at least one of us on the planning committee has heard in person. Same thing for Mass celebrants and confessors – we recommend priests that we think can make the confession experience less frightening to someone who has been away for years....when one of us sees an interesting potential speaker in town, we add them to our list of people to ask back for one of our retreats."

Factors That Help You Differentiate

▪ Types of Speakers

- Religious, Priest – may be less expensive; may or may not be a gifted speaker, but is likely to be well-received; will probably need at least expenses reimbursed; may double as a celebrant/confessor, or spiritual director (Ask! Don't assume they'll fill these other slots.)
- Casual Speakers – speak locally and at smaller venues; may speak a few times per year; Fees: \$400 - \$1000; may have lower travel expenses
- Professional Speakers – usually are book authors; may have leadership or teaching experience; experience in larger or more demanding venues; have some audience of their own and are working on building a platform; Fees: \$1000 - \$2000 + travel expenses
- Top Speakers – widely known and so are a drawing card for your event; best-selling authors, radio or TV show hosts, Church leaders; experience at larger events and as keynote speakers; turn down a large percentage of the requests they receive to speak; Fees: \$2000 and up + expenses
- Remember, the top speakers all emerged 'from within the ranks'. The way speakers grow better and better able to serve the Church is to be called to speak.

"It is critical to understand the difference between the speakers you hire. Most already have full time jobs and come in for a weekend. The road warriors are out all the time and in airports and may need some flexibility with preferred airlines. ... understanding that they try to get rest whenever possible and returning late at night from the west coast may not be what is best for their health despite the fact that it could cost you another night's hotel. Just have honest discussions with them about everyone's needs."

▪ Other Factors

- A speaker may or may not be willing to customize a talk for your particular audience, time frame, or theme.
- Some speakers can help with your event planning, as they have event planning experience themselves – helping you with concept design, or with ways to expand the theme in various talks.
- If a speaker has a social media presence, blog, podcast, magazine column, or leadership position, he may be able to help promote your event.

The Money Question

Speakers handle the Money Question in different ways. You should not consider a volunteer, or free-will-offering speaker less professional because they don't charge higher fees. By the same token, asking unambiguously for the fees that make your work possible should not be a strike against you. It is no more, or less 'spiritual' to dislike the financial aspects of public speaking, or to deal with those aspects as naturally as any secular professional speaker.

Speakers may be shy about asking for payment, but their reality includes hours of preparation and practice, paper and ink, time 'wasted' on travel to and from and during events, plus their own living and business expenses. Their hesitation to demand actual recompense should not be interpreted as lack of self-confidence.

"I give guidelines about average stipends for my speaking services, such as \$400 for a one hour event, \$600 for 2-3 hours, and ask for whatever they can give above the travel, accommodation and food expenses that are non-negotiable."

There are two ways you might approach the Money Question:

Propose

You make a proposal to the potential speaker. Detail the event as fully as possible, express what you need from them as clearly as possible, and let them know what you are willing to pay, plus other forms of compensation you can offer. They counter-propose and negotiations result in a solution you both feel is a win.

Ask for a Proposal

You ask the potential speaker what their fees and other requirements would be, given as much detail as possible about the event, attendees, length of talk needed. When their proposal arrives, you accept, or counter-offer. Again, negotiate to a solution.

Other Forms of Compensation

There may be non-monetary ways to boost what you can pay your speaker. Together, you can create a win-win situation that also becomes a win for your audience.

- Give them a Guest Pass (it is assumed that they get into your event gratis) to allow a spouse or friend to attend your event with them. (Remember to budget for both those meals.)

“Ask for news coverage from your diocesan or local paper. Local podcasters can do live interviews with speakers, vendors, guests.”

More From Speakers

"I arrived with a carefully crafted one-hour speech and they told me in an off-hand way, a few minutes before my talk, that the time should be cut to 45 minutes."

"I encourage event planners to propose an honorarium amount, and then accept or decline it. Sometimes hosts refuse to propose an honorarium. This is a bad sign: it generally means they have no idea what a fair price is for a person of your capabilities."

"CMG negotiates fees for you. It's much easier through a third party."

"I think I'm at my best during Q&A time! I love it."

"To give others affirmation that God is real and that He loves and cares about them, that He is STICC the God of miracles, is the greatest gift I can give."

"I find this arena the most difficult of what I do...I'm shy about asking a set fee, and let inviters set the pace on this."

"I leave it in God's hands and simply ask whatever would be usual or standard for that conference or event."

"I am just asking God to direct me as to His will for when and where I speak..."

- Offer them a vendor/exhibitor table – with electricity, table cover available, volunteer set-up help, free ads wherever those of other vendors appear.
- Allow them to send their own promotional materials ahead of time, to be placed in freebie/goodie bags for your attendees. Specify quantity, size limitations, as you do for all those contributing to the event bags.
- Offer to record their presentation and send them the material for use in their own promotions efforts. If you do record all presenters, be sure when they sign your contract they give clear permission to record, and that the terms of use for any recordings are specified.

"PLEASE tell event planners to put a contact person on their website who responds if a speaker approaches. I wouldn't want to speak for you if I weren't enthusiastic about your event, and pretty sure I'd be a great fit for your audience."

- Offer to have a photographer take speaker and audience shots during their presentation. Good photos are hard to come by, and great content for speakers' promo materials, blogs, or newsletters.
- Offer volunteers to man their back-of-room sales table with their books and promo materials. If any speaker contracts do specify that back-of-room sales will be allowed, make a note on the logistics page to have that table set up and volunteers in place as promised.

