

A SCHOOLHOUSE BREWING FIELD GUIDE

HOW TO NOT SCREW UP YOUR EVENT

Everything we learned running events at our place,
so you do not have to learn it the hard way at yours.

Reunions • Showers • Birthdays • Work Parties • Celebrations of Life

With eight fill-in worksheets in the back.



Schoolhouse Brewing • 840 Franklin Ct Suite 100, Marietta, GA • 770-361-5247

schoolhousebeer.com • Free to share. Steal from it.

1. YOU HAVE NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE

That is fine. Almost nobody has.

The person planning a reunion has planned exactly one reunion. The maid of honor got voluntold. The guy organizing the company party was handed it in a meeting he was late to. And the person planning a celebration of life has never planned anything in their life and is doing it while grieving.

Meanwhile the venue has done four hundred of these and knows precisely where you are about to get it wrong. Most people never think to ask.

This book tells you. The worksheets in the back are where you actually fill it in.

THE WHOLE THING IN ONE PARAGRAPH

Guests remember how it felt, not what you spent. Nobody has ever driven home saying the centerpieces were adequate. They remember whether they laughed, whether they talked to someone good, whether the host looked happy to see them, and whether there was enough to eat. Everything after this page serves that.

YOUR ACTUAL JOB IS REMOVING FRICTION

Friction is the line at the door. The dead air because nobody turned the music on. The forty-five minutes with no food while the bar is wide open. The seating chart that strands your aunt next to a stranger with nothing to say.

You are not trying to impress anyone. You are trying to make it easy for people to have a good time, then get out of the way.

THROW THEIR PARTY, NOT YOURS

This is where most events go sideways, and it is the easiest one to avoid. You are not the guest of honor. Ask the people who know them best what a good night looks like to them. Then plan that one, even if it is not the one you would want.

THREE NUMBERS RUN EVERYTHING

How many people. How much money. What date.

Lock those three before anyone says the word napkin. Every planner we know agrees on this, and every first-timer does it backwards, which is why there are so many beautiful centerpieces at half-empty parties.

→ [Worksheet 1: The Three Numbers. Page 25.](#)

2. REUNIONS

The hardest event in this book. Not because it is complicated, but because you have to locate two hundred adults who moved away and changed their last names, then talk them into giving up a Saturday to see people they have not thought about since 2006.

SURVEY FIRST, VENUE SECOND

Before you spend a dollar, find out who is actually coming and what they will pay. Send a short survey: are you interested, casual night out or sit-down dinner, and what would you spend on a ticket.

Plan for the people who answer, not the whole graduating class. Turnout runs anywhere from 20 to 40 percent, with about half bringing a guest.

THE CLASS STACK

Here is the move nobody makes and everybody should. Combine two or three graduating years into one night.

The math on a single class at year 20 is brutal. You need 120 people in a room and you are going to get 55. So stop trying to squeeze more out of one class and add another one.

Why it works:

- Classes a year apart already know each other. Siblings, teammates, people who dated, the same miserable chemistry teacher.
- Three committees instead of one. Three contact lists, three Facebook groups doing your recruiting for free.
- Break-even stops being a problem. Forty per class is 120 in the room.
- Cost per head drops for everyone, because one venue bill splits three ways.
- Nobody has to be the person who failed to fill the room.



One warning: a stacked reunion needs real capacity and a real check-in table. Do not cram three classes into the small room because it was cheaper. That is how you end up with a hundred people in a hallway.

→ [Worksheet 3: Reunion Committee and Class Stack Math. Page 27.](#)

BUILD A COMMITTEE AND ACTUALLY DELEGATE

One person can start a reunion. One person cannot run one. Recruit early and hand out real ownership: venue, budget, communications, program, decorations.

Then let go. The fastest way to kill volunteer energy is treating every idea that is not yours as wrong. You asked for help. Accept it.

THE BUDGET FORMULA

(Total expenses minus donations and sponsorships) divided by expected attendees equals ticket price.

That is it. Example: \$9,000 in costs, 120 paying guests, \$75 tickets.

Two habits keep you out of trouble. Hold back 10 to 15 percent as contingency, because gratuities, parking, and shipping the decorations will appear out of nowhere. And set your ticket cutoff before the venue final headcount deadline, or you will be paying for food nobody eats.

To stretch it: early-bird tiers with a \$20 gap, a raffle, and sponsorships from local businesses who want 150 adults seeing their logo. Sell through Eventbrite. Open a dedicated bank account with two signers, so nobody has to wonder.

FORMAT

Three to six hours, one evening, is standard. Three to four suits casual mingling. Five to six fits a structured dinner with speeches.

For a milestone year, consider a weekend: casual Friday plus the main Saturday. Attendees always say it went too fast, and two nights gives the out-of-towners their flight money worth.

Early summer through late fall is the popular window. Thanksgiving weekend works because everyone is already in town and already avoiding their relatives.

The trend is casual. Forced-formal banquets kill attendance, especially among the classmates who are quietly price-sensitive and will not tell you. A relaxed night with good drinks, good music, and room to talk beats a rubber chicken in a hotel ballroom every single time. This is why breweries have become a default reunion venue: the format already fits, the bar is built in, and drink tickets keep the price sane.

