

## *Working With a Wedding Planner*

Professional wedding planners used to be considered an extravagance or relegated to the role of social secretary. In the past decade, however, more couples have begun to rely on their expertise.

You may want to consider hiring a planner if:

- ✓ You can't spare at least 12 hours per week to do the job yourself — and twice that much time as the wedding date draws near
- ✓ You want to invite more than 100 guests
- ✓ You're holding your wedding in a home, garden, loft, museum, or other location that isn't a full-service venue
- ✓ You're getting married in a far-off location

If you've enjoyed a wedding and it seemed similar in taste and style to what you have in mind, ask the couple who was responsible. A tried-and-true way to find a reputable planner is to ask other suppliers such as caterers, florists, and photographers. Trade associations are another good source, but bear in mind that they provide listings, not recommendations.

The best time to hire a wedding planner is at the beginning of the process. Some planners, however, can be brought in at any point to handle just a few aspects or serve as the director of events on the actual wedding day.



Most often, planners charge in three ways: a flat fee, hourly, or a percentage. Expect to pay between 10 and 15 percent of your total wedding budget for a planner to coordinate the entire wedding.

Depending on the level of assistance you require, you may choose one of the following kinds of planners:

- ✓ **Event producer:** The whole enchilada — someone who designs the look of your entire event, meeting with all vendors on your behalf and becoming your point person for the planning process. Although a good producer takes your taste and style into consideration, be prepared to entrust the producer with complete creative control. This arrangement is best for couples with no time and a lot of dough — the flat fee ranges from \$40,000 to \$75,000.
- ✓ **Full-service coordinator:** This planner can recommend vendors, accompany you on appointments, and negotiate contracts. He or she then schedules and supervises the entire wedding day. If you want to take an active role in the planning, but want help along the way, hiring a full-service coordinator is a good way to go. The cost — usually a flat fee or a percentage of the wedding budget — ranges widely from \$5,000 to \$50,000.
- ✓ **Day-of planner:** This person gets involved up to a month before the wedding, touching base with suppliers and ensuring that details are in order, coordinating and managing the wedding-day schedule. This option works well for couples who can oversee many of the details themselves but want someone around to make sure things run smoothly. Besides a fee of \$1,500 to \$6,000 for the wedding day, there may be additional fees for time before that.

- ✓ **Hourly planner** If you just need someone to bounce ideas off of or to help with a specific aspect of your wedding, such as finding a band or location, paying a planner by the hour can be money well spent. Most planners have a two- or three-hour minimum, charging \$50 to \$200 per hour.
  
- ✓ **Referral maker:** Certain professionals provide nothing more than recommendations for vendors, including caterers, musicians, and florists. Their services appear to be free, but these planners get their compensation from the vendors they recommend. Still, the help can be worth it.

*Note:* These fees are based on national averages and don't necessarily include any other wedding expenses.