

Event Planning in City Parks – The Basics: Overview

If you have organized a simple family dinner, then you have planned an event.

There are general steps to planning almost any type of event.

These steps in this guide are focused on items specific to outdoor events in [City of Seattle parks](#).

There are so many types of events that can be held in a park, this guide cannot address every possible item. By following the steps that are presented here, a person should be able to tailor these steps to any specific type of event in a park.

One way of thinking about planning an event is to think of the process as a list of questions, and by getting answers to these questions, you will have planned the event.

This guide shows a way of looking at an event that hopefully will help you be clearer in what you want to accomplish by holding it, and more effective in holding it.

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For questions about this guide please contact:

Event Scheduling
City of Seattle, Seattle Parks and Recreation
parkusepermits@seattle.gov
Office: 206-684-4080 x3

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Offering food

Many events want to have some kind of food available, and food can make an event more fun. As an event organizer, the first question to address is how involved should the food offered be?

The simplest way to offer food is to choose types of food that don't require you to get a health department permit. To do this, you must only offer food that is on the health department's list of 'exempt foods' There is a page on the health department's website on this topic:

www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/environmental-health/food-safety/food-business-permit/food-exemptions.aspx

Below is a list of examples from their website. You can think about exempt foods as ones that come pre-packaged or in portions that are individually packaged, that do not need to be cooked, or kept hot or cold to avoid spoiling, and/or that are fruit with a peel-able skin (such as bananas or oranges).

- Popcorn (including kettle corn)
- Cotton candy
- Herbs and spices (if processed in an approved facility)
- Machine crushed ice drinks (premix is frozen and dispensed completely within a self-enclosed machine; such as icees, slushies or slurpies)
- Corn on the cob (prepared for immediate service with butter, shake-on spices or commercial mayonnaise in squeeze bottle only)
- Whole roasted peppers (if roasted for immediate service)
- Roasted nuts, roasted peanuts (including candy-coated)
- Fruits and vegetables for sampling (if used for individual samples of non-potentially hazardous produce)

If you decide you want to offer food that is not exempt, then you will need a permit. It does not matter if you are selling the food or giving it away for free, or if the organization running the event is non-profit, or for profit, or a group of friend or neighbors. **If your event is in any way providing food to the public that is not exempt, you must have a health department permit.**

What about potlucks? In general potlucks at public events are not recommended. As an event organizer, you have no way of knowing how each of the dishes that people bring will be prepared, and if someone gets sick because from food poisoning at your event, you may be held liable.

If you have decided that you want to offer food that will need a permit, there are two options:

1. The event organizers coordinate the process of making the food available themselves (get a permit, buy food, keep it cold, set up a food booth as required, prepare and serve the food according to the permit requirements). The type of health department permit you will need is a **“Temporary food service business permit”** and information about it is online here:

www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/environmental-health/food-safety/food-business-permit/temporary.aspx

2. Or the event organizers **hire a company to cater the event.** A caterer, or restaurant with a catering license will handle all the details of providing the food at your event for a fee. A

Items to consider about providing food yourselves

Do not wait until the last minute to apply for a permit. You will need time to understand the requirements and acquire the items you will need to operate a food booth at the event in a safe and proper manner.

You must have at least one person who has a current food handlers card supervise and be at the booth for the entire time the booth is in operation. (No walking off for a break)

You will benefit from putting someone in charge of the food operation who either has previous experience with food service or food booths at events, or who is detail-oriented and dependable.

You should expect that a health department inspector will show up at your event, and that they will take the temperature of all food items you are serving, and if the temperature of any food items are not in the safe zone, they will require that you throw that food away immediately.

Do not argue with the food inspector. They have the authority to shut down your booth immediately, **with no exception**. They take their job of insuring the health of the public seriously. As should you.

If any of the above items feel like too much to take on, you should either hire a caterer or consider only offering exempt foods.

Items to consider about hiring a caterer

If you hire a caterer you should ask to get a photocopy of the company's King County Caterer's License. For more information on this, contact the Seattle King/County Health Department's Food Protection Program at 206-263-9566.

You should be clear about your expectations. Agree in writing and have signed.

What foods and/or beverages will be offered?

Will the attendees pay for the food they get, or will the event organizers?

Will there be a limit of the number of portions served?

Who is responsible for providing trash or recycling receptacles?

Who is responsible for hauling away the trash or recycling generated by the food offered?

Will the caterer need a power source, such as a generator, or does the park happen to have an electrical outlet that can be available as part of the park reservation?

Marketing to your audience

Review the purpose of your event, and who your intended audience is.

How will you tell them about your event?

How do you know that a particular method will reach your intended audience?

How can your method of telling them about your event communicate (visually or otherwise) key qualities of your event?

Print: flyers (8 ½ x 11 inches), posters (larger), or handbills (2 or 4 to a page)?
Who designs them (graphic artists) and what do they charge?
Who prints them and for what price?
How will they be distributed, get to people, or be placed around the city?

Online: E-mail – who or where is the email sent to? (neighborhood email lists?)
Facebook post – who posts it? Who can update the information?
Website – who designs the page? What is web address? Who can update the information?