"If the Church wants an architect, a lawyer, an accountant, they are prepared to pay professional fees. It seems they think a speaker is only holy if he'll speak for free. But I have to feed my family, too."

- Offer to buy copies of their book to use for surprise audience give-aways and contest prizes.
- Let them hear about your event marketing plans. Be clear about the number of your social media followers, or email newsletter recipients. How often will you mention (plug) these speakers and their work with your event promotions?
- If the speaker is willing to speak elsewhere within the same time-frame, perhaps you could help set up another opportunity for him and split the travel expenses with the other group (who must negotiate their own fee with the speaker directly).
- Is there a local radio station, podcaster, TV show that might enjoy having your speaker on the air? If so, this opportunity might be great PR for the speaker and for your event, plus provide a non-financial 'perk' that enables her to accept the lower fee you can pay for your event.

"I tell them I am in solidarity with their mission and hope they will be with mine...will pay as the Spirit directs, and take into account their budget, whether attendees are paying, what they are paying other speakers. I could just quote a flat rate, but I want to be fair to them, too."

Make the Event Even Greater

Your Great Event will be greater if it's also great for your speakers. Fair compensation, a responsive audience, enthusiasm about their presence and message, and boost in book sales get you off to a good start.

Boost Positive Elements

- Great Introductions – most speakers provide a media kit from which you can draw biographical material of interest, or, if you ask, they'll write an intro for you, or direct you where to look on their website for prepared introductions of various lengths.
- Great Q & A Time – Be sure to discuss Q&A time with potential speakers! Some adore and others abhor it. If you want it, get a speaker who enjoys extemporaneous interaction. Have someone (the speaker's guide, session chairperson, introducer, timekeeper, or just one lively attendee) ready with one or two provocative questions to get the ball rolling.
- Promise to share audience feedback with speakers. They often leave an event and never hear about the great comments people wrote on your evaluation forms.
- Express willingness to help set up book signings, or meetings with interesting people while the speaker is in your town. Your offer might include an extra night's stay with a local Catholic family who will escort the speaker to tourist attractions and cover the extra meals involved.

"...leaders of organizations doing the asking need to take a hard, prayerful look at fee schedules for the speakers they invite. In most cases, I would think that the fees are too low to be just."

"...remember the basics – good communication, good response, good affirmation and respect. Responding to e-mails, voice mails and other forms of communication is key."

Watch Out for Negatives

While doing your best to increase positives, you can also boost the speaker's perception of your event by decreasing these negatives:

- Last minute changes, surprises, or shocks. (Avoid these by detailed planning, preparation and event run-through.)

"Problems? Last minute changes in topic or timing; promised talk would be recorded and it wasn't; prior speaker overran time and I was asked just to shorten mine to what was left; event was overbooked with speakers – too many sessions to choose from meant sparse audiences and a dead, empty feeling in the big rooms."

- Confusion about where the speaker is supposed to be, and when. (Have a speaker escort with an agenda and facility map, and a phone alert set to move the talent to the podium NOW.)
- Crummy introductions. (Have intros written, have cheerful, enthusiastic people read them well.)
- Black holes in communication. (Get back to the speaker asap after negotiations begin. Your event may be penciled in, blocking him from accepting other engagements. Or, your event may get bumped if something firm comes up before you get a commitment from the speaker. If he needs information from you before he can prepare his talk, please don't hold up the show!)

Notes



Vendors & Exhibitors

Does your wish list include an exhibitor hall, or vendor area? It's a lot of extra work for your team, but here are a few reasons to reconsider, if you've discounted this option out of hand.

Why Add a Vendor Area?

Your event, whatever else it accomplishes, might help promote some fine Catholic business owners and their families. Their opportunity to connect with your audience may be their primary form of marketing.

Attendees enjoy browsing the vendor/exhibit area. It leads to chance meetings with friends, new books, and ideas. Whether they buy or not, they are stimulated by the wares, and make gift/wish lists for future purchases.

Vendors are part of your event team, helping add value for attendees. They're also potential co-promoters, and may revisit your future events as attendees if they have a great experience. Your event is helping to build a strong, interconnected network among Catholics.

This area provides another form of compensation for your speakers – many of whom need opportunities for book sales, or promotion of their own ministries.

Exhibits can help educate attendees about serious issues, and make resource materials available just as your speakers challenge them to dig deeper, do more, or get answers.

Non-Sales exhibits might include:

- Displays, materials, continuous-loop video presentations from missions, pro-life, ministry, special interest, or other Catholic organizations
- Art gallery exhibits of work by local Catholic artists
- Face painting, or art activities for kids
- Busker-style acts such as jugglers, barbershop quartets, clowns, mimes, magicians, sketch artist/caricaturist
- Live music – string quartets or bluegrass background music, or a stage area with scheduled concerts on the event agenda... A 'stage' can be a roped-off corner, a regular vendor-sized table space, or a duct-tape circle on the floor!



"The placement of sales tables has been a problem: in some venues they are placed out of sight and away from the speaking auditorium, rather than in the path of traffic. As a result, very few people make any purchases."

"I'm sure the vendor area draws almost as many to our conference as our speakers and activities! It's a vital part of our offering."

