



## Event Planning Guide for Student Leaders

Examples of events include but are not limited to:

*Interfaith events*  
*Panel discussions*  
*Debates*

*Hosting a Speaker*  
*Volunteer Projects*  
*Community Outreach (tabling)*

*Fundraisers*  
*Conferences*

This planning guide describes the process of planning an event. There are a range of different events that you should consider for your campus, from awareness raising events, to service projects. If you have questions about how this planning guide relates to different types of events please reach out to your campus organizer at [organizers@secularstudents.org](mailto:organizers@secularstudents.org).

### THE FIVE STAGES OF EVENT PLANNING



The event planning process has five (5) key stages and takes several weeks, so be sure to start earlier than you think you'll need to.

#### STAGE 1: SET GOALS (2-4 MONTHS IN ADVANCE)

Use this checklist to help you with setting reasonable goals for your event. Think about types of events related to C.A.S.E: Community, Advocacy, Service, and Education.

- What is the purpose of your event?
- What impact will your event have?
- What do you want to get out of your event?
- What does success look like to you?
- What is your expected event attendance?

Response/Notes

## STAGE 2: PLANNING AND FUNDING YOUR EVENT (1-3 MONTHS IN ADVANCE)

- ❑ **CHOOSE YOUR TEAM:** Ideally, you'll have more than one person helping you complete this guide. Delegate and divide responsibilities along with setting deadlines for each task.
- ❑ **NEED A SPEAKER FOR YOUR EVENT?** *(If not applicable, move to "Reach out to Campus Organizer")* Before you select a speaker, you need to know what your event is about. Think about the theme, the goals you want to achieve, and the perspectives you would like to have represented. Poll your members, list all suggestions, discuss, and make your choice.
- ❑ **FIND A SPEAKER.** Now find a speaker who can help you achieve your goals. The [SSA Speakers Bureau](#) is organized by broad topics but each speaker has more specific topics they speak about, which can be found in their biography. If you're asking a speaker to debate someone, first make sure that's something they do and be prepared to explain to them what topic you'd like them to debate on. Ask your campus organizer which speakers require fees (honorariums) and which ones are completely free.
- ❑ **REACH OUT TO YOUR CAMPUS ORGANIZER:** The campus organizing team can walk you through this guide, help you plan it, and offer tips related to marketing and event planning.
- ❑ **CHOOSE A DATE:** Find 2-3 dates that you'd like to have the speaker come. You're goal is to pack the room! So find out which day would get the highest amount of traffic. Will a weekday or weekend work better? Is it better to host in the morning, afternoon, and night etc. Are there any on campuses that would affect your events attendance.
- ❑ **REQUEST A VENUE SPACE:** Pick a space that accommodates less people than you expect, a full venue is always better than an empty one. The only exception is when you absolutely know it's going to be a full house. Be sure that you request the space at least 30-60 minutes prior to your event start time so you have time to set-up.
- ❑ **FILL OUT A SPEAKERS BUREAU REQUEST FORM.** *(If not applicable, move to "Acquire Any Needed on Campus Funds")* You can find the form [here](#). This will let the SSA national office know that you are interested in bringing a speaker from our speakers bureau to your school. If the speaker is available on the date of your event your organizer will put you in touch with the speaker directly.
- ❑ **ACQUIRE ANY NEEDED ON CAMPUS FUNDS.** Visit your student activities office and become acquainted with their specific requirements for getting funded for your event or project.

- ❑ **STILL NEED FUNDING? HOLD A FUNDRAISER.** Your SSA organizer has resources to help you do a fundraiser for your chapter. Reach out to them for suggestions and resources on fundraising.
  
- ❑ **FILL OUT AN SSA GRANT APPLICATION.** If you still need funding you may fill out the [Project & Event Grant Application](#). This will take some leg work on your end. You'll need to know where the speaker is coming from so you can look up plane ticket costs or calculate gas mileage. Please keep in mind that SSA funding is offered through a reimbursement check so make sure to keep all of your receipts. If you need help filling out this form, check out the funding section of the [Event Planning Checklist for Speakers Events](#). Please note, if this event includes a speaker, grant funding is only available for speakers chosen from the [SSA Speakers Bureau](#). Contact your CO if you need additional support.
  
- ❑ **THINK ABOUT TRAVEL.** *(If not applicable, move to "Create a Timeline")*

Decide on the type of travel that will be needed for your speaker. Will they need to fly or can they drive? If they need to fly will they purchase their own flight and be reimbursed or do they expect you to purchase their ticket?  
If they want you to buy their ticket there is some information that you'll need to find out.

