



## Chapter 2

# Planning Tools

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PLANNING A BABY SHOWER is no different from planning any other type of party. There is some basic information that must be gathered to determine how you will proceed. Whether this is your first baby shower or you're a shower-throwing veteran, one thing remains constant: The entire reason for this activity is to shower the new baby and new mommy with love and good wishes—and an occasional present is also nice. Ultimately, your task as planner is to create a relaxed and welcoming environment where these sentiments can be expressed.

## Hostess with the “Mostest”

Hosting a baby shower doesn't have to be a lot of work, and it doesn't have to cost a lot of money. It should, however, be fun to plan. As with any job, the same results can be achieved with many different tools. You may find that a binder or BlackBerry suits your needs, or perhaps Post-its on your refrigerator work best. Those idiosyncrasies will define your record-keeping style and may also define the style of the shower. Use what works for you to your advantage. Don't fight it, celebrate it!

### Party-Planning Basics

Entertaining is the marriage of your party vision with the needs of your guests. Before you begin organizing and selecting the details, stop for a moment and create a mental picture of the shower in your head. Is it a confection of gossamer-clad women with parasols at high tea on the veranda, high-heeled fashionistas sipping nonalcoholic Appletinis at a trendy restaurant, or dear old Grandma and all the cousins reminiscing on Aunt Betty's patio? There is no wrong answer—all of these showers can be successful and fun. But you need to have an idea to shoot for, so think, think, think.

### Three “Ds” of Decision Making

There are three things you should keep in mind when planning any party:

- ✓ **Demographics of guest group.** The demographics of the guest group or groups (coworkers, relatives, age group, gender mix) will help you narrow down the venue location and size, as well as the time of day and possibly the degree of formality.
- ✓ **Degree of formality.** For baby showers, this ranges from jeans at a barbeque to high tea at the Ritz. It is highly unusual to have a formal, black-tie baby shower. This factor may also be influenced by the location. A shower at work might be business casual, whereas a shower in your backyard might be jeans casual.
- ✓ **Day of week/Time of day/Time of year.** Most baby showers are held in the last trimester, generally about six to eight weeks before the

baby's due date. This factor obviously will determine any seasonal influence on your event, such as having it indoors or outside, using specific colors, and so on. If you are inviting work friends and social friends, you may choose an after-work or weekend time. If it's other young mothers, morning coffee with toddlers may be more appropriate. These time factors will influence several decisions, such as guest list and menu.

These three “Ds” can be assessed in a matter of minutes, but they are the cornerstones for the balance of the detail decisions. They should be part of the initial discussion when you are cohosting a shower with another person or with a group.

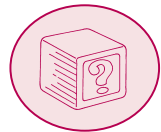
## Setting a Date and Time

Which comes first, the venue or the date? Well, that depends. If you are having an at-home shower, date considerations depend on your own calendar and the guest of honor's due date. If you have chosen to have it at a restaurant, hotel, or other venue, be aware that you may need more lead time and some date flexibility. Hotels that are popular for weddings may not have much weekend availability—you may need months to book the date you want. Holiday and vacation seasons also present some scheduling challenges as your guests' calendars fill up with travel plans or social commitments.

Ideally, the mother-to-be or her spouse will be able to give you several dates that would work in her last trimester. As you narrow the date range down to a specific day, remember to take into account work schedules, commute or travel considerations, and naps or babysitting needs. If you do it during the day on a weekday, women who work will likely not be able to attend. Though you can't accommodate everyone's schedule, the goal is to make it convenient for the widest possible number of people to attend this special occasion.

Weekend showers are popular because they allow the maximum number of guests to attend with minimum impact to their hectic work-week schedules and stress. They also allow an opportunity for out-of-town guests

to have travel time. If a weekend won't work, perhaps you need to reconsider the format of the shower. Maybe a mid-week dessert and coffee format will be a better fit and still allow you to host the event.