WHAT TO ASK ANY VENUE

Capacity for your headcount with room to actually move. Flow between check-in, food, and the program. Parking. AV for the slideshow, which matters more than you think. Setup and breakdown terms. Noise rules and cutoff time. Deposit and cancellation policy.

Get the fees in writing before you sign: service charges, security, overtime. "That is usually included" is not a contract.

THE DETAILS THAT CARRY THE NIGHT

Name tags with the senior yearbook photo and maiden names. This is the single most repeated tip in reunion planning and people still skip it. Nobody recognizes anybody and everyone is too polite to admit it.

The slideshow. Assign one person to own photo collection starting eight to twelve months out. It takes four times longer than anyone expects. Shared upload link, loop it during cocktail hour.

The memory table. Framed class photo, yearbooks, era props, headlines from your graduation year. A candle or memorial sign for classmates who have passed. Keep any in-memoriam moment short, dignified, and early in the night.

Music from your actual high school years. Ask for two or three song requests in the ticket survey. Keep it at background volume during arrivals so people can talk. Dancing comes later, after the bar has done its work. Book the DJ six months out.

Two or three activities, maximum. Yearbook photo matching, a prom-portrait photo booth, alumni superlatives, a where-are-they-now video. In a brewery, a flight tasting and a pinball tournament do the job by themselves.

TIMELINE

- 12 to 18 months out. Lock format and budget. Form the committee. Send the survey. Start venue research. If you are stacking classes, recruit the other committees now.
- 8 to 12 months. Book the venue. Save-the-dates out. Set ticket pricing. Start collecting photos.
- 6 months. Lock catering and menu. Book DJ and photographer. Formal invitations out.
- 3 months. Track RSVPs. Confirm food quantities and dietary needs. Reconfirm vendors.
- 1 month. Final headcount. Write the day-of timeline. Assign roles: check-in, vendor liaison, MC.
- Week of. Walk the venue. Pack supplies. Reconfirm every vendor by phone.

MISTAKES

Locking the format and price before surveying anyone. Setting your ticket cutoff after the venue headcount deadline. Skipping the contingency fund. Letting speeches eat the evening because nobody gave them a time limit. Skipping the walk-through the week before and discovering on Saturday that the screen does not face the room.

Running a reunion? Semi-private holds up to 50, the full taproom holds up to 250 with the patio. AV for the slideshow, pinball for the competitive ones, and drink packages that keep ticket prices human. Chapter 8 has the numbers.

3. SHOWERS

Baby and bridal run on the same rails. Small, short, daytime, and driven almost entirely by the guest list.

WHO HOSTS AND WHO PAYS

Tradition says someone other than the guest of honor hosts and pays, so it does not look like the family is passing a hat. The modern version is looser. Moms, sisters, mothers-in-law, and friends all host now and nobody blinks.

The one rule that survives: the guest of honor does not host a party where people bring her gifts.

If several people co-host, agree on the budget and the split before anyone spends a dime. Put it in the group chat in writing. And name one lead planner anyway, because everyone helps is how a date slips three times.

Budget reality: \$100 to \$500 at home, \$500 to \$2,500 and up at a venue. If guests are covering their own meal or entry, say so on the invitation. Nobody likes a surprise check.

→ [Worksheet 6: Shower Plan. Page 30.](#)

THE GUEST LIST

Bridal: everyone invited to the shower gets invited to the wedding. A shower invite implies a wedding invite. Compare notes with the bride, or with someone close to her if it is a surprise. Office showers are the one accepted exception.

Baby: build the list with the parents, starting from venue capacity and working backward. Do not invite the same people to two showers for the same baby unless you say clearly that no second gift is expected.



Co-ed showers are mainstream now. If the guys are genuinely coming, change everything. Skip the lingerie games. Trivia, cornhole, karaoke, a taco bar. The vibe moves from Sunday tea to Friday night, and a brewery afternoon is one of the standard formats for exactly that reason.

TIMING

Baby showers: 4 to 6 weeks before the due date, while the guest of honor can still comfortably sit in a chair. Go earlier for high-risk pregnancies or heavy travel. Sundays and weekend early afternoons. Midday beats evening for someone who is exhausted by 7 p.m. A meet-the-baby party after the birth is completely acceptable now and often easier.

Bridal showers: 2 weeks to 2 months out, most often 4 to 6 weeks.

Keep it to about three hours. A drop-in, open-house format removes all the guilt about arriving late or leaving early, which is a gift to everyone.

Invitations: 4 to 6 weeks out for baby, 3 to 4 for bridal. Registry goes on an enclosure card, not the invitation.

FOOD AND DRINK

Match the food to the clock. A midday shower means snacks, not a meal, but say that on the invite so nobody shows up starving and furious. Charcuterie, mini sandwiches, grazing boards, brunch bites, a bakery cake. Evening or co-ed goes heartier: tacos, BBQ, sliders, pizza.

The drink question matters because the guest of honor often is not drinking. The self-serve mimosa and mockmosa bar is the signature move: sparkling juice or NA sparkling wine, several juices, fresh fruit, herbs. Mock Moscow mules, NA sangria punch, cucumber-lime spritzes all work. Prep the fruit and juice ahead and add anything bubbly right before serving.

