

scope.

Operational Planning

Events may take months or even years to plan and execute, with each logistical area having its own needs and timelines. For example, the 2017 PGA Championship in Charlotte, North Carolina, was only a weeklong event, but planning started when the city was awarded the event in 2010. Tickets went on sale more than a year before the event, with renewed marketing pushes over the winter holiday period eight months before the event. Two hundred separate structures, ranging from souvenir shops to hospitality areas, started to go up more than two months ahead of the event. Logistical plans for parking and transportation took months and had to be completed well in advance of the event so that ticket buyers would know their transportation options. Food service locations and menus needed to be addressed. This planning was in addition to the landscaping that needed to be done to accommodate the golf itself (Spanberg 2017).

Project management techniques apply to event planning in that larger tasks need to be broken down into smaller units. These smaller activities can then be assigned to appropriate work groups and time and cost can be effectively budgeted (Bladen et al. 2018).

When developing operational timelines, the keys to success are to start early, identify important tasks, and budget an appropriate amount for completion. Important tasks left to the last minute add time, costs, and stress. Further, tasks must be scheduled in relation to each other (e.g., promotional materials cannot be printed until the date and site have been confirmed).

The following is a sample event timeline. Keep in mind that every event will have different needs, and the length of time to complete tasks will vary according to the event. Small events may require only a few weeks to a few months of planning, but larger events may require years of planning.

Initiation (18 months to 2 years out)

- Needs assessment and feasibility analysis

- Bidding process

Early planning (1 to 2 years out)

- Develop mission, vision, and purpose

- Select date and location

- Secure venues

- Create organizing committee

Detailed planning (6 months to 1 year out)

Generate budgets

Assess staffing needs

Develop marketing plans

Develop contingency plans

Produce event program

Pre-event (3 to 6 months out)

Seek event sponsors

Begin promotional campaign

Create internet presence

Arrange for security, parking, transportation, and vendors

Order supplies and equipment

Sell tickets and register participants

As the event approaches (1 to 3 months out)

Follow up with teams or participants

Confirm officials

Event week

Perform on-site checks

Install equipment and set up venue

Finalize event day timelines

Continue staff and volunteer training

Ramp up media activity

Schedule transportation for VIPs and guests

Event day

Perform equipment checks

Conduct pre-event briefings EVENT!

Postevent

Postevent review

Aftermarketing

Begin planning cycle for next event

Another tool that can help with operational planning is a Gantt chart, which will give you a visual of how tasks are scheduled over time. These charts specify start and end dates for each task, allowing organizers to see what tasks need to happen, how long each task will take, and who is working on each task. Figure 2.3 is an example of a basic Gantt chart covering sales, promotion, and operations functions.

Event Planning Blunders

Strong event planning is necessary to ensure your event is successful. Details that may seem small can cause big problems. Think about how these seemingly minor issues can derail your event. You've scheduled your championship game on a religious holiday, meaning you will be losing potential participants or spectators. Your big volleyball tournament is ready to begin, but no one brought the game balls. There is a misspelled word on the sign welcoming your attendees. The following is a list of common errors you should strive to avoid.

- *Lack of focus.* Not being specific about your purpose and mission leads to disorganization and waste. Everything you do should be directed toward achieving your mission.
- *Limited concept.* Trends in producing sporting events are constantly changing, as are customer expectations. Just because something has been done before does not mean it is necessarily going to work now. Event planners have to keep up with trends and identify how to make their events different from the competition.
- *Overlooked details.* Considering the number of things that have to happen to execute a successful event, it is easy to overlook details. Details such as the intricacies of the venue and complexities of contracts may seem small at first, but if not dealt with may create large problems as the event approaches.
- *Lack of depth.* The best way to ensure you are successful and to reduce the risk of things going wrong is to plan every element of the event. Merely hoping things work out is not a plan but an invitation for failure. Further, a lack of planning tends to create issues needing attention at the last minute, adding to unnecessary stress and expense.
- *Overlooked contingencies.* Things don't always go as planned. Don't be surprised if something takes longer than expected or does not turn out as you hoped. Good event planners plan for these occurrences so that they don't ruin their events.

Task	Group	5/7	5/14	5/21	5/28	6/4	6/11	6/18	6/25	7/2	7/9
Sponsorship sales	Sales										
Group sales	Sales										
Individual sales	Sales										
Create website	Promotion										
Ad campaign	Promotion										
Media blitz	Promotion										
Order equipment	Operations										
Event setup	Operations										
Staff training	Operations										
Event day	Operations										

Figure 2.3. Sample Gantt chart

Summary

Event planning can be a time-consuming and complex process involving numerous decisions. Event planning goes through multiple stages, involving many individuals. As such, leadership and decision-making are vital to success.

A project management approach can help with working through the planning process. This process starts with understanding and defining the event's purpose and stakeholders. An understanding of each stakeholder's interest in the event assists in decision-making. Many of these decisions will be driven by the purpose of the event, such as raising funds for a cause, promoting an image, driving tourism, promoting sponsors, or promoting sports.

A significant part of the planning process is the SWOT analysis. A frank assessment of an event's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats enables organizers to make informed decisions. The event's mission, goals, and objectives provide direction so that organizers can prepare strategies and plan logistics to meet the event's purpose efficiently. Once the major issues have been identified, logistical issues such as date, time, and place are determined, and operational timelines are developed to ensure everything that needs to be done is accomplished at the right time. Considering the number of things that could change or go wrong, contingency plans are developed to deal with deviations from the plan.

Learning Activities

Assume you have decided to stage a 5K mud run. Mud runs are races through trails, hills, and other assorted obstacles (especially mud). There is no standard course; each event host plans unique and creative obstacles to challenge competitors' stamina and mental discipline. Further, mud run organizers usually add ancillary events such as awards ceremonies and postevent parties to create an exciting event.