

Module 6

Venue Selection and Operations

Selecting the right venue and site for the event will involve achieving a balance between the aesthetic and operational needs of the event. Choosing an existing venue with adequate staging and facilities may simplify the organisation and logistics of the event. However, choosing an unusual venue and providing staging and facilities may be more costly and demanding but can contribute to the overall uniqueness, atmosphere and success of the event.

1 The basic steps in developing a site plan

- Deciding on the site requirements of the event
- Identifying possible sites or venues and comparing them with the event site requirements
- Selecting the site or venue that best matches the event requirements
- Obtaining or preparing a site plan to scale
- Deciding on placement of event activities and facilities
- Refining the site plan based upon the needs of event stakeholders
- Using the site plan as a key planning and communication tool.

Site selection for the purpose of an event can range from a small room in a borrowed or rented building, to an Outdoor Park, neighbourhood, sports complex, or as in the Olympics, an entire city. Most importantly, the location of the event should be readily accessible, easy to find, and located in a safe area.

The site must be capable of fulfilling the requirements of space, electricity, bathrooms and other amenities to handle the event, and be of a proper construction, meeting zoning regulations and offering a contract to provide a seamless event with the least amount of hassles. Selection of a site relates directly to the event function, and the degree of surety required for the event to proceed. Exposed sites, such as when events are held out-of-doors, may be subject to inclement weather,

which is capable of shutting down an event or greatly diminishing the number of guests who attend. A site venue with inadequate parking may deter guests from attending as will the selection of a site in a crime-riddled or dangerous area.

The perception of the site itself is also a key to a successful event. The site itself must lend its own sense of anticipation and excitement to the event. Modern structures with grand scaling, parking garages, rich interior details, and carefully designed floor plans are suited for events, making such venues perfect for providing a site to host a memorable occasion. Hotels are always a suitable option, filling the lodging needs of out-of-town travellers, offering ready provision of catered food and beverages, and large rooms for classes, banquets, or vendor displays. In addition, they are usually located along major routes, may provide shuttle services to airports and train terminals, and can greatly reduce event staffing costs.

2. Venue selection

A number of factors need to be taken into account in selecting the right venue:

- Contribution to the theme and atmosphere of the event
- Capacity availability on the required date(s), including set-up and rehearsals cost
- Reputation of the venue
- Staging facilities
- Power and water supply
- Catering arrangements
- Restrictions on use of the venue
- Toilets
- Waste management facilities
- Access to transport
- Parking
- Accessibility for disabled persons
- Accessibility for deliveries and emergency services
- Ease of set up
- Safety

- Other events at the venue at the same time
- Weather contingency
- Security

3. Types of Venues

3.1 Hotels

Hotels are a popular choice when it comes to event planning and the search for a perfect event location. An event venue providing accessibility to virtually every budget is the hotel. Hotels can easily be found on nearly every corner in larger cities and somewhere within or near other small towns. Hotels come in various shapes, sizes and number of stars awarded. Regardless of budget and taste there is a hotel to fit the bill. Up-scale, top-of-the-line, five-star hotels often feature on-site catering and meeting facilities ubiquitous with professionalism and formal elegance. Picturesque ballrooms and meeting rooms give guests the grandiose feeling leaving a good impression on the more affluent crowd. Mainstream hotels, perhaps with 3-4 stars, are none-the-less effective in achieving an overall ambience to event attendees. This calibre of hotels offers nearly the same facilities; however, on a much more affordable budget.

Hotels lend themselves quite nicely to corporate affairs for the business crowd. Such professional events well suited for the hotel venue include award dinners, promotions of products, launching of new lines, partnership appreciation, client appreciation, staff appreciation, lectures, seminars and many other endeavours. This venue speaks volumes to the business crowd with its accessibility to technology and vast array of amenities. Easy to find with parking on location, hotels provide a great venue for the professionals of the business world.

Amenities found within a hotel can make the affair flow smoothly with built-in necessities. Hotels feature staffs well prepared in handling business meetings and can be of assistance during any unforeseen issues should they arise. The facility is designed to meet the needs of all guests, including private events. Hotels are a familiar venue for good

reason. They have in-demand technology capabilities, adequate space and ease of location while promoting productivity with networking, fully functional computer labs.

3.2 Restaurants

Restaurants are the best choice as venue for some events. With a numerous selection and cuisine to choose from, restaurants often find themselves a well-matched venue for many elite, exclusive and intimate events.

Several restaurants feature meeting or gathering rooms for larger than usual party sizes. These rooms can be reserved in advance for planning the perfect event. Some restaurants even offer more than one room, allowing guests to be housed into separate dining quarters close by without trimming down the final number on the guest list.

Banquets honouring high achievement in business, social or personal life are quite common as restaurant events. Award dinners for employees show true appreciation in this casual or formal after-hours atmosphere. Restaurants are frequented by individuals due to their nature of routinely presenting a comfortable familiarity to even formal affairs. This familiarity often promotes friendliness and inviting climate allowing guests to look forward to attending such an event.