In a brewery the drink program becomes the entertainment: a tasting flight for the guests, a curated mocktail flight for the guest of honor. Two drink tickets per guest is the normal way to cap the bar tab at a casual co-ed shower.

GAMES PEOPLE DO NOT HATE

Two or three, optional, and never at the guest of honor expense. The ones that work:

- Advice and wishes station. Cards guests fill out for a keepsake box. Doubles as the guest book. Universally liked, zero cheese.
- Diaper raffle. Bring a pack, get a ticket. Parents stock up, guests feel clever.
- Gift bingo. Guests predict the gifts and play during the opening, which rescues the duller twenty minutes of any shower.
- The Price Is Right. Guess the retail price of baby items, closest without going over.
- Onesie decorating. Fabric markers, plain onesies. Keepsakes instead of landfill.
- Couple trivia. For bridal or co-ed. Who knows them best. One game is usually plenty.

If the guest of honor hates games, skip them entirely. Nobody in recorded history has complained about a shower with great food, good drinks, and no forced fun.

DECORATIONS WITHOUT THE SPIRAL

Close Pinterest. Three big balloons, flowers on the table, a paper garland. That is genuinely enough.

Pick a color palette early and carry it from invitations through favors, and it reads as intentional without costing anything. Let the venue do the heavy lifting on atmosphere. Favors people keep: mini succulents, seed packets, candles, good cookies.

MISTAKES

No single decision-maker. Vague money arrangements that get awkward later. Inviting someone to the shower who is not invited to the wedding. Running past three hours. Over-decorating while under-feeding. Running a ladies-only program for a co-ed guest list.

And no day-of plan. Assign a greeter, a games lead, and someone on food and drink refills. Keep an emergency kit behind the bar: tape, scissors, chargers, stain wipes.

Planning a shower? Outside food is welcome here, so the charcuterie spread or taco bar of your dreams is not a problem. Co-ed groups get trivia, pinball, and a real bar. Chapter 8.

4. BIRTHDAYS AND MILESTONES

NOBODY THROWS THEIR OWN 40TH

That is why so many of them do not happen. The person turning 40 feels weird about asking. So somebody else has to do it, and that somebody is you.

If it is a surprise, ask the people who know them best what their ideal night looks like, then build that one. Curate the guest list the same way. Twenty people who genuinely light them up will beat fifty obligatory invites every time. Bigger is almost never better.

DOUBLE UP

Two people hitting the same milestone in the same month, one party. Twice the guests, half the cost, and neither one has to feel self-indulgent about it. Works for 30s, 40s, 50s, retirements, and anyone who hates being the center of attention but would happily share the spotlight.

→ [Worksheet 7: Milestone Birthday. Page 31.](#)

FORMAT

Three hours is the sweet spot: arrivals and drinks, mingling and food, one centerpiece moment, wind-down. People arrive late and leave early, so the middle hour is the actual party.

Match the shape to the milestone. A 30th can be a loose cocktail party. A 40th suits a seated dinner with speeches and a slideshow. A 50th earns a longer night.

And rethink the default restaurant reservation. Restaurants are easy to book, but you are a guest in someone else's business. Their music, their room, their pressure to turn the table. A rented space often costs less than you would guess, especially on a weeknight, and the room becomes part of the night instead of a backdrop.



KILL THE AWKWARD FIRST HOUR

Every party starts stiff. Adults will not organize their own fun, so hand them one thing to do early.

A photo wall from every decade. A memory jar station. A photo booth with props. A phone set up to collect voice messages for the birthday person. One interactive thing ends the standing-around phase.

And have music playing when the first guest walks in, not twenty minutes later. One person owns the playlist. Not four.

ENTERTAINMENT ADULTS WILL ACTUALLY DO

Trivia about the birthday person, played in teams, is the most recommended adult party game there is. It is customizable, it includes everyone, and it keeps the night pointed at the honoree.

Karaoke. A murder mystery. Board game stations. Two truths and a lie for mixed groups who do not know each other. A decade or costume theme gives people a reason to dress up, which lifts the energy of the whole room before anyone has had a drink.

Personal touches that cost nearly nothing: a signature cocktail named after them, a photo display across the decades, short video toasts collected in advance from the friends who could not fly in and played mid-party. In a brewery, add a pinball tournament and a tap renamed in their honor. A restaurant cannot do that.

THE SURPRISE PARTY PLAYBOOK

Three parts: the invitations, the secret, and the diversion.

Invitations. Make SURPRISE unmissable. Digital, so nothing hangs on a fridge where the honoree does the dishes. Send about four weeks out. Give an explicit arrival time (be here by 6:45, she arrives at 7:00) and tell the known latecomers to come after the reveal. You know who they are.

The secret. Separate group chat without the honoree. Silence planning-app notifications when you are around them. No social posts, not even to close friends. One innocent comment ruins it.

The diversion. An accomplice takes them to a decoy activity that ends at the venue. Everyone in place 30 to 45 minutes early, with cars parked out of sight. A full parking lot is the number one giveaway.

