

Tips for Planning a Great Reunion

Successful reunions begin with successful planning. The suggestions below can help you plan your next reunion.

FORM A REUNION COMMITTEE

Putting together a good committee takes some time and effort. Start by forming a core local team of dedicated and enthusiastic individuals who are willing to go the extra mile to ensure a successful reunion. Appoint a reunion chair who will arrange and drive meeting agendas and a treasurer to oversee finances. Solicit classmate volunteers who will actively participate and work on various reunion tasks. Don't underestimate the work involved. Share the work amongst as many who are willing to offer help. Emphasize that everyone on the committee is responsible to promote the reunion, recruit classmate attendance and help locate missing classmates. Committees that are active and well organized will be positioned for success. Organizing a successful reunion can be a truly enriching and rewarding experience where old friendships are re-established and new friendships formed.

START EARLY

Begin planning up to two years out so your attendees can plan ahead of time. This helps you increase attendance numbers and build momentum and anticipation. Lead time really depends on how elaborate your event will be. The more time you give yourselves the better! Plan on a minimum of a year. Don't expect to pull off a successful reunion if you start planning just 6 months out. Classmates who live far away will especially need the extra time. Additionally, prime locations and other services you need for your reunion may require at least a year in advance booking.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE MEET?

Your reunion committee should plan to meet once a month either in person or via conference call.

WHAT ARE COMMITTEE TASKS?

Consider dividing the work activities of your reunion committee into subcommittees or workgroups. Here are some general tasks to consider:

Nuts & Bolts

- Date selection
- Event theme selection
- Event format
- Event venue
- Event program (speakers, tributes, etc)
- Event lodging
- Financing (reunions should break even, establish your registration fees accordingly)
- Decorations
- Entertainment
- Photographer for group photo
- Registration & name tags

Marketing & Communications

- Classmate contact listing
 - Secure postal addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers (to call stragglers who haven't committed)
 - Search for missing classmates. Every email to classmates should include a list of missing classmates.
- Website development/maintenance. A class reunion website is a great way to communicate with the class both before and after the class reunion. It is an added bonus if your website lets you create online registrations, accept payments, keep track of who is coming, and even input personal information to help create a memory booklet.
- Mailers, email, Facebook
- Newspaper and social media

Reunion Activities

- Deceased classmates tribute
- School tours, pre & post-reunion events
- Class gift to your school foundation

Mementos

- Welcome bag to include agenda, restaurant suggestions, neighboring business coupons, connection information to your school foundation.
- Reunion/memories booklet for attendees and those who were not able to attend as well. Include contact information.
- Novelties, ie coffee mug, tote bag, note pads, pens,
- Prizes/awards

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE POSSIBLE UPFRONT EXPENSES?

Here are some of the expenses you might incur along the way. A professional reunion planning service is an option that can help handle your upfront costs for you. Add 10% to the expected cost of the class reunion for unanticipated costs.

- Stationary supplies & postage
- Printing (reunion booklets, name tags)
- Gifts / novelties
- Decorations
- Website development & hosting
- Liability insurance
- Reunion facilities deposit
- Entertainment deposit
- Deposits for additional activities (tours, etc)

TIMELINE FOR SUCCESS

Twenty-four months out

- Form a committee
- Recruit and appoint subcommittee members
- Survey classmates for ideas and venue preferences
- Determine event format
 - Picnic, dinner-dance, etc
 - Informal, formal
 - Single day event, multi-day event
- Brainstorm additional activities (school tours, etc)
- Set date(s)
- Scout candidate reunion facilities and hotels
- Develop budget
- Start developing mailing list

Eighteen months out

- Select and reserve reunion facility and hotels
- Arrange for and hire entertainment, caterer, photographer, etc.

Twelve months out

- Determine cost per ticket
- Send initial mailer announcing date and location of the reunion
- Publicize reunion information
 - Public websites
 - Newspapers
- Arrange for additional leisure activities (sightseeing tours, etc.)
- Pay deposits

Six months out

- Mail reunion registration materials
- Confirm all reservations, caterer, entertainment, etc.
- Select menu
- Meet with hotel and reunion venue staff

Four months out

- Make payment arrangements with all suppliers for group functions
 - Meals, tours, photographer, DJ, etc.

One month out

- Finalize any last minute details

WHEN SHOULD WE HAVE OUR REUNION?

