Volunteer to Organize Events

Non-Profit Organizations

One of the best ways to gain experience in event planning is to volunteer on event committees for local organizations. **Non-profit groups** are always looking for help with their fundraisers and galas, and you'll get the double benefit of helping a worthy cause while you hone your skills. This is also an **excellent** way to make contacts in the community to help you land a paying job when you are ready.

You can find help in locating your community's non-profit groups through the Internet. **GuideStar** is a searchable online database of more than 850,000 non-profit organizations in the United States. If you click on "Advanced Search" you can search by your city, state, and non-profit category (e.g. Arts, Environment, Health). **CharityVillage** has a similar database of Canadian non-profit organizations.

GuideStar http://www.guidestar.org

CharityVillage.com
http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/nonpr/index.
asp

You might also contact your local **Volunteer Center** or **Chamber of Commerce**. Both

of these organizations usually run a volunteer matching program and can help make the introductions you need to get involved. Other opportunities to volunteer your services as an event planner include:

- your local community association

- your child's school

- a local nursing home

- any civic opportunity (sporting events, music festivals, parades, etc.)

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Volunteering to Plan Business Events

Back in the old days, when throwing a party meant putting out a plate of crackers, cold cuts and cheese and unscrewing the top on a couple bottles of Baby Duck, almost anyone could plan a successful party. Even gala events were simple in comparison to the computer-generated sound and laser light pyrotechnical showstoppers of today.

Back then, you simply rented a ballroom (where you were assured of a nice – but

perhaps stuffy – room) in a local grand hotel, booked the local favorite orchestra, let the chef decide on a dinner menu and invited the city's elite. Planning the gala event of the year (there were usually only one or two) could be accomplished quite nicely by almost anyone. Secretaries, public relations clerks and anyone else the boss could collar rose
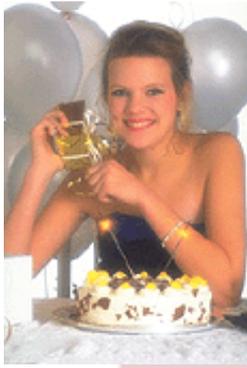
to the occasion (not always willingly) and got the job done.

There are still armies of volunteers who plan wonderful events, but most of today's workers are simply **too busy** to act as event planner as well. So, here's the good news — you can still get experience the **old-fashioned way**, by offering to plan or at least coordinate some aspects of every event you hear about.

Start at **your own workplace**, if you have one. Most companies have at least one or two events a year (e.g. Christmas parties or summer picnics) and some have many more than that. If your company has a social committee, volunteer for it. If they don't

have one, start one. If they have a public relations department that is notoriously short- staffed, offer to help them out. The beauty of this plan is that you will be learning a new career while still being paid at your old job!

If you aren't currently employed (or if you are employed, but have the time) you could offer to **volunteer** with special events at a spouse's or family member's place of business.

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Don't Forget Events for Family and Friends

Any opportunity — yes, even unpaid — is a valuable learning experience and one where you will make contacts by networking with planning industry professionals. When someone wants to use your services, try to work with them the way you would with a "real" client, using the steps described in chapter 2.

TIP: **To get the most benefit from your volunteer work, arrange to have photographs taken of all the events you are involved in planning. The photos will be proof of your event planning experience to show to prospective clients and employers.**

You can also ask for a letter of recommendation. See section

6.2.2 for more information about preparing a portfolio and getting letters of recommendation.