



WARD ACTIVITIES: GET THEM IN GEAR!

In charge of a ward activity? No idea where to start? This can be a challenge, especially with no dedicated activities committee. Sometimes ward activities tend to fall to the wayside, or end up being dull and bland due to a lack of complete planning. Whether you are a member of the ward council, an individual assigned to the task, or an auxiliary taking the reins, this handout will help you plan, prepare and provide the perfect ward function from conception to clean up.

Gear 1 : Conception

The very first step in preparing for a ward activity is to decide what type of function it should be. There are endless ideas and while some may not be right for your ward, there are plenty of interesting and fresh activity choices that will help you leave the plain old pot luck in the past. When choosing what type of activity to plan, there are three main points to keep in mind:

1. Seasons: Most ward activities tend to fall every 3-4 months. This ends up to be generally once per season. Although this may seem like an easy task since there tends to be major holidays in each time frame, it's also a great opportunity to think outside the box. For example, if there isn't a need or desire for a 4th of July party, don't make one there simply because you think it needs to fit that holiday# Instead, host a cookout in June, or a beach themed ice cream party in July. If your ward does not want or need a Halloween party, host a Harvest or Bounty night in November in it's place. Here are a few ideas based on planning for your season:

Spring:

Easter Egg hunt for all ages! (even have a hunt for the grown ups)
Saturday Mother's Day brunch
Kite Flying and Cookie Party
Family Game Night
Ward Field Day
Ward Talent Show
No Rules Pinewood Derby
Service Action
Spring clean up Swap and Snack

Summer:

All American Cookout
Beach Party (no beach required!)
Summer Olympics!
Garden Bounty share and swap
Ward Campout
Outdoor "Drive in" or concert
Picnic in the park
Bicycle decorating and Parade
4th of July breakfast
Pioneer Games and Pie Cook-off
Family "Amazing Race"
Family "Survivor" Party

Fall:

Mystery Dinner
Harvest Fair
Carnival
Back to School Party
Lip Sync
Sock Hop and "Sock Drive" for a local shelter
A Night at the Circus

Winter:

Christmas Breakfast
Breakfast in Bethlehem
Dinner in Whoville (from The Grinch)



Polar Express Party
Early New Year's Eve Party
Valentine Dinner
Red Carpet Night
Ice Cream Social
Cocoa and Cookies

2. Location Location: In some wards, the only viable location is the church building, but think of using it creatively. Can you utilize outdoor space in order to do something new? Can you use the classrooms to your advantage? How about using only half the cultural hall to make it more welcoming and cozy? With permission from your bishopric, think even more out of the box. Can you use a local park, landmark, campground or beach? Sometimes a change of location can help ward members open up and feel more willing to socialize and get to know one another.

3. Traditions vs. Tired Ideas: Traditions are wonderful. They give ward members something to look forward to in a year and help us become closer as a ward family. However, some activities seem to happen only because no one has bothered to try something new and are not necessarily a tradition. If your ward has a much anticipated Summer Party every year, don't throw it out the window, but tweak it to add some new fun and make new memories. On the other hand, if that same old potluck happens and no one knows why... then be brave and change it up! Here's a few ways to tweak your traditions and keep them fresh:

- Instead of a Christmas Dinner, try a Christmas Breakfast or Brunch.
- Like above, try out a 4th of July pancake breakfast and skip the cookout
- Spice up the Ward Luau with a "Castaway" or "Survivor" theme and include some games.
- Keep your potluck, but assign families to make specific recipes so it's one big family dinner instead
- The annual Ward Talent show could be changed to include non-performing talents and have an area for members to display things that have created or made... better yet, make it a NON talent show and let ward members pick out of a hat something they have to perform/create for the evening!



Gear 2 : Creation

Once you have chosen what theme or type of activity you want to have, now it's time to create it! In this step, it will be time to plan according to your ward's parameters and dynamics. During this "creation" phase, you will be deciding exactly what will happen during the activity and at what time frame.

****SIDE NOTE:** If you don't already have a group of families or individuals assigned to help with this ward activity, now would be the best time to get them involved. When choosing members to help out, think broad! Don't always go to the same people that are always asked, think outside of your own scope. Many ward members would love a chance to help throw an activity and there are probably several members of your ward who have a certain set of skills that could be useful for the specific type of activity you have created.**



For every ward activity, there are a few key creation points that will need to be addressed. The answer to each point will vary from ward to ward and activity to activity.