Friday or Saturday are the most desirable dates for reunions. The most popular times of the year are early summer through late fall. Thanksgiving weekend is also a fairly popular time as many classmates may be in your home area visiting family for the holiday. There are several factors you should consider when selecting a date. Certainly the weather is more accommodating during these periods. If your classmates are in the child-rearing stages of life the summer months might be a more ideal time while children are out of school on summer vacation, especially for those classmates traveling from out of town. Of course Fall is also a wonderful time of year as it evokes memories of homecoming and football games. You may want to consider coordinating your event around your high school's homecoming as it offers an opportunity for classmates to participate in additional activities on your reunion weekend.

SHOULD WE HAVE A SINGLE DAY OR MULTI-DAY EVENT?

Some classes just have a one evening reunion event while other classes host multi-day reunions. Classmates who have attended one-day reunions repeatedly echo the same words after the reunion is over.... "The evening went by too fast" ... "There just wasn't enough time to talk with everyone I wanted to." How do you pack 5, 10, 20, 30 years of each other's lives inside of 5 hours? The answer is you can't. Hosting a multi-day reunion, however, gives your classmates additional time to relax and get reacquainted. This is also a far more attractive event for those traveling from afar to attend the reunion. It may involve a little more work to host a multi-day reunion, but offers many advantages to your class-

mates. Consider some of the following suggestions for the weekend should you choose to hold a multi-day reunion.

Friday night

Many classes kick off their reunion activities with an informal Friday night get together that are referred to as "Mixers" or "Icebreakers." This event is intended to loosen classmates up in an informal, neutral and relaxed atmosphere prior to the grand event. Typically, these are held at a local restaurant, bar, or someone's home that can accommodate a large number of people. Usually light hors d'oeuvres are served and classmates pay for their own cocktails at these gatherings. Keep this event simple. Don't put a lot of undue stress on yourselves as you need to direct most of your energies toward planning the big event. If such an event is not offered, you can suggest classmates make informal arrangements on their own with some classmates they were close with in high school. It gives them extra time with those with whom they were close.

Saturday

While the night is typically reserved for the big event, consider adding some daytime activities. One of the most popular events is a tour of your old high school. After 10, 20, 30... years this can be a wonderful experience to once again walk the halls of your youth. If your event happens to coincide with your school's homecoming or a school football game, encourage classmate participation and try to organize special seating arrangements so your class can all sit together. Some classes also organize activities like a morning golf outing, local site seeing tour or a group shopping trip. You may want to also invite teachers and principal to your reunion evening or one of the other activities. If you are planning on an evening dinner, food stations and buffets in general encourage people to get up and mingle more than a sit down meal. Consider taking a video at the event that will be posted to the Reunion website. Classmates can submit their own videos as well.

No matter what pre-reunion events you plan, don't underestimate their value in terms of making classmates more comfortable attending the reunion event. They all serve as relaxers or anxiety reducers that can help make the big event a smashing success.

Sunday

If your class isn't burned out from Friday and Saturday festivities you might want to consider a wind-down event such as a Sunday picnic. This is a chance for any last minute catching up and to say your goodbyes in a less hectic atmosphere. For younger classes, make it a family event with spouses and children invited.

WHAT KINDS OF ACTIVITIES SHOULD WE PROVIDE AT THE REUNION?

If you are planning a more formal evening event, certainly the night will contain a sit-down dinner and likely music entertainment. You can add some formality to the evening with an official opening welcome and a few brief speeches and awards before dinner. Perhaps a tribute to classmates who have passed away. One thing you need to remember is that people are coming to the reunion to catch up with old friends. You need to allocate the majority of the evening to free socializing. You might also want to consider setting up a continuously running slide show of old class photos in one corner of the room. A nostalgia table for classmates to view memorabilia and artifacts from your class is a great way to jog faded memories and spark discussions amongst classmates. Place it close to the entrance for better visibility. You can ask each of your classmates to bring one piece of personal memorabilia for the nostalgia display. If you want to encourage dancing make sure your music provider plays music from your era. Just remember, people want to talk so don't make it hard from them to do that with loud music.

STAFFING THE EVENT

Unfortunately, the reunion committee's job isn't over after all the plans and arrangements are complete. On the day of the reunion, there is still the work of registering guests as they enter. You've worked hard and you too deserve to enjoy the reunion. Some facilities may provide this service for you or you might want to consider asking friends or family members to handle this for you. You might even be able to make arrangements with volunteers from the class year ahead of you or behind you to provide this service in turn for providing this service at their reunion. Given the likelihood that they may know people in your graduating class it could be an attractive opportunity for them as well to help out.