The venue. Pick somewhere they already go, so the trip raises no eyebrows. Visit ahead and map the entrance and the sightlines. Have a stall plan, because they may guess, arrive early, or try to cancel. Even a half-spoiled surprise lands if the entrance moment is good.

MISTAKES

Disappearing into the kitchen instead of working the room. No food out when guests arrive. No music plan. Forgetting dietary restrictions you could have asked about on the invite. Cleaning up while the party is still going, which is the universal signal for please leave.

And for surprises: guests walking in during the reveal because nobody enforced the arrival time.

Milestone coming? Semi-private for up to 50, drink packages from \$15 a head, outside food welcome, and we will rename a tap for the birthday person. Chapter 8.

5. CORPORATE EVENTS AND HOLIDAY PARTIES

The easiest events to book and the easiest to make miserable. The budget is someone else, the date is dictated by a calendar, and a third of the room does not want to be there.

NAME THE GOAL IN ONE SENTENCE

Celebrate a record year. Thank the clients who got us here. Get the team in one room for once.

Write it down early, because it decides everything after it: venue, format, budget, guest list. Tell the planning group and tell the attendees, so the whole thing hangs together instead of being a room with a bar in it.

→ [Worksheet 5: Corporate Party. Page 29.](#)

BUDGET LIKE IT IS AN INVESTMENT

Set the budget before you pick anything. For client events, track the return. One company ran a private concert for about a thousand clients and prospects and reported fifteen dollars of new business for every dollar spent, with clients still talking about it months later.

You do not need a concert. You need an event with a point.

Holiday budgets are tightening everywhere, which means the money has to leave something behind. Food, beverage, and production are your biggest lines. Get those on paper before you commit to a room.

GET OUT OF THE OFFICE

An office party feels like overtime with cake. A bar, restaurant, or taproom feels like a party.



Pick somewhere central and easy to reach. December is the most competitive booking window of the year, so start hunting before September. Thursday and Friday in peak weeks go first. A January new-year party, after everyone has survived year-end, is badly underrated and costs a fraction.

Before signing: deposit and payment schedule, cancellation and rescheduling terms, event hours plus setup and cleanup, AV, parking, weather plan. Visit in person, ideally at the same time of day as your event.

THE ALCOHOL PLAN. READ THIS PART TWICE.

This is where work parties get expensive in ways nobody budgeted for. The advice that holds up:

- Skip the open bar. Two drink tickets per person. This is the single most recommended move in the entire category.
- Beer and wine. Avoid liquor and anything fruity that goes down like juice.
- Professional bartenders, trained not to overserve. It also spreads the liability off you.
- Last call at least an hour before the end. Cut the bar during dessert.
- Feed people properly so the bar is not the only activity.
- Real non-alcoholic options, treated with the same care as the beer. Free for designated drivers.
- Plan the rides. Rideshare codes or taxi vouchers, decided in advance, not at 9 p.m. in the parking lot.
- Invite plus-ones and families. It is more inclusive and it self-regulates. People behave better with their spouse in the room.
- Say in writing that conduct policies apply, and that attendance is optional. Say both plainly.

A brewery checks most of these by default: beer and wine only, professional bartenders, food alongside drinks, a defined end time, and enough to do that drinking is not the activity.

ENTERTAINMENT THAT IS NOT CRINGE

What employees actually want: good food, good drinks, light entertainment, and no forced participation. In our experience, the work parties people actually enjoy are the ones with room to talk and nothing anyone is forced to join.

If you want structure, keep it optional. Trivia, photo booth, minute-to-win-it, a gingerbread build-off, an arcade tournament. The thing people still mention in January is almost never the food. It is the thing they did together.

For actual team building: the resentment almost never comes from the activity. It comes from mandatory attendance outside work hours. Make it genuinely optional, hold it during work hours when you can, and skip anything involving forced vulnerability or performing in front of colleagues.

THE CO-BUYOUT

Two small companies, 40 people each, splitting one venue buyout. Each side gets a room neither could justify alone, and they meet a business down the street. Costs nothing and makes both offices look generous.

LOGISTICS

Small planning team, one project leader. Decide whether attending staff are guests or hosts, and put it in writing so nobody ends up working their own party. Save-the-date at least a month out so people can arrange childcare. Chase RSVPs two to three weeks out through an online system so the venue gets a real number a week before.

MISTAKES

Making it mandatory, or implying that skipping it will be noticed. Serving alcohol with no plan. Booking late and losing December. An understaffed check-in with a line out the door. No ride plan.

Under-investing in food and music. One company ran a party where the boss grilled burgers while a phone played Spotify, and twelve of fifty people showed up.

And cramming work into the party. Award presentations turn a celebration into a meeting with worse chairs. Keep it social.

Planning the company party? Drink packages map cleanly onto drink tickets, the pinball arcade runs a tournament by itself, and a tap renamed for the company is a nice touch at a client event. Chapter 8.

6. WAKES AND CELEBRATIONS OF LIFE

This chapter is written differently from the others, on purpose.

The goal here is not a great party. The goal is a fitting goodbye where the family does not have to think about logistics for a single minute. Everything below serves that.

