

Food & Beverage Planning Tips

Food

- For every plated meal, allow for at least one wait staff for every 25 guests at breakfast and one for every 20 at lunch and dinner. For a buffet, allow one wait staff for every 40 guests at breakfast and one for every 30 at lunch and dinner.
- Lock in your menu prices no less than 6 months before your event. Write this into your contract so that you can plan your expenses appropriately.
- For receptions with no meal, plan on 14 appetizers per person per hour. Over the lunch hour, 10 appetizers per person are appropriate. For late afternoon or late evening receptions 6-8 appetizers is sufficient.

Beverages

- Have one bar and bartender for every 75 guests at a hosted bar, and one for every 100 guests at a cash bar.
- Spread out the bars to help keep lines manageable. Don't put them too close to food stations or seating areas.
- Don't open all the bars at once. Open the ones furthest from the entrance first in order to avoid bottlenecking. Close the bars in reverse order—the ones to the rear about 20-30 minutes before the end of the reception and work your way towards the entrance about every 8 minutes.

Saving Money on Your Next Food & Beverage Function

- Conduct an opening and closing inventory on the bar stock.
- Purchase your liquor on a 'per drink basis' or a 'by the bottle basis'. If you do the latter, require in your contract that partial bottles be carried over to your next scheduled reception or function.
- You should never pay special labor or service fees on your food functions.
- Use cultural cuisine. Ethnic-inspired receptions offer a wonderful opportunity to serve inexpensive foods, such as beans and rice, pasta, tacos and wraps.
- Substitute menu items. Serving chicken piccata instead of veal piccata, for example, may save a significant amount of money.
- Change the cut. If you'd like to serve fillet mignon but don't have the budget, ask the chef to recommend a less expensive cut of beef.
- Eliminate courses. Serve a salad instead of soup and salad.
- Purchase nonperishable items, such as cereals and granola bars, on a consumption basis.
- Serve butlered hors d'oeuvres. Your labor costs are higher, but this should be offset by lower food costs. Guests tend to eat less when the food is passed versus buffet style.
- When serving passed foods, place only one type of food on each tray. This speeds up the serving process and reduces food consumption.
- Position buffet tables along a wall. Consumption drops when people don't have 360 degree access to food tables.
- Don't use dinner-sized plates. Larger plates encourages guests to eat more and increases waste.
- Station a server at each buffet table. Their function is to replenish food, bust soiled tableware, remove trash and act as a "psychological deterrent" to curb attendees' tendencies to overload their plates for return several times.
- Determine if it's less expensive to purchase hors d'oeuvres by the piece or by the person. If you order per person, find out how many pieces per person the price includes.
- Order enough food, but not too much! Use this rule of thumb: one ounce of dry snacks per person, enough anchor foods (such as cheese and vegetables) for one-third of the attendees, enough food at action stations for half of the attendees, one hot hors d'oeuvres of each type for each person, and enough desert and coffee for one-third to one-half of attendees. These estimates are made on the assumption that the reception will replace dinner.

- Provide starchy and high-protein foods. Such foods stay in the bloodstream longer and delay the absorption of alcohol into the body. Salty, sweat or greasy foods create a thirst which may cause guests to drink more alcohol.
- Ensure that hors d'oeuvres are bite-sized. This will make the foods easier to consume and reduce waste.
- Keep seating to a minimum. The availability of tables and chairs encourages people to sit and eat rather than network. Chairs for 25-30 percent of attendees is optimal.
- Distractions such as live music, entertainment and dancing reduce food consumption.

Beverage Planning Charts

Morning Break Beverages

Drinks	All Male	All Female	50/50
Regular Coffee	Attendance x 60%	Attendance x 50%	Attendance x 55%
Decaf Coffee	Attendance x 20%	Attendance x 25%	Attendance x 25%
Tea	Attendance x 10%	Attendance x 15%	Attendance x 10%
Soda	Attendance x 25%	Attendance x 25%	Attendance x 25%

Afternoon Break Beverages

Drinks	All Male	All Female	50/50
Regular Coffee	Attendance x 35%	Attendance x 30%	Attendance x 35%
Decaf Coffee	Attendance x 20%	Attendance x 20%	Attendance x 20%
Tea	Attendance x 10%	Attendance x 15%	Attendance x 10%
Soda	Attendance x 70%	Attendance x 70%	Attendance x 70%

How to use these charts: Locate the percentage of the makeup of your group and multiply that percentage by your overall attendance. Then divide the resulting number by 20 (size-ounce cups per gallon) to determine the number of gallons needed. Round each partial gallon up to the next half-gallon. For example, for a morning break at a conference that has an audience of 500 predominately male attendees, the formula should be calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Regular Coffee} &= 500 \times 60\% = 300 \text{ cups} \div 20 = 15 \text{ gallons} \\
 \text{Decaf Coffee} &= 500 \times 20\% = 100 \text{ cups} \div 20 = 5 \text{ gallons} \\
 \text{Tea} &= 500 \times 10\% = 50 \text{ cups} \div 20 = 2.5 \text{ gallons} \\
 \text{Soda} &= 500 \times 25\% = 125 \text{ sodas}
 \end{aligned}$$

* Source Conferon Guide to Meeting Management