

How to Plan a Successful Prom or Homecoming

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The biggest social event of most teens' high school careers is the Prom. Indeed, the Prom has become so important over the years that it has become a mini-industry of its own. With almost \$1.8 billion spent on prom-related purchases and regular reporting on the industry from Wall Street analysts, the Prom is indeed the paramount high school social event.

With respect to planning, a typical Prom breaks down into the following areas that require attention.

Venue

The venue is by far the first thing you want to take care of. All other things flow from the choice of venue. You cannot set the date, hire entertainment, hire security, or plan a budget until your venue is set.

A good rule of thumb is to start looking at your possible venue choices as early as possible, and no later than at the end of September before your spring Prom. Early planners will usually get the dates they want, while Prom committees that start the planning process later in the year usually have to juggle their schedule to accommodate the venue they want or stick to their date choice and settle for a venue of lesser caliber. Looking at venues even a year ahead of time is not inappropriate, especially in areas where there is competition for the best sites.

Décor

The décor choices you make have only one major limiting factor: finances. If your budget allows you to create a virtual movie studio, then by all means go for it. If your budget is more limited, then you must figure out what part of your budget you can spend on decorations and make sure you do not exceed this amount.

Food

Food is usually tied to the venue, in that almost all hotels and banquet halls have either an in-house catering department or a preferred list of caterers. As with décor, your limitations are primarily financial, with special consideration being given to nutritional concerns. Use your free school resources—your school district will usually have someone on staff who is knowledgeable about dietary issues and can advise you on subjects such as vegetarian meals or special dietary restrictions that some students may have.

Your main decision about food will be whether to have a sit-down dinner, a buffet-style dinner, or just serve appetizers and desserts. Local custom usually dictates your choice in this area. In areas where most people favor restaurant dining before the Prom, it doesn't make sense to spend the money to serve dinner.

Entertainment – Very Important!

The subject of entertainment is greatly misunderstood when it comes to budgetary planning. The mistake some groups make is to blow their budget on the venue, décor, and food, and not have enough left for quality entertainment. This is the biggest mistake that a Prom committee can make, as the choice of entertainment will determine the quality of the evening.

If your DJ is great, people will say they had a great time. If the entertainment is bad, your teens will remember the event as a dud. I've seen plenty of Proms where the food was not up to scratch but the attendees still considered it a success because of the quality of the entertainment. I've never seen an event with good food and bad entertainment that was considered a great time. Clearly, the entertainment choice is your most important choice, with the venue close behind.

After-Prom

In the last two decades, schools have begun to run after-Prom parties, where all Prom-goers are locked into the school building or other community building for the evening to enjoy a variety of activities such as dancing, casino-type games, movie rooms, fortune tellers, caricature artists, breakfast, and raffle-type events. (At the 2004 After-Prom at Kennett (PA) HS, they even raffled off a brand new car!)

Indeed, in schools that sponsor such events, they have almost eliminated Prom night drinking fatalities. I'll save the major discussion about these events for the May article on overnight lock-ins, but just remember that almost as much planning goes into this event as the Prom itself.

Security

Some sort of a security team is always a good idea at your Prom. My best recommendation is for your group to hire off-duty police officers and have them show up in uniform. A good show of force will eliminate a lot of the problems before they even start, and for those problems that still occur, the officers are there to solve them.

Finances

The major overriding concern of every planning decision you make will be whether you can afford to do it. After fundraising efforts by your class, the major source of revenue for Prom expenses is your ticket sales. When making decisions about cost, you need to

decide whether or not the incremental increase in the price of the ticket is worth the expense.

For example, let's say you have 500 people coming to your Prom. You have a choice of an okay DJ company for \$750 for the night or an amazing DJ company for \$1,500. Your incremental ticket price for the okay company is $\$750/500 = \1.50 per ticket, and for the amazing DJ company it would be $\$1,500/500 = \3.00 per ticket. Base your decision on whether the increase from one cost per ticket to the next is the best decision for your group.