GRAND
TENTS & EVENTS

PRIVATE PARTY EVENT PLANNING CHECKLIST

Your event has a lot of moving parts.
This checklist makes sure none of them get dropped.

Produced by Grand Tents & Events
Nashville's Premier Tent, Furniture & Event Rental Specialists

(615) 868-3747 info@grandtentsandevents.com grandtentsandevents.com

Most party stress doesn't come from one big mistake. It comes from doing things out of order. This checklist walks you through the right sequence, so you can make confident decisions instead of expensive last-minute ones.

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS CHECKLIST

01 Define Your Vision
Occasion, guest list, and theme

02 Lock In the Big Four
Date, location, headcount, and budget

03 Book Your Vendors and Rentals
Food, bar, rentals, entertainment, and photography

04 Design Your Layout and Send Invitations
Floor plan, invitations, and decor

05 Confirm and Finalize
Final headcount, logistics, safety, and shopping list

06 The Final Stretch
Vendor check-ins, food prep, decor, and host prep

07 The Day Before
Setup, walkthrough, and overnight prep

08 Day Of
Pre-party setup, hosting, and wind-down

09 The Day After
Returns, cleanup, and follow-up

10 Take a Breath
Let the event sink in

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

QUICK TIMELINE REFERENCE

EVENT TIMELINE	SUGGESTED PLANNING TIME
Low-demand season (Jan–Feb, late Jul–Aug)	**6 to 8 weeks** in advance
Regular season (Mar–Apr and Sep, excluding holidays)	**2 to 4 months** in advance
Peak season (May–Jun weekends, Oct–Dec, holidays)	**4 to 6+ months** in advance

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 1

DEFINE YOUR VISION

THE OCCASION

- [ ] Write down what you're celebrating in one sentence.
- [ ] Decide on the overall feel: a casual dinner, a backyard cookout, a cocktail party, a laid-back get-together, or a more formal evening.
- [ ] Note anything that would make the event feel personal to your group, like a certain kind of food or a tradition people would notice if it was missing.

THE GUEST LIST

- [ ] Write a rough list of everyone you'd invite if budget and space weren't a factor.
- [ ] Flag guests with mobility needs, dietary restrictions, or children attending.
- [ ] Flag severe food allergies separately as these may need caterer coordination to avoid cross-contamination.
- [ ] Note any guests who'd benefit from a quieter space: elderly guests, young children, or those with sensory sensitivities.

THE THEME OR AESTHETIC

- [ ] Decide on a theme or color palette by building around the occasion, the time of year, or the kind of atmosphere you want guests to walk into.
- [ ] Browse Pinterest, Instagram, or rental galleries for images that show the colors, lighting, and table setups you like.
- [ ] Save 3–5 inspiration images to reference when picking linens, decor, and tableware.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 2

LOCK IN THE BIG FOUR

CHOOSE YOUR DATE AND TIME

- [ ] Pick two or three date options before committing (in case your venue isn't available).
- [ ] Check for conflicts: holidays, local events, school schedules, key guests' availability.
- [ ] Set start and end times.
- [ ] Build in enough setup time before guests arrive. Larger events may need setup to begin a day or two in advance.

CONFIRM YOUR LOCATION

- [ ] Decide between hosting at home, renting a venue, or using a park or community space.
- [ ] Check venue availability for your date options, then book once you confirm which is available.
- [ ] Check the venue for restrooms, parking, power, and kitchen access. Plan rentals for anything missing.
- [ ] Ask about noise restrictions, end times, outside vendors, catering requirements, and alcohol rules.
- [ ] Ask whether tents, stakes, open flames, grills, or amplified music are allowed.
- [ ] Check the HOA rules and whether a permit is required.
- [ ] Confirm where vendors can unload and where delivery trucks can park.
- [ ] If hosting outdoors, make a weather plan now, whether that means a tent, an indoor backup space, or coverage for rain and heat.
- [ ] If setting up the day before, confirm the venue is secured overnight. Lock up or remove valuables like AV gear and bar supplies.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 2

LOCK IN THE BIG FOUR

SET YOUR BUDGET

- [ ] Start with the maximum amount you're comfortable spending for the whole event.
- [ ] Budget for vendor gratuity separately. Bartenders, rental crews, and catering staff are commonly tipped and it's easy to forget until the moment arrives. Plan to have cash on hand.
- [ ] Decide what matters most before spending. The breakdown below covers the biggest guest-facing costs first and leaves room for the easy-to-miss and unexpected expenses.