3.3 Conference Centres

Conference centres are the perfect event venue to organize huge and professional conferences and seminars. When planning an event to include a medium to large number of attendees, a conference centre provides a great choice. Events focusing on large groups and/or large groups that will break down into smaller units during the course of the programme will find comfort in the facilities offered by a conference centre.

With on-site accessibility to technology capability, a conference centre limits the amount of equipment necessary to transport by the event host. Some conference centres require an additional charge for the use

of their equipment, while the access to the capability is included in the base fee. Some upgraded features may include use of a wireless microphone or an outside line entirely available for credit card transactions- very important in events where products can be purchased on-site.

Conference centre facilities include various sized rooms with the option of renting one space or several spaces at a time. The rooms needed simply depend upon the number of expected guests or space needed for displays. With a variety of room options, there is the prospect of deeming one area for dining for maximum convenience of those in attendance.

For events lasting more than one day/night, a conference centre is a good choice due to its accessibility to hotels. Overnight accommodations are near or sometimes within a conference centre and generally offer a discount to attendees or a group rate when combined with admission to the event. Many conference centres are an extension of a hotel providing everything on a guests' list when travelling and enjoying an important occasion.

3.4 Outdoor

Outdoor event venues are important for both private and corporate events. When not even inclement weather can put a damper on event planning, the outdoor venue makes its voice heard. With a variety of options, choosing an outdoor venue has never been easier or more enjoyable.

Outdoor venues offer so many features unmatched in celebrating indoors. First, the sense of feeling carefree with room to spare is exquisite in comparison to jamming 200 people into a 100 person capacity room.

Many options are available for outdoor venues including zoos, botanical gardens, parks, conservatories, camps, retreats and lawns. The location can be as simple or as sophisticated as desired. When planning an outdoor event, it is vital to have a back-up plan, specifically a back-up

location in mind. Some outdoor venues include a shelter away from the elements should inclement weather strike. Another important item for consideration in outdoor event planning is the use of technology and any extra equipment. Check to see if the site provides it or accommodates it. In most cases, outdoor venues will increase the amount of equipment brought to the site by the host/hostess of the event.

3.5 Stadiums

Stadiums are perfect venues to host events with a huge number of participants. A unique and unmatched creative ingenious idea for a venue location is a stadium. With obvious parking and seating capacities nearly unmatched, stadiums are great venues for tremendous events. Corporate or company picnics are very popular events held at stadiums. Corporate picnics often find themselves perplexed with the venue dilemma of finding a large enough facility along with a great atmosphere that is somewhat more impressive than a simple day at the park. Conducting an important business transaction at a stadium may be an impressive way to mix business with pleasure in a higher scale version of the traditional golf outing.

3.6 Gardens

Gardens are event venues that are often used for private events, but these event locations are also perfect to host certain business events. A romantic event, family affair or corporate activity can easily be configured on the grounds of a garden. Gardens are wonderful, whimsical backdrops to many spectacular events on small or large scales.

Birthday parties, luncheons and reunions are other great events well suited for the garden venue. Sprawling many acres, some gardens offer multiple spaces to facilitate larger functions as well.

Within a city, it is sometimes reassuring to attend an event at a garden to remind oneself of life beyond the concrete jungle. Gardens take the cares of city life and momentarily set them aside to revisit the true beauty of this world.

4. Site-design considerations

4.1 Venue capacity/occupant capacity

The capacity of a venue is generally dependent upon the available space for people and the number of emergency exits. The latter is the subject of a calculation involving the appropriate evacuation rate, ie width of available exit space and appropriate evacuation route. Some of the site will be taken up by structures which will be unoccupied. The rest of the site will need to be considered in calculating occupant capacity even though a direct view of the entertainment may not be possible for all locations. If there are any areas where the audience does not have a reasonable view of the performance, this space should be deducted from the available area or a lesser density used in calculations. Areas which could afford partial or total cover to the audience in the event of inclement weather should be identified and the effects of audience migration to these areas considered.

In venues where seating is provided, the major part of the occupant capacity will be the lesser of the two figures determined by the number of seats and exit provision. However, in other cases a calculation based on the acceptable occupant density should be carried out. Generally, 0.5 m² of available floor space per person is used for outdoor music events.

Double-check the preliminary occupant capacity calculation and exit requirements once all initial infrastructure requirements and facilities are in place on the site design.

4.2 Exit requirements

The exit numbers for a venue depend directly on the occupant capacity and the appropriate evacuation time for the type of structure. Place exits around the perimeter and ensure that they are clearly visible, directly and indirectly by signage. Ensure they are free from obstruction on either side. The final exit terminus should be assessed and be as safe as possible, ie into open spaces, assembly areas, etc, rather than into a

main road or into traffic flows. It is therefore important to examine these areas when carrying out your overall event risk assessment.

Exit gates should operate efficiently and effectively. Where practicable provide separate exits for pedestrians, service and concession vehicles. Wheelchair access and exit will also need to be taken into consideration.