WHAT YOU ARE HOSTING

A traditional wake or funeral reception is the social side of mourning. People gather, eat, talk, and hold the family up.

A celebration of life is deliberately forward-looking, focused on stories and on who the person was. It can stand alone with no fixed template.

Both do the same emotional work: commemorate the person, let friends say something, and carry the family through an afternoon. Done well, people leave feeling the send-off fit.

→ **Worksheet 4: Celebration of Life. Page 28.**

TIMING

Most funeral receptions happen right after the service, but they do not have to. Later the same day, or days later, is entirely acceptable, and travel time for out-of-town family often decides it.

Celebrations of life are frequently held weeks or months afterward. On the person birthday, on a meaningful anniversary, or simply when the family can travel. Some families hold a private burial first and plan the larger gathering later, which gives them room to breathe before planning anything.



There is no required timeline. If the gathering is delayed, say so in the obituary and give people a way to get the details later.

CHOOSING THE PLACE

The best location reflects something about who the person was. A favorite restaurant, a park, a backyard, the funeral home, a taproom they went to every Friday. The setting does not need to be convenient. It should be them.

Funeral directors themselves name breweries and wineries as good options: gather where they liked to raise a glass.

Check the room own atmosphere first, so you are not fighting it with decorations. Then date flexibility, capacity, parking, and whether an older relative can actually get through the door. If the memorial and the reception happen in one place, nobody has to move between them, and a flexible room with AV can shift from quiet remembrance to a shared meal where laughter comes back.

FOOD AND DRINK

Food at a memorial is nourishment and community at the same time. It gives people a reason to stand near each other and talk.

Simple is gracious. Match the spread to the hour: pastries and coffee mid-morning, sandwich platters and salads at lunch, finger sandwiches and cheese boards in the afternoon, a fuller buffet in the evening.

Finger foods, platters, and casseroles are the easiest formats. Minimal last-minute work, and they hold while guests arrive and leave at different times. Label dishes for dietary restrictions.

One of the most meaningful things you can do is serve their food. A family recipe of theirs. Their favorite restaurant spread. Their specific brand of coffee.

On alcohol: the decision belongs to the family and the venue. Beer or wine as a nod to what they liked is common. Others keep it alcohol-free out of respect. Both are right.

Nobody expects a free bar at a funeral reception, and guests buying their own drinks is completely normal and expected. Saying that plainly takes real pressure off the family budget. A drink named in their honor, cocktail or mocktail, is a small thing people remember.

THE PROGRAM

Keep it simple and leave room for stories to find their way out. The most memorable celebrations are under-programmed on purpose. A structure that works:

- Welcome and opening remarks, five minutes. Thank everyone for coming and say what will happen, so nobody is anxious about it.
- A short reading, prayer, or story from someone close.
- Meal and conversation, thirty to forty-five minutes. Open with a moment of silence or gratitude.
- Memory sharing, twenty to thirty minutes.
- Slideshow or tribute video, about ten minutes.
- Everything after that is food, drinks, and people talking. That is the real event.

The memory table. Photos across every stage of life, personal things such as their books, their tools, their hobby gear, written memories from guests, flowers or a candle. Invite guests to bring their own photos. A memory jar, with slips read aloud or kept for the family, gives quiet people a way to take part without a microphone.

Storytelling. Ask a few specific people in advance to prepare something, then open the floor. Give them guidance on tone and length beforehand. Lined cards and pencils on the tables let everyone else write something for a basket the family keeps.

Music. Play music that sounds like the person, not generic memorial music. Their songs, their genres, running through the whole gathering. Live musicians are the upgrade if the budget allows.

TAKING CARE OF THE FAMILY

The host handles everything so the family handles nothing. Ordering food, booking the venue, building the tribute video, setup, cleanup. Nobody should be clearing tables after saying goodbye to someone they love.

Practical details that matter: tissues and water everywhere, a quiet corner where someone overwhelmed can step away, one person assigned to any livestream tech, and the family never pulled into behind-the-scenes decisions.

If someone offers to help, do not turn them down. Give them a job.

For children: let them take part as much or as little as they want, and never push. Explain what will happen step by step. Give them a role if they want one, like choosing a photo for the display or handing out programs. Assign one caring adult to stay with them who can leave the room when they need to.

COSTS

The immediate family or the estate typically covers reception costs. A gathering at home can cost very little. A rented venue with catering typically runs several hundred to a few thousand dollars.

Set a budget first and hold to it. Grief makes overspending easy, and no amount of money makes the day easier.

MISTAKES

Over-programming, so the stories never get room. Making it about the host instead of the person. Feeling obligated to make it elaborate or expensive. Turning down help that was sincerely offered. Ignoring the family stated wishes about dress, flowers, or donations. And no quiet space for anyone who needs a minute.

A warm room, their favorite beer on tap, a slideshow on the big screen, and stories told over comfort food. That is a celebration of life done right, and it is what a taproom is built for. We will walk you through it ourselves if that is easier.

7. THE UNIVERSAL PLAYBOOK

Everything in chapters 2 through 6 runs on the same machinery. A timeline, a budget, drink math, food math, and a day-of plan. Get these right and the event type barely matters.