SAMPLE BUDGET BREAKDOWN:

Category	Allocation
Food and drink	35%
Rentals	20%
Venue	15%
Decor and flowers	10%
Entertainment	5%
Invitations and stationery	5%
Buffer	10%
Total	**100%**

ESTIMATE YOUR GUEST COUNT

- [ ] Trim the rough list based on venue size and budget. This is your working headcount.
- [ ] Keep a running RSVP list so changes are easy to track.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 3

BOOK YOUR VENDORS AND RENTALS

CATERING AND FOOD

- [ ] Choose who is handling the food: caterer, restaurant, family, friends, or a mix.
- [ ] Choose a food format: plated meal, buffet, food stations, heavy appetizers, or potluck.
- [ ] Finalize the menu by locking in the specific dishes you will serve.
- [ ] Set the time food should arrive, be served, and be cleared.
- [ ] Assign who is setting up, refilling, and clearing food.
- [ ] Note whether food needs power, refrigeration, warming equipment, or water access.
- [ ] Confirm how your caterer will handle severe allergies, including separate prep and storage.

BAR AND DRINKS

- [ ] Choose your bar setup: full bar, beer and wine, signature cocktail, non-alcoholic, or a dry event.
- [ ] Assign bar service: bartender, trusted helper, or self-serve station.
- [ ] Check alcohol rules for your venue.
- [ ] Plan where drinks, ice, and backup supplies will be stored.

RENTALS

- [ ] Contact a rental company for a quote. A good rental partner has the inventory and capability to build the setup your event needs.
- [ ] Walk with them through the following categories and share your budget, guest count, style, and setup plans so they can guide you.
- [ ] Get your rental agreement in writing. Review cancellation policies, damage liability, and the exact return timeline before signing.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 3 BOOK YOUR VENDORS AND RENTALS

RENTAL CATEGORY LIST

SHELTER & STRUCTURE

- [ ] Tent
- [ ] Tent sidewalls
- [ ] Flooring or turf
- [ ] Tent lighting

SEATING & TABLES

- [ ] Dining tables (round, rectangular, or a mix)
- [ ] Chairs
- [ ] Cocktail or high-top tables for mingling areas
- [ ] Kids' table and chairs if children are attending
- [ ] Lounge furniture for a separate conversation area
- [ ] Gift table, cake table, or dessert table if needed

LINENS & TABLETOP

- [ ] Tablecloths based on your table sizes and theme
- [ ] Napkins
- [ ] Dinner plates, salad plates, and dessert plates
- [ ] Glassware
- [ ] Flatware

FOOD & DRINK SERVICE

- [ ] Serving tables, buffet tables, or station tables
- [ ] Bar table, bar cart, or drink station
- [ ] Coolers, ice buckets, or drink tubs
- [ ] Drink dispensers for water, lemonade, or batch cocktails
- [ ] Chafers or warming stations for hot food

COMFORT & ATMOSPHERE

- [ ] Lighting: string lights, uplighting, lanterns
- [ ] Heaters
- [ ] Fans or misters
- [ ] Dance floor
- [ ] Trash and recycling bins

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 3 BOOK YOUR VENDORS AND RENTALS

FINALIZE YOUR DECOR PLAN

- [ ] Decide on centerpieces for each table.
- [ ] Choose your linen colors and confirm sizes with the rental company.
- [ ] Plan your entry or welcome area: a sign, balloon arch, or floral display.
- [ ] Think through small touches: candles, photo displays, menu cards, place cards.
- [ ] Order or purchase anything that has to be custom-made or shipped at this time.

ENTERTAINMENT

- [ ] Book any live entertainment: band, DJ, musician, or performer.
- [ ] Arrange activities: lawn games, photo booth, or kids' entertainment.
- [ ] Set the event timeline: arrival, food service, entertainment, speeches, and key moments.
- [ ] Share entertainment setup details like space, power, and equipment needs so the venue or rental team can prepare accordingly.
- [ ] If speeches or presentations are planned, confirm whether you need a microphone or PA system. If a projector or screen is needed for a slideshow, arrange this now.
- [ ] If any guests will be joining remotely, plan your streaming setup and test it in advance.

