



The Church Event Planning Checklist

From the First Idea to the Final Follow-Up

A Ministry Resource from Emmanuel Pines Camp
& Conference Center

Helping churches and ministry leaders plan well, serve their people, and create space for meaningful ministry. A well-planned event gives your team the freedom to be present, care for your group, and focus on the purpose that brought everyone together.

Use this checklist as a starting point, adapt it to your event, and skip anything that doesn't apply.



ONE START WITH THE WHY

Before you choose a location, open registration, or start promoting the event, get clear about why you're gathering.

- Define the primary purpose of the event
- Identify who the event is for
- Decide what you hope participants will experience, learn, or take away
- Estimate your group size
- Identify the primary event leader
- Build your core planning team
- Establish a preliminary budget
- Decide what a successful event will look like
- Identify what your group needs most from this time together
- Consider why this event is important right now
- Identify any specific challenges or needs that should shape the event
- Decide what you want participants to remember after they go home
- Consider what you hope happens after the event as a result of your time together

Finish This Sentence

If this event accomplishes one thing, we hope...



Set Your Budget

- Review ministry funds & Determine whether financial assistance will be available
- Estimate attendance and participant price
- Account for costs like transportation, speakers, activities, supplies, and promotion

Reserve Your Camp or Retreat Center

- Choose preferred and alternate dates
- Estimate your group size and lodging needs
- Confirm meeting space, meals, activities, and A/V
- Discuss dietary and accessibility needs
- Review pricing, deposits, cancellation policies, and important deadlines
- Sign the agreement, pay the deposit, and add deadlines to your calendar

Build Your Team

- Assign a leader for each major area: programming, registration, finances, transportation, and communication
- Designate one person as the primary contact with the camp or retreat center
- Identify additional volunteers you'll need & Set planning deadlines

Open Registration

- Set registration and payment deadlines
- Add the event to your registration system
- Collect the information, forms, and permissions you'll need from participants
- Assign someone to monitor registrations and answer questions

Start Promoting

- Establish one clear message for the event
- Create a promotion schedule with multiple touchpoints
- Equip leaders to personally invite people
- Monitor registrations as you promote

Build the Experience

Now it's time to think through what participants will experience from the time they arrive until they head home.

- Create the event schedule
- Order shirts or other participant items, if applicable
- Order or purchase supplies
- Confirm speakers, teachers, or facilitators
- Confirm worship leadership, if applicable
- Determine A/V needs
- Select activities
- Plan small groups or breakout sessions, if applicable
- Determine supplies and materials
- Build in appropriate free time
- Create opportunities for prayer and reflection
- Think through transitions between activities
- Develop a backup plan for weather-dependent programming
- Consider how first-time participants will be welcomed and included
- Determine how you'll communicate schedule changes during the event

Planning Tip:

Resist the temptation to fill every open space on the schedule.

A conversation over a meal, an unexpected walk, or an hour around the fire may become one of the most important parts of the retreat.

Prepare Your Leaders & Volunteers

- Confirm leader and volunteer commitments
- Clearly communicate each person's role
- Identify any training that's needed
- Complete required background checks
- Review expectations for working with children or students, if applicable
- Identify who will handle medical needs or emergencies
- Determine how leaders will communicate during the event
- Schedule a final leader meeting or orientation

FOUR 30 DAYS BEFORE

Turn the Plan Into Details

At this point, the major decisions should be made. Now you're making sure all the pieces connect.

- o Review registration numbers
- o Follow up on incomplete registrations or missing forms
- o Follow up on outstanding payments
- o Create room or cabin assignments, if needed
- o Create small-group assignments
- o Finalize transportation arrangements
- o Confirm drivers and required documentation
- o Submit dietary and accessibility needs to the camp or retreat center by its deadline
- o Confirm speakers, worship leaders, and other outside participants
- o Confirm activity reservations
- o Communicate meeting-room and A/V needs to the venue
- o Prepare name tags or participant materials
- o Review the schedule with your leadership team
- o Confirm your emergency plan
- o Identify any participants who may need additional support
- o Begin preparing final participant communication
- o Determine how check-in and arrival will work
- o Create a master contact list for leaders, drivers, speakers, and the venue
- o Identify any medications or medical needs that require a plan, if applicable
- o Determine who will be the primary point person during the event
- o Confirm the follow-up or next step you want participants to receive after the event



FIVE THE FINAL WEEK

At this point, your goal is to make sure everyone knows the plan.