THE TIMELINE

Use 8 weeks for a normal party, 3 to 6 months for anything big.

8 weeks out. Define the goal in one sentence. Set the date and check holidays, big local events, and your VIP calendars. Draft the guest list. Set the budget. Book the venue. Figure out which vendors you need.

6 weeks. Finalize the guest list. Send invitations and give people 3 to 4 weeks to respond. Book vendors, everything in writing. Plan the menu. Order anything custom.

4 weeks. Book rentals: tables, chairs, linens, AV. Plan entertainment. Order decorations.

2 to 3 weeks. Chase RSVPs personally. Call or text the non-responders, because a form reminder is easy to ignore and a text is not. Finalize headcount for catering. Write the day-of timeline and the playlist.

1 to 2 weeks. Confirm every vendor by phone. Assign setup and breakdown. Write any speeches. Build one contact list with every vendor number on it. Send a reminder to attendees.

Day before. Buy perishables. Prep make-ahead food. Charge everything. Confirm delivery times. Check the weather, and if any of this is outdoors, have a real plan B instead of a hope.

Day of. Arrive at least an hour early. Set up, test the AV, walk the room like a guest. Meet the vendors. Then host.

After. Thank-yous within a week. Settle bills. Write down what worked, because next year you will not remember.

THE BUDGET

Venue plus food plus drinks is roughly half of any event budget. Protect that half. Everything else is trim. A common private-party split: venue 20 to 30 percent, food and drinks 30 to 40 percent, decorations 10 to 20 percent, entertainment 10 to 20 percent, favors 5 to 10 percent.

Hold back 10 to 15 percent as contingency. Surprise costs are not a risk, they are a certainty.

Ask about hidden fees up front and get the breakdown in writing: delivery, setup, breakdown, overtime, taxes, service charges (often 18 to 25 percent), vendor travel, corkage, cake-cutting, security, insurance, cleaning, parking, AV. Treat "usually included" as extra until it is on paper.

Rough anchors: venue rental \$500 to \$5,000. Catering \$15 to \$100 a head depending on service style. DJ or band \$500 to \$2,500.

The classic mistake is spending 80 percent on venue and catering and treating the actual experience as an afterthought.

DRINK MATH

The rule: two drinks per guest in the first hour, then one per hour after.

You will see one-per-guest-per-hour quoted everywhere. It is the same number averaged flat, and it undercounts the first hour, which is when the bar gets slammed. Use the two-then-one version.

For 100 guests over 4 hours: 200 in hour one, 100 an hour after, so 500 drinks. Add 10 to 25 percent on top, because running dry at 9 p.m. is the one failure nobody forgives.

About 20 percent of any adult crowd is not drinking alcohol. They still need something good, and hiding the NA options behind the bar makes them feel like an afterthought.

Splits. Full bar runs roughly 30 percent spirits, 25 percent beer, 45 percent wine. Beer and wine only: about 25 percent beer, 75 percent wine. In a brewery this flips hard toward beer, which simplifies your life considerably.

Servings per container. A 12 oz beer is one drink, 24 per case. A 750 ml wine bottle pours 5 to 6 glasses. A 750 ml spirits bottle gives 16 to 17. A champagne bottle fills 6 flutes for a toast.

Everything else. Non-alcoholic: about one 8 oz serving per person, more with kids. Water: roughly a liter per person over 3 to 4 hours. Ice: 1 to 1.5 pounds per guest, double outdoors in summer. Cups: 3 per guest, because people lose them.

At a venue with drink packages, none of this is your problem. That is the entire point of a package.

→ [Worksheet 2: Bar Plan. Page 26.](#)

FOOD MATH

- Appetizers-only evening: 10 to 15 pieces per person.
- Pre-dinner apps: 3 to 5 pieces, keep them light.
- Hearty cocktail reception: 8 to 12 pieces per person.
- Dinner protein: 6 to 8 oz per person. Lunch protein: 4 to 6 oz.
- Buffet: about a pound of total food per person, 1.5 servings per guest.
- Dessert: 1 to 3 servings per person. Half trays serve 8 to 10, full trays 15 to 20.

Dietary restrictions go on the RSVP, not in a group text three days before. People answer a form honestly and a group text not at all. Even with no data, make 10 to 15 percent of your options vegetarian and label everything on the buffet. Ask the guest of honor privately about anything they avoid.

Add a 10 to 15 percent food buffer over headcount when the RSVPs are soft.

RSVP MATH

- Local event: 75 to 85 percent of invitees attend.
- Casual party: closer to 60 percent.
- Out-of-town guests: about 55 percent.

Rule of thumb: invite 10 to 20 percent more people than your target headcount.

Set the RSVP deadline two weeks out. Follow up with non-responders personally a week before. Send a final reminder to confirmed guests the week of. Expect some no-shows regardless, and expect more of them at bigger events.

One more thing: charging even a small ticket price cuts no-shows sharply. Free events are the ones with empty chairs.

VENDORS

Everything in writing at booking. Ask every vendor the same four questions: are you available on my date, what is included and what is extra, how many events do you take per weekend, and what is your backup plan if you cannot make it.