PHOTOGRAPHY

- [ ] Decide between a professional photographer or a designated friend or family member.
- [ ] Create a short shot list for moments you don't want missed.
- [ ] Set up a shared photo album link so guests can upload their own pictures.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 3

BOOK YOUR VENDORS AND RENTALS

PRO TIP

BUILD YOUR VENDOR CONTACT SHEET.

Keep this on your phone and share with your point person.

VENDOR CONTACT SHEET

Contact	Name	Phone	Arrival time
Rental company			
Caterer			
Bartender			
Photographer			
Entertainment			
Venue contact			
Sanitation provider			
Parking access coordination			
Generator provider			
Nearest urgent care			
Day-of point person			

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 4

DESIGN YOUR LAYOUT AND SEND INVITATIONS

MAP YOUR SPACE

- [ ] Request a floor plan from your venue, then mark guest entrance and delivery access.
- [ ] On the floor plan, mark your tables, chairs, bar, buffet, dance floor, lounge areas, and activity zones.
- [ ] Mark power outlet locations and plan for extension cords or a generator.
- [ ] If using a generator, confirm fuel type, who fuels and monitors it, and whether noise rules restrict use during your event.
- [ ] Note anything that may affect setup: low branches, sloped ground, narrow gates.
- [ ] Confirm the layout is accessible for guests with mobility needs.
- [ ] If you're designating a quieter space for guests who need a break from the crowd, mark it on the floor plan and keep it clearly accessible.
- [ ] Take photos of the setup area, delivery path, and access points.
- [ ] Share your floor plan with vendors who need it.

SEND INVITATIONS

- [ ] Send invitations at least 8 weeks out (paper or digital) with date, time, address, dress code, and RSVP deadline.
- [ ] Set the RSVP deadline 2–3 weeks before the event.
- [ ] Include parking instructions, whether kids or plus-ones are welcome, and any accessibility notes.
- [ ] Create an event page, group chat, or text thread for updates.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 5

CONFIRM AND FINALIZE

CONFIRM YOUR HEADCOUNT

- [ ] Tally final RSVPs. Follow up with anyone who hasn't responded.
- [ ] Send the final guest count to your caterer or food provider.
- [ ] Update your rental order: chairs, tables, linens, plates, and glassware.
- [ ] Update your seating chart if you're doing assigned seats.

LOGISTICS AND SAFETY

- [ ] Arrange guest transportation or parking if your venue has limitations.
- [ ] Share parking instructions with guests via your event page or a text reminder.
- [ ] Plan your weather backup: tent, indoor option, or a go/no-go timeline.
- [ ] Identify a first aid kit location at your venue.
- [ ] Note the nearest urgent care if your event is at a remote location.
- [ ] Plan for open flames: candles, fire pits, and grills should be away from high-traffic areas.
- [ ] If kids are attending, check for hazards: pools, stairs, fire pits, and uneven ground.
- [ ] Arrange rideshare options or designated drivers if alcohol is being served.

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- [ ] List everything you still need to buy or make: printed items, decor, and consumables like ice, candles, and batteries.
- [ ] Stock restroom supplies if hosting at home or in a private space.
- [ ] List borrowed items and who is bringing them.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 5

CONFIRM AND FINALIZE

YOUR SHOPPING LIST

- [ ] Order or purchase non-perishable items now.
- [ ] Assign pickups for ice, drinks, flowers, food, and last-minute supplies.
- [ ] Prepare gratuity envelopes in advance, so you're not scrambling for cash on the day. Label each envelope with the vendor name.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 6

THE FINAL STRETCH

VENDOR COORDINATION

- [ ] Reconfirm your order and delivery windows with your rental company.
- [ ] Reconfirm setup and delivery times with your caterer.
- [ ] Reconfirm arrival times with entertainment, photographer, and bartender.
- [ ] Walk vendors through your access points: driveway, gate code, parking.

