

# 7

## Easy Steps

A Chamber Members Guide to  
Planning a Special Event

Compliments of the  
Brownsville Chamber of Commerce



## **So You're Planning To Stage A Special Event...**

Are you planning a grand opening for your new business? Or a ground breaking ceremony for a new building? Perhaps your firm is celebrating a significant anniversary and you want to have a party to commemorate the occasion.

Don't be afraid - whatever your plans, we can help you make your special event truly "special".

Inside this guidebook, available only to members of the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce, we've put together Seven Easy Steps to planning and staging a special event... steps ranging from selecting the date to getting media coverage.

Just read through this booklet, fill out the basic worksheet of things to do, and contact us at The Chamber, 542-4341. Staging a special event can be easier than you think!



## Step 2: Choosing the Best Time of Day

The time of day you choose to hold your event is crucial to its success. It is an important step in the planning process and helps determine the type of special event that you will conduct.

Morning functions, for example, will have an entirely different atmosphere and style than an evening cocktail reception. Luncheon gatherings may naturally require more food and beverage. Consider the following when making your decision:

- Very few successful special events are held in the early morning (7:00 to 7:30 a.m.); unless it is a necessity, morning events should begin no earlier than 8:00 a.m.
- Luncheon events often turn out well, since most everyone eats a mid-day meal, but they do require more advance notice in sending out invitations. Many people schedule luncheon appointments weeks ahead, and they will need to be notified as early as possible to get your event on their calendar.
- Late afternoon or early evening functions appear to be the most popular and successful. Perhaps it's because guests can stop by an event on their way home, or that the day is over and there are no more business matters to interfere with guests attending your event. The best time for an evening event is 4:00 to 5:30 p.m., allowing everyone a chance to "drop by". Unless your event is a major one, few people will want to go home, change clothes and go out again, so avoid late evening functions (such as ones that begin at 7:00 or 8:00 p.m.).
- Avoid mid-morning or mid-afternoon time periods. Many people are reluctant or unable to break away from their own work schedule in the middle of the day.
- Half-day open houses or tours of your company are not advisable unless it is necessary or traditional in your line of business (such as hotels or new housing developments). If you decide on a half-day event, be certain to have a designated time for a ribbon-cutting or other special ceremonies to lend to your event.
- One more note: If media coverage is important to you, give serious consideration to their deadlines before selecting a time for your event.

Notes/Questions/Things To Do:

---

---

### **Step 3: Developing an Invitation List**

Your event can be considered a complete success if you do nothing more than get the "right" people to attend. The "right" people will vary event to event, but they would normally include the following:

- Potential and current customers (your most important group)
- Suppliers
- Friends and family - this is a big day for you and you will want them to be there to share it with you.
- Your employees and their spouses
- Those who helped you get started - your banker, accountant, attorney, or other advisors
- Fellow businessmen and women in your area
- Representatives from The Chamber
- Key government officials - city, county commissioners or other officials
- The media

Once you have identified your guest list, here are some tips to remember when inviting them:

- Prepare a nicely written letter or very basic invitation form... but whatever you do, keep it simple and to the point.
- Check to make sure that all basic information is included: who, what, when, where and why.
- Be sure to include an RSVP with reply deadline date, reply card, and/or phone number. You may be in for a real surprise if you do not ask for people to either return a reservation card or call you to confirm their attendance. This will also help you in knowing how much food and beverage to order.
- Allow ample notice - between a week and ten days is ideal for most events, although two weeks would be preferable if you are planning a luncheon or dinner event.

- Be sure to include a good map or very clear instructions on how to get to the site of your event if you are not located in a well known area of town.
- If you choose to do a fancy or elaborate invitation, do it right. Get professional help from a graphic artist or designer. The Chamber can provide you with a list of members to help you.
- Indicate in your invitation whether the event is casual, semi-formal (often called "business attire") or formal.
- If spouses or a guest are invited, say so. Otherwise, it will be assumed they are not.
- Send your invitations by first-class mail, if at all possible. Bulk mail can take up to a week or longer and delayed delivery of your invitation could seriously hurt your attendance.

