



ECSU Student Center and Student Activities Office *Co-curricular education for student organizational leadership*

← PLANNING A RETREAT →

Perhaps your executive board officers have little experience working together. Maybe the members of your organization do not know each other very well. Or you could just be looking for a fun way to help your group members bond. What better way is there to solve these problems than by taking some time away from campus and planning a retreat? It can be as short as a few hours or as long as an extended weekend. A little effort and a bit of planning is all you need. Where do you start? Begin with the purpose for organizing your retreat.

ESTABLISHING THE PURPOSE

What do you hope to accomplish with this retreat? This is the first thing you have to ask yourself. Will you focus on team building, strategy-planning, strengthening the group's working relationship, or resolving conflict? Your goals will shape how you plan the entire retreat. It is imperative that you know why you are planning it and design it with that purpose in mind. If the participants see no point to the retreat, they may not give it their best, and the retreat could fail. Developing clear objectives with your planning team establishes the direction of your planning and sets the tone of the retreat.

<p>STRATEGIC PLANNING do right things QUALITY STRATEGY do things right TOTAL STRATEGY do right things right</p>
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CREATING ACTIVITIES AND DETERMINING LENGTH

Begin planning activities that will meet the goals you set. Maybe you have some specific tasks which the group needs to collaborate on and complete. You may be expecting a tangible finished product at the conclusion of the retreat. If your purpose is more abstract, create activities which will promote it. The Student Activities Office can help you with this if it is proving difficult. Lectures, discussions, games, skits, and songs are but a few possible activities. Brainstorm with your planning team. Use any and all resources available to you. Bring in speakers and consultants; ask people for their input. Just make certain that your activities relate to your goals. Using activities just because they seem fun may frustrate your participants if your intent is unclear.

End the retreat with something that will tie the entire experience together. Recap what you have learned or accomplished. Have some fun. Share a campfire or have a pizza party. Use your imagination!

Once your activities are established, the length of the retreat must be decided. Is an afternoon enough time to complete your activities, or do you need a day or a weekend? Try to estimate the time accurately. If you allot too little time, the participants will be frustrated because they may not have a chance to bring the experience to a close. If too much time is allowed, they will be bored. Be sure to schedule time for meals, breaks, and recreation. Plan some "down time" where your members can relax and get to know each other.

FINDING THE LOCATION AND CHOOSING A DATE

Now that you know what you plan to do on your retreat, when and where are you going to do it? Let's start with when to plan it. Picking a time when there are not a lot of other things happening on campus is a good idea. While it is hard to find free time on a college campus, without participants your retreat will be doomed. Try to find a time that is convenient for as many people as possible, and schedule the retreat far enough in advance that members can plan for it on their calendars. If the retreat is on their calendar before other things, they can better plan their schedules.

The question then becomes, where will your retreat take place. You could be as simple as reserving a room in the Student Center or shutting out the world from inside one of your member's on campus houses. Ideally, getting off campus relieves the group of distractions. Taking the group off campus separates them from their school work and allows them to concentrate on the tasks before them. The Student Activities Office has information about places to go for a retreat.

REFRESHMENTS

What about food? People love to eat, and even if your retreat only lasts one afternoon, having a snack for them during breaks gives people something to do. Furthermore, food tends to bring people together. Eating is something we all share and people tend to get hungry. They may become disagreeable if they are not fed. Depending on your budget, you could order pizza or subs, or you could cook something yourself. However you do it, make sure your members aren't hungry! College students think best with food in their stomachs.

A FEW FINAL WORDS

Finally, remember to be enthusiastic and have fun. No matter what your objectives, fun and laughter must abound. If your participants have fun while working, they will also learn how to work as a team. Teamwork does not come about with bickering and arguments, it grows out of sharing and laughter. Good luck!

RELATED SAO RESOURCES

- ◆ Brainstorming
- ◆ Building an Effective Team
- ◆ Icebreakers

REFERENCE

Adapted from: St. Norbert College, Department of Leadership, Service & Involvement

*Additional resource handouts are available as well as consultation services.
For more information, contact the Student Activities Office in the Student Center at 465-4450.*