FOOD PREP

- [ ] Write out a complete food prep timeline.
- [ ] Identify anything that can be made ahead and refrigerated or frozen.
- [ ] Plan your ice: how much, who's buying, where it's stored.
- [ ] Confirm you have enough serving dishes, utensils, and storage containers.
- [ ] Gather trash bags, paper towels, and cleaning supplies.

DECOR AND SETUP

- [ ] Gather all decor items in one place.
- [ ] Confirm everything on your list is accounted for.
- [ ] Do a quick dry run: vendor arrivals, setup timing, access points, layout, and key moments.
- [ ] Test all AV equipment during the dry run if you're using a mic, projector, or streaming.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 6 THE FINAL STRETCH

YOURSELF

- [ ] Plan your outfit.
- [ ] Write yourself a day-of schedule with time blocked for getting ready.
- [ ] If the party includes speeches, performances, or formal moments, rehearse those with the people involved.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 7

THE DAY BEFORE

- [ ] Clear the driveway, gate, or delivery path before rental arrival.
- [ ] Set up everything that can go up early: tent, tables, chairs, linens, lighting, and decor that won't be damaged overnight.
- [ ] Do a damage walkthrough and photograph any pre-existing damage to the venue.
- [ ] Secure or remove any valuables, AV equipment, or bar supplies that will be left overnight.
- [ ] Prep all non-perishable food items. Refrigerate anything that needs to stay cold.
- [ ] Set out serving dishes, utensils, and bar supplies.
- [ ] Charge all devices: phone, camera, speaker, outdoor lights.
- [ ] Check the weather forecast one more time. Follow through with your backup plan if needed.
- [ ] Send a quick reminder to vendors and helpers with their arrival time and responsibilities.
- [ ] Eat dinner, hydrate, and go to bed at a reasonable hour.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 8

DAY OF

BEFORE GUESTS ARRIVE

- [ ] Do one walkthrough 3–4 hours before guests arrive, then a final one 30–60 minutes out to confirm everything is ready.
- [ ] Walk the full rental setup before the crew leaves if delivery happens the same day.
- [ ] Check the setup against your floor plan.
- [ ] Test lighting, music, fans, heaters, and any powered equipment.
- [ ] Test microphone, projector, and any streaming setup if applicable.
- [ ] Set out ice and stock the bar or drink station.
- [ ] Place welcome signage and entry decor.
- [ ] Light candles only when someone can monitor them.
- [ ] Start music before the first guest arrives.
- [ ] Take photos of the setup.
- [ ] Hand off vendor questions to your day-of point person.
- [ ] Distribute gratuity envelopes to vendors at the appropriate time, typically at the end of their service.
- [ ] Take a few minutes to get ready and settle yourself before guests arrive.

DURING THE PARTY

- [ ] Greet guests at the door or designate someone to welcome arrivals.
- [ ] Check in with your caterer and food stations periodically.
- [ ] Monitor the bar for ice, mixers, cups, and anything running low.
- [ ] Keep speeches, cake, and planned moments on schedule.
- [ ] Keep walkways, exits, and food areas clear.
- [ ] Keep guests from moving tent legs, cords, anchors, or any rental equipment.
- [ ] Take a few moments to PART back and enjoy being there.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 8

DAY OF

WINDING DOWN

- [ ] Make a last-call announcement 30 minutes before the end.
- [ ] Begin clearing food and perishables as the crowd thins.
- [ ] If serving alcohol, start arranging rides for guests who need them.
- [ ] Gather personal items (gifts, cards, coats) into one secure location.
- [ ] Turn off candles, grills, heaters, fans, speakers, and powered equipment.
- [ ] Keep rental items together as guests leave.

