

## **Tips for Planning a Successful High School Reunion**

by Scott Share, Lincoln Class of '75

1. **Start Early.** So...next year will mark 25 years since you graduated high school, and you and a couple of your classmates have been kicking around the idea of planning a 25th reunion. Twelve months' lead time should be more than enough time to plan and implement a great reunion event...right?

Think again. It sounds easy...but it can take months just to pull together a working group to begin discussions, let alone make the big decisions about where and when your reunion should take place. And if you have a big class and hope to have an event for one hundred or more classmates, larger venues like hotels, country clubs and catering halls start booking most of their events a year or more in advance.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**Start your planning process at least 15-18 months in advance.**

2. **Check With Your Alumni Association.** Start on the Alumni Association's website: <https://www.alhsalumni.net/> and go to the Reunions page.

Your Lincoln High School Alumni Association has supported the reunion planning efforts of many classes over the years. Contact them **before** doing anything else; there may already be some classmates who have initiated planning for a reunion. The Alumni Association will either put you in touch with these folks, or help spread the word about your interest in starting the planning process.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**The first step in your planning process should be a conversation with a representative of the Lincoln Alumni Association.**

3. **Pull Together a Planning Committee.** Don't attempt to plan a reunion on your own. Use existing personal contacts, and put word out on social media about your interest in planning a reunion for your class. Ask the Alumni Association to put a notice on its website, encouraging interested classmates to contact you to help plan your class reunion.

Planning committee sizes can vary. If you form a relatively small committee (say, 3-6 members) you'll have an easier time making decisions, but the workload on

each individual may be heavy at times. With a larger group (7-12 members), it may take longer to reach consensus on key decisions, but you'll be able to distribute the workload among more individuals. Also, starting with a larger group provides you with a "buffer" in the event that one or more committee members drops out during the long planning process.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Early in your planning process, seek 10 or more volunteers to staff your reunion planning committee.**

4. **Diversity Matters.** Whatever size group you end up with, it's important to have a diverse, multi-talented committee. For example, if you were a sports standout in high school, don't fill your committee with teammates. As word gets out that you are looking for volunteers, be deliberate about seeking membership from across the many social groups that existed in high school. From cheerleaders to band members, from student government to the computer club, from the school newspaper staff to the French Club, people with different interests will bring a diversity of skill sets to your planning committee. And the wider you cast your net among various groups, the better your chances of having a larger turnout for the reunion.

**RECOMMENDATION: Staffing the reunion committee with classmates possessing diverse skill sets (e.g. creative, technical, social, organizational, etc.) will help ensure the success of your planning efforts.**

5. **Agree to a Meeting Format.** While in-person meetings would be ideal, it is much more practical to agree to a virtual meeting format. Virtual meetings require no commuting time, are not impacted by bad weather or traffic, and allow each member to participate from the comfort of home. Whether it is via Zoom, GoTo Meeting or other online meeting formats, select a format that allows participants to see as well as hear each other on your meeting calls. Many members may not have seen each other since graduation day; some members may not have even known each other in high school. Virtual calls that include video as well as voice enhance your ability to reacquaint (or introduce) members to each other, and to build camaraderie among the planning group.

Chances are that at least one of your planning group members already has an existing virtual meeting account; that is ideal, since you won't incur additional costs to establish a new account. With more mature age groups, don't assume that everyone is proficient on these virtual meeting platforms; consider

scheduling an optional planning session *prior to* your first official meeting for members who are new to this technology.

**RECOMMENDATION: Agree to a single virtual meeting platform, and offer training for members who are not familiar with this technology.**

- 6. Planning Committee Meetings.** At your initial planning committee meeting, discuss the need for regularly scheduled meetings throughout your year-long (or more) planning process. The frequency of these meetings may vary. In the beginning, when the two most important issues are *when* and *where* you will hold the reunion, a bi-weekly meeting schedule may make sense. Once your group has settled on a date and location for the reunion, you may move to a monthly meeting schedule for the next few months. As you find yourself getting closer to the reunion - when it is just 6-8 weeks away, for example - your group may decide that weekly meetings are needed to ensure everything is progressing on schedule.

**RECOMMENDATION: Establish a cadence for regularly scheduled meetings. Meeting frequency can change throughout the planning process. You may start out bi-weekly, defer to monthly, then switch to weekly as your reunion date approaches.**

- 7. Prepare Meeting Agendas Ahead of Time...and Keep Meeting Minutes**  
Successful planning projects require structure and discipline. Your meetings will be more successful and flow more smoothly if an agenda is prepared and distributed at least a day or two ahead of time. In addition to the subjects that will be discussed, include the name(s) of the person(s) who are expected to lead each discussion. No surprises!

Task one individual with preparing minutes summarizing the key issues discussed, decisions made and questions to be addressed at future meetings. Decide ahead of time if one person takes responsibility for preparing and distributing minutes, or if this is a task that will be rotated among members. Minutes are an important way for members to keep track of their efforts, and serve as a great resource for those members who may have missed the meeting and want to stay abreast of planning efforts.

**RECOMMENDATION: Prepare and distribute agendas ahead of each meeting, and share a written summary of each meeting with all members.**

- 8. Form Subcommittees.** As you kick off your planning process, it's easy to be overwhelmed by the amount and scope of the decisions that you'll need to make. When and where should you have your reunion? How will you get the word out among your classmates? Do you want an afternoon or evening event? Will you create a reunion website? What type of food will be served? Do you want a DJ...or a band? Are you hiring a photographer? How will people register? How will they pay? What about decorations and giveaway items? Will alcoholic drinks be available? Will you do anything special to encourage out-of-town classmates to attend?