Sales oriented exhibitors might include:

- Sales of freshly-burned CDs of conference talks by the company that handles session recordings. (Be sure you have speaker permission for recording and on-site sales in your contract.)
- Catholic bookstores, publishers, and authors
- Catholic schools, colleges, and curriculum providers
- Food concessions – run for profit, or by your own or other non-profit organizations as a fundraiser
- Handcrafts by local moms-at-home, or teens
- Fair trade sales of crafted items, brought in 'on consignment' to provide income for their third-world makers, and for whoever handles sales.
- Monasteries and other religious organizations that produce jellies, beer, music CDs, or other items for sale.

One last plug for a vendor area:

Even if you decide against having an entire exhibit hall, you might allow the local Catholic bookstore owner to set up a table at your event, to sell resources that relate to your topic, theme, or audience. Or perhaps the store would send some materials for a resource table on consignment. Include a speaker's book, and a book-signing, if you like!



“Your exhibits can include some alternative new presentation styles: Pecha Kucha: 20 slides, 20 seconds each...great fun for an audience without much time, and great training for newbie speakers, young people, anyone with passionate interest in a topic. A variation is called ‘Ignite’: 15 slides, 20 seconds each, for a rapid-fire, 5 minute presentation.”

Notes



Marketing & Promotion

More material is available to you on event promotion than you'll ever digest! The main thrust?

- 1) You've got to promote your Great Event, or it will probably flop, and
- 2) There are dozens of methods, roughly group-able by the means to be used to get the word out.

People

Word of mouth, vocal mentions, actual speech – these are free and very effective means. Make the most of face-to-face marketing by asking for the help. Your bishop's and pastor's support is invaluable. They are the 'thought leaders' among faithful Catholics, and will help you tremendously by offering a word of support for your event. Ask for a mention during their staff meetings, personal engagements, Sunday announcements and podcasts.

The leaders of your own organization need to be **asked** to mention the event. Just because 'we' put on an event doesn't mean 'we' are all planning to come! Even your own group members need to be encouraged to sign-up.

Assign sections of the Church directory to team members for phone call invites.

Ask your speakers to mention the event to their friends, in interviews, at their book signings and on their own podcasts or TV shows.

Ask your vendors and sponsors, donors and volunteers to talk up the event. If you really believe in your own 'narrative' (remember that story of an attendee who enters, rises to the high point prepared and engaged, receives much-needed wisdom, and leaves re-charged for running in God's paths??), it should be easy to 'sell' your event enthusiastically.

Print

Your archdiocesan newspaper, local newspaper and events calendar, back-of-bulletin ads and weekly bulletin inserts, ads in Catholic magazines, fliers, brochures, posters, save-the-date cards, event bag stuffers, and old-fashioned snail-mailed invitations and letters requesting referrals to your event are all promo possibilities.

Many of these will translate easily into 'content' you can also share via digital media.



"Pray first, then enlist the help of 'obsessive-compulsive' doers!"

"Vision. Commitment. Platform. You need to get your vision to church leaders, then let them shake the bushes and get the people there. In your marketing, share who from church leadership is behind you."

Broadcast

The world of TV, podcasts, and radio is crossing the line into internet, or digital media. There are no firm boundaries between any of the marketing and promotion media you'll use. Remember that, as you translate your excitement about your upcoming event into different media. It's really one message, in various forms – not as daunting as creating some whole new thing for each channel.

Who shares your audience? What shows is your audience likely to be listening to, or watching? It won't hurt to ask how to get a mention there – an interview, an ad, or just a verbal nod from the show's host. You may not be able to afford it, but they may have a special place in their hearts for your cause, or smell a sponsor-ship, win-win opportunity. Ask!

Digital

If you have an email list and permission to send those folks a now-and-then newsletter, or email, by all means, get moving on the design of a series of emails that will keep your event in mind without being too bothersome.

- Save the Date
- Early Bird Invitation with Discounted Ticket Price
- Reminder Before Early Bird Phase Ends
- Main Invitation at Full Price
- Reminder Before Registration Closes
- Last Chance to Get In Before At-the-Door Price

You may want to issue a news release, submit your event to an online events calendar, seek out ad placements on related or local websites, Facebook groups, or blogs.

Upload and promote content from previous year's events, such as a video clip collage, Slide Share presentations (with permission from your speakers), great photos, digital images of your fliers and posters, etc...

Your own event website may be a single landing page within a parish website, a free DIY Google site, a WordPress or Blogspot-based group blog site, or may be integrated with a ticketing and registration app, or software. You may also set up an event page on any number of other social media channels (Facebook, Google +, Twitter, etc...) Figure out where your audience spends time, and be there.

Miscellaneous Promos

T-shirts and other 'conference brand' merchandise might be offered as gifts to any blogger who writes up your event, or anyone who 'likes' your event page, tweets your hashtag to friends, or shares your event link on their own Facebook page.

Partner Promos – you get air time, and the radio station gets a free vendor table or interview with a speaker; the Men's Conference adds your brochures to their event bags, and your ladies take home fliers for the next men's conference; sponsors donate up-front cash, or in-kind materials, food, supplies, or copying in exchange for promo at your event and/or ads on your event website, program, event bags.

Your own group's bloggers might offer a few T's to anyone who comments on their posts about the event, or who shares the post with their social circles.

Incentives – prizes or free event tickets to those who sell the most tickets, promote most widely on social media, sign up first, or refer the most ticket buyers through an 'affiliate link' system.

