

8 Tips for First-Time Event Planners

So you're planning your first event – congratulations! Whether you volunteered or were “voluntold”, event planning can be creative, rewarding and a lot of fun.

But, there's one problem: you've never done this before. Don't worry – Meet Calgary is here to help. Here are eight things to do up-front – as recommended by the event experts at our partner hotels – that will set you up for success.



1 Define your goals.

The key to a successful event is defining what success looks like ahead of time. Before you choose a venue or hire a speaker, make sure you (and anyone on your planning team) can clearly answer these three questions:

- What is the purpose of this event?
- What do you want to achieve?
- What is the expected return on investment?

2 Pick your team.

Repeat after me: you are not in this alone. Event planning will require you to delegate, and it's important to consider early on who you can trust to help out. Make a list of names and don't assume; confirm their interest and availability.

3 Do your research.

Yes, this is your first time planning an event – but this isn't the first event to ever happen. If the event you're planning has taken place in the past, there's a lot you can learn from previous attendees, partners and planners. A short interview about their experience can save you from repeating past mistakes. If this is a brand new event, take a look at comparable events and learn as much as you can about their logistics.

4 Pick a date.

This is the single most important piece, so choose wisely. Ideally, you should have three potential dates in mind so you can compare prices and availability. For maximum flexibility, choose a few different days of the week.

5 Choose your time frame.

Even an hour or two can impact your price and planning for example, if you start at 8 you might need to budget for breakfast; if you start at 10 you probably won't.

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6 Get specific about your attendance.

The more specific you can be about the number of attendees, the better you can budget and negotiate with venues and caterers. Start a spreadsheet and get realistic about who'll be there – don't haphazard a guess.

7 Brainstorm your venue requirements.

Now that you have an estimate of attendees, you know approximately what capacity you'll need – but that's just one consideration.

Location is one of the most important questions. Are people coming from out of town? If so, you might want to consider a hotel near the airport, like in Calgary's North East. Do your guests prefer to be surrounded by amenities? Consider a downtown location, like Calgary's Core. Is parking a priority? The South has lots of it, and it is free. Are your attendees interested in excursions? Calgary's North West offers the easiest access to the Rockies.

You'll also want to consider catering, layout, accessibility and accommodations. On the latter front, remember that hotels are event experts themselves and a great resource. Your hotel partners will have tips and tools to help you plan.

8 Creating a marketing plan.

Event marketing is right up there with budget in terms of importance. Even if you're just planning a small meeting or a soccer tournament, you'll need invites and agendas for attendees.

Things like on-site signage, tickets, handouts, and even your Facebook event page should all look consistent and reflect your brand. It'll up the “wow” factor, and help attract both attendees and even sponsors – so make a list of assets early.

This probably sounds like a lot of information to gather up-front, but remember that these details that will affect your entire planning process. Sure, spreadsheets are less exciting than venue visits and menu planning, but if you focus on the small stuff now, you'll be rewarded with less stress, and a better event.

If you need some help, reach out to any one of Meet Calgary's partner hotels – they're ready and to help make your event a success.

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