4.3 Venue access

Venue access is a function of the design and location of transport and parking facilities and the design of access roads. The layout of the access routes will obviously depend upon the location of facilities. Distribute routes around the site to minimise the load and ensure that the routes do not converge. The routes should be simple, easy to follow, direct and avoid cross flows.

4.4 Entrances

The entrances provide the means for supervising, marshalling and directing the audience to the event. At some venues they may be used as an exit, at others such as football stadia, they are separate. It may be necessary to provide separate entrances for performers, workers, guests, etc.

The design and location of entrances depends on the numbers of entrances required, where they are placed and the capacity to be handled at each entrance. There should be sufficient numbers of entrances to cope with the peak demand and achieve a smooth and orderly flow of people through them. The direction from which people are likely to come, the maximum number of people from each direction and the flow rate through the entrance are important issues which determine the number of entrances required.

4.5 Sight lines

It is important that the audience has a clear line of vision to the stage to avoid movement towards the centre. The widest possible sight lines help to reduce audience density in front of the stage and help to

minimise surging and the possibility of crushing injuries. The stage width, height and position of PA wings, etc, all affect sight lines. Design sight lines to create areas of clearer space on the immediate stage left and right. This allows movement and emergency access.

4.6 Video screens

For very large audiences the increased distances between the stage and the back of the viewing area results in poor visibility and reduced entertainment value. This can lead to crushing and overcrowding. Strategically placed video or projection screens can be very effective. Screens located at some distance from the stage encourage a proportion of the audience to use a less crowded part of the site. Screens near the stage can help to stop people pushing towards it. Screens may require substantial foundations and support so sufficient space should be allowed in any site design. Not all types of screen operate in daylight and if the intention is to use a screen in these conditions, make sure that an appropriate type is used.

4.7 Seating arrangements

Where there is a risk of over-excitement among audience members, consider holding an all-seated event as this may help to prevent crowd surges and crushing at the front of the stage area. If temporary seating is provided, seating will need to be adequately secured to avoid 'snaking'.

4.8 Slopes

Ensure that you have fully considered the effects of any slopes at your venue in your risk assessment. It may be necessary to consider providing exit steps or ramps with non-slip surfaces. The area in front of the stage should be as flat as possible to prevent tripping and crushing.

4.9 Observation points

At some outdoor music events, observation points may be considered necessary these should be strategically placed to maximise the 'view of

the audience. Establish safe entrances and exits to these observation points.

4.10 Production infrastructure and backstage requirements

The production infrastructure will depend on the type, size and duration of the event. Typically, production offices, refreshment facilities, accommodation (for workers and artists), dressing rooms, storage space, equipment, etc, needs to be accommodated, usually backstage. Carefully consider the number of units required, fire hazards, access routes and circulation space, generators, first-aid posts, ambulance, fire and police requirements. Try to keep performers' areas separate from production and working areas.

4.11 Fire and ambulance requirements

Fire and ambulance requirements such as parking areas, first-aid posts, rendezvous points, triage areas, etc, need to be carefully assessed and positioned in the appropriate places. Design the site so that they are readily accessible and can be easily identified. Fire appliances should be able to access all parts of the site and be able to get within 50 m of any structure. Establish emergency access routes which are kept clear at all times. Temporary track ways may be necessary for wet, difficult ground. Consider separate gated entrances and exits, of sufficient height and width, for fire and ambulance vehicles.



In an emergency, it is essential that all available exits are used. Clearly indicate all available exit routes so that members of the audience and workers are aware of all the routes to leave the venue in an emergency.

4.12 Noise considerations

The overall site design and layout should maximize the audience's enjoyment and protect the neighbours from noise nuisance. Consider the stage location and other sound sources, in relation to nearby noise-sensitive properties and the topography of the site. Use slopes and natural barriers to their maximum effect. It may well be advantageous to use a distributed sound system suspended from delay towers. Carefully consider the siting and construction of such towers to control sight lines, avoid crushing points and prevent unauthorised 'viewing' platforms. Perimeter fencing Whether or not a perimeter fence is required depends on the type and nature of the event. Fences may be necessary to prevent trespassers entering the site and for the safe management of the audience.

4.13 Front-of-stage barrier requirements and arrangements

A front-of-stage barrier may be required particularly if significant audience pressure is expected. The risk assessment for the event, relating to the evaluation of the performer and audience profile, together with the capacity, should assist in determining whether or not one is required and if so what type and design is required. For most large music events, some form of front-of-stage barrier will be necessary

4.14 Welfare facilities

The number and type of welfare and information facilities, sanitary accommodation, water supply, etc, will depend upon the type of event, but once numbers have been agreed these need to be considered in your venue or site design.

Distribute sanitary accommodation around the site in a manner which does not block sight lines and serves the greatest need, eg near bars and catering concessions. Ensure they are clearly visible and well signed and that queuing areas do not obstruct any gate, emergency route, etc. Water supply is normally situated next to sanitary

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accommodation. If tankers are used, consider the space requirement and ground drainage.