**E-QUESTION**

**How long should a baby shower be?**

At work: thirty minutes to one hour. Most at-work showers are held during a break or at lunch. At home: two to four hours. Coffee and dessert take less time than a meal or cocktail party. At a restaurant: two to three hours. Most restaurants set a start and end time and charge extra if your party runs late. Add an activity: one to two hours extra, depending on the activity.

**Setting the Budget**

Even if you've decided that the sky's the limit for the shower you're about to plan, you will then need to define "the sky." Every shower has a bottom line. The question is: How much money can you spend on this event? Protect yourself and your cohostess from shower sticker shock by putting it down on paper first, while there's still time to say, "No thanks, let's skip the caviar." Be realistic, and then get moving—you have a party to plan!

**Budget Basics**

While your plans for the baby shower will be unique and personalized, the main budget categories will be surprisingly similar. Most baby showers will include food, drinks, décor, music, entertainment or games, and invitations. The cost of these items, when added together, will be your total budget. The largest expense category is food and beverage, which generally accounts for 40 to 50 percent of your budget; decorations require 25 percent; with most of the balance going toward games, music, or other entertainment. And don't forget 10 percent for incidentals. You should always have a miscellaneous category to cover all those little things that mean so much but cost so much more than you thought.

There are several ways to approach the issue of budget. If you have never planned a shower before, use the following worksheet to determine a preliminary budget. Is the total what you wanted or can afford to spend? If it is, move forward; if not, write your bottom-line budget number down and work backward.

**Budget-Planning Worksheets**

**Shower Budget**

Estimated Number of Guests:

**Cost Breakdown**

ITEM	ESTIMATED COST	ACTUAL COST
Site		
Invitations		
Postage		
Decorations		
Food		
Beverages		
Music/Entertainment		
Party Favors		
Party Games/Prizes		
Present for Mother-to-Be		
Photography/Video		
Cleanup		
Rentals		
Miscellaneous		
Total		
Cost per person		

## Planning Tips from Professional Experience

When you strip away all the glitz and glamour of being a professional party planner, what you're left with is years of experience and lots of tips. There are no great secrets here, just some commonsense, practical advice, and lots of practice. Anything you can do to lighten the work load during the planning phase and ease the stress event week, will make you a more relaxed hostess, which is the goal.

### Stress Savers

- ✓ **Enlist help.** There's no medal of honor for going it alone. If you have a cohost or many cohosts, delegate the tasks and share the responsibilities. Husbands, children, and neighbors can be vital resources when it comes to napkin folding, furniture rearranging, and ribbon tying. And their involvement makes them feel like a part of the party.
- ✓ **Enlist professional help.** Sure, you can clean the house, mow the lawn, or roll pigs-in-a-blanket by yourself, but if you have to give up a workday (or more) to do so, you might consider professional help. Hire a house cleaner for the morning, have a gardener do the lawn and flower beds, get help to serve and clean up, consider a caterer, or hire a florist.
- ✓ **Don't procrastinate.** The closer you get to the big day, the more things will pile up on your planning plate. Anything that can be done ahead will make you feel more in charge as the party approaches.
- ✓ **Don't overschedule yourself.** During the week of the event, make your schedule easier, not harder. Reschedule your dental hygiene appointment. Throw in a frozen lasagna, hand off your turn to drive carpool.

### Money Savers

As the details of your shower begin to fall into place, you may discover the conscientious hostess's worst nightmare—expenses add up quickly! As tempting as it is to forego the budget, stay on track and keep it simple. Here are a few money-saving tips in some of the “big ticket” party areas.