Confirm the Details

- o Confirm final headcount, lodging, meals, activities, and meeting spaces with your camp or retreat center
- o Confirm transportation, speakers, worship leaders, and outside vendors
- o Check the weather and adjust plans if needed
- o Review emergency procedures and make sure participant information is accessible to the appropriate leaders

Get Everything Ready

- o Print or prepare participant lists, schedules, name tags, signs, and emergency information
- o Gather and pack session materials, activity supplies, and anything your group is bringing
- o Test any A/V equipment you're responsible for

Communicate

- o Send participants final details, including arrival, transportation, packing information, and an emergency contact number
- o Send leaders the final schedule and assignments
- o Confirm how your leadership team will communicate during the event

Prepare Your Team

- o Review responsibilities and make sure every important task has an owner
- o Identify who will make decisions if plans change
- o Answer final questions
- o Pray together for the event and the people attending

One Last Question:

Is there anything participants need to know that we haven't told them yet?



A good plan gives your team enough clarity that they can turn their attention toward the people arriving.

Before Participants Arrive

- Have the leadership team arrive early
- Walk through the spaces your group will use
- Check meeting-room setup
- Test A/V
- Set up check-in
- Put up directional signage
- Set out materials and name tags
- Confirm the day's schedule with key leaders
- Make sure every volunteer knows where to be
- Gather the team for final instructions and prayer

Who Owns What?

Before the first participant walks through the door, put a name beside each responsibility.

- Who is the liaison between the group and camp during your event? _____
- Who welcomes participants? _____
- Who manages check-in? _____
- Who handles participant questions? _____
- Who communicates with the camp or retreat center? _____
- Who keeps the schedule moving? _____
- Who coordinates speakers and worship? _____
- Who handles A/V issues? _____
- Who manages transportation? _____
- Who handles medical needs or emergencies? _____
- Who has the master contact list? _____
- Who takes photos? _____
- Who checks in with volunteers? _____
- Who watches for someone who may need connection or extra support? _____
- Who makes the final call when plans need to change? _____

Planning Tip: A name beside a responsibility is much more useful than assuming someone will take care of it.

Before Everyone Goes Home

The final session may be over, but there are still a few things worth doing before everyone heads out.

- Clearly communicate departure plans
- Confirm transportation
- Check rooms and gathering spaces
- Collect lost and found
- Gather participant feedback
- Capture stories or testimonies while they're fresh
- Communicate important next steps
- Make note of pastoral conversations that need follow-up
- Thank volunteers
- Thank camp or retreat center staff
- Return borrowed equipment or supplies
- Complete any checkout procedures required by the venue



EIGHT WITHIN 72 HOURS

Keep the relationships and momentum going after everyone returns home.

- o Thank participants for coming
- o Personally thank volunteers and key leaders
- o Thank speakers, musicians, or others who contributed
- o Follow up with first-time participants
- o Follow up on pastoral conversations or prayer requests
- o Share photos, when appropriate and permissions allow
- o Pay outstanding invoices
- o Record final attendance
- o Record final income and expenses
- o Save participant lists
- o Save the final schedule
- o Save promotional materials
- o Document unexpected changes or challenges while they're fresh
- o Schedule your team debrief



BONUS!

PLANNING A RETREAT?

10 Questions to Ask Your Camp or Retreat Center

The right questions early in the planning process can help you choose the right setting and prepare your group well.

1. What are our arrival and departure times, and how flexible are they?
2. What is included with our lodging?
Ask about bedding, towels, room configurations, and accessibility.
3. What meeting spaces will our group have access to?
Ask about capacity, setup options, and whether you'll have exclusive or shared use.
4. What A/V equipment is available?
Find out what's provided and what your group should bring.
5. How are meals handled?
Ask about meal times, dietary accommodations, snacks, beverages, and any information the food-service team needs in advance.
6. What activities and recreation are available?
Find out which activities require reservations, additional fees, trained staff, waivers, or minimum participation.
7. What should participants bring?
Ask whether the camp or retreat center has a recommended packing list you can share.
8. What are the emergency procedures?
Know how emergencies are handled on the property and where the nearest medical care is located.
9. What does the retreat center need from us before we arrive?
Ask about final headcounts, room assignments, dietary needs, schedules, forms, payments, and deadlines.
10. Who is our primary contact before and during the retreat?
Knowing exactly whom to contact when a question comes up makes communication easier for everyone.

