



CONFESSIONS OF AN EVENT PLANNER

CHRISTMAS PARTY EDITION

A DETAILED GUIDE TO PLANNING YOUR
BEST CHRISTMAS PARTY YET

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WELCOME!

Whether you are a first time event planner or a seasoned expert, it is no secret that putting together a Christmas party can be a stressful, time consuming and sometimes tearful process (if you haven't experienced this, please tell me your secret?!). But over my years of event planning, I have come to find that although you will always be thrown a few curveballs when planning an event, there is plenty you can do to minimise their impact... and avoid rocking in the corner.

Over the past 12 months I have been busy putting together a series of blogs that take you through the Christmas party planning process, providing plenty of resources, tips and tricks along the way. As event planners, I know that we are all very busy, coffee/sugar infused individuals so to make your life easier, I have compiled our whole Confessions of an Event Planner series one, including all the resources in one easy location (you're welcome!).

So come on this journey with me as we turn planning this years Christmas party into the easiest, most joyful experience ever! You will be so cool, calm and collected, others will be scratching their head wondering how you pulled it all off so effortlessly.

Are you ready? Let's do this!

Kathryn Laslett

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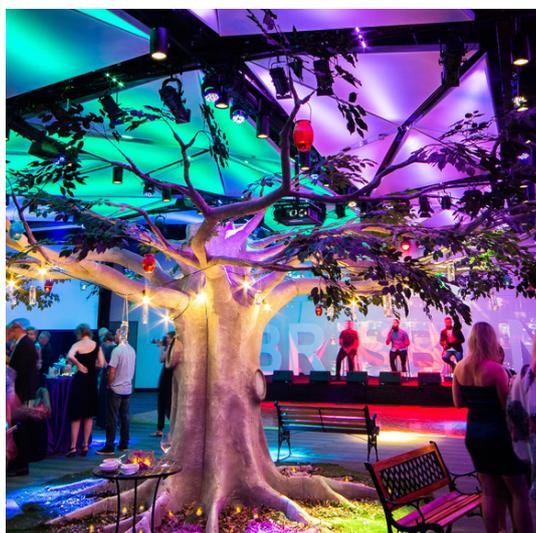
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FINDING THE PERFECT VENUE

Choosing the right venue for a Christmas function can be an overwhelming, confusing and frustrating process. With so many great options available, it can be hard to know where to start, let alone make the right choice. So how can we help? Well, we have put our years of industry experience to use to come up with 5 key areas you should consider when choosing a venue. You're welcome!

Key Area 1: Location, Location, Location!

No matter what city or country you are looking at holding your celebration in, it is important to first think about location. Do you want to be removed from the hustle and bustle of normal routine? Or do you want something more easily accessible? It might be the most beautiful venue in the world, located on a remote hill top with spectacular views... but can your attendees get there? If the answer is no, and you don't have the budget to organise accommodation or transfers for your attendees then you may not want to get too attached to this venue, no matter how pretty it is!

Key Area 2: It's all about Style

No we aren't talking about the latest fashion trends! What we mean here is, if you don't have a massive styling budget to add all the bells and whistles, does the venue style match the theme or feel you are trying to achieve for your event? Think about taking advantage of what the venue already has to offer. If you are doing a traditional festive party, selecting a venue that invest in Christmas decor (think Rockefeller Centre Christmas Tree) will highlight the theme and add to the overall experience.

Key Area 3: Watch this Space

You are ultimately going to be spending majority of your time in your chosen function space. So it is super important to really take the time to do a thorough site inspection of the room. Really think about what you want to do in the room. How will guests enter? Is there enough room for everything you want to put in there? How will you set the room up? Also think about audio visual capabilities, bump in and bump out and don't forget to ask if there is any noise or styling restrictions.

Key Area 4: But I don't want to go Home!

Even if you aren't planning on providing accommodation for your attendees, if it is a night time with alcohol provided it is important to consider accommodation options for them. Is there accommodation onsite? Is there enough for all your attendees? If not, what else is nearby?

Key Area 5: I'm just here for the Food...