Group Sales – discounts on blocks of tickets for representatives of groups, who will then sell to their own members.

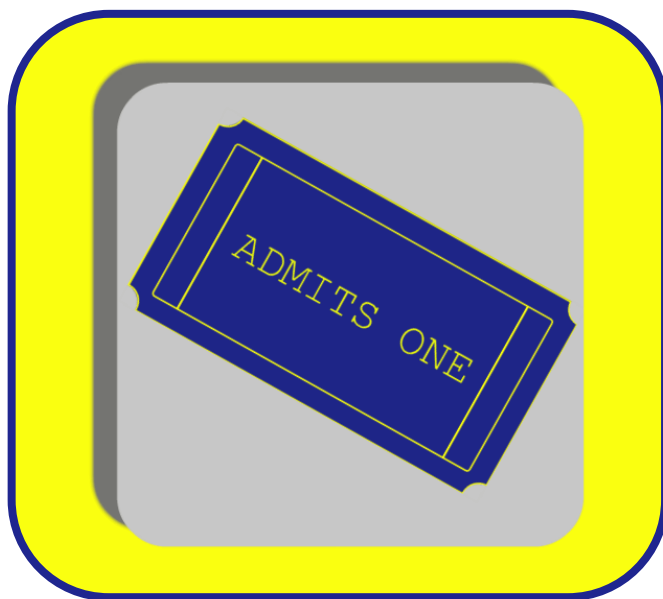
'Joint Venture' Bundles – ask Catholic authors and other vendors to donate items for a promotional blast to your list. "Buy a conference ticket today and receive these five books, and etc... FREE!"

Crowd-funding – set up a campaign to raise the money needed to do what you want to do. Offer prizes for different giving levels, such as "3 ads and 2 conference passes for a donation of \$2000 or more." This is a form of 'sponsorship,' but can extend down to the single ticket level, making early funders similar to Early Bird ticket buyers.

The early purchase of tickets does more than fill your coffers with working capital. These buyers help to 'vote up' your event, let you know there is adequate interest to go ahead, and provide a group you might consult about conceptual design. They can also start building the buzz by letting others know about your event. Their early enthusiasm helps supply the feeling the event is already successful – 'social proof' that leads to actual success.

"The most demanding aspect is gathering a crowd for the event. You cannot advertise and remind too much. Folks have so much information coming in to their brains that they will not remember just one announcement. Personal invitation is the best means of getting people out."

Notes



Tickets & Registration

Your registration and ticketing process may be high- or low-tech, but needs to be well-organized, however you take care of it. The most basic questions are:

- Whether the event is free
- Whether (free, or not) it is open to all-comers, or to a membership group only
- Whether entrance is limited by housing, seating, food service, or any other constraint

Even for free events, you may want to 'sell' tickets, or require advance registration in order to limit attendees and/or gauge interest in the event. Beyond the basics, you must decide whether tickets will be sold both before and at the event, where and by what means, and for how much.

When to Sell Tickets

- Early Only
- On-Site Only
- Both

All three options have pros and cons. Early ticket sales assure you of sufficient interest in the event to consider cancellation if a weak response will cost you too much, or do more harm than good. Early sales gives you opportunities to discount, pre-market, and repeat your marketing pitch more often. The earlier you sell, the more closely linked your sales and marketing efforts should be.

On-site sales allows you to pick up last-minute attendees, but puts more potential crowd-pressure on the ticket sales system. Long lines might turn some people away. Ticket sales takes more volunteer management and training, and event lead time must account for this crucial area of planning. The availability of last-minute tickets may make potential attendees more complacent about buying-in early. Instead of being 'inked in' on their calendars, your event may be penciled in, and face more competition.

Events with overnight housing and big food service plans must get people signed up and payment-committed as far in advance as possible and may, or may not also allow for walk-ins, based on past experience, or on the number of volunteers available.

"Don't let anyone on the team keep information just in their own heads! Nobody should be indispensable, and no info should be inaccessible if something happens to you. Share as much as possible on Google docs, or by copying notes for everyone's planning notebook after meetings. Emphasize with your team that it is not enough to do your job, but you must also communicate about what you're doing!!!"

A hybrid registration and ticketing system is probably the best for most events. Next, decide how soon the early sales can begin, and how far into the event the on-site sales will continue. Your sales plan must include careful cash-handling procedures and training in electronic payment processing.

Where and How to Sell Tickets

Online Sales

Online sales involve event management software, or apps, that range in price from 'free' to thousands of dollars. The free ones stay free by adding a payment processing fee to ticket prices, or deducting some percentage of ticket sales revenue from what they pass through to you. If you are dependent on sales revenue for cash to produce the event, be sure you understand exactly what the time lag will be between ticket purchase and a transfer to your bank account.

Neighbor Sales

Your group, or team members may sell tickets to friends, or sponsoring businesses may sell tickets through their own customer service channels. You may offer a block of tickets to a group, for sale to their members and friends. These sales usually involve careful accounting for physical tickets and returning cash, but can also be integrated with online ticketing systems. If so, those selling for you will probably be considered 'affiliates,' so that you can track who sells what and provide incentives for high sales, if you like. A free pass might be offered to the group representative who sells to their members, to anyone who sells ten tickets, or to the person who sells the most tickets, for instance.

On-site Sales

Sales of tickets at your event can be handled from the Welcome Desk, if the registration and check-in process there isn't too involved. Separate the two otherwise.

