

Backwards Planning

You know where you are going, right? You are planning a program and you know what you want it to look like, when it is going to take place, and how long you have to plan. But, do you know what you need to do and when you need to do it by to ensure success? Backwards planning begins with the final results in mind. And, it ensures that everything, from the largest to the smallest detail, is covered! Why wouldn't you do it?

"Discoveries are often made by not following instructions, by going off the main road, by trying the untried."

~ Frank Tyger

Steps in Backwards Planning

- State what your finished result will be.
Clearly and very specifically state your desired result.
- Identify the major steps to the finished result.
Break the overall task down to smaller parts—Promotion, Reservations, Food, Accommodations, Technical Services, Volunteers, Evaluation
- Create your timeline for accomplishing each step.
Give yourself time limits and set deadlines which give you appropriate time to complete the task without rushing.
Consider you institution's timelines (i.e. how many days it takes to process a contract, reserve a room, or cut a check).
- Be aware of possible obstacles and distractions.
Do you anticipate anything sidetracking you?
Write down all possible obstacles and distractions.
- State the substeps.
Work out the fine details of each major step.
Write the details on a calendar and consider the most appropriate date for each.

Take some time
to keep in **M**ind ...

...that in our ideal world of programming, everything should run smoothly, but reality can throw a

few fast ones our way. Backwards planning helps catch potential programming snags, but consider some other methods to cast your planning net far and wide:

- ▲ Don't compromise the details—the smallest ones sometimes sneak by you.
- ▲ Don't assume anything.
- ▲ Trust your gut instincts—if it feels like something is wrong, it probably is.
- ▲ Remember, the audience is not aware of what happens behind the curtain, so just handle it and move on.

- Work the Plan!
Put your strategy in action.
- Revise and flex according to needs.
Adapt and adjust your original plan to accommodate any emergencies or miscalculations.
- Complete your plan and accomplish your task!
Congratulations!

So Get Started...

Make a list of all the tasks that need to be completed before the program begins. Include publicity and advertising pieces, reservations, accommodations and all other areas that will need to be taken care of. Using a calendar, start with the last task on your list to be completed before the program. Write it down on your planning calendar on the appropriate date, and then consider its components. If there are tasks that need to be completed, work backwards with them and plug them into the calendar. Then proceed with the next to last task to be completed, and so on.