We are all guilty of getting a little hangry every now and again, so let's avoid that at your Christmas party shall we? Now we aren't saying you need to taste everything on the menu prior to the event, but think about not only the quality of the food you are serving, but also the style of food you want to serve (e.g. Food Stations, Canapes, Fine Dining, Share Platters). Also don't forget to ask the venue how they will accommodate special/dietary requirements to avoid any food disasters. And if your attendees are real foodies, also consider where the venue's produce is sourced.

One final piece of advice before you head off on your journey to venue bliss. You may not always be in a position to do a site visit, but if the opportunity does arise I cannot recommend this enough. Seeing a venue in person, being able to walk through and actually see and feel what your attendees will experience is invaluable. Still not sure what to look for during a site visit? Well, we have developed a Site Inspection Checklist that you can take with you so that you don't miss any of the important stuff. So there you have it, now you are ready to go out there and find your dream venue with confidence!



SITE INSPECTION CHECKLIST

Venue Name:	
Space Inspected:	
Venue Contact:	
Site Inspection Time:	

Venue Accessibility

Close to public transport?	Yes / No	
Will it be easy to transport delegates to the venue?	Yes / No	

Accommodation

How many rooms are there?		
Room Types?		
Any accessible rooms?	Yes / No	
How do the rooms look/feel?		
How will rooms be booked? (e.g. Through company? Directly through hotel?)		

Bathrooms

How many bathrooms are in the venue?		
Any accessible toilets?	Yes / No	
Where are they in relation to the function space?		

Parking

How many parking spots available?		
How many accessible parking spots are there?		
Is there valet parking?	Yes / No	
What parking is included?		
How close is parking to the function space?		
What is the cost of parking?		

Catering

What meals need to be included?

Where will catering be served?

What kind of tea / coffee? (e.g. pods, instant, barista, etc.)

How will special dietaries be managed?

Function Space

How big is the space?

What is the capacity?

What seating styles are available?

Is there natural light? Yes / No

Is there room for a stage? Yes / No

Are the chairs comfortable? Yes / No

What signage is available? (e.g. electronic, freestanding, etc.)

How early can we bump in?

How long do we have to bump out?

Is the space accessible? (e.g. ramps, elevators, stairs, etc.)

Audio Visual

Is there a projector? Yes / No

Is there a screen? Yes / No

Is there an audio system? Yes / No

Is there a white board / flip chart? Yes / No

Is there a microphone? Yes / No

Is there access to power? Yes / No

Is there Wifi available? Yes / No

Overall Venue Analysis



CHOOSING A SUPPLIER

So you have secured your dream venue and now you are ready and excited to start locking in the other elements that will really tie your party together. But once you start looking you will find there are A LOT of options out there all promising to be better, quicker and cheaper than the last! Before you go into information overload, below are 5 tips to take the stress out of choosing a supplier.

Tip 1: Know What You Want

Before you start your search, be very clear about what you want. Write down your vision and be as specific as you can. Do you picture an acoustic guitarist performing Ed Sheeran covers or a Christmas cover band complete with a visit from Santa? Do you want your attendees arriving by bus or making an entrance in stretch hummer limos? This will help you clear out some of the suppliers that will not meet your needs early on in the process. Also before you get too excited make note of what your budget is and keep this in mind when choosing your suppliers. If you fall in love with a band but it is outside your budget you may need to compromise on another element of your event.



Tip 2: Ask Your Network

Whether you are planning your event alone or as part of a team, chances are that most people around you have been to a similar event that has used a DJ, band, stylist, transport company, etc. that they can not stop raving about. Take advantage of this! Ask your trusted colleagues or friends and family about suppliers that they remember as adding WOW to that event. They have already experienced the supplier first hand, and if you trust them that is all the referral you will need.





Tip 3: Don't Forget Your Venue

Your venue is a very valuable resource and you should definitely use this to your advantage. Remember they have already hosted thousands of events similar to yours so not only will they have a good insight into what works in your chosen space, but they will also have contact details for lots of suppliers. Also don't forget, some venues do have preferred suppliers, which means you may not be able to bring in your own. Make sure you read through your venue contract again carefully to confirm what your restrictions are and if in doubt ask the question. You never know, they may even be happy to make an exception.