Another on-site possibility is a stand-apart sales (and/or check-in kiosk that coordinates with your online system. Even if you don't use an event management, or ticket sales app, your buyers will likely expect that you'll be able to swipe their various cards (Get a 'Square,' or PayPal 'Triangle' swiper for a few of your volunteers' phones, or tablets.), make change (lockable box, small bills), and take checks.

Think ahead about security, accountability, cash handling, bank deposits, processing fees and procedural issues, how to handle refunds (for cancellations, for dissatisfaction), and sales tax (check your state requirements, especially if you plan to sell resources to help raise funds).

Wherever you are dealing with money during the event, there need to be clear procedures in place: donation jars, collection during Mass, ticket sales, resource sales, food sales, cashing checks for attendees, petty cash on hand for volunteers to make emergency purchases, donations handed to team members casually, sales of 'event brand' merchandise, money collected for membership in your organization.

How Much to Charge

An event that is completely subsidized has more flexibility in pricing than one which must pay its own way. Many events are given some funding that allows attendees to participate for less than the full actual cost. The 'parent' organization considers the event a ministry, or promotion for the organization itself or for the cause it represents. The Great Event is at least partially supported by other fundraising efforts, and donations, or grants to the parent, or sponsoring organization.

So, you must be clear about the nature of the relationship between your event and its 'parent'. You must have a good estimate for the per-person costs of accommodation and food service, handouts, goodies and gifts, in order to calculate what part of each ticket payment is available to defray the overall costs of producing the event.

You might prefer to design your ticket sales process so that housing and food costs are added to the customer's bill, or shopping cart, separately from the event ticket prices. This is particularly helpful if attendees will be offered multiple choices about room size, and meal plans.

The 'breakeven point' is the number of guests it will take at a given ticket price to defray the 'sunk,' or 'overhead' costs that are unsubsidized. The ticket price is a question of breakeven point, the number of guests you expect, and the price you think the 'market' will bear, based on your experience and on the price of similar events for your audience. Your team may need to work through calculations based on various approaches to sales in order to come up with a ticket price that is affordable, reasonable, and workable for all concerned.

You will take some risk to sign contracts for paid services and for charges that will be incurred no matter how many people attend. Failure to consider expenses, revenues and risks up front often results in an extra burden for your team members, who quietly ignore their expenses, or pony up to help meet shortfalls. Try to avoid this by facing the financial realities as squarely as possible up front.

Three Examples

Here are three scenarios that illustrate how fixed costs, variable costs, and ticket price fit together:

A

Total Projected Costs of Event (housing and food costs not included): \$25, 640

Grant from parent organization's outreach budget: <\$5,000>

Estimated Donations-in-kind and in Cash: <\$2,000>

Per Person Costs of Housing and Food: \$193

Ticket Price:	\$400	\$500	\$600
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Breakeven Point*:	90 tickets	67	46
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* Breakeven = Overhead/Contribution, where Overhead = 25640 - 5000 - 7000, or 18640, and Contribution = Ticket Price - 193.

Event for 50 women who want to pay as little as possible, bring their own snacks, and each invite a friend to come for free.

Speaker: \$500

Travel Expenses: \$450

Room Fee (4 hours @ \$50/hr): \$200

50 invitations with postage: \$100

Coffee and tea service for 100: \$75

Copying of handouts: \$32

Janitor - Set-up & Strike: \$150

Total Cost: \$1507

Per Hostess Ticket Price: \$30

B



Attendees make their own housing arrangements. We provide a banquet (budgeted as a separate event) for a separate fee. Coffee/tea/snack service is budgeted for 200 whether or not we sell that many tickets. Box lunch can be added to the ticket price (we agree to order at least 100 box lunches, and may add to the number up until the day before the event). We have seed money to start the planning process, but are expected to recoup all costs and pay it back.

6 Speakers: \$6000; Travel Expenses: \$3200; Building Rental (8 rooms, 24 hours, with AV equipment and free wi-fi, set-up and janitorial included): \$5500; Promo costs (Graphic artist's fee included): \$2600; Decorations: \$450; 100 Box Lunch Minimum: \$650; Copy/Print: \$120 (event folder donated-in-kind by sponsor); Comp Banquet tickets for speakers, spouse/guest, 2 priests, 4 religious sisters, 10-woman planning team, @\$30/each: \$840; Coffee/Snack Service: \$600; Etc..., etc...: \$4400

Total Costs: \$24,360 less Sponsor donations <\$3000> and Vendor Fees <\$3750>

Balance: \$17,610/180 (90% sales rate estimated) = \$98 + 8% processing fee = \$106...so, set ticket price at \$110 per person.

"Think about the legacy of your event. Encourage people to be leaders at the end of your event.... You can develop a substantial legacy that goes beyond the end....Plan a significant legacy strategy so that your events are still having an effect months later."

The Welcome

Your welcome desk sets the tone for a well-organized event. Plan its location and layout carefully, considering how many check-in stations will be needed to process the number of attendees you expect, without long lines. What signage will you need to direct them to the correct location (Ticket Sales Here...A-M, N-Z...Speakers Check-in Here...Information)?

Vendor check-in should be a different process, elsewhere (and, preferably, they are all set up before your guests arrive). Speakers and VIP Guests may get a separate check-in station and different welcome folders.

