

Transporting Your Guests

Successfully moving attendees, VIPs and competitors means leaving nothing to chance

Transportation can make any event run smoothly or, conversely, ruin even the best-laid plans. Sports-event organizers know that transportation sets the tone for any event, regardless of whether it's at the amateur, collegiate or professional level. Transportation either primes guests for a great time or creates so much aggravation that not even the most exciting sporting event can make up for it. Transportation can also provide a welcome finishing touch or a bad last impression that tarnishes memories of the entire event. It's no wonder, then, that the savvy event organizer attaches great importance to it.

Transportation Matters to Attendees. Research reveals that 70 percent of attendees at events harbor negative feelings about the event largely because of their travel experience. As one respondent of a recent survey put it, "I stress about the logistics of how to get to the event and back again."

For the event organizer, it's important to note that much of the negativity event-goers feel is related to the parts of the travel experience over which the event planner has little or no control. For example, attendees in surveys complain about problems related to air travel, delays in check-in and security screening lines and expensive or unpleasant taxi service once they arrive at their destination. They also complain about losing control when they travel. While the event organizer may not be able to control every part of their attendees' travel experience, the need to compensate for the negative aspects of that experience makes flawless event transportation all the more important.

Even so, a recent survey of event organizers found that ground transportation ranked last in overall importance out of seven event components. According to the survey's results, event organizers, on average, select a hotel nine months before an event while they plan ground transportation only three

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months out. Typically, they spend five times as much on food and beverage as they do on ground transportation. This is not to say that there is a correct budget for food and beverage relative to transportation, but there are smart ways to arrange an effective transportation program that will contribute

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to making your event a success.

Checking Up on Your Transportation Partner. Event organizers who don't feel confident scheduling transportation for their event might consider seeking help from experts in group transportation. Here are some guidelines that can be used when selecting a company to handle transportation needs:

Think about more than vehicles. A great transportation company must provide more than vehicles and drivers: It must be able to handle complete transportation management and delivery. While a door-to-door pickup and drop-off makes a good impression, additional services like airport greeters and luggage handlers can offer competitors, VIPs and attendees the high-touch treatment they deserve.

Expect the unexpected. Transportation is one of the more challenging aspects of an event. Everything from the weather, security emergencies, traffic, attendees' special needs or VIP requests can require last-minute changes in plans. Select a transportation company with a proven ability to respond to whatever issues surface—even if they could not have been anticipated in advance.

Make safety a priority. Only work with a transportation company that considers the safety of your attendees to be of

utmost importance. The company's vehicles should be impeccably maintained and their drivers well-trained. Be sure to request details about the transportation company's safety policies, training programs and record.

Plan ahead. Event organizers should share dates, locations and the estimated number of attendees with the transportation company as early as possible. You need not commit to final counts before you have them, but sharing estimates will help the transportation company understand the issues it needs to consider. Planning ahead will also generally help you avoid resource issues and

should lock in preferential pricing. A good rule of thumb: Transportation companies need to begin reserving vehicles and arranging staff at least six months out for events of more than 1,000 attendees.

Make your life easier. An event organizer that maintains one steady partner in the area of transportation planning will have the peace of mind of knowing what can be expected. It also means having to deal with just one contract, one invoice, one of everything instead of a patchwork quilt of paperwork and service standards.

There are so many things that can go wrong with an event, relying on professionals to help manage the complex logistics of ground transportation is paramount. After all, an event with attendees who either don't arrive on time or show up in an ill-tempered mood has failure written all over it. Sports-event organizers that consult and then work with professional transportation companies are much more likely to truly transport their guests in a way that makes for a memorable experience.

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