In-Person/Word of mouth: where? on the street, at meetings, at other events?

Professional media (print or digital): Community calendar listings
Community newsletters or blogs
Organization newsletters or announcements
Press release
Earned media, such as a story or article on your event
Paid advertising

Other: Promote your event via swag, novelties, buttons, etc.

What will you tell them about your event?

What is the essential information your intended audience needs to know for them to be interested in coming to your event?

- When and how long is the event?
- Where is the event location?
- What are the options for getting there? (bus routes, parking, shuttle?)
- Is it free?
- Will there be food?
- Will there be seating?
- Are children welcome?
- Are there restrooms?
- What should they bring?
- What will organizers provide?
- Are there noteworthy performers or guests?

Are there limits to how much information you can place in a particular method of marketing?

Such as having the essential date, time and location of the event, and a short description of the event on a flyer or handbill, with the web address for people to get more information?

How does the public contact the event organizers if they have questions?

Who checks the email, facebook messages, or phone calls?

Planning physical details and logistics

Think about your event and where it will physically take place.

Are there things that need to be done before the day of the event?

- What is each item that needs to be done in advance?
- Who is doing each item?
- When does each item need to be done?
- Do some items need to be done before items?
- Who is in charge of keeping track of what items need to be done, when they need to be done by, and whether they have been done?

Example:

	What?	Who?	By When?	Completed?	Notes
✓	Confirm permits	Gwen	April 10	yes	
✓	Confirm performers	Abdi	April 30	yes	
✓	Hire caterer	Maria	April 30	yes	
	Make flyers	Habib	May 10	not yet	
	Write and send email announcement	Bob	May 10	not yet	
	Distribute flyers	Inaya	May 20	not yet	
	Pick up tents	Chris	June 3	not yet	
	Day of event	Everyone	June 4		

Key logistical details:

- When is the event?
- Where is the event?
- Are permits required, and if so, what types?
- What labor is needed to hold the event?
- How many volunteers do you need?
- How will you recruit the volunteers you need?
- What equipment is needed to hold the event?
- What supplies are needed to hold the event?
- What funding or resources is needed to hold the event?
- What transportation is needed to hold the event?
- What safety issues are there to address?
- Will you record the event, with photos, or sound recordings, or by other means?
- What is the physical layout of the event?
- What is the plan if the weather is bad?
- How will you let people working on event know if the weather is bad?
- How will you let people planning to attend if the weather is bad?

Managing the day of the event

A successful event is not an event that has no problems. Rather it is an event where the problems that do happen can be solved easily by what you have on hand at the event.

- Are there tasks that need to be done, or items that need to be brought to the event or picked up on the way?
- Who is in charge of each of these tasks or items?
- Are there tasks that need to be done or items that need to arrive and be set up before other items?
- When does the event open to the public and what needs to be done by that time?
- When does the event end and what needs to be done by that time?
- What are the steps to cleaning of the site and leaving it in good condition?
- Who is in charge of keeping track of what tasks or items need to be done, when they need to be done by, and whether they have been done?
- A reminder that Seattle Parks require event organizers to arrange for their own disposal of all trash/recycling/composting generated by the event.

A good way to prepare for a successful day of the event is to create a chart that lists details of each hour of the day, from start to finish.

EXAMPLE SCHEDULE

<i>Hour</i>		<i>STAGE</i>	<i>GAMES</i>	<i>FOOD BOOTH</i>
Preshow (10:00 am-noon)	10 am set up starts	Sound technician is Ahmed		Set up according to permit
				Mya is in charge
Hour 1 (Noon-1pm)		Noon: MC is Sabina		Hot dogs, chips, fruit, juice, water available
		Noon: 1 st playlist		
		12:30 Jumping Bean Dogs performs		
Hour 2 (1pm-2pm)		1:00 MC is Ashok		1:00 first 20 pizzas delivered
		1:00 open mic	1:20 Waterballoon toss with Josh	
		1:15 2 nd playlist	1:40 Watermelon contest with Lane	
Hour 3 (2pm-3pm)		2:00 MC is Latoya		2:00 rest of pizzas delivered
		2:00 Dance-U! performs	2:40 Basketball demo with Kami, Roger, and Dale	
Hour 4 (3pm-4pm)		3:00 MC is Fabian		
		3:00 Fresh Roots performs		
		3:30 Nae Nae dance		
Post Show (4pm-6pm)	4:00 clean up starts			

After the event

After all the work, it is worth taking the time to plan a way for everyone who made the event happen to celebrate together. There are some details to take care of first:

- Where will the items that you brought to the event site go after the event, and who will take them there?
- Are there payments that need to be made?
- Is there a report or summary about how the event that you need to do? (to donors, helpers, attendees, and the media)
- What resources do you need to report back about how the event went?
- Will you do a review or debrief about how the event went, and how the whole planning process went?
- Will you do a survey of those attending (if they provided a way to contact them), or performers, or vendors about their experience of the event?
- What worked well?
- What should be done differently or better the next time (if there is one)?
- How will thank everyone who helped? (cards, a photo page, a gift card, a party)