

FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

STICKY REUNION SITUATION

FIRST REUNION PLANNING TEAM

August 2021

The Situation:

Our family is finally getting together to plan our first reunion. When it comes to creating a planning team, what's needed, what works, what doesn't?

The Fix:



Doug Harris

My first thought when it comes to a family reunion planning team is diversity. You need a mix of family members, ranging from elders to middle-aged to families with young children to teens. A note of caution: You need to know that some may work hard on working out details, arrangements, and follow-up—while others may be best at giving a perspective on their particular group. You need to know which is which and that you won't have all of one or the other. If all your family does not live in one area, you need to be sure you have someone on the planning team (in an active or advisory capacity) from each geographic area as well.

Diversity should also include a mix of skills. Some people excel at data collection, analysis, and recordkeeping; others excel in communications, personal interaction, hospitality, activity planning, or organization. You need them all. But be careful you don't overwhelm the process with too many people. Five is a good number for the core committee. Those you call on for review and advice can be any number that works for you.

It's amazing what you find out when you ask people about their expectations and desires about the family reunion. Do not assume you know: ask.

The Fix:



**Suzanne
Vargus Holloman**

Congratulations that your family has agreed to hold its first reunion! You've asked an important question as careful planning and organization are key to a successful reunion. Planning a reunion is complex and one person doing all the planning doesn't usually work. So, you're wise to begin with focusing on the creation of a planning team. You can have a national team, a regional group, or a local host committee. Or you can have a combination. Since this is your first reunion, to keep it as manageable as possible, I would recommend that you have only one committee. Who serves on the planning committee? Any interested family member. In other words, the good news is that there's no limit on who can help plan the reunion! As this is the first reunion, it's important that all branches

of the family are represented on the planning team to symbolize that the reunion is for everyone. It's also important that planning committee members act as advocates who urge the family members they're in contact with to attend.

When identifying committee members, note that it's not up to you to know everybody in the family. Just knowing a few family members from each branch can get you started with forming the team as they can help identify who to invite to the planning committee. Also, if you are going to survey the family early in the planning process for feedback on activities, costs, location, etc., use it as an opportunity to solicit volunteers for planning as well as at the reunion. Personally talk to each person that's been recommended or that volunteered via the survey. Find out what their areas of expertise and interest are. Once you've gathered this information identify which subcommittee is the best fit for each team member. Then make suggestions at the first planning committee meeting as to which subcommittee you recommend each person lead.

Typically, each member of the planning team leads a subcommittee. Subcommittees include, but aren't limited to, accommodations/hotel selection, catering/food, activities/entertainment, communications, fundraising, finance/budget, and family history/genealogy. For a first reunion, the planning team should equal the number of subcommittees. With a smaller team, the committee members will need to be responsible for managing more than one subcommittee. This may be too much responsibility given everyone's lack of experience in planning reunions. I've recommended seven subcommittees above so this would be the size of the planning team.

One consideration is to have an odd number of people on the planning committee to break up any ties regarding the decisions that need to be made. Alternatively, the chair can make the final decision, but with a group of people that are unfamiliar with each other it might build resentment or conflict to have the chair make the final decision.

Once you have the core group identified, a chair should be selected for the planning committee. Having formed the core group, it makes sense for you to chair it. Alternatively, at the first planning committee meeting you can ask for a

volunteer or suggest someone on the team. The responsibilities of the chair include: 1) schedule and facilitate committee meetings, 2) sign any contracts after they have been presented to the planning committee for approval, and 3) ensure coordination and communication between subcommittees that have joint responsibility for a task. Most importantly, the chair holds the planning team members accountable to confirm that their subcommittees are adhering to the plan and meeting the agreed upon timelines and budget.

Although it may be tempting to have two co-chairs lead the reunion, I wouldn't recommend it unless you have two people who have worked together on events in the past. Appointing two people that barely know each other could easily become problematic.

The Family Reunion Institute has several resources that can assist you in planning including an overview of planning a reunion, a countdown/timeline, and a list of reunion activities for all ages:

<https://familyreunioninstitute.net/who-what-where-when-how>

<https://familyreunioninstitute.net/countdown%2Ftimeline>

<https://familyreunioninstitute.net/reunion-activities>