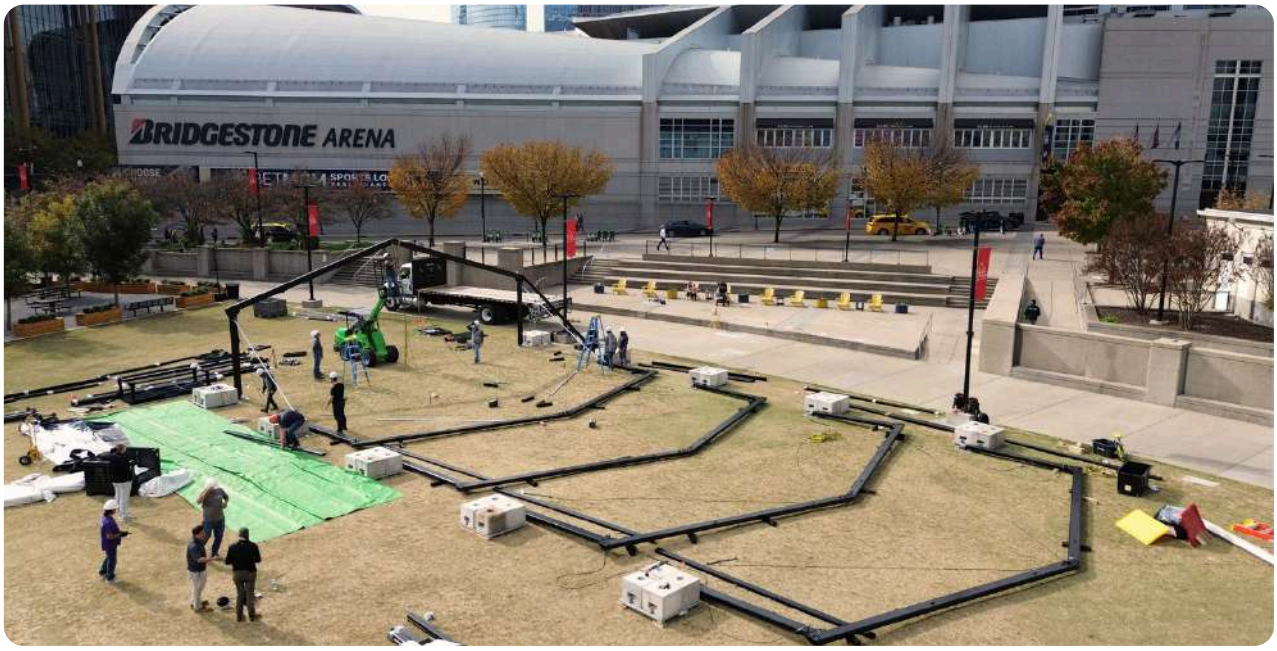
© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 9

THE DAY AFTER

A clean wrap-up helps you avoid late fees, missing rental items, cleaning charges, and follow-up issues.

- [ ] Return rentals on schedule. Check your contract for the exact timeline.
- [ ] Bag linens separately from food waste before pickup.
- [ ] Return any borrowed items to their owners.
- [ ] Walk through every room, closet, and garage for stray rented items.
- [ ] Share your photo album link with guests.
- [ ] Plan when to send thank-you notes or messages to guests who traveled far, gave gifts, or helped.
- [ ] Leave reviews for vendors whose work you appreciated. It only takes a few minutes and can mean a lot to the people who helped make your party happen.
- [ ] Write down two or three things you'd do differently next time.
- [ ] Take a moment to appreciate the work that went into making the party happen.



© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

PART 10

TAKE A BREATH — YOU DID IT

The decor is down, the rentals are gone, and the leftovers are slowly disappearing from your fridge. Take a moment to actually let that *sink in*.

- [ ] Acknowledge that pulling off a party is genuinely hard work, even when it looks effortless to your guests.
- [ ] Accept compliments graciously. When someone says it was a great party, believe them.
- [ ] Do something nice for yourself today — a long walk, a favorite meal, a nap with zero guilt.
- [ ] Look at the photos. Not to critique the setup, just to remember the good moments.
- [ ] Remind yourself why you did it in the first place — the people, the occasion, the memories you made.

Planning a party is an *act of generosity*. You gave people a reason to show up, dress up, and be together. That matters more than whether the centerpieces were perfect or the timeline ran ten minutes late.

© Grand Tents & Events | All Rights Reserved

GRAND
TENTS & EVENTS

EVERY GRAND PARTY STARTS WITH A VISION

If you want a partner who can help bring your vision to life, Grand Tents & Events is here. From tents and tables to linens and lighting, we've helped Nashville hosts of every kind create events they're proud of — and we'd love to do the same for you.

812 Madison Industrial Rd., Madison, TN 37115

(615) 868-3747

info@grandtentsandevents.com

grandtentsandevents.com