1. Budget: What's your budget? Plain and simple. Once you know the bottom line, it will be much easier to plan what you CAN do with that money instead of worrying if you CAN'T. Within your budget will need to fall all of your expenses including decorations, activities, food, prizes, paper goods... anything you plan for. Begin to look at where you can use items you already have and also look at ways to have ward members contribute to any of the budget busters in order to stay within your means. Usually this is accomplished by having members volunteer to make food. Once again, this does not always mean potluck. Assign members specific dishes, recipes or toppings if wanted. Also, it sometimes helps to think smaller. Do you need a dinner every time or fancy decorations? Instead of a big meal, opt for a dessert only activity or switch a dinner to a breakfast to help cut costs. Finally, decide what the priority is. What are you trying to create? If, for example, you have chosen to create a summer Olympics themed activity,

maybe a chunk of your budget to the meal doesn't make sense... instead opt to put it towards fun prizes and serve healthy snacks and power food.

2. Timing: Timing can be a very important and often overlooked tool in planning your ward activity. A ward dinner has always been a tradition, but choosing a different time of day can often be better for the type of activity you are trying to create. In fact, a different time of day can also help out your budget! Try out a breakfast or brunch, possibly a late afternoon start time if it's a physical event. A fun dessert activity after normal dinner time often works for families whose parents work longer hours. If you are providing a meal, try to set the time at a standard time for that meal. Also make sure you are giving yourself enough time to provide the meal AND the entertainment. Two hours is usually enough time for this.

3. Food: Let's face it, who doesn't love food? We all love to be fed and it brings us closer together. At your activity, you will most likely want a type of refreshment. This can run the gamut, however, from water and fruit to a full dinner and dessert. The best way to start planning food is to look at your concept and see what makes sense. If a ward volleyball night is what you are trying to accomplish, then a full dinner simply doesn't make sense. Unless, your ward leadership feels otherwise, there is also no reason to feel as though a full meal needs to be served, and you can plan your timing as such. Sometimes an activity with a smaller but higher quality spread can be much more successful. Instead of a full meal, invest your efforts in an over the top Sundae bar or finger foods buffet. What you are able to serve will greatly depend on your budget. In order to stay under budget, most wards have members contribute with food to share. This is an area where you can be creative with what members can provide. Here are a few examples:

- Have a baked potato bar! Have the ward provide the potatoes and have members contribute by baking them up and providing toppings
- Sundae Bar! Have members provide toppings again
- Pancake Breakfast. Ward provides pancake mix, members provide milk and juice.
- Skip dinner and opt for a dessert or appetizer night
- Plan your activity in the afternoon and serve snacks instead of a full meal.

Make sure to plan your potential menu with your personal ward make up in mind. Sugar free desserts might be welcomed as kid friendly choices are appreciated by parents and children alike.



Serving sizes can always be a tricky challenge, below are some examples of general amounts you will need according to activity size:

Appetizers/Snacks

6 bites before a meal.

4 - 6 bites per hour when hors d'oeuvres are the meal.

The longer your party and the larger your guest list, the greater the number of selections you should offer.

The Main Meal

Poultry, meat or fish - 6 ounces when you have one [main dish](#), 8 ounces when you offer two or more main courses.

Rice, grains - 1.5 ounces as a [side dish](#), 2 ounces in a main dish such as risotto.

Potatoes - 5 ounces

Vegetables - 4 ounces

Beans - 2 ounces as a side dish

Pasta - 2 ounces for a side dish, 3 ounces for a first course, 4 ounces for a main dish

Green [Salad](#) - 1 ounce undressed weight

Desserts

1 slice cake, tart or pastry

4 ounces creamy dessert such as pudding or mousse

5 ounces ice cream

When serving two of the above, reduce each by a little less than half.

When serving your food, try to avoid any type of long lines. Seriously, who likes those? NO ONE! Long food lines create frustration, chaos, and make any other activity planned at the event feel rushed. There are a lot of different ways to help avoid unnecessary lines. Here are a few:

- Instead of one food table, create 3 or 4 “stations”
- Make sure the food table can be accessed from both sides and members know to use both
- Serve food family style by table, this helps lines AND portion size.