Tip 4: Show Me, Don't Tell Me

If you are tossing up between a few suppliers, don't be afraid to ask to see an example of their work or testimonials from previous clients. Not only will it give you a clear representation of their work, but it will also give you a chance to explore their range. For musical acts, speakers or performers, this may be an online showreel from previous performances. Similarly, photographers, photo booths or stylists might have an online gallery of their work. Look and listen closely to what they are showing you and always make sure it meets your vision.

Tip 5: Start a Database

If you are likely to be hosting the Christmas party for years to come, save yourself a headache and create a database of suppliers as you go! Not only will it save you time later, but it will also help you compare similar suppliers and help you accurately budget for future events through storing information to refer back to. This could be done simply in an excel spreadsheet, or via other online software such as Smartsheet, find a platform that works well for you. To help get you started we have prepared a Supplier Tracker that you can use to write everything down.



CHOOSING TRANSPORT

So you've secured a venue, locked in your suppliers and are ready to host the event of the year! But there is one tiny, little thing we need to think about before we get too ahead of ourselves... how are you going to get everyone to your fabulous event?! Below we have highlighted 6 key tips to help you ensure that your guests have just as much fun getting there as they do at the actual event!

Tip 1: Before You Start

Before you get too carried away and book a horse drawn carriage or hot air balloon, clearly define what is required and what budget you have available to you.

Ask Yourself:

- What modes of transport are required? Do I need multiple?
- Do I need to organise any international or domestic flights? If yes, how many?
- Are attendees staying close by?
- What budget do I have available?
- Can I do this by myself? Or do I need help?

Flights

Organising flights for events can be time consuming and tricky if you don't have all traveler information, an online registration system can help with this. If you have a lot of flights to organise and you aren't used to this task I would recommend outsourcing this portion of your event planning to a travel specialist. You can thank me later!

Budget

Also don't forget to clearly define your budget for transport. This will strongly impact the options that you have available to you. If you need to organise multiple modes of transport e.g. international flights & local transfers, consider dividing your budget into different categories to accommodate this.



Tip 2: It's All About Timing

As they say, timing is everything, and it is no different with your transfers. Really think about your timings and do your research.

Ask Yourself:

- How long does it take to get from the pick-up location to the event location?
- What could impact this time frame?
- Do I need to stagger the arrival/departure times?

Depending on your mode of transport this time could be impacted by elements outside of your control such as traffic, road closures, airline delays or cancelations, etc. If you have a larger event, consider if you need to stagger your transfer arrival times. You do not want 300 attendees showing up or leaving your event all at once!

Tip 3: Escape the Ordinary

Your event starts the second your attendees arrive for their transfer. So while buses or cars are simple options, why not set the tone for your event and add a bit of WOW factor while you're at it?

Ask Yourself:

- Where is the venue located?
- What options are available to me?
- How long will people be travelling for?
- How can I make the journey fun and entertaining?
- Do I have any VIP guests I need to WOW?

Close to water? What about a boat? Heading up to the mountains? Have you thought about a helicopter arrival? Your options will be greatly impacted on where your event is located, your group size and your budget, but here is where you have the opportunity to get creative.



Tip 4: Use One of Your Biggest Assets

Your venue is a fabulous resource that you should use to your full advantage. Nobody knows the venue better than they do!

Ask Your Venue:

- What has worked well in the past?
- Where is the best location for arrivals?
- How much space is there for arrivals?
- Are there any restrictions?

Once you have locked in your transfers, make sure you update your venue on your plans. This way they can brief their staff so they know when to expect arrivals and can better manage this process for not only a seamless beginning to the event, but also the finish.



Tip 5: Put Together Your A Team

Unfortunately you can't be everywhere at once, so we recommend assigning a contact or transfer leader for each transfer. This person will be your point of contact during the transfer so you can easily communicate any cancellations, changes or delays.

Ask Yourself:

- Who can I trust to be the transfer contact?
- How will I manage any cancellations or changes?
- How will I communicate with them?