### Food Tips

Some ideas for saving money on your food budget include:

- ✓ **Appetizers.** These tiny morsels tend to be more labor intensive than a plated meal. If you're serving at home, keep the appetizers simple—a tray of olives, hummus dip with pita chips, or a silver bowl of spiced nuts; these will give guests something to pop in their mouths without breaking your budget. If your shower is catered or at a restaurant or hotel, you can serve one or two passed hors d'oeuvres or a fruit or cheese platter before the meal instead of a canapé smorgasbord. This will satisfy the need to nibble without spoiling appetites for the meal to come.
- ✓ **Main course.** Whether you're cooking or someone else is doing the honors, too many choices can be a food-budget nightmare. For an at-home lunch, make the menu simple—a main-course salad, some crusty bread, and the dessert. If you're away from home, the buffet is always a popular choice because it feels more casual, but beware—it may cost more. At a buffet, food portions are less controlled, so more food is necessary to accommodate the same number of people. When serving a plated meal, don't let the guest choose from the main menu—it can be a runaway train! Instead, give your guests menu options by preselecting two or three choices that fit into your budget. The venue will often print a special menu with just those options, which is an elegant touch.
- ✓ **Desserts.** A cake is part of the traditional shower fare, but it's not the only dessert option. If a fancy cake will break your budget, consider a tower of cupcakes, mini-brownie sundaes, or ice-cream sandwiches made with cookies.

### Decorating and Entertainment Tips

Some money-saving tips for decorations and entertainment include:

- ✓ **Décor at home.** While it is sometimes tempting to use the impending event date as the target for a major remodel or redecorating—resist the urge. This will definitely add stress and money woes to your shower. Moreover, it's not necessary. The great news is that

eclectic is in! Walk around your home, and see what you have with “party eyes.” A mirror can become a tray, mismatched wineglasses can hold votives. The old silver teapot is the perfect vase for flowers. If you are willing to move your furniture a little, you can cozy-up a family room or living room by reconfiguring a few chairs. Borrow interesting serving pieces, extra silverware, or a beautiful water pitcher from your mother, sister, or friend—it’s amazing what a few pieces used in a different way can do for your décor. The grocery store is another great source of décor—a wooden bowl full of lemons, a pedestal cake plate of pears, bunches of fresh herbs—all offer an affordable, and edible, alternative to flowers, plants, or paper decorations.

- ✓ **Décor away from home.** The best advice here is to select a venue that is good-looking to begin with. And though these types of venues may at first glance appear to cost more, you may find that you spend far less on decorations. Many sites will provide a bud vase centerpiece or votive candles, which may be entirely adequate. Don’t rule out a fancier site until you have done the math.
- ✓ **Entertainment.** Whether home or away, showers have a built-in entertainment factor. Oohing and aaahing over booties and blankets can take some time, so you don’t have to get carried away with entertainers and circus acts. Music adds a much-needed layer to any party, so do plan to have something playing in the background, but don’t drown out the opportunity for great conversation.



### E-ALERT!

The gratuity and tax at restaurants, hotels, or through a caterer can add an additional 25–30 percent to the total bill for food and beverages. For a \$40-per-person estimate, that’s a whopping \$12 more per person. It can be a budget buster if you haven’t included it in your estimates. And by the way, a gratuity is not a tip; it is added automatically to your bill, whereas a tip is optional.

## Time Savers

The more time you have, the more options you may have available to you. When you are out of time, you can incur rush charges for printing and mailing or extra labor charges to complete work in a shorter time frame. Some time-saving ideas include:

- ✓ **Plan ahead.** As you sail through the event week, think through the details and have a mental rehearsal of how the shower will look and what needs to be done to make your vision a reality.
- ✓ **Prepare ahead.** Somehow, the laws of time and space seem to collapse during the week of the event. Even with the best time management and planning, the favors that should take an hour to complete suddenly take two or more. Complete as many tasks as possible two weeks before the shower and keep those final days clear for “pop-up” problems.
- ✓ **Take one away.** It is a well-known rule of fashion that when you’re finished getting dressed, look in the mirror and take one accessory away. It’s the same for parties. During the final planning approach, take a critical look at what lies ahead and do a little editing. You won’t miss the detail, but you will appreciate the extra time it will give you.

## Food and Beverage Needs

At this stage in the party-planning game, it is very easy to get sidetracked with the yummy details of menu selection. Don’t do it yet! All you need to know right this minute is what broad category of food you will be serving—breakfast, brunch, lunch, supper, dinner, coffee, cocktails—take your pick. Of course, it should correspond to the time of day, although “breakfast for dinner” or “desserts for breakfast” are fun ways to liven up the festivities.

