



2nd Annual Planning Successful Meetings on Campus- 2013

Catering: Creating Successful and Memorable Events

- 1) **Work as a Team:** Do not see the Caterer as a separate part of your meeting, or as the vendor only; they can make or break your event. It is just as important to the catering to have a successful event. Have pre-con meetings with them to ensure that last minute details and numbers are discussed. Do not choose a caterer solely on high or low bid, you get what you pay for and you need someone you can work well with. Meeting attendees remember the venue and the food first and foremost!
- 2) **Choose the right caterer:** Is your event going to be plated (never more than 300), buffet, have food stations, what type of presentation do you need, BBQ, box lunches, ethnic food, drop off service, or kosher food? Who can do it best, do your homework. Each caterer has their own strengths. Talk with other meeting planners and professionals, as they know and arrange catering all the time.
- 3) **Communicate:** Caterers must know: your budget right up front, theme and your over-all objectives of the meeting etc.: colors, run of show/agenda, formal or informal, who are you feeding, over-all feel of the event, contact information and alternative contact, they must also know you Plan B for weather or over-flow crowds. Must know numbers 7 to 10 days ahead, especially for plated meals, box lunches etc., late posted numbers are now assessed fees. Touch base with caterer 3 days prior, confirm delivery times and arrival times, clean up times, and pick up times. Never assume that they know all the information, repeat the information over and over again.
- 4) **Talk budget right up front:** Ask for an all-inclusive price, must include: wait staff, paper products or china service, bar ware, delivery fees, linens, extra add-ons, service fees/production fees. Don't forget to add tips in your budget, for the wait staff and catering managers.
- 5) **Trust the opinion and suggestions of the professionals:** Ask them what their suggestions would be for your event, let them tell you what fruits, veggies, are in season, what meats would they suggest, what side dishes, should you do plated or buffet, what are some fun food trends that are popular. What has been successful and memorable at other events, what do most people like and how much to serve and in what order...They KNOW!

- 6) Always discuss alternative foods for special diets.** Include in your registration forms, a place for attendees to let you know about their special dietary needs: vegan, gluten free, diabetic, allergies etc. The caterer will not automatically bring something special unless you tell them to. For plated foods you can set colored cards out by the attendee's plate so the wait staff will know and the guest will not be singled out.
- 7) Be accurate in your numbers:** Never assume that the caterer will bring a lot of extra food, so you can aim low in your numbers. There is nothing worse than running out of food. Always shoot high and be as accurate as you can be. Caterers are now charging for last minute changes in numbers, because they are getting blamed when the meeting planner fails give accurate final numbers. If you are unsure of how much food to order, just ask the caterer to help you estimate, they are the professionals and that is their job. When ordering box lunches, they have a great idea of how many of each type of sandwich to order because they do this all the time. Trust them!
- 8) Worry about your food choices, but don't forget to think about the beverages too.** Do your attendees take their caffeine hot or cold? Do you have too much coffee and not enough Diet Coke? Do you have iced tea and not soft drinks; do you have enough water, water stations? What about alcohol make sure you have enough lead time to get a permit if needed, have you done the University paperwork to serve alcohol?
- 9) Get creative in your food choices, Try something new:** Don't always stick with chicken, ask the caterer what is popular and what trends are successful. Can you try food stations to increase mingling, try new break items to add life and fun in the dull afternoon, try new drinks, new desserts, new themes, new presentations. Ask the caterer for suggestions.
- 10) Don't try a new caterer without checking them out:** Attend an event that they are doing, go in the middle of the event to get an accurate view of the food quality and wait staff. Try the food, get samples, get menus, and get opinions of others who have used them. Do your homework, it will pay off.



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