No backup plan is a red flag. Walk.

Get each vendor load-in, setup, and load-out timeline and cross-check it against the venue access window. A florist who needs three hours against a two-hour window is a classic collision that nobody notices until the morning of.

Reconfirm by phone one to two weeks out, then confirm delivery times again two or three days before.

THE ROOM

Take the venue advertised standing capacity and subtract 15 percent for buffet style, 20 percent for a plated dinner with a dance floor. That is your honest comfortable number.

Every add-on subtracts space: photo booth, bar station, gift table, lounge furniture. Keep a clear 5 to 6 foot path from the entry to check-in and the bar. Keep catering away from the door.

Test the AV before anyone arrives. Slideshow on the screen, mic on, playlist playing.

DAY-OF SURVIVAL

Arrive an hour early. Walk the room as a guest. Test everything. Confirm the dietary dishes are labeled.

Keep a printed run of show and the vendor contact list on you. Appoint a timekeeper who is not you, because your job today is human, not technical. Greet people. Introduce strangers to each other. Keep the energy moving.

Eat something yourself, early. You will forget otherwise. Bring a fix-it kit: tape, scissors, markers, chargers, stain remover, pain reliever, band-aids, extension cord.

And have a clear ending. An event that fizzles out feels worse than one that ends on time.

→ **Worksheet 8: Run of Show and Pre-Flight Check. Page 32.**

THE UNIVERSAL MISTAKES

No clear goal. Starting too late, when venues and caterers book months ahead. Choosing the venue before defining the event. All sitting and no doing, which is the single best predictor of a forgettable night. No weather backup in writing. Tech as an afterthought. No contingency budget. An agenda stuffed with speeches.

Forgetting basic guest comfort: seating, temperature, parking, restrooms.

And treating the event as the finish line. No thank-yous, no bills reconciled, no notes for next time.

Every line of math above is something you do not have to think about when the bar, the room, and the cleanup come with the booking. Chapter 8.

8. WHY A BREWERY

You have probably noticed a pattern by now. Almost every chapter points at the same short list: a relaxed room, a real bar with professional bartenders, food you do not have to cook, something to do, and AV for the slideshow.

That is a taproom.

We would say that anyway, since this is our book. So judge it against the list, not against us. People want room to talk, not a ballroom.

Here is what hosting at Schoolhouse actually looks like.

THE SPACES

Semi-private. Our production area, set up for your event, up to 50 guests. The taproom stays open around you, so your group gets its own area with the brewery running in the background. Three hours, starting at \$400. Extra time \$75 an hour. A \$100 deposit holds the date.

Whole facility buyout. The entire place, closed to the public. Up to 250 guests, 200 inside and the rest on the patio. Three hours, starting at \$3,000. A \$1,000 deposit holds the date.

There is also a dog-friendly patio and a beer garden with firepits.

DRINKS, HANDLED

You do not do the drink math. Pick a package and the bar handles it: 2 drinks at \$15 a guest, 3 drinks at \$22 a guest, or open bar at \$27 a guest with wristbands included.

Packages bill on 75 percent of your expected guest count, so give us an honest number. Guessing high is a donation.



Each drink covers a full or half pour of beer, a glass of wine, a cider or seltzer, or a soft drink. Beyond beer we pour house red and white, homemade sangria, margaritas, fresh cider, hard lemonade, and a rotating hard seltzer.

Professional bartenders. A 20 percent gratuity applies to the rental and the drink package, and 6 percent sales tax applies to packages. Twenty-one and up to drink, and no outside beverages of any kind.

FOOD, YOUR WAY

We do not have a kitchen, which turns out to be a feature. Bring your own food. Order delivery. Book one of the food trucks that park outside. Bring in any licensed and insured caterer you want.

No exclusive caterer. No catering fee. Nobody telling you the chicken has to come from their list.

THE EXTRAS

Full AV with multiple displays. Slideshows, tribute videos, your playlist, the game on the big screen. This is the number one thing reunion and memorial planners ask about, and it is already here.

Pinball. The Teacher Lounge Arcade has 21 machines, available as an add-on in blocks of games. Tournaments run themselves.

A renamed tap. We will rename one of our taps in your honor for the night. Birthday, company party, celebration of life. It is the kind of thing people photograph.

Decor. Signs, balloons, your own touches, all fine during your event time. Two rules: no glitter or confetti, and everything comes down when you do.

THE FINE PRINT, PLAINLY

Kids welcome with supervision. Dogs welcome, leashed, on the patio. Free on-site parking.

You can book as little as a week out if the space is open, though weekends and full buyouts go earlier than that.

Rescheduling is free if the new date is available and you tell us before the original date. The deposit carries over. Cancel and the deposit is forfeited.

Cleanup: bag your trash and we take it from there. You show up, celebrate, and leave. Someone else mops.

THE MATH, HONESTLY

A 40-person birthday in the semi-private space on a Friday: \$400 for the room, 3-drink packages on 30 guests (75 percent of 40) at \$22 is \$660, plus 6 percent sales tax on the drinks and 20 percent gratuity on the whole thing. Room and bar comes to \$1,311.60.