We recommend that you share the transfer leader's details with the other members of that transfer so that if anyone is delayed, gets lost or cancels they can contact someone who is onsite at the departure location. This will help avoid a delayed departure because people are missing. Don't forget to get permission from the transfer contact to share their details first.

Tip 6: For the Independent Travelers

For most events you will also need to consider options for attendees to get themselves to and from the event.

Ask yourself:

- Parking- How much is available?- Is it accessible?- Is it paid or free?
- Public transport- How far is it from the venue?- What time does the service run until?- Is it clear how to get from the train station/bus stop to the venue?- Is it safe at night?- Do I need to organise a walking transfer?
- Taxi-/Uber: Where is the closest taxi rank?- Is it easy to order a taxi/ uber to the venue?- How long will it take for a taxi or uber to get to the venue?- Do I need to pre-order any taxi's?

This information should be made available for all event attendees and could be displayed on an event website, or sent out via a reminder email.

No matter how your attendees are arriving or departing it is important that they are given clear instructions prior to the event. To help you plan out your transfers we have created a Transport Planner. Remember the transfers are all part of the event experience that you are creating, so it is important to make them special where you can.



IT'S REPORTING TIME!

Congratulations, you are so close to pulling off the event of the year! But before you pop the champagne, have you thought about your event reporting and what you will need with you onsite? Now before you all fall asleep on me, I promise you the event reporting is your MOST important tool on the day of your event. So with that in mind, please see below the reporting I believe is a necessity to keep you relaxed and confident on the day! You can thank me later.



Report 1: Run Sheet

Without a doubt this is the most important piece of event reporting you will have with you on the day. The key to pulling off a good event is all in the details and in the timing, and a good run sheet will capture both.

Create a Great Run Sheet

- Be precise - down to the minute, detail what is happening when and where throughout the whole event.
- Assign tasks - assign tasks to individuals on your onsite team. Just make sure you brief them prior to the event so they fully understand what is required from them.
- Add detail - the devil is in the detail and you need to be as detailed as you possibly can. Add in the menu items, the names of any speeches or AV details, what should be on the registration desk; whatever you feel will help you on the day.





Report 2: Contact List

You will always need to contact someone at a minutes notice when you are onsite, it could be a supplier, the venue, or even someone attending the party. Either way having a list of all your key contacts on hand is an invaluable resource that just might save you a lot of stress and searching through countless emails and paperwork on the day.

Create a Flawless Contact List

- Separate it out – group all of your contacts into categories e.g. Clients/Staff, Suppliers, Attendees, etc.
- Source the best contact number – make sure you ask for this from each person on the list prior to the day.

Report 3: Registration List

Who is coming to your event? The registration list is a helpful tool to monitor event attendance and also avoid un-registered guests from entering the event. It is also a great way to cross check name badges (if you are using them) and accurately advise final numbers.

Create the Perfect Delegate List

List delegates alphabetically – this will make it easy to find someone if you need to check them off or confirm their registration. Include their registration details – this will help you quickly identify if they are a VIP, employee or perhaps a guest of the companies. Allow extra space – we always aim to have the reporting printed at least 2 days out from the event. So in the very likely occurrence that you have last-minute RSVP's or cancellations allow yourself space to adjust the reporting accordingly.

Report 4: Special Dietary Requirements

It is pretty much impossible to host an event without at least one delegate having some sort of special dietary requirement. A special dietary requirements report will help you clearly identify the people who have requested anything that you need to be aware of, and will also help you communicate this with the venue.

Create a Detailed Special Dietary Requirements Report

- List the name and the requirement – you need to make sure this is super clear and precise. This will help not only yourself but also the venue clearly track what is required.
- Understand how it will be managed – will there be a special table? Will the special meals be labelled with delegates names? Write this at the top of the report so that whoever is managing this onsite has a clear understanding of how it will run and can pass this information on to the delegates.



Report 5: Risk Assessment

What could possibly go wrong? Well for this report we want you to think of anything and everything that could. By running through all possible hazards, this allows you to come up with means to prevent or minimise as many of these as you can and also come up with a plan should the worst case scenario happen.