Before you get too far into the weeds on any of these issues, it makes sense to establish subcommittees that can each take primary responsibility for specific topics. Ask for volunteers to staff one or more subcommittees, depending on their skills and interests. Some subcommittees may require having just a single member, but most do best with 2-3 members, depending on the complexity of the issue or task. Subcommittees with two or more members should select one person to take the lead for report-outs at planning committee meetings.

**RECOMMENDATION: Create and staff subcommittees to take responsibility for different aspects of the reunion planning and implementation process.**

- 9. Don't Underestimate the Challenge of Locating Your Classmates.** Most of your classmates have moved multiple times since graduation. The likelihood of securing accurate mailing addresses for the majority of your graduating class is slim. For this reason, it's important for your planning committee to establish a "missing persons" subcommittee early in the reunion planning process. The more time that has elapsed since graduation, the less accurate your mailing list will tend to be. As an example, the Class of 1975 held its 50th reunion in 2025, and we had usable mailing addresses for less than 25% of our classmates.

The Alumni Association will supply you with the addresses they do have, and a list of the students for which they have no known addresses. While you will find email addresses on the alumni website, they do not maintain a *current* directory of email addresses or phone numbers. The larger your graduating class, the bigger your list of "missing persons" will be. Your "missing persons" subcommittee will expend many hours tracking down as many addresses as possible, using personal contacts, research, and reaching out via social media. You may end up using some combination of U.S. Mail, e-mail, and social media to send out invitations and get the word out about your upcoming reunion.

**RECOMMENDATION: Get your "missing persons" subcommittee up and running as soon as possible. Work with the data that the Alumni Association provides you, and use phone calls to friends, research, and social media to locate as many mailing addresses and email addresses as possible.**

- 10. Establish a Website for Your Class Reunion.** A multi-dimensional, dynamic website is an ideal way to promote everything reunion-related. Every message you share about the upcoming reunion - date, time, location, how to purchase tickets, etc. - should be included on the website. You can list all of your "missing persons" and ask website viewers to share contact information they may have for one or more of the classmates on this list. You can also create an "In Memoriam" page that honors classmates who have passed away. Another useful feature to include is to build a "who's coming" page; as classmates register and pay for tickets, this list will grow and help build excitement about the upcoming reunion. It can help some "undecided" people make the decision to attend, especially when they see familiar names on the attendee list.

**RECOMMENDATION: Develop a class reunion website for your event. It should serve as the hub for all reunion-related communications.**

- 11. Create a Working Budget for Your Reunion.** Your major event expenses will be for the venue, food, and entertainment. Once you have made decisions on these three key issues, it's time to build your budget. Other expenses you will need to account for include decorations, signage, displays, photography, giveaways, invitations, nametags, and website development and hosting.

In order to set a per-ticket price, you'll need to guesstimate how many classmates will attend the reunion. For example: If you think that 100 people will attend the reunion, and you estimate total expenses to be \$10,000, you'll need to charge \$100 per attendee to break even. (100 attendees times \$100 per person equals \$10,000). To be safe, it's best to build a budget that allows for the unexpected (e.g. costs that may run higher, or attendance than runs lower). A good rule of thumb is to create a ten percent buffer: if you think you'll need \$10,000 to break even, build in an extra \$1,000 for contingencies.

Your planning group should do a regular reality check on your budget; it can be adjusted up or down as you move through the planning process. If you are a month away from your reunion and it looks like your revenue will exceed your budget by \$2000, you can always decide to enhance your event (e.g. add an

open bar, upgrade your food order, etc.) Likewise, if it looks like you're running short on funds, you can cut down on decorations or other non-essential items.

**RECOMMENDATION: Build a working budget based on your projected attendance. Monitor your revenue and expenses throughout the planning process, and make adjustments as necessary.**

- 12. Consider Signing Up Sponsors For Your Reunion.** One way to stretch your budget is to recruit paid sponsors for the reunion. Your pool of potential sponsors includes fellow classmates, local businesses, and vendors you are hiring for the reunion. As an example, the Class of '75's recent 50th reunion expanded its budget by over 25 percent with paid sponsorships that totaled nearly \$3,000; these extra funds were used to add pre-dinner hors d'oeuvres, provide prizes for a contest held during the event, and to make a donation to the Alumni Association for its scholarship fund. It also supplied some peace of mind; at a time when ticket sales were falling below expectations, the sponsorship funds served as a safety net in case we did not meet our attendance projections (which, in the end, we did.)

**RECOMMENDATION: Create a subcommittee to solicit sponsorships for your reunion; these funds can allow your committee to add "extras" to your event, or help you attain your budget goals in case ticket sales lag.**

- 13. Conduct a Post-Reunion Survey.** With all of the time and effort your committee put into the planning process, it's worth your while to measure classmate satisfaction with the reunion experience. After your reunion event, email a survey out to all attendees. Ask questions that measure each attendee's satisfaction with key aspects of the reunion event - venue, food, price, entertainment, etc. - and generate a summary of findings that can be shared with committee members, as well as your Alumni Association. Survey results can be used to enhance your future reunion events...and other classes can benefit from learning about what attendees liked about your reunion, and what could have been improved.

**RECOMMENDATION: Develop and implement a post-reunion survey, the results of which can be used as you and others plan future reunion events.**

- 14. Enjoy Yourself!** Reunion planning is a rewarding and joyous endeavor. It's a chance to relive your high school days, reunite with old friends, and make new ones. Planning a reunion requires hard work, but it becomes a labor of love when

you do it with a group of committed classmates dedicated to bringing your class together...one more time.

**RECOMMENDATION: Serving on a reunion planning committee is an experience whose benefits extend far beyond the actual event. Volunteers gain the satisfaction of knowing that they are helping fellow classmates make memories that will last a lifetime.**