Food is on top. Figure \$15 to \$20 a head from your favorite taco place, so \$600 to \$800. Pinball is a paid add-on at \$100 per 100 games. All in, about \$2,010 to \$2,210 for 40 people. Roughly \$50 to \$55 a head.

Go price that at a hotel and come back.

9. BOOK YOUR DATE

Tell us what you are planning and we will tell you honestly whether we are the right room for it. Sometimes we are not, and we will say so.

SCHOOLHOUSE BREWING

840 Franklin Ct Suite 100, Marietta, GA 30067

770-361-5247 · tmonti@schoolhousebeer.com · schoolhousebeer.com

Current hours and availability are on the site.

Thanks for reading. Now go throw the party.

APPENDIX A: THE WORKSHEETS

Print the pages you need. Fill them in by hand. Bring them to the venue.

Every worksheet stands on its own, so you never have to print the whole book.

WHICH ONE YOU NEED

Worksheet 1. The Three Numbers Page 25

Worksheet 2. Bar Plan Page 26

Worksheet 3. Reunion Committee and Class Stack Math Page 27

Worksheet 4. Celebration of Life Page 28

Worksheet 5. Corporate Party Page 29

Worksheet 6. Shower Plan Page 30

Worksheet 7. Milestone Birthday Page 31

Worksheet 8. Run of Show and Pre-Flight Check Page 32

Start with Worksheet 1 whatever you are planning. The other seven assume those three numbers are already locked.

WORKSHEET 1

THE THREE NUMBERS

Lock these three before you argue about napkins. Chapter 1.

WHAT KIND OF EVENT

TARGET DATE

BACKUP DATE

PEOPLE ON THE INVITE LIST

HEADCOUNT YOU ARE PLANNING FOR

TOTAL BUDGET

WHO IS ACTUALLY IN CHARGE, AND WHO IS ONLY SAYING THEY WILL HELP

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE? ONE SENTENCE. BE SPECIFIC.

WORKSHEET 2

BAR PLAN

Two drinks per guest in hour one, then one per hour. Chapter 7.

GUESTS

HOURS

DRINKS NEEDED (GUESTS X 0.8 X (1 + HOURS))

PACKAGE, OPEN BAR, OR CASH BAR

HARD CAP ON BAR SPEND

NON-ALCOHOLIC OPTIONS CONFIRMED WITH THE VENUE

WHO CUTS PEOPLE OFF, AND WHO IS DRIVING THEM HOME

WORKSHEET 3

REUNION COMMITTEE AND CLASS STACK MATH

Price it to survive low turnout. Chapter 2.

CLASS YEAR(S). STACKING? LIST THEM ALL.

MONTHS UNTIL THE DATE

ALUMNI OFFICE CONTACT

NAMES ON THE MASTER LIST

TOTAL FIXED COSTS

PER-GUEST COST

TICKET PRICE

BREAK-EVEN TICKETS (FIXED COSTS DIVIDED BY TICKET MINUS PER-GUEST)

WHO OWNS WHAT: FINDING PEOPLE, MONEY, VENUE, NIGHT-OF

WORKSHEET 4

CELEBRATION OF LIFE

The family handles nothing. Chapter 6.

DATE

EXPECTED GUESTS

WHO GREETES GUESTS SO THE FAMILY DOES NOT HAVE TO

WHO HOSTS AND WHO SPEAKS, AND HOW LONG EACH

MUSIC: THE TWO OR THREE THAT MATTER

MEMORY TABLE: WHAT GOES ON IT, WHO BRINGS IT

WORKSHEET 5

CORPORATE PARTY

Food before the bar. Rides decided in advance. Chapter 5.

HEADCOUNT

BUDGET PER PERSON

START TIME

HARD END TIME

LAST CALL TIME

RIDE POLICY

THE ACTIVITY. NOT "MINGLING."

FOOD PLAN AND WHAT TIME IT HITS THE TABLE

WORKSHEET 6

SHOWER PLAN

Three hours, daytime, and feed them. Chapter 3.

GUEST OF HONOR

DATE

GUEST COUNT

BUDGET

CO-ED OR NOT

CO-HOSTS AND WHO PAYS WHAT. WRITE IT DOWN.

RUN OF SHOW, START TO FINISH

WORKSHEET 7

MILESTONE BIRTHDAY

Throw their party, not yours. Chapter 4.

WHO, AND WHAT MILESTONE

GUESTS

DATE

WHO OWNS THE PLAYLIST

THE ONE MOMENT

IF IT IS A SURPRISE: WHO GETS THEM THERE, WHEN, AND THE COVER STORY

WORKSHEET 8

RUN OF SHOW AND PRE-FLIGHT CHECK

The single most useful page in this book. Chapter 7.

WRITE THE NIGHT, TIME BY TIME

BEFORE YOU GO

- ☐ All-in price confirmed in writing, including tax, gratuity and fees
- ☐ Final headcount deadline written on the calendar
- ☐ Run of show sent to the venue
- ☐ Someone assigned to greet at the door
- ☐ Food timing confirmed relative to the bar
- ☐ Rides and last-call policy decided
- ☐ Weather backup, if anything is outdoors
- ☐ Someone other than you knows the whole plan