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Book of Lists

Banquet Function Checklist



The Experient **Book of Lists**



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The most important item in any checklist is the one you forget!

The Banquet Function Checklist is a living document. Meeting professionals are encouraged to forward their own checklist items to: meetingmentor@experient-inc.com. Updates will be posted regularly at experient-inc.com.

You've decided you're going to hold a banquet function, chosen the location and set the date and time. Now comes the fun part—the details. As you go through the planning process, consult the following checklist to help ensure that nothing falls through the cracks. While this list applies to the majority of events, keep in mind there will always be additional items that are unique to every function.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND PURPOSE OF EVENT

- What is the age, gender, job and level of sophistication of your attendees and guests?
- Find out if they have special dietary requirements (vegetarian, vegan, kosher, diabetic, etc.).
- What is the purpose of the event? Do you want to foster networking or is the focus entertainment or a speaker? Would a plated meal or a buffet be more appropriate? Will food stations promote people moving throughout the room and networking? Should hors d'oeuvres be passed so that attendees focus on exhibits or one another instead of food stations?
- Does the function have a theme? How will it impact the food and decor?
- Are there any sponsorships or affiliations that require the use of certain food or beverage items – Coke vs. Pepsi, specific brands of dry snacks, donated products?
- Is your guarantee based on history or is this a new event? Is the function included in the registration cost of a convention or do people have to pay to attend? (Individuals paying their own way are more likely to show up for the function.) Are exhibitors included in the count?

EQUIPMENT AND INVENTORY

- What is the facility's inventory of tables and chairs? (Eight people can be seated comfortably at a 60-inch round, nine at a 66-inch round, 10 at a 72-inch round.) What are the choices for cocktail tables – high boys, 30-inch rounds, 48-inch rounds?
- What are the linen options? Colors and patterns? Overlays? Floor length or double-clothed to cover table legs for rounds? Does the property have any upgraded linens available at an additional cost, such as tablecloths, napkins and/or chair covers?

- What is available free of charge for centerpieces and general decorations (buffet pieces, backdrops, props, carts, foliage for stage or perimeter)? Determine what is standard and the pricing for any upgrades, and negotiate from there.
- What is the attire for waitstaff and captains? Will the facility provide staff members with specialty attire that fits your theme (Hawaiian shirts, etc.)? If not, will you be allowed to provide it?
- What is the general equipment inventory – easels, risers, standing lecterns, sound system and piped-in music and associated costs, if any?
- If the location of the function is a restaurant or lounge in the venue, are you using existing seating or is there a furniture removal fee?

MENU SELECTION

- What are the facility's house or regional specialties – dishes that may not appear on its standard banquet menus?
- Inquire about seasonal items that may provide a cost savings and add the benefit of freshness and taste.
- Ask to review the menu selections of other groups in-house at same time. There may be a cost savings in ordering some or all of the same items.
- What is produced in-house versus purchased? Some properties no longer have pastry kitchens, for example.
- Are some menu items frozen? Keep in mind that they will take time to defrost if you need to reorder during a function.
- Do a tasting once you have narrowed down the options for your event. Take photos of the dishes during the tasting or have the chef e-mail the ones that he/she takes.
- Require labeling on all buffet items.
- Review your sponsorship opportunities at each meal – donated products, recognition of sponsors through chocolate logos, etc.

FOOD SERVICE

- If the function is being held at an outdoor or remote location (not near the kitchens, for example), what area will be used for staging and service? How will it be blocked off (if it's not the back of the house or an unused function room)? Where will the servers enter? Will it interfere with the production equipment? Is there a fee for using an outdoor or remote location?

- Are there union issues that might impact service or create overtime issues due to the programming or length of the function?
- What is the service ratio – number of waiters to guests?
- For sit-down or plated meals, Experient recommends one waitperson per 25 guests at breakfast and one per 20 at lunch and dinner. If wine is being served, you may need to change the ratio to one per 15.
- For buffet meals – one waitperson per 50 guests at breakfast, one per 30 at lunch and dinner.
- What items are typically pre-set on the tables?
- If service time is an issue based on your program, ensure that any pre-set courses are appropriate to be pre-set. Do not pre-set hot soup or ice cream, for example.
- What is the property or caterer's policies on overset, guarantee period and increases in guarantees?
- What are the tax and service charge amounts? Is the service charge taxed? Are there additional taxes on any items such as alcohol or soft drinks?
- If the event is taking place at a convention center, is the china/ silver/glassware included in the cost or is there an additional charge for these items?
- Does the facility charge for seating for a continental breakfast or rolled silverware at a buffet-style continental breakfast?
- Is there a minimum number of attendees for certain meal types, such as buffets?
- Ask about per-gallon versus per-person pricing on coffee. Some venues no longer allow a per-person price or enforce a minimum guarantee. Can any of these things be negotiated?

BEVERAGE SERVICE

- What is the bartender ratio – number of bartenders to guests? Experient recommends one bartender for every 75 people on hosted bars and one per 100 on cash bars.
- Will it be a hosted bar, cash bar or a combination of both, in which attendees receive a set number of drink tickets and then pay for their own beverages after those are used?
- For cash bars, will the bartenders handle the money or is a cashier required?
- Are you serving beer and wine only? Premium or call brands?
- Ask if there is any dead stock wine (wine no longer on the standard list, but available in lower quantities) that may be cheaper.
- Does the bar need to open and close at certain times? Will it remain open during meal service, for instance, or reopen afterward?
- Will wine be served at the tables? Will there be a limited number of bottles per table or glasses per person? After the first glass of wine, servers should ask guests if they would like more rather than just pouring.
- Does the facility set both red and white wine glasses on the table or just one glass? Is the wine served in goblets or standard wine glasses? This will help you determine the number of glasses per bottle.
- Don't announce last call before the bar closes.

FUNCTION TIMELINE

- Give the property, in advance, an agenda of the events taking place during the function – national anthem or flag presentation, invocation, speaker, awards, music (dance music or background music), etc.
- Do the servers need to leave the room or stop service/ clearing at any time?
- Is a rehearsal time required?
- Are the guests in-house or will they be driving to the facility? Determine the need and location for a coat check. Is valet parking available? Who pays for it?
- In order to determine what time the doors will open, ask how long will it take to seat people. How will guests be directed to their tables? Do you want the staff to wait to serve a full table or begin service when attendees sit down?
- Ask the property to produce a diagram of the room based on your requirements.
- Relay your plans for assigned seating or open seating. Will you be using place cards? Do you need table numbers and/or number stands?
- Coordinate reserved seating and head tables. Will people be eating at the head table or will dignitaries take their places from reserved tables after the meal?
- If meal tickets will be used, determine who will collect them (group or facility) and whether the collection will take place at the door or at the table.
- Are there printed programs or gift items to be set out? Who will handle it?
- Have the centerpieces been ordered? For the head table too? Coordinate with the florist the time that the waitstaff will have the tables set and linens in place.
- Will you serve coffee while the entree is down and refill with dessert? Should pots be placed on the table for guests during after-dinner speaker or awards?
- How will guests with special meal requests be identified? With a special ticket or by asking the waitstaff?
- Identify the tables and seats of VIPs, any special requirements and their time of arrival if different from the main group.
- Is the band/entertainment aware of the schedule of events? Does the band need to take breaks at certain times for coordination of service of meal courses?
- If you will be eating, ask to be served last so that you will be able to gauge what time the last guest was served, if the venue ran out of food, the temperature of the food and whether everyone is on the same course.

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