In addition to folders, badges/nametags, event schedule, and room assignment information, your Welcome Desk might have snacks and water bottles available for weary travelers...an emergency sewing kit...a first aid kit...dollies and/or volunteers to help with luggage...be creative!

Is there room to write, if guests need to fill out any forms at check-in? Is there a way attendees can find out who else is at the conference, or leave a message for someone they expect will arrive? Do you need for them to pre-select the sessions they will attend? Do they have any food allergies, handicaps, or other special needs you need to take into consideration? Is there anywhere they can just sit down for a bit before trekking to their room, or hang out with arriving pals (without blocking your welcome desk) before the event begins?

What supplies and equipment should be on hand at the welcome desk (paper clips, scissors, stapler/staple remover, pens, duct tape, clip boards, notepads, sticky-notes, extra folders and inserts, cash box, tape, index cards, highlighter, permanent marker, labels, credit card swiper and tablet/phone, etc...)? Do you need a pretty basket for snacks, a mug full of coffee beans for pen-flowers, a huge plastic tub or milk-crate for welcome folders?

The Welcome Desk may also be an information hub for attendees. Train the desk staff to answer questions, give them a quick-reference guide to FAQs (the first question is likely, “Where’s the nearest bathroom?”) and contact phone numbers for team members to call in case they do not find the answer, or have issues that need resolution. Plan to have at least two people at Welcome so the desk won’t be empty if one needs to go to the restroom. If the desk will close, prepare a sign directing late-comers, or anyone with questions to an alternate location.

Welcome Folders

What information do you want to hand them (about the event schedule; about meal plans; about building layout and use policies such as smoking areas, security, late entry, wi-fi password; about your organization or sponsors; about the locale – tourist spots, nearby restaurants, etc...)? Be quite specific, and add to your timeline the task of rounding up, creating, and copying all these enclosures.

Include information about your event’s social media channels. Is there an event app they can download, a Twitter hashtag, a live event blog, a Google chat opportunity with speakers? Are any of the session handouts, slides, or suggested resources available to them online? Is it possible to submit questions to particular speakers ahead of, or during their sessions via cell phone?

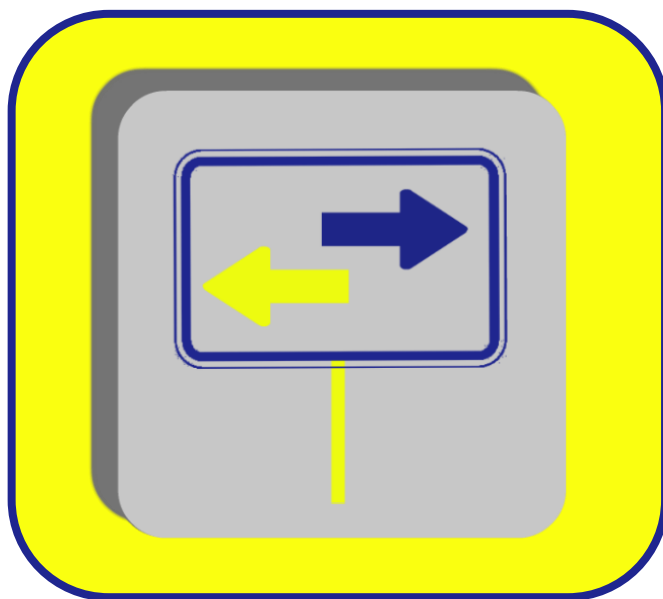
Give Exit Information: clear expectations for stripping beds and drop points for used linens; event evaluation questionnaire and location for drop-off; check-out time; where to leave re-usable badges, or recyclable paper, or borrowed books; how to stay in the loop with fellow-attendees and next year’s event planners, etc....

Do your welcome folders share a color scheme with your event decorations and promotional materials? Are they printed with your conference title, group logo, or other 'event branding'? Is your folder your only give-away, or is there an event bag stuffed with material from your vendors, coupons, goodies and gifts?

Will your folders be labeled with the names of attendees, or be 'generic'? Will they be sitting in tubs on the table, or in boxes beneath it? Do they include blank paper for taking notes? Pens? Prayer cards? Donation envelopes?

Don't forget to plan Folder-Stuffing and Event Bag Stuffing into your logistics as early as possible.

"Everything that can go wrong probably will, at some point, in your years of event planning. What makes a Catholic event planner different – or should – is that when the inevitable happens, we do not lose our peace, we do not freak out and start blaming, we do not let stress and crisis become an opportunity for Satan, and we maintain unity in the bond of Christ's love with the members of our team, our attendees, volunteers, vendors, speakers, staff, hosts, and sponsors. To us, CRISIS means 'stop and pray together' and then 'act, don't react'."



Follow-up

Post-event follow-up needs to be an integral part of your event planning, or it probably just won't happen. As soon as possible after the event, have a relaxed team meeting – while all the details are fresh on your minds. Schedule this beforehand so that they will be more consciously collecting intel during the event.

Knowing there will be a 'day of reckoning,' a 'place' to put their frustrations, notes about glitches, complaints and observations about how things might have gone better will help your team stay calm and enjoy the event more. Naturally, everyone should be encouraged to take notes in some form along the way, to record comments made by attendees, speakers and vendors, and to reflect on the event before your evaluation meeting, in order to contribute as much as possible.

As team leader, you must beg them to bring real constructive criticism, and not to be shy, or to think that offering criticism is 'unspiritual,' or 'not nice.' Without it, true evaluation and improvement are impossible.