There are always exceptions to the budget rule; however, following is a chart of some of the price ranges (based on dollars per person) for these mealtimes as a starting point for your budget worksheet.

Breakfast	\$10 to \$25
Brunch	\$15 to \$35
Coffee Break (at work)	\$10 to \$20
Lunch	\$25 to \$50
Dinner	\$40 to \$85 (can go higher depending on location)
Dessert and Coffee	\$12 to \$25
Cocktail-Party Food	\$35 to \$75

*This information is based on national industry standards. If you live in a metropolitan area, prices may be higher. These prices do not include tax or gratuity. Gratuities range from 15 to 25 percent.*



**E-ALERT!**

When considering a hotel or restaurant, remember that the posted catering menu does not include beverages unless specifically noted. Though some venues will include coffee and tea service, they may not include soft drinks, and they will not include alcoholic beverages.

## Selecting a Great Location

The old real-estate adage is true in event planning: Location is everything. Choosing the venue is usually the first step in this phase. The right venue will set the tone for the event, making the management easier for the planner and allowing for greater control. For a shower, you will need a space to visit, a space to open presents, and a space to serve and eat. It's nice if you can get up and move from one area to another during the event; it allows for mingling and leg-stretching.

### The Home Shower

A home is the classic backdrop for a baby shower. It's intimate, comfortable, and there's no pressure to get in and out on a time schedule. Having it at your house gives you plenty of flexibility, and it can sometimes save you money. If you have space for the number of guests expected, a reason-

ably convenient setup for food preparation, and access to adequate serving pieces (trays, coffee pots, etc.), a home shower may be the perfect choice for you.

If you decide a home shower is for you, there are many ways to adapt an *almost* perfect space into the *perfect* space, without an extreme makeover.

- ✓ **Rearrange furniture.** Reconfigure your space to allow for maximum seating and to open up floor space for better traffic flow.
- ✓ **Food stations.** Set up food and beverage stations around the house or yard. Create vignettes of seating and eating: Guests will enjoy a chance to engage in conversation in small groups.
- ✓ **Think inside-out.** If the weather allows, use a patio or backyard to fashion an outdoor room. Move indoor seating outside and group to form conversation areas.
- ✓ **Camouflage.** Who doesn't have a crayon-marked table or water-stained cushion? Colorful throws, tablecloths, a stack of books, magazines, or framed pictures can hide a multitude of blemishes.
- ✓ **Hide and seek.** When in doubt, gather unnecessary extras in a laundry basket and tuck out of sight. The party police won't catch you, promise.

The downside of hosting the shower at your house is that your house is in use, right up to the moment when you wave children and Dad off to the movies and dash upstairs to get dressed.

The responsibility of preparing the space for guests, as well as cleaning it all up afterward, is yours in addition to the rest of the shower-related preparations. Before you dive too deep into the hostessing pool, make sure that you have realistically evaluated what you need to stage the shower at your home. If you need to rent a tent, tables, chairs, umbrellas, dishes, and coffeepots and have to hire staff to assist you, compare the costs to that of a hotel or restaurant where those items are included.

### The Hotel or Restaurant Shower

Choosing a hotel or restaurant for your shower can be a lot of fun. It's a good idea to look at several venues until you find the right one for you.

Many facilities now post pictures on their Web site, which can help you narrow the search before you even leave home. Be sure to look for a location that is convenient, has ample parking, adequate restroom facilities, and comfortable seating, and, of course, great food.

Once you've decided on a place, ask the manager to set aside the date in writing, preferably in the form of a contract. The contract should state the following things:

1. The date of the event
2. The start and end time of the party and the time allotted for setup and cleanup
3. The name of the room you have reserved for the party
4. The estimated cost of the party (or minimum cost of party)
5. The amount of deposit (usually 50 percent)
6. The due date for final payment and final guest count
7. The items and services included with the rental facility (i.e., linens, tables, chairs, candles, etc.)
8. The guarantee number
9. The cancellation policy
10. The "bumping" policy

Be a good businesswoman about this rental contract. Items 1–7 are fairly self-explanatory. Item 8, the guarantee, is the number of guests or minimum dollar amount that you are responsible for—regardless of how many people actually attend your party. Although you may like to estimate on the high side, in contract negotiation, you want to set a realistic number on the low side.