- Break the meal into sections and have some items on tables, such as bread and salads.
- Do not set dessert out on the table and serve it later in the activity. Children linger in the line for these, and some adults too.

Food clean up can seem to always be an exhausting endeavor. Make sure you have asked people to help with clean up during your commitment phase! This will make things a lot easier at the end.

4. Entertainment: If it's a ward activity, you need just that! Dinner and socializing is fun, but a structured reason to come together can go a long way to making memories and bringing people together. Hopefully your conception phase has given you a strong direction for the activity. If you are still looking for some things to do, look at your ward for inspiration. A ward with a large primary might benefit from some children's or family games separate from the originally planned activity. If you are stumped on this, just remember your ward is just like a big family! Family games and activities planned on a larger scale can be a big hit. Also remember that just like a family, not every type of activity will appeal to every single person. That's okay. To make all feel welcome and comfortable, keep it an option to sit out and socialize.

5. Décor: Decorations. Sisters get 'em. Brethren do not. That's how it goes. While they can really set the atmosphere for your event and help people feel welcome, decorations can also be a budget buster very quickly without some savvy shopping. Much like food and timing, evaluate what type of activity you are planning and see what type of decorations (if any) make sense. All of your décor will mainly fall into two categories: Table and atmosphere. Table décor is just that, for all your tables as well as buffet table and serving areas. Atmosphere décor will be anything extra on or against walls, ceilings, entrances and perimeters. Providing decorations is a great way to get everyone involved in the activity. Think of the members of your ward ask around for volunteers. Have décor assembly parties at someone's home to prepare decoration for some of the larger events. Ask members to contribute personal items (such as china) for table settings or centerpieces. You can also have members sign up to decorate tables or sections of the activity instead of providing food. This can often be wildly successful in wards full of creative members!

While choosing décor, keep in mind the dollar store and local thrift stores for items. Sometimes a quick trip through either or both can bring great finds. Also contact your neighboring wards or wards you share a building with and make a “swap” list of items you can both use to help cut costs. Don’t forget to add any paper products that need to be purchased in with your décor budget so you don’t end up surprised later.

Gear 3 : Commitment



Once you have your conception and creation in place, commit to your idea! Ever heard the expression that 80% of success is just showing up? The same is true for ward activities. When other ward members see how excited you are, their excitement will follow. Not every ward activity will have appeal for every member or family, but hopefully in your creation process you have covered all of your bases. Any complaints or naysayers should not affect your choice for an activity if you have planned effectively, so stand behind your plan! Here are a few ways to get ward members excited and ready for the upcoming event:

Advertising!! SO many ward events are poorly attended simply because people did not know it was happening! Advertise in every single auxiliary, DO NOT assume that a quick announcement in Relief Society will do the trick. Make sure it is announced in Primary, Young Men and Women, Elder’s Quorum and Relief Society. Also never underestimate the power of visual reminders! Make sure you are covered with the following advertising tools:

- Posters—place at all church entrances at least 2 weeks before the event
- Ward bulletins – make sure you place it in your ward bulletin before any deadlines.
- Ward newsletter – If you ward has a newsletter, don’t miss that opportunity to get the word out.

- Ward emails- many wards send out a weekly email, make sure your activity is included even weeks before so it can be put on to calendars.
- Flyers – flyers are a great take home reminder and can be handed to home and visiting teachers. They can also be great for the ward missionaries to use in order to invite others to ward functions.

Sign ups: If you are having ward members contribute to the activity with food or other items and services, make sure the sign up lists are going around the auxiliaries the same time the advertising begins. Consider sending sign ups through email as well in order to reach all ward members. Find your “mock” committee. If you are going to need additional help, it’s time to find your “mock” committee. Since there are no longer official ward committees to help with events, this can be a great opportunity to involve everyone. Think of the different aspects of your activity and find places where members can be included. Never be afraid to ask people to be involved and commit!