And a couple of other things to remember:

- While it is impossible to predict how many people will attend, you can usually figure that between 25 and 50 percent of those invited will show up. The percentage of friends and relatives who attend will be much higher than the percentage of those to whom you have sent a courtesy invitation, or who you do not know very well.
- Always provide easy-to-find and accessible parking for your guests. People will start off in a bad frame of mind if they experience difficulties in finding a place to park their vehicle.

Notes/Questions/Things To Do:

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

## **Step 4: Serving Food and Beverage**

Although it is an added expense that you may prefer to avoid, serving food and beverage of some kind is almost a necessity for a successful event.

No matter what time of day your function is held, people will expect that something to eat and drink will be served. It has become traditional and your event will be remembered as the exception to the rule if you choose not to offer refreshments. Here are some hints:

- For morning events, coffee, juice, fruit and pastries would be perfect. Unless you are in the restaurant business or wish to go overboard to impress your guests, a full breakfast is not necessary.
- At luncheon functions, remember that this is the mid-day meal for most of your guests and they will expect (and deserve) some kind of sandwich or buffet meal at minimum. Do not hold an event from noon to 1:00 p.m. and then force your guests to go elsewhere to eat lunch.
- During late afternoon or early evening events, light hors d'oeuvres or finger foods are appropriate. Cheeses, vegetable plates or coldcut meat trays are perfect, as are nachos, fajitas, tamales and other popular Mexican style botanas.
- If you choose to have a formal dinner or late evening party for your guests, make it exceptionally nice. If you are asking people to spend most of an evening with you, they deserve something special.
- About alcohol - the only times alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, mixed drinks, margaritas) are advisable are for late afternoon or evening events. Many people enjoy an after-work cocktail and it can add greatly to the enjoyment of your event. Beer and wine may be served at luncheon gatherings. At events where alcoholic beverages are served, always have something non-alcoholic for those who do not drink.
- It would be smart to enlist the help of a professional caterer for medium or large events, or if you haven't the time, manpower or talent to provide your own food and beverage. Caterers can give you good, solid advice and are not as costly as you might fear. Check with The Chamber for a list of our catering members.
- If you do decide to provide your own refreshments, be sure to have an ample food and beverage supply for your guests, as well as sufficient plates, cups, napkins, trash cans and other supply items. Running out of food and drink is a bad way to have an event end.

## **Step 5: Planning a Program**

Whether you are staging a groundbreaking, a grand opening or an anniversary celebration for your firm, it adds a nice touch to an event to have a brief program of some kind.

It provides not only valuable recognition for you and your key people, but it makes the event more purposeful and allows you to explain more about your business. Consider these points when planning your informal program or formal ceremonies:

- The shorter, the better. People have very brief attention spans at events such as these and you might lose a large part of your crowd if the program drags on too long. As a rule of thumb, no program or official ceremony should ever last longer than 20 to 30 minutes, with 10 minutes being ideal.
- Your program should be led by a good, effective master of ceremonies. You can serve in this capacity if you wish, or you can draw upon the experiences of someone at The Chamber. He or she can keep your program moving smoothly.
- Limit the number of speakers and the length of their speeches. People get bored easily when speakers speak for too long a period.
- Introduce only those who need to be introduced, even though the temptation will be to acknowledge nearly everyone in attendance whom you know. Otherwise, it slows down the program and you will invariably forget someone.
- Conclude your program with some appropriate ceremonial or symbolic activity to commemorate the event: a ribbon cutting for a grand opening, shoveling the first load of dirt for a groundbreaking, or cutting a cake for a 50th anniversary of your business. These are nice ways to let guests know the formal program is over and they create good publicity opportunities for the photographer.
- If your event includes an open house or tour of your facilities, be certain that friendly and knowledgeable employees conduct group tours. Unguided self-tours by your guests are not nearly as valuable as guided tours.
- Speakers taking part in any formal program should include appropriate city or county government representatives, a Brownsville Chamber of Commerce spokesman and you... along with any partners or others you feel have played a key role in your business. Since these speakers are particularly important to your program, place a reminder call to them the day before your event to confirm their attendance.



## Step 6: Getting Media Coverage

Without discouraging you unnecessarily, we need to be frank. The media cannot be counted on giving extensive coverage to your special event.