### E-FACT

Hotels and restaurants can always accommodate small changes in the number of guests they can seat and serve, and in fact, most venues prepare for a 5–10 percent difference. When giving a guaranteed number of guests, take into account that there will always be last minute cancellations.



### E-SEENTIAL

You have more negotiating options at a party venue than you may think if you are willing to be flexible. Breakfast, brunch, or lunch menus may offer a significant savings from a dinner menu. Work with the chef to create fewer courses, simpler service, or smaller portions to make your budget work.

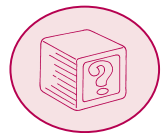
### Destination Showers

Many hostesses want to add an extra bit of panache to their shower event, so they opt for a destination shower. Locations that fall into this category are places like the beach or a specialty shop (a tea emporium, a wine shop, a clothing or baby boutique, etc.). These sites come with a bonus: The activity is built right in. There is also a trend toward hosting showers at day spas or nail salons. Treatments ranging from simple massages to manicures and pedicures are offered to guests.

If you have decided that you want to stage your shower in an unusual place, there are some special issues that you must consider. The first consideration is based on basic needs—is there shelter, are there restrooms, is it safe? A beach may be beautiful, but if the mother-to-be has to scale a cliff to get there, perhaps this isn't the best choice. Other considerations include food safety—is there a place to prepare, refrigerate, store, and dispose of food items? There may be restrictions about bringing food into a nail salon.

Does the site provide party essentials such as a room for guests to congregate in? Are tables and chairs available, or do they have to be rented?

Interesting places come with interesting challenges. They can work, but it's your responsibility to know exactly what those challenges will be before you sign anything. Also, do the math: That fabulous Japanese tea garden may be prettier than your own backyard, but if you need to rent furniture and linens to make it work, it may also be more expensive.



## E-QUESTION

### Can you use the venue's kitchen?

Some venues will give you access to their kitchen and some will connect you with their caterer. Most will not allow you to bring in your own food or cooking supplies, so make sure you know precisely what you'll be allowed to do before putting down a deposit.

If you have opted for a shower away from home, handle the booking like a professional. A site visit is a necessity. See for yourself what you're getting into. Don't count on someone else's recommendation alone. In order to get the most from your site visit:

- ✓ **Make an appointment.** You want to speak with the person who knows the property and handles both food and beverages.
- ✓ **Come prepared with questions.** This is the moment to ask all your questions. There are no dumb questions, so dig deep until you feel satisfied that you have enough information to make your decision.
- ✓ **Go with a friend.** You may be receiving a lot of information, and two heads are always better than one. Avoid taking small children or surly teenagers to the meeting; it can be distracting.

### Venue Checklist

No matter which out-of-home venue you are thinking of, use the following checklist to help in your planning.

### Does this venue work for the shower you want to plan?

- What dates are available?
- What space is available on those dates?
- Is there indoor and outdoor space?
- Can the room accommodate the service style you want? (i.e., buffet, food stations, sit-down)
- Are there adequate restrooms for the number of guests?
- Is there enough parking? Is there valet service? Is there any parking charge?
- How will food and beverages be provided?
- Who provides food and beverage service? Is it on-site? Catered?
- What are the food and beverage minimums?
- Will the event be adequately staffed? (ratio of servers to guests)

### How does the site look?

- What is the condition of the carpets and floors? Walls and drapes? Furniture and lighting?
- What other amenities are available?
- Do they have audio/visual equipment and staff available on-site?
- Is there adequate power and lighting? Are there plugs available?

### And finally . . .

- Is there a Plan B for inclement weather, extra guests, food issues, etc?
- Can the space be used in a different way in case of weather, change in party size, etc.?
- Can you get a commitment in writing?



