

Planning a Grand Opening

Your clinic Grand Opening is to be:

- a celebration of accomplishing the mighty task of creating and opening a new entity to serve your uninsured neighbors
- a way to say thank you to your donors
- inform potential patients that you are open and ready to serve their needs
- share your need for volunteers and financial support for the future.

Remember

A grand opening need not coincide with the first day of patient care provided at the clinic. In fact, it is best to separate the celebration and the first day of clinic visits to protect the privacy of patients.

Keep in mind

There may be local companies who can assist with:

- your printing needs
- your advertising needs
- your catering needs

Call your local Chamber of Commerce office for a listing of businesses that provide these services.

Steps to planning a successful event:

1) Date Selection

Before you make your decision consider the following:

- Allow plenty of preparation time
 - give yourself at least four to six weeks to make arrangements
- Avoid holding your event on a major holiday

- if applicable to your donor pool, take note of holiday work hours for
 - bankers
 - government officials
- Avoid schedule conflicts with major community events and activities
 - you may lose when competing for attendance
- The best attendance days for community leaders and business people are:
 - Tuesdays
 - Wednesdays
 - Thursdays
- Try to avoid weekends unless absolutely necessary

2) Choosing a Time

An important step in the planning process is to determine the type of special event you will conduct.

For Example

Morning functions will have an entirely different atmosphere and style than an evening reception. Luncheon gatherings usually require food and beverage.

Consider the following:

- Morning events should begin no earlier than 8:00 a.m. as a rule
 - few successful special events are early in the morning (7:00a.m. to 7:30 a.m.)
- Avoid late evening functions
 - few people will want to go home change clothes and go out again
- Half-day events
 - open houses or tours of your clinic can be good for promoting your clinic to potential volunteers
 - make sure to schedule ceremony to focus the event (e.g. a ribbon cutting)

3) Invitations

Who you invite to your event is as important as hosting the event.

People to consider inviting:

- Current and potential donors
- Family and friends of the Planning Team or Board of Directors
- Members of the healthcare community
- Supporting churches as well as potential partner faith-based organizations
- Key government officials:
 - Mayor
 - City/Town Council Members
 - State and Federal elected officials

Tip: Elected representatives are more likely to attend if you invite them to say a few words

- Media representatives
- Neighboring business people

Important elements:

- have correct and current contact information
- Know the proper person in the organization you should be sending information to
- Prepare a written letter or very basic invitation
 - be sure all critical information is included:
 - who
 - what
 - when
 - where
 - why
- Identify a method for confirming attendance, RSVP
 - this will allow you to plan for your food and beverage requirements
- Allow plenty of notice

- two weeks is preferable
- 10 days to a week is ample for most local participants
- A follow-up phone call may be appropriate
 - depending on the size and type of event (e.g. personal invite or open house)
- Include a map for out of town attendees who require it
 - Google Maps can provide a link

Attendance

Predicting how many people will attend is tricky.

Tips:

- You can estimate between 20-40 percent of those invited will attend
 - The percentage of friends and relatives will be much higher than the percentage of courtesy invitations sent
- Make sure you have a venue that's an appropriate size for your projected attendance
 - the organization of the venue also depends on this factor
- Always provide easy-to-find and accessible parking for your guests
 - Difficulty in finding space to park discourages attendance

4) Program Planning

Whether you are celebrating a groundbreaking, grand opening, or an anniversary, a brief program adds focus to an event. It provides not only valuable recognition for you and your key people but it makes the event more purposeful and permits you the opportunity to explain more about your organization.

Tips:

- The shorter the better
 - Rule of thumb:
 - no program or official ceremonies should last longer than 15 minutes

- the ideal program time is 10 minutes
- An effective MC will keep the program moving smoothly and inject some humor when needed
 - you can run the program if you wish, or ask an experienced friend
- Limit the number of speakers and the length of their speeches
 - speakers in any formal program should include:
 - your medical champion
 - your Board chair
 - partners or others you feel have played a key role in developing your clinic
 - appropriate municipal government representatives
 - elected officials are always looking for opportunities to speak
 - the chance to provide a few remarks may encourage attendance at your event and further develop your relationships with these important people
- Place a reminder call to all scheduled speakers the day before the event to confirm their attendance
 - make sure you confirm the individual's title and know how to pronounce their name correctly for introductions
- Resist the temptation to acknowledge nearly everyone attending
 - introduce only those who need to be introduced
 - these may include:
 - your Planning Team
 - your Board leadership
 - elected and civic leaders
- Conclude your program with some appropriate ceremonial or symbolic activity to commemorate the event
 - a ribbon cutting for a grand opening
 - your local municipality may be able to supply you with oversized scissors and ribbon for the ribbon cutting
 - shoveling the first load of dirt for a groundbreaking
 - cutting a cake for an anniversary of your organization

These are nice ways to let guests know the formal program is over and they also create great photo opportunities

- Make sure you have a public address (PA) system sufficient for the size of your venue
 - double check it before you start your program
- Be sure to send thank-you letters soon after your event to anyone who played a key role in staging it
 - particularly those who took part in the program or ceremonies
 - a thank-you in the paper may also be appropriate
- Be sure to check with your local municipality if you plan to hang banners, etc. outdoors.
 - you may need a “Special Use” permit for extravagant outdoor events.
- Always try to have a backup plan for a rainy day
 - this may involve moving indoors to a nearby restaurant, hotel, or meeting room
- You may want to consider having a door prize or drawing as part of your program donated by a local business
 - For example:
 - winning a dinner at a nice restaurant can add to your guests’ enjoyment and perhaps even build attendance

5) Media Coverage

Realistically, you should not expect extensive coverage, but inviting the media to your special event is definitely worthwhile.

Suggestions to assist the media with covering your event:

- Send your invitation to the news directors or editors at least a week prior to your event
 - Include a personal letter explaining some details about your clinic and why your event is different or has some significance to the community
- Media is more likely to attend if:
 - your event is held in the middle of the week

- your event is held in the morning
- Be sure your invitation includes the journalistic basics of WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE and WHY
 - this may form the basis for the reporter assigned to covering the event
- A follow-up or reminder call the day before the event is a good idea