It is not that they do not view your function as significant, or that they are deliberately ignoring it - it is simply a matter of manpower available to cover the event and a lack of sufficient time to carry your story. The media are often swamped with business community news of grand openings and groundbreakings, and they are unable to provide good coverage to them all.

Armed with that realism, then, remember that there are some concrete things you can do to enhance the chances that it is your event which they choose to publicize:

- Send your invitation to the news directors or city editors at least one week ahead of your event, and include a personal letter or note explaining some of the details about your firm and why your event is different or has some significance to the overall community.
- Include a brief letter or news release that contains the basics of who, what, when, where and why. Your release letter does not need to be fancy - just factual.
- Check with the local newspaper that you would like to cover your special event. You may need to purchase advertising space before they will consider covering your event.
- A follow up call the day before your event is a good idea.
- You may also want to consider hiring a photographer and have him/her take a glossy black and white photo of the key people at your event. Then mail it to the media with a brief, but clear, caption.

Notes/Questions/Things To Do:

---

---

---

---

## Step 7: Using The Chamber's Services

By reading this booklet, you are already taking advantage of some of the help available to you from the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce.

And there is more. We will be happy to meet with you and help you make some of the required decisions cited earlier. We can also describe some of the other ways we can be of service. Some of these include:

- Providing invitation lists: Besides the people you will invite on your own, we can offer lists of our board of directors, fellow business people who are members of The Chamber, government officials, community leaders and others.
- Showing you samples of good, effective invitations.
- Making arrangements for members of our Bienvenidos Committee to attend your event, represent The Chamber, and help you in any way you may need.
- Providing a good master of ceremonies for your program.
- Advising you on reliable caterers: We have had experience with a number of caterers (who are Chamber members) and can recommend several excellent ones to you, if you decide to use any catering services.
- Providing our current media list, which will help in your efforts to get some publicity on your event.
- Supplying some special event traditional items, such as ceremonial scissors and ribbon or ground breaking shovels.
- Recommending photographers and printers from our list of members.

Notes/Questions/Things To Do:

---

---

---

---



## Special Event Worksheet

Grand Opening \_\_\_\_\_ Groundbreaking \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

1. Date: 1st choice \_\_\_\_\_ 2nd choice \_\_\_\_\_

2 Time: 1st choice \_\_\_\_\_ 2nd choice \_\_\_\_\_

3. Invitations (if any)

Format (letter, formal, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Guest list to be developed no later than \_\_\_\_\_

Invitations to be mailed no later than \_\_\_\_\_

4. Food and Beverage:

Type to be served \_\_\_\_\_

Name of caterer to be used (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Program/Ceremony:

Master of Ceremonies \_\_\_\_\_

Other items on the program \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Length of time for entire program \_\_\_\_\_

Special items needed (podium, name badges, door prizes) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Media coverage:

Notice of event to media no later than \_\_\_\_\_

Name of photographer to be hired (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

7. Chamber services:

\_\_\_\_\_ Samples of invitation formats

\_\_\_\_\_ Recommend caterers

\_\_\_\_\_ Recommend photographers

\_\_\_\_\_ Recommend graphic artists/designers/printers (for invitations)

\_\_\_\_\_ Media list

\_\_\_\_\_ V.I.P. list

\_\_\_\_\_ Mailing labels (approximately \$60 & \$80)

\_\_\_\_\_ Member list on disk (\$100)

\_\_\_\_\_ Member list printout (\$15)

Fill out as much of this form as possible and contact the Membership Department at the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce (542-4341) for any further assistance or questions.

Notes/Questions/Things To Do:

---

---

---

---

---

Member Data Sheet

***To be turned in to Master of Ceremonies a week before the event.***

Please return this form to The Chamber (fax 504-3348) along with Worksheet.

Name of firm: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of event: \_\_\_\_\_ Type of event: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for event: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal(s)/Owner/Manager, Speaker in behalf of business, Invocation (if any) by  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Any dignitaries present: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please provide The Chamber with a background of your firm, including a brief history, products, specialties or services, years in business, etc.:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**(use back if additional space is needed)**