Create a Thorough Risk Assessment

- Nothing is too silly – it could be as simple as tripping stepping off the bus. If it could cause a risk no matter how small or how unlikely, write it down.
- Have a ranking system – follow a ranking system like this one or use your company's, to make sure you have evaluated each risk appropriately. This will help determine whether further measures need to be taken to avoid or minimize this risk.
- Include an incident report form – just in case!



Report 6: Site Plan

By now you have spent hours putting together your event, so to ensure that your vision really comes to life, create a thorough site plan. This is also a great way to make sure everyone is on the same page and the venue understands exactly what you want.



Create an Excellent Site Plan

- Make sure elements are to scale – to avoid a major headache on the day of your event, make sure that each element within the plan is to scale.
- Get a template from the venue – majority of venues will have a floor plan of the space that you can use as a starting point for creating the most accurate site plan.
- Use it as a tool – Use this as a visual for bump in/out points and emergency exits. Don't be afraid to think outside the box and include foyers (registration), toilets and car park/drop off zones as well.



Bonus Tip: Don't Forget Your Signage!

Often forgotten or left to the last minute, don't forget to think about what signage you will need to provide. It might even be a good idea to pack some additional spare signs in case you need to make any additional signs on the day.



Top Tips for Signage

Write a list – run through your run sheet and make a list of every possible piece of signage that you might require during the event, then check it off as you create it.

Can you use digital? – most venues will have the capabilities to do digital signage, if this is the case, make sure you find out the specifications and send it through to them prior to the day.

I know reporting may seem boring, but I promise you it is important! The key thing to remember is to create each report in a format that works well for you and is easy for you to access on the day. Each event's reporting requirements will be different so you may use all of or some of the above with a few extras thrown in. To help you keep on top of it, we have developed a Reporting Checklist just for you. Let the report writing begin!



GAME DAY

This is it! The moment you have been waiting for. It's time to see all your hours of planning and hard work, come together. But before we celebrate (don't worry, I promise the time to pop the champagne is coming soon!), ensuring the smooth running of your event is all part of the process. To help navigate your event delivery and come out the other side like a pro, we have devised 5 key tips to help you get there.

Tip 1: Your Reporting is Your Best Friend

Now that you are a pro at event reporting, this will literally be your best friend onsite. Whether you choose to print your reporting or have digital copies handy, your reporting should have all key information for your event. It should also be readily available to all the appropriate people for easy access on the day, this may mean sending the reporting prior to the event or having printed/digital copies available to them on the day.



Tip 2: Test Your AV

If you have any issues on the day, I guarantee they will be through Audio Visual (AV). The best way to avoid these is to be as prepared as possible in the lead up to the event. Where possible collect any presentations prior to the event so that you can test them prior to the event. This will provide your best chance for smooth sailing on the day. If you are bringing in a live musician or DJ, make sure you get them to arrive onsite early to set up and do a sound check, so they are ready to wow the crowd when the event starts. Each venue is different, so it is important to remember that each AV set up will be too. If you don't have an AV technician on hand for your event, make sure you get them to go over what they have set up and how the system works during the event set up so you and your team are ready to take over.





Tip 3: Communication is Key

As with most things, communication is key. This includes all communication during the event, including communication with the venue staff and communication between your team as well. A key tip here would be to have a briefing with both onsite prior to the event to run over the event in detail, to confirm timings and reiterate who is responsible for each task. On the flip side, you should also have an event debrief each time a portion of the event finishes. If you are holding a multi-day Christmas extravaganza or perhaps a day to night event, you may have multiple briefings and debriefings throughout the day. Make sure you add these into your run sheet.

Tip 4: Pack an Event Kit

An event kit is basically a wonderful, seemingly random collection of items that you take to the event with you to help quickly solve issues onsite. We usually recommend that the event kit hold a collection of items such as stationary, audio visual and personal hygiene, we have developed a basic checklist below to help get you started. Now obviously you will tailor this to suit your own needs and over time it will develop with your own experiences onsite, but as a basic guide this is a great place to start.

