

Ten Tips for Planning and Ordering Catering For Your Next Event

Catering is an important element of any event. That's why we do more than just serve food. Our team will work with you to make sure your event has the catering it needs. Here are 10 tips to help you when planning and ordering catering for your next event.

- 1. Decide between our hot and cold options.** The type of event and your guest demographics help determine the type of food you order. For an event where food is the focus (like a team lunch), hot food is great – it's filling and substantial, it's served and eaten right away. For an event where food is more functional (like a working meeting), cold food is your best bet.
- 2. Plan the menus and order catering early in the process.** You've got enough to worry about; you don't need to be rushing around at the last minute trying to determine menus and confirm your catering order. Planning your catering in advance allows you time to create a menu you will be sure is right for your event and its budget. All final menu selections and catering orders need to be placed a minimum of seven business days (Monday through Friday) prior to your event date
- 3. Try something different!** When looking at our menu, try to pleasantly surprise attendees with "unique menu items" by thinking outside the box. A build-your-own pita bar, macaroni and cheese bar or even a charcuterie board can make a lasting impression and still stay within your budget.
- 4. Budgeting for your catering services.** The most common questions asked are, "How much will it cost and what food should I order"? The answer really starts with you. Ask yourself *what are attendees expecting* and *what can we offer within our event budget?*

When planning your menu, start by determining the amount of money you have to spend on food. Here are some basics to help you estimate your per person budget.

Breakfast, Morning and Afternoon Breaks: approximately \$10–15 per person | When ordering breads or pastries, budget for 1 ½ – 2 items per person for breakfast (i.e. bagel and muffin/ croissant and danish/ breakfast sandwich). For morning and afternoon breaks, 1–2 items or servings per person (fruit, kettle chips, sweets and squares or cookies)

Lunch: approximately \$12–20 per person | For a sandwich lunch, \$10 allows for one full sandwich per person. If you're after something more exciting and hearty, a budget of up to \$20 is generally enough to provide a reasonable amount of variety.

Receptions: approximately \$15 - \$25 per person | Depending on the length of the reception and the time of day, high-quality appetizers are anywhere from \$3- \$4 per item. Platters (meat and cheese board, [antipasti](#), etc.) are good budget-friendly options that don't compromise on quality. Here's some guidelines to help:

4 pieces per person, if served before dinner (reception 30 – 60 minutes in duration)

6–8 pieces per person, if served before dinner (reception 1 – 1 ½ hours before dinner being served)

12–15 pieces per person if the reception is in place of dinner.

5. Determining the beverages.

Our catering manager can provide expert advice on the amounts of coffee/tea/decaf and cold beverages for morning and afternoon breaks. For conferences and meetings with beverage larger containers of water, juice and coffee and environmentally friendly cups or re-usable containers for self-service are cost-effective and sustainable options.

6. Guaranteeing your number of guests. Consider the people attending. In general, men eat more than women. If your guests are pre-dominantly male, you'll want to order extra portions—one extra serving of food per ten people, particularly for buffet-style meals where people tend to help themselves to seconds (and thirds!). Always build a 1–3% contingency into your guaranteed numbers to ensure you have enough food for your group; especially if you have not collected an RSVP for the event.

If you are unsure about your guaranteed number of guests, our catering manager can help. We don't want to over-produce food and have it go to waste, but want to be sure you have enough for your guests to eat comfortably.

7. Cover basic dietary requirements. Vegetarian and gluten-free menu options are the norm at any event. Consider ordering 10% vegetarian and 5% gluten-free for your event. Other common special meal requests include vegan and food allergies. By working closely with our catering manager to choose your menu with these restrictions in mind, you can reduce the number of special meals needed. Including a question about dietary requirements in your RSVP/on-line registration can help guide your menu choices for your event.

8. Prevent the afternoon head bob. Everyone's trying to eat healthier. If you're feeding your team or guests lunches that are refined carbohydrates and hard to digest, the effects may have a negative impact on the rest of the day's productivity.

9. Provide the information needed to ensure on-time delivery. The key to a smooth, catering delivery starts with clear and complete delivery information from the person placing the order. This may include but is not limited to: location of delivery (room number – 7-126), time the event needs to be setup by and when the food should be set and ready for consumption, and any other specific access or setup information. Most importantly, we must have a contact name and number for the individual on-site receiving the catering delivery.

10. Expect the unexpected. The reality is that no matter how hard you try, sometimes things don't go as planned. Maybe it snows, so less people attend your event a last-minute guest has an unusual dietary requirement you haven't planned for; or more people turned up than RSVP'd. Catering Services is here to help you deal with all these situations.

We want to make it easy for you to choose and order the best catering for your event according to your needs and budget.

Check out our [catering menus](#) and contact Jen Brunsch, our catering manager (cateringmanager@macewan.ca or 780-497-5028) to help guide you through selecting catering services for your event!

MacEwan Catering Services – FAQs

How far in advance should I place my order?

All catering requirements need to be selected a minimum of 7 business days (M-F) prior to the event date or day of the first scheduled food service. For any catering order booked with 3 business days or less notice, we reserve the right to make substitutions to the menu and adjustments to your service times that may be necessary due to staff scheduled and other orders already confirmed. NOTE: See timelines for guaranteeing the number of guests below.

Can I order catering from an outside catering company other than MacEwan Catering Services?

MacEwan University Catering Services is the exclusive provider for all catering (food, beverage and alcohol services) on campus. It is not permitