

Planning a Military Reunion

Pre-Planning

- **First of all, determine who will attend**
If you are planning a business meeting, will you include staff members, people from other units, civilians? If you are planning a social event, will you include spouses, children, or others?
- **Estimate the number of participants**
If this is your first event of this type, it will be more difficult than if you have some history of prior attendance. Be careful not to underestimate attendance. It's far easier to cancel rooms and cut back on space requirements than it is to find additional space later.
- **Decide how expenses will be covered**
Some expenses to consider are airfare, transfers, hotel room, tax and gratuities, meals, social functions, recreational activities, meeting space and incidental expenses. If you are planning a business meeting, you need to decide if you will be covering these expenses or if they are the responsibility of the individual. If you are planning a social event, you need to decide how much people will be willing to pay to attend your function.
- **Determine how much pre-event promotion will be needed**
Building attendance may require announcements, invitations, follow-up mailings, advertising and more. If you are planning a reunion, tracking people down after time has passed may be an issue. Keep in mind you will need to allow time and planning for the search. Ask the professional staff at the local CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureau) what Pre-Event Services they can provide or assist you with.
- **Decide when to hold the event and for how long**
If you can be flexible in selecting dates (and arrival/departure days), you will be better able to deal with hotels, particularly over summer months, when availability may be limited. Check for conflicts with civic or religious holidays, competitors' meetings or other events. Be sure the timing is convenient for most participants.



Destination Selection

- **Consult with the CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureau)** in the area which you are considering holding an event. The CVB offers FREE services such as assisting in creating and submitting RFP (request for proposals) bids for hotel rooms, food and beverage, entertainment and transportation. Many CVB's also provide FREE products which you can use during your event, such as local area coupons, maps, name badges, etc.
- **Decide on a geographic location**
Unless attendance is mandatory, you need to pick a desirable location, particularly if the attendees will pay all or part of the costs themselves. Consider where the participants are located. Is one central location best? If this is an annual event, should it rotate from one region to another each year? Which destinations have had the best attendance and which destinations can provide the best cost versus services for your group?
- **Look at the demographics of your audience**
A close look can help you decide which destinations might be most appealing. What is the average age? Are they mostly female or male? What are their income levels? Are they frequent travelers or is this their one major trip of the year?
- **Rate the overall appeal of the destinations you're considering**
Think of climate, recreational facilities, nightlife, tourist attractions and perceived image in your decision. Is it a place that people would be likely to choose themselves?



- **Choose a destination that is easily accessible**
Be sure there is adequate transportation so your attendees will be able to get to and from your meeting with a minimum of hassles. Consider accessibility via airports and interstates.
- **Tax considerations of your destination**
If you're thinking of an international destination or a meeting on a cruise ship, be certain to check with your tax advisor about IRS regulations on the deductibility of business meetings held outside North America or aboard ships.
- **Visit the planned destination if you are unfamiliar with it**
Doing so during the same time of the year as the planned meeting date will give you first-hand knowledge of what it's really like. The local CVB professional can arrange for hotel site-visits in the area which you are considering.

Hotel Selection

- **Type**
Consult the local CVB who will work on your behalf through this process. Having chosen a destination, the next task is to select the property best suited to your event. A resort property may be best for social events, groups that combine recreation with business or when participants are likely to extend their stay. Airport hotels may be best for shorter meetings when transportation access is important. A downtown hotel may also be an attraction, depending on the city.
- **Cost**
Although negotiable, it is a critical consideration. If your budget is luxury class, then the sky's the limit. Otherwise, you may have to broaden the selection range to match your budget. Consider affordable destination locations if your budget is conservative which may help increase your attendance.
- **Space availability**
Sleeping rooms, meeting rooms and function space must be adequate to house your group and handle all activities. Can it accommodate your group and other groups scheduled for the same dates? If yours is one of the largest groups in house, you can probably count on good service during your stay. On the other hand, if you have a small group in a hotel hosting larger groups you may not get the same level of service. If your group is very large you'll need a large hotel or convention center to accommodate your needs.
- **Amenities**
If you are planning a business meeting your guests may require a desk in their room with wireless internet access, voice mail and business center access. Or if this will be a long meeting you may want recreation on-site such as a pool, fitness center, laundry options, etc. If you are planning a social function, consider what amenities people on vacation would want.
- **Check out as many hotels as possible**
Meet with the sales staff to begin contract negotiations. This is where the Convention and Visitors Bureau can assist and make this process easier and can also arrange for hotel site visits. During your hotel site visit, you can meet with convention services, food and beverage and other staff members to check the attitude and efficiency of the entire staff. Remember, it often takes a series of phone calls with each hotel to iron out issues of the prospective contract from room rates to food and beverage and event space requirements. It can take several days and many conversations back and forth which the CVB can assist you with.