Gear 4 : Coordination

This will be your most difficult gear! Many great ideas and efforts fall apart at the coordination phase. During the coordination, you will need to delegate assignments and tasks including building, supply and food logistics to any that are helping out with the event. Make sure you are covering all of the following:

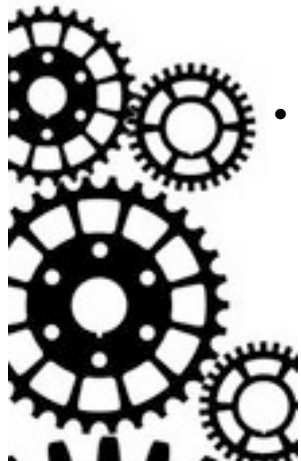
- Building and/or location scheduling and reservation. Make sure this is done ASAP!! Never assume your ward has the building only to be surprised on the day of your event.
- Assignments for all aspects of the activity from the creation phase. Possibly have one person over each different category such as food, entertainment, set up, take down, and so forth. Assign as soon as you can to give anyone who is helping as much time as possible.
- Timing for day of activity. Make sure any helpers know what time to help set up and what exactly needs to be taken care of. This will also be a great time to begin coordination of the clean up effort. Do it now and you won’t be overwhelmed when the time comes!

- Reminders. Everyone is busy and sometimes things just fall through the cracks. Be courteous to your fellow ward members and remind them of anything they have signed up for or volunteered to do. A small reminder a few days before the activity can go a long way to success. Email is a great way to get this done quickly.
- Ward Leadership —keep your leadership up to date on all activity plans and any other needs you may have. If you get stuck on a problem, they may know someone who can be a great resource!

Gear 5 : Crowd Control (sort of...)

Okay okay, it's not a rock concert, but a little bit of crowd awareness can go a long way during the activity. Hopefully you have come up with a good plan and flow of events during your creation phase, all you need now is to see it through. All ward events, large or small, will need an efficient way to serve food as well as progress to any entertainment or activities you may have planned. Here are a few tips to consider:

- Begin and end on time. Do not be tempted to wait only to feel rushed later.
- When setting up the activity, make sure you have plenty of room for traffic flow. This will help members feel more comfortable socializing.
- If serving a buffet, set up your table so lines can form on both sides. Create a separate station for drinks and desserts to not compete with the other food.
- Consider serving all of the food family-style on large platters by tables. This adds a level of hominess and comfort as it rids everyone of the dreaded food line.
- Any activities specifically designed for the children can begin about 30 minutes into eating, most children are finished by then and this will give your mock committee time to set up dessert without little fingers.
- Keep parents engaged with their own children. Make sure in the creation phase you have covered what families will be doing together. Adults love to chat, but everyone is miserable if there are children



- running around with no supervision. If necessary, assign “hall monitors” on rotation.
- Meet and Greet! A smile goes a long way to make everyone feel welcome. Just because we are all members of the same ward doesn't mean we are all comfortable at a ward activity. Make sure everyone knows that you value their presence. Greeting members as they come in or go through a food line is always nice, or table by table if necessary. If this is hard for you, assign it out to another ward member.
 - Begin to transition to any entertainment or activities you may have planned for the event BEFORE everyone is finished eating. This will greatly help any “down time” from turning into “child melt down time.”
 - Make sure any volunteers or mock committee helpers are recognized. Activities are hard work! Let them know you appreciate their help.

Gear 6 : Clean up!

Congratulations on your successful activity! Now comes the aftermath. Don't fall apart now! Hopefully many of your ward members will pitch in with the physical clean up at the church and you have already assigned a few to help during the coordination phase. The clean up, however, is always more than just breaking everything down and doing the dishes. Here are a few points to make sure you get checked off before you call it quits:

- Delegate members of your "mock" committee to take care of any after items, such as washing linens, store returns, decoration breakdown...
- Follow up with your mock members and even yourself to make sure all receipts are submitted.
- WRITE DOWN everything you did for your activity, including amounts of food purchased and where. This will be INVALUABLE for the next person assigned the task.
- Make sure any and all extra supplies and paper products are either put into general storage for the ward or readily available for the next person to use. This can save quite a bit of money and helps reduce waste.

- Thank your helpers and committee personally.

NOW you are done! Remember, the true test of a successful ward activity is not how many show up or how much food there was, but if even one member of the ward now feels closer to his or her ward family. Small steps bring us closer together as a people and closer to our Father in Heaven.

Hopefully this guide has helped you along the way during your ward activity adventure and has turned your ward activity tears into well tuned gears! For any additional information or questions, please feel free to email Vanessa at vanessa@vanessireneblog.com.