  - ⇒ Full legal name as it appears on their government issued ID
  - ⇒ Date of birth
  - ⇒ TSA Precheck Known Traveler Number (not required but many people do have one)
  - ⇒ Preferred seating (aisle or window)
  - ⇒ Timing limitations or preferences. Some people may live hours away from the airport and need a flight that is not at 6 am.

Now, use [Google Flights](#) to find a list of available options. Find the cheapest flight that works for them and do your best not to schedule your speaker on extremely early or late (red eye) flights unless that's what they've asked for. It's always a good idea to check with the person just before purchasing the ticket to confirm that the schedule works for them. BOOK FLIGHTS EARLY TO FIND THE BEST PRICES, AT LEAST 4-6 WEEKS IN ADVANCE.
  
- ❑ **CREATE A TIMELINE:** Make a list of everything that needs to be done to plan the event. Sometimes it's easier to work backwards from the date of the event to the present. Create a timeline that shows when each task needs to be completed.

- ❑ **PROPOSALS, PERMITS, AND PAPERWORK:** Complete any the necessary paperwork your school may require. Examples of paperwork include Use of Facilities Space Request, Temporary Food Permit, Parking Services Request, etc.
- ❑ **DEVELOP AN AGENDA.** Be sure to decide on the time when doors will open, the event will start, food will be served, etc. Share your agenda with your team.

### STAGE 3: [ADVERTISE](#) (3 WEEKS-2 MONTHS IN ADVANCE)

- ❑ **Create print advertising** such as flyers, posters, small pieces you can hand to people
- ❑ **Create a Facebook Event** and invite everyone you can and ask them to invite others.
- ❑ For more tips on marketing your event see [Tips for Advertising](#).

### STAGE 4: EXECUTE (2-5 DAYS IN ADVANCE)

- ❑ **SEND OUT A REMINDER TO GUESTS WHO RSVP'D TO YOUR FB EVENT**
- ❑ **CHECK IN WITH VOLUNTEERS:** Volunteers should be contacted 2-3 days in advance to make sure they can still help out.
- ❑ **SETUP:** Have an "event kit" – additional flyers, calendars, scissors, tape, safety pins, paperclips, Band-Aids, etc.
- ❑ **COMMUNICATE WITH SPEAKER ABOUT PICK UP ARRANGEMENTS (if applicable):** Share detailed instructions with speaker on how to arrive and where they'll be picked up.
- ❑ **COMMUNICATE WITH SPEAKER(S) ABOUT NEEDS (if applicable).** Take the time to contact speakers about their needs - do they walk when they present (and therefore need a wireless microphone), do they bring a laptop or do they need one, do they use PowerPoint or do they use something else. Consider the little things. Offer them a bottle of water or a snack. Although a speaker will rarely use a bottle of water if you put one by the lectern, s/he will be glad you left it.
- ❑ **GETTING GUESTS & PARTICIPANTS TO THE EVENT:** For large scale events, call the Welcome Center and let them know about your event and secure parking. Provide a campus map to the driver. You cannot over-inform regarding events - don't think "they must know," because much of the time, they don't.
- ❑ **NAME TAGS:** Name tags are always a good idea. Alphabetize them on the welcome table and have blank name tags and markers for unexpected guests.
- ❑ **HAVE HONORARIUM READY FOR THEM (if applicable):** It's awkward for a speaker to ask for money. Make sure to give them their check, when you see them or immediately after they speak.
- ❑ **PICK SPEAKER UP (if applicable):** Make sure the speaker your contact information and let them know in a clear and concise way, where they should meet you.

## **STAGE 5: EVALUATE AND ASSESS**

### **EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST**

- ❑ Tell us about your event by [submitting a brag it up](#). You'll then be entered into a chance to win \$100. You MUST submit a brag it up if you received funding for your events. The brag it up is brief synopsis of the event, including participant and planner comments, attendance, suggestions for future events, and final costs.
- ❑ Create internal records of post-event assessments of good ideas and lessons learned, and a master list updated after each event to compile all of these lessons and tips for each type of event or activity.
- ❑ Create go-to reference lists. e.g. listing a set of venue rooms on campus, describing their capacity, seating arrangement, layout, A/V, etc, lists of common purchase items, prices, inventory count, etc, lists of caterers and their rates, and so on. This way, it is easy to find the right venue and supplies each time, and transfer this knowledge across administrations.

### **THINGS TO REMEMBER**

If it isn't an emergency, don't call it one. If you messed up, say so - most service people on campus will find it refreshing. Plus, it goes a long way to establishing good long-term relationships. Find humor in everything that goes wrong or you'll go crazy. And most of all - try and have a little fun.