

Ways to Learn Event Planning

One of the wonderful things about a career in event planning is that you have many options for learning. Unlike some professions such as accounting or engineering, there are no specific **educational requirements** required to become an event planner.

(There are, however, some certification programs available that we will cover later in this chapter). Here are some ways to learn event planning.

Information Interviews

Vendors

One of the best ways to learn about all aspects of event planning is by speaking with vendors. After all, they are **experts** in their respective areas and most have built their businesses by servicing events.

For example, a **catering company** could give you detailed information and ideas for meals and snacks that are used by most event planners for different types of events (breakfast buffets, build-your-own sandwich buffets, pasta stations, etc.). They can also tell you approximate costs, how far ahead to book a caterer, what their busiest times of year are, and anything else you would need to know about catering for meetings or events.

Building a strong relationship with different suppliers is essential for success in the events industry, so it would be worth your while to set up appointments to **speak with a variety** of vendors. But, how do you get to know suppliers when you are the new kid on the block or have not yet met anyone from these industries?

Fortunately, there are a variety of ways to find them. Start by asking **friends** or **family** members who have recently planned an event about the suppliers they used and whether they were happy with the services of those suppliers. Almost everyone has attended an event in the last year (like a wedding, Christmas party, or festival) and hopefully can provide a contact for you to find out who the suppliers were.

Next, look for suppliers that advertise their services for events. Before you set up an appointment to meet with a supplier, jot down a list of **questions** that you want answered and use that list as an agenda for the meeting. Here are a few good questions to get you started:

- What types of **events** does your company specialize in?
- What types of **products** do you carry?
- Do you have **access** to products that you don't normally carry?
- How much **lead time** do you require?



- How much **deposit** is required and when is it payable?
- When is the **final payment** due?
- What is your **cancellation policy**?
- Do you offer **discounts** to industry professionals (i.e. event planners)?
- Do you have a **standard contract** in place?
- What types of **crisis situations** have you seen happen and how were they handled?
- What is your best **advice** for a novice event planner?

Event Planners

One of the best ways to find a busy event planner to interview is through a personal referral. Ask your network of contacts if they know anyone who works in a job that involves planning meetings or events. If possible, go beyond getting a name and telephone number. Ask the individual who personally knows the event planner to **contact** them, explain that you are learning about event planning, and see if you can call them to ask a few questions.

If no one in your network knows anyone who is an event planner, you can try arranging a meeting with a cold call. Grab the Yellow Pages and start dialing. Explain that you are studying event planning and ask if you can arrange to meet with them for **20 minutes** to ask a few questions. People are much more likely to agree to a meeting if they know it won't take too much time.

TIP: Although you are conducting an “information interview,” it may be better to avoid using that term when you first call.

Many professionals assume someone who wants to set up an information interview is actually looking for a job, not simply looking to learn about the profession. So they may decline to meet with you if they do not have any current job openings. Instead, it may be better to say that you are doing research.

Be prepared that the event planner may not be available for a personal meeting but may be willing to answer questions on the phone or by email. If they make such an offer, take them up on it! If you're sending an email, you're more likely to get a response if it is limited to only a few key questions.

If the event planner agrees to a personal meeting, arrive on time and come prepared with a **list of questions**. At the 20-minute mark, acknowledge that your time is up, say you know they are busy, and offer to leave. If the event planner doesn't have another appointment, they may be happy to extend the meeting. (If you want to make a good impression, it's usually not a good idea to stay longer than agreed without permission.)

After asking and learning about what types of events the event planner organizes, you can ask about any area that you would like to learn more about. For example:

- How do you get people to **attend** your events?
- Which **vendors** do you work with?
- What are some **challenges** you've experienced and how did you handle them?
- What advice do you have for getting corporate **sponsorships**?

While owners of event planning businesses may also be willing to speak with you, be aware that they probably will not be eager to help if you start a competing business in

the same locality. However, if you are going into a niche they do not serve, they might be more willing to tell you how they built their business.

After the Interview

Whenever someone takes time to assist you, make sure you thank them. Send a **thank-you note** to the person you interviewed and, if someone referred you, thank that person as well. If you make a good impression, it might lead to future opportunities such as an **internship** or even a **job**.

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