Logistics

- **Name one final decision-maker**
When working with the CVB, be sure that they know who has the authority to approve plans and costs, request changes, etc.



- **Develop a general scenario of events**
Schedule everything from the time participants arrive until they depart. You'll need to know in advance who is actually attending in order to meet the hotel's room guarantees by the cut-off dates agreed to in your contract. "No-shows" can be very costly, although they are largely unavoidable. You should know airline flight numbers and scheduled arrival times if you plan to transfer attendees from the airport. You'll also need to know how many attendees actually checked-in, so you can adjust your food and beverage guarantees. Finally, you'll need to know departure schedules for airport transfers.
- **At the airport**
Will you need "meet and greet" staff at the airport? Is there adequate public ground transportation for hotel transfer, or will you need private transport? Again, the local CVB can provide you resources for transportation options.
- **At the Hotel**
Your group may be able to pre-register depending on whether they are paying individually or are on the master billing account. Ask the hotel to set up a group registration area away from the normal registration desk, especially if your group is large. Although the hotel will handle registration, have your own staff on hand to give out name badges, arrival packages, etc. Be sure to have signs identifying the registration area, as well as meeting and function rooms.

Facilities

- **Financial Arrangements**
Before signing a contract, be sure everything you want is covered in writing. Your CVB representative can assist you in overseeing all details before you sign any contracts.
- **Select the proper size rooms for your event.**
A high comfort level promotes a more enjoyable experience. You will need to consider room dimensions and characteristics--width, length, height, obstructions, lighting, etc.--to determine if the room is a good match for your group.
- **Food and beverage functions**
Choose food and beverage menus and decide if you will have a cash or open bar. If you choose an open bar you will need to decide if you want to apply a limit. You also will need to set start and finish times. Find out from attendees about special dietary requirements including vegetarian, low sodium, low cholesterol, gluten free or kosher, and share this with the catering staff.
- **Entertainment**
Theme parties, music and entertainers such as DJs, live bands, etc., can give your event an added air of excitement. Depending on the length of your program, you may also want to plan an off-site event. Check with that area's Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) for options. CVB's are a valuable resource when traveling or planning group events.
- **Special issues**
Be sure the facility has the capability to deal with the special needs of any physically or otherwise challenged individuals within your group. If you are aware of a specific situation, bring it to their attention in advance so it can be dealt with before check-in time.



Program

- **Theme**
Based on what type of event you are planning and your objectives, develop a theme to be used in everything from your invitations to graphics or decorations. Allow plenty of time for creation, approvals, revisions, production and shipping of all materials.
- **Mailings**
Announcements or invitations and promotional follow-up mailings



should go out well in advance of hotel cut-off dates for room and food and beverage guarantees. They should state a specific deadline for reservations.

- **Speakers**

If you are planning a business meeting, decide on the topics to be covered by speakers and who the speakers will be. Estimate the amount of time each speaker will need. If you are planning a social event, decide who the host will be and how they will need to direct the group.

- **Exhibits and decorations**

If you are planning a business meeting and intend to have a display area for products or services, set up a schedule for the necessary materials. If you are planning a social event, decide on decorations and extras you may desire.

- **Audio-visual equipment**

You may already own the necessary equipment or you may choose to buy or rent it, along with a technical crew to run it. Choose equipment to perform the functions needed to meet the needs of your event. Check with the facility's engineering staff on electrical requirements. If you're setting up yourself or with an AV company not associated with the hotel, be certain of the local union regulations and how they apply to your situation.

Last Minute Preparation

- **Welcome Packets**

Consider putting together welcome packets which can be distributed when your guests arrive (possibly during the Meet & Greet or during Registration). The local CVB who has assisted you in securing hotel accommodations, contracts, transportation arrangements, entertainment, etc. can often provide you FREE professional services: Name badges, Area maps, Welcome Banners and Table Tents to just name a few.

- **Arrival**

Plan to arrive early, allowing adequate time for set-up rehearsals and problem solving. Depending on the size and complexity of your event, this may range from a few hours to several days in advance.

- **Contact**

Find out who will be your contacts within the hotel or at outside suppliers at all times of the day or night if problems should arise.

- **Event room**

Do a last minute check of the meeting room for lighting, temperature and any other requirements you have.

- **Remain flexible**

Remember there will always be last minute changes that can't be avoided.



The Chicago Southland Convention and Visitors Bureau can assist you in many ways from site selection through on-site registration. We are your primary source for information for the Chicago Southland area. You can rely on the expertise of our professional staff to assist you in all facets of planning your next event. We offer a variety of FREE professional services. Contact us to get the process started. Inquire about our current incentive program and grant programs.

***Let the Chicago Southland Convention and Visitors Bureau
help make your next event a success!***