Assuming you want to reproduce your Great Event another time, this process can result in significant changes that make it better each year. Attendees will notice that it just keeps getting better, and want to continue coming back. One of the kindest – and most sensible – things you can do right now, as your 'term' ends, is to compile your team's planning and evaluation notes for future reference.

You, or the next Great Event chairperson, will so appreciate having the details as a springboard for the next round of planning. Future teams will have plenty of flexibility to make changes and to be creative, but the legacy of your particular experience will be an invaluable guide.

Who were your team members, volunteers, and donors? What sponsors helped, and how? Who were your vendors, and how did you attract and serve them? Who were your speakers, and how did you like them? Did any of these people indicate particular preferences about how, or when to communicate with them? Why did you make the choices you did about theme, colors, topics, food, activities, and location? Are there any 'traditions' established for this event that the parent organization wants remembered in succeeding years?

Were any relationships established with vendors, sponsors, speakers, suppliers, or venues that should, or might, continue into the future? Is there anyone we want to avoid in future? Why? What all went into the Event Bags and Registration Folders this year? What foods were served (let's not have the same dinner, year after year!)?

How did you split up the work assignments, or tasks? How many additional volunteers were needed in addition to your planning team?

What aspects of the event were well-received? What went wrong, fell flat, or went over like a lead balloon? What did your team decide should be done differently next time? Why? (In other words, pull together this 'planning legacy' at the follow-up meeting, and place your own team's recommendations at the end.)

Central to your follow-up meeting is the stack of attendee evaluations. You collected those, right? You designed a form that allowed for gathering of responses, feedback and suggestions, right? You made sure to leave time in your schedule for filling those out, right? You told attendees how important you considered their feedback, right?

See why follow-up must be planned along with every other aspect of your Great Event??

If you intend to repeat this event, your best audience for next year is the pool of satisfied attendees who just went home. Have a follow-up contact plan (by your Marketing & Promotions team) ready to email (or include in a newsletter) some post-event content. It might include:

- Photos collected from attendees this year, posted to your Facebook or webpage gallery (privately, for this group only)
- Anonymous, positive quotes from the evaluation forms
- Mea culpas about huge glitches that occurred, with apologies, thanks for their patience and prayer support, and a promise that "this will be fixed next year"
- Positive feedback from speakers about the event, or group, or audience
- Reminders about Event Bag coupon expiration dates (Did you want to include a way-early-bird discount coupon for next year's Great Event?)
- Save-the-Date announcement for next year

- Ads, thank-you's for sponsors and donors and volunteers
- Ways to interact with the parent organization during the next year
- Lost & Found Items collected at event
- Link to press coverage of the event
- List of attendee contact emails (IF and only IF you collected this info with their express permission to release it to fellow-attendees) This could be a simple name + email address, or extend to a fuller profile with photo, blog and website url, phone numbers, and social media links.
- Ideas for and/or links to event-related reading and resources
- Polls about next year's theme, session topics, speakers or activities
- Sign-up to be on the planning team next year, or to be on a newsletter mail list for the next event, as it begins to be planned
- Ask everyone involved, "What can we do to make this event even better?"

Your follow-up is the basis for your next Great (or greater) event, so plan for it wisely!

And, now that you've debriefed, it's time for those thank-you notes (in your handwriting, with stamps!) to each member of your team. (Speakers, priests, musicians already received theirs, with fee/honoraria enclosed, on arrival, or just after their talks.)



Technology & Resources

A staggering array of apps and software is available to help you plan, promote, and produce your event. Digging into, comparing and using them will be, for most people, a steep learning curve, but one that may save you buckets of time in the long run.

From registration and ticketing platforms like BrownPaperTickets and PicaTic, to event management platforms like Bizzabo and Guidebook, you can pick and choose what help you need, if you're willing to wade through it all and make a lot of decisions.

Technology can help you:

- With marketing, promotion, newsletter management
- With ticket sales, registration, and analysis of which marketing efforts are producing the most sales
- Schedule a series of email appeals, alerts, offers
- Create a mobile guide to your event schedule with instant updates about room and speaker changes
- Generate maps for your event venue
- Manage sharing of attendee profiles and contact info
- Allow attendees to create customized schedules at multi-track events
- Use scan-able badges for security, shopping and attendee analytics
- Encourage networking among attendees
- Live stream presentations
- Place ads for sponsors and the parent organization
- Manage audience response and interaction

A low-tech event:

- Will assume everyone has cell phones
- Will use email to keep in touch with attendees and speakers
- Will have a website, or page on a site

Might take advantage of an online ticketing site just to handle receipt of payments for event tickets, with various options for housing and meals. Emails gathered through ticket sales can be used for pre-event polls, incentives to share event news, and event follow-up feedback requests. Links to your particular event tickets can be shared in emails, newsletters and on your event website.

