



PLANNING GUIDE

Socials for Adults with Autism & Caregivers

I. Suggested Timelines for Planning the Event

A. 6 Months Before the Event

- Identify partner organizations, sponsors, venue and the date. Sunday afternoons are recommended.
- Reserve a venue
 - if the event is planned on a campus consider Student Unions, gyms, athletic facilities, performing arts centers, etc.
 - Community centers, YMCA's, Parks and Recreation Departments, churches and synagogues, local school campuses, meeting halls, etc.
- Assign responsibilities to Planning Committee members and set timelines to complete tasks
- Estimate the number of guests, caregivers and volunteers who will attend
- Develop a plan to market the event and identify groups and media sources to notify

***Tool Box indicates samples are available to download**

B. 4 Months Before the Event

- Send solicitation letters (*Tool Box) for donations (\$, prizes, food, in-kind services)
- Plan the event activities and entertainment (*Tool Box)

C. 3 Months Before the Event

- Confirm entertainment
- Send out “Save the Date” flyers to prospective guests, volunteers and organizations (*Tool Box)
- Post flyers and information at sites and online to outreach to prospective guests and volunteers

D. 1 Month Before the Event

- Estimate refreshments, where to purchase or pick- up
- Send flyers, driving directions and confirmations to volunteers who should arrive 1 or 2 hours before event for set-up and training. (*Tool Box)
- Send guests reminders, flyers and driving directions (*Tool Box)
- Reconfirm entertainers, and activity managers and send them schedules, flyers and driving directions (*Tool Box)
- Buy drawing tickets, if applicable, wrap prizes
- Determine decorations, refreshments, paper goods, table covers and other supplies needed

II. Entertainment & Activities

A. Suggestions

- Provide refreshments in one area throughout the event. Sandwiches and gluten free options such as vegetables and fruit, chips and dips that are easy to eat, work well.
- *People Bingo* (*Tool Box) recommended to use at the beginning of the social to facilitate introductions and to earn drawing tickets. Used to encourage interaction for *guests and caregivers*
- Schedule entertainment in 15 to 20 minute segments with breaks in between.
- Music: choral groups, singers, guitar sing along, bands, DJ. (*Tool Box) All should perform at a low sound level
- Dancing – best in a separate large room so sound can be controlled and not disturb other activities. Group dancing, like YMCA is most popular. (See DJ song list in Tool Kit)
- Magicians, dancers, mimes
- Simple art projects with visual instructions.
- Photo Booths with props for posing
- Bowling, billiards, movies, picnics

- **Guest Interest Sign-Up Sheets** (*Tool Box)
When they arrive, guests are guided to a table displaying 6 or more Interest sign-up sheets. Guests sign only their first names on the sheet of their favorite activity. During the last hour of each social, they meet with their interest group and a facilitator to discuss how they like to participate in their interest.
 - Blank notecards and pens are provided in the center of each table so guests can easily exchange their contact information with each other.
 - This is the **most important activity at the social** for guests, including caregivers. It provides opportunities for them to continue new friendships after the Social.

- Drawing Prizes – are an incentive for guests to stay until for the interest matching activity. Gifts are donated (*Tool Box) and on display. All guests receive complimentary drawing tickets at registration. They may also get additional drawing tickets for playing the Social Bingo game to win prizes at the end of the event.

B. Provide a “Quiet Room”

- A separate area should always be available for all guests during events as an alternative to participating in other activities.

- Volunteers bring games and engage in playing them with guests, one-on-one or in small groups in a quiet environment, away from the entertainment and other activities. (*Tool Box)

C. Caregiver Resources

- A table displaying resource materials is highly recommended.
- Professional autism service providers (volunteer psychologists, Board Certified Behavioral Analysts, Neurologists and faculty members) available at an “**Ask an Expert**” table throughout the event.
- Separate focus groups on topics of interest, facilitated by professionals, held concurrently with guest activities (*Tool Box)

III. Suggested Schedule for Event

A. Social Timeline: 3 Hours for Guests

- **Volunteers arrive 1-2 hours before guests** to register, set up signage, activities, refreshments, etc. (*Tool Box)
- One hour prior to guests arriving, *all volunteers* receive PowerPoint Orientation, have Q&A with the presenter and tour the venue. (*Tool Box)
They receive an activities schedule or schedules are posted where everyone can see them (*Tool Box)
- When guests arrive, each adult with autism is introduced to and paired with a volunteer. If they arrive with caregivers, they are all given a tour of the venue by the volunteer host. Caregivers are then directed to their own activities and invited to enjoy the refreshments and networking with other caregivers.

- Volunteers take guests to sign their first names on a sheet with their favorite Interest. They stay with their assigned guests throughout the Social, participating together in planned group activities or in the Quiet Room. (*Tool Box)
- The **last hour** of the Social, guests and caregivers meet at tables designated by Interests. Facilitators at each table encourage discussions about how guests like to participate in the interest. (*Tool Box) Blank notecards and pens are provided for guests to share contact information with each other.
- Finally, committee, sponsors and volunteers are acknowledged and, if applicable, drawings are held. The Social ends.
- Evaluation forms may be distributed to guests during the last hour or after the event. (*Tool Box)
- Volunteers remain to clean up the venue, sign out and receive volunteer service certificates for the number of hours they participated. (*Tool Box)

B. Final Tasks

- Enter names, including unregistered guest walk-ins, into the guest and volunteer databases (*Tool Box)
- Send thank you letters or emails to sponsors, volunteers and donors (*Tool Box)
- Review and evaluate the event with the committee and partners and make recommendations for future Socials
- Forward recommendations to partners

IV. Benefits

A. Students

- Have opportunities to personally engage with the people they may be training to serve (special education, speech, physical and occupational therapy, psychiatry, psychology, social work, medical, nursing and philanthropic curriculums)
- Will gain new understanding about how autism affects generations in families
- May decide to become future autism service providers
- Receive community service hours and possibly extra credit in their courses for volunteering

B. Partner Organizations

- Serve as models for other community colleges, businesses, non-profit organizations, philanthropic organizations, etc. to increase social opportunities for families affected by autism.
- Increase public awareness and support for autism
- Expand community outreach, good will and resources by sharing
- Provide new opportunities for community integration and friendships for adults with autism.