Tip 5: Enjoy Yourself!

Trust me, once the adrenaline starts pumping the party will pass by with a blur so it is important to remind yourself to stop and enjoy yourself throughout the event. Celebrate the festive season with your team and have fun, after all you deserve it!

And at the end of the day, when the party goes home and the event bump out is done, and everyone is raving about how wonderful the event was... THAT's when you can pop the champagne! Before we start the process all over again and plan an even bigger and better party next year!

EVENT KIT CHECKLIST

Event Name:	
Event Date:	
Event Time:	
Event Location:	

Stationary

Things to Pack	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> It Off	Comments
Paper (Note pads)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pens	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pencils	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pencil Sharpeners	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Permanent Markers	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Scissors	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Stapler	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Staples	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Whiteout	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sticky Notes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sticker Labels	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Eraser	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Rubber Bands	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Paper Clips	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Glue	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pins (e.g. for Pin Board)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sticky Tape	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Gaffa Tape	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Packing Tape	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Blu Tac	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ruler / Measuring Tape	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Zip Ties	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sewing Kit	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Stick on Velcro	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	



FINISH OFF THE EVENT

So you did it, you made it to the end of the Christmas season! It was a huge success and people will be talking about it for years to come (or at least that is what I'm assuming if you have followed our awesome guide). But believe it or not, we still have a bit of work to do on the other side now the event is done. Now I know you are tired, but trust me this is important and have no fear we are going to walk you through it and provide you with a simple to follow check list. Let's do it!



Get Feedback

Whether your party was for 10 people or 1,000 people, asking for attendee feedback is an invaluable resource that will help you shape future events. This could come in the shape of an onsite paper survey the attendees complete before they leave, or an online version that is sent out post event via email. You could consider offering a random draw prize, if you think people need incentive to fill it out, after all who doesn't love winning a prize!?



Say Thank You!

Everyone likes to feel appreciated, so it is important that you say thank you to those that have helped you out in the lead up and on the day. Whether they are your staff, a supplier or a venue a quick email or a phone call to say thank you is a lovely gesture. If you want to take it a step further, you could send a hand written card or small gift if appropriate.

Do A Debrief

Now unless you are magic (which if you are, super cool!) there is no way that you could have been everywhere at once on the day of your party, which means that there is a high chance that something happened during the event that you missed. This is why it is so important to do a post event debriefing with your onsite staff to get a fresh perspective on the event and everything that happened. It is also a great chance for your team to share their thoughts and ideas on how this could work better.

Report It

Taking everything you have learnt from your various debriefs, your own observations and also any information gathered through post event surveys from attendees you will create a report that overviews the event. It should include details such as what worked well, what didn't and provide recommendations for future events. Depending on the size and style of the event this could be presented in an email or you could put together a formal report.

Dollars and Cents

I'm sure you have been keeping track of this along the way, but now is the time to put it all together and reconcile your event. It is a great time to double check how you did sticking to your event budget and take a closer look at where you might be able to make budget improvements for next Christmas. Keep a digital folder with all your receipts in it for easy reference.

Make Records

Again, hopefully you have been doing this along the way, but if you haven't don't forget to put together a list of suppliers and venue contacts for your record so that you will have easy access and a point of contact should they be a good fit for next years festivities. Need a place to store the information? See the supplier tracker on page 7.

And that's it, you did it! You have successfully taken your event from start to finish and now that you have crossed your t's and dotted your i's, you can relax and reflect on the process.

Not only that, but you are now in the best position to plan future Christmas events, and like most things, we promise it gets easier with practice, and if in doubt these guides aren't going anywhere. Happy Event Planning!



POST EVENT CHECKLIST

Event Name:	
Event Date:	
Event Time:	
Event Location:	

To Do List		
Task	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> It Off	Comments
Send Post Event Surveys	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Complete Debriefs	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Onsite Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Supplier	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Venue	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Client/Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Send Thank You Note(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Suppliers	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Venue	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Client	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Create Post Event Report	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Send Event Report to Client/Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Compile Event Receipts/Expenses	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Finalise Event Budget	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Make Records of all Suppliers	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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