



Reunions: Planning a Successful Reunion – Part 1

Whether your organization runs a robust reunion program or whether you are planning your first ever reunion, the steps below will focus your efforts and help you to plan a successful and productive reunion.

Step 1: Determine Your Objectives

You likely have many goals for your reunion celebration, and a reunion, especially in the form of a multi-day reunion weekend, can deliver on many goals simultaneously. You want to determine at the outset which goals are most important and reflect your programming around those goals.

What do you want to accomplish with your reunion? Is the primary objective to bring people together to reconnect with one another? Is the primary objective for alumni to reconnect with the university? Are you celebrating the accomplishments of certain individuals? Are you attempting to show alumni how the university has changed since they attended? Are you trying to raise donations for a specific endeavor? Is there a theme or life concern that you want to discuss with a specific group of alumni?

Step 2: Determine Your Audience

Knowing your objectives will help you determine your audience such as young alumni, older alumni, alumni sharing a specific interest, or all alumni. The typical American model (which Yale initiated) is to have a class reunion every five years (bring classes back 5, 10, 15, etc. years after graduation) to maintain the basic connection to the university established when they were students. Not all schools follow this model however. Some schools (Princeton) invite alumni to return every year although they put special emphasis on the five year classes for the annual reunion weekend.

A key question is how many segments of the alumni population will you invite (ten classes, twenty classes, one area of study or more) and how many alumni do you expect will attend? Many schools enjoying larger attendance (Yale included) have most of the reunion events separated by class or interest group even on different days or weekends. Other schools (and programs) will run most of their programming as one large group with one or two events that breakout by co-hort. Each approach has its benefits such as strengthening class ties or networking between classes though the logistics involved in your program may ultimately determine your decision. For a discussion about audience see <http://www.iup.edu/upper.aspx?id=88431>.

Step 3: Find a Venue (and Related Impact on Scheduling and Logistics)

Venue is a crucial decision deeply linked to scheduling and logistics. Organizing at your university provides access to university resources such as faculty lecturers, classroom facilities, and experienced event planners as well as the ability to tap into university traditions such as athletic events and graduations but is constrained by the academic schedule and the need of the student body for the facilities. An interesting venue not on or near campus maybe be an attraction as a destination in its own right, especially for a smaller group or on an off-cycle year (like Yale's mini-reunions). Off campus events often rely more on volunteers and less on university staff for logistics. For choosing venues: http://www.military.com/Resources/ResourceSubmittedFileView?file=reunions_how_to_plan.htm.

Step 4: Schedule the Event

For a large event, the University itself often schedules dates, and is deeply involved in planning sub-events. Some universities have traditional Homecoming or Alumni weekends during which the University will assist smaller groups that wish to hold their own reunion. <http://www.iup.edu/upper.aspx?id=88431>, <http://alumni.dal.ca/get-connected/dal-homecoming/reunions/reunion-planning-guide/>.

Step 5: Logistics

Depending on your institution, there may (or may not) be resources available to support the logistical planning involved in a reunion. There is a great deal of event planning (booking spaces, planning meals and lodging, accepting RSVPs and payment) and if the university is not able to provide resources to assist with this aspect of the reunion, your class or volunteer group may want to consider hiring a professional event planner.