For a higher-tech event, you might:

- Make presenter slides available on SlideShare
- Have Google+ chats with speakers
- Use QR codes (that lead to the ticket sales page, or event website) on posters and fliers
- Set up a Facebook fan page and Twitter hashtags for the event, create a Facebook event to notify all your followers, and use Facebook ads to promote the event
- Create an event 'app' with attendee and speaker profiles and real-time notifications ("Keynote begins in 10 minutes!")
- Collect attendee-generated content
- Make photo booths available just for fun

And even higher-tech:

- Get a microphone 'cube' that can be thrown around in the audience to encourage questions
- Use an Audience Response System to allow questions to be collected during presentations, and allow the audience to share their own answers even as the speaker speaks
- Put up a huge display of every event-tweet as it happens
- Download an app that turns phones into mics
- Open your event to a remote audience
- Issue smart badges that help you track attendee movement and buying patterns
- Set up interactive kiosks for registration and check-in and moment-to-moment conference updates
- Compile transcripts of talks and panel discussions into an ebook

- Use beacon technology to beam info to attendees as they pass certain vendors or rooms

The list grows continuously, so what I think is high-tech today may be yesterday's news by the time you read this!

You should know that the younger your audience, the more they will assume they'll be able to interact with your conference, your speakers, your content via their cell phones, at least. Today's college classrooms are increasingly interactive and students expect not just to listen, but to question and interact actively (in a way we might think was just rude if we didn't realize that it's their way of being engaged and interested).

Ultimately, your tech decisions are inseparable from many other areas of conference preparation and planning. If you have the nerve and the verve to go high-tech, do add that layer of complexification (or was it 'simplification'??) to each of the other areas as you plan, and to your budget.

"The more high-tech we get, the more we lose the human touch. I hope our events will always have a very personal feel, the Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the time for real conversations and the kind of teaching that only comes from being fully present to the person in front of you, looking one another in the eyes and hearing each other's voice."

RESOURCES*

The National Fellowship of Catholic Men offers a [New Conference Planbook](#)

Dr. Taylor Marshall offers "[Steps to Finding the Perfect Catholic Speaker for Your Event](#)"

Bizzabo offers a list of the "[10 Event Apps Every Event Planner Needs](#)" and an ebook, [100 Must Know Tools for Event Planners](#)

Shannon Kilkenny's book ***The Complete Guide to Successful Event Planning*** includes a CD with lots of checklists and extras.

[Catholic Online](#) offers a free news release (PRWire) and Event Calendar

Catholic Speakers Bureaus:

[CMG Booking](#)
[Dynamic Catholic Speakers](#)
[Catholic Speakers Association](#)
[Catholic Answers](#)
[Catholic Writers Guild](#)
[Catholic Mom](#)
[Integrated Catholic Life](#)
[Dulce Laborum](#)

Event Apps & Platforms:

[Eventbrite](#)
[Guidebook](#)
[Brown Paper Tickets](#)
[Picatic](#)
[Etouches](#)
[Cvent](#)

Find (or become) a Professional Event Planner:

[Internat'l Special Events Society](#)
[Convention Industry Council](#)
[Event Planners Association](#)

Newsletter & List Management

[Mail Chimp](#)
[Aweber](#)
[Constant Contact](#)

Event Recording

[JMJ Communications](#)
[National Conference Recording](#)

Virtual Group Meetings:

[Google.com/hangouts](#)
[Gotomeeting.com](#)

Notes

In Closing

There are events with specialized requirements we couldn't cover here. Camps, Fundraisers, Pilgrimages, Service and Mission Trips, Concerts, Fairs, for instance. But all events share many of the same core aspects covered here, and so this is a good place to start making adaptations for your more varied purposes.

Event planning is, of course, a paying profession. I think you can see from the level of planning detail required for even a small-ish weekend retreat that much larger events would benefit from the services of an experienced, professional planner.

Contract negotiations, supplier relations, design and technology considerations could easily overwhelm you unless your team packs some serious punch in these areas. This guide can't substitute for the services of a professional, but should help where those services can't be afforded.

I think our smaller venues are actually something of a training ground for developing, among Catholics, a lot of seriously helpful skills. We need to have opportunities like this to work together and try our hand at marketing, speaking, social media, planning, catering, design, fundraising – strengthening the Body of Christ to be present to the world in creative and helpful ways.

My thanks to all the amateur (remember, that means “*doing it for love!*”) and pro event planners out there who shared advice from your wealth of experience. I hope it will mean more Great Catholic Events for us all to attend together, and less stress for all the people who plan them.

About the Author

Charlotte Ostermann is a veteran homeschooler, a Catholic convert and speaker, a freelance writer and blogger, poet, editor, and author. Contact her for speaking engagements and writing projects at Speaker@CharlotteOstermann.com.

Her books include *Souls at Rest, Souls at Work* (Angelico Press), *Making Sunday Special* (Catholic Truth Society), *Explode the Box*, and *B is for Brick* (Motherheart Press).

Her work has appeared in St. Austin Review, Gilbert, Envoy, Thesauri Ecclesiae, Canticle, and other publications. She writes for Roman Catholic Spiritual Direction, Catholic Writers Guild, Catholic365 and other online venues.

She lives with three of her eight children on a 'farm wannabe' north of Lawrence, KS, where she worships at the St. Lawrence Catholic Campus Center.

She's a founding member of the Family of the Apostles of the Interior Life, of Sursum Corda Polyphony Ensemble, the Northeast Kansas Chesterton Society and the Catholic Creatives Salon.

Charlotte is the Director of the Joy Foundation of Kansas, and of the 50 Million Names Project. Joy's mission is to create and support Catholic Cultural Initiatives. At 50MillionNames.com, names are registered to honor aborted children, emphasize the reality of their existence and humanity, and to generate ripples of blessing in their honor.



MotherheartPress

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Charlotte Ostermann, [JOY's](#) Director, welcomes you to receive, participate, donate, and [RESPOND](#)...freely!

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