

# 10 TIPS FOR PLANNING YOUR EVENT

- 1. DETERMINE THE PURPOSE OF YOUR EVENT.** If the purpose is to perform more Vessel Safety Checks, focus all your efforts on achieving this goal. Ask yourself, "What is the end result I want?" Try not to have too many objectives. The odds of achieving them are greater if you have a short list. Jot them down. The act of writing will help you focus your thoughts.
- 2. IDENTIFY KEY ELEMENTS.** Will you need to provide transportation to and from your location? Parking? Security? Public sanitation facilities? Food/catering? Rental Items? Entertainment/Activities for adults and children? Audio-visual services like a special sound system or lighting? Will you need liability insurance? Other kinds of licenses/approvals? Do you need a booking agent for your entertainment? Will you offer giveaways? Any staging/decor? Will you need props such as boats or computers, signs, posters, or banners? Invitations/badges/name tags? Develop the content of your event. Identify your production team.
- 3. PICK A THEME/CONTENT.** Have a brainstorming session in which you and your team write down all your ideas no matter how off the wall they seem. In the beginning, you don't want to limit yourself. You don't have to have a special theme, but you may want to consider picking an unusual, colorful, or timely theme to make your event stand out. Sample theme ideas for VSCs: Carnival; historical; holiday; ethnic, e.g. Mexican with theme food and entertainment; Treasure Island with pirates, treasure chests, someone dressed like Captain Hook; military; tropical.
- 4. ESTABLISH YOUR BUDGET.** This is a critical step, because knowing how much you can or want to spend will ground you in reality, as you see what is possible and what you may need additional funding to achieve. Estimate how many attendees you can accommodate, which will determine the quantity of food, rental equipment, giveaways, and other items you order. It is very important to track your actual expenditures versus your projected costs throughout the planning and event phases. This will enable you to determine at any time if you are over/on/under budget.
- 5. CHOOSE/BOOK YOUR LOCATION.** Many locations require reservations months in advance. Besides availability, other factors to consider include the size of the venue, accessibility, cost, visuals, i.e., is the location a good photo opportunity for the media and does it support the message/theme of your event? Make sure you perform a site inspection. Nothing is more valuable than seeing what you actually have to work with.
- 6. MAKE A CONCRETE PLAN.** Define all action items. Make someone accountable for each one. Make sure they know your expectations and deadlines. Recruit volunteers, if needed. Early on, seek out the decision makers or those whose approval or involvement you'll need to make this event fly. Are there specific guests you wish to invite? Do your homework. Research different vendors/suppliers and be sure you know what's included in the price quoted. Ask if they might offer a discount for your event. Use diagrams of your proposed set-up at the location, when possible. They help everyone visualize what you are picturing, and help get everyone on the same page.
- 7. HAVE A BACK-UP PLAN.** Be prepared for the unexpected such as bad weather, entertainment no shows, problems with audio-visual equipment, or medical emergencies. Include a back-up plan for your location. This means having a list of possible alternatives in the unlikely but not inconceivable instance that something happens to your preferred location.
- 8. CREATE A TIMELINE.** Schedule key steps leading up to the event and activities during the event, if applicable. Pick your event date wisely. Make sure the date does not conflict with national or religious holidays, community events, or other factors that could negatively affect attendance, or, conversely, pick a date that could increase attendance, e.g. for VSCs, pick summer dates when more people are boating if this applies to your location. Allot enough time to accomplish each task and to avoid incurring rush charges for ordering an item at the last minute.
- 9. COMMUNICATE OFTEN AND CLEARLY.** Find out the best way to communicate with everyone involved in the planning and delivery of your event. Create a contact list. Keep everyone in the loop. Emails, phone calls, websites, and regular meetings are good ways to keep in touch. This includes any freelancers you may use as well. Photographers, for instance, will find it a big help to receive a shot list documenting the pictures you would like them to take, which ensures you get the pictures you want.
- 10. CREATE A PUBLICITY PLAN.** Develop media materials, e.g. press release, fact sheet, list of local press contacts. Contact the press several weeks in advance of the event. Some media, like seasonal magazines, may need to know months in advance about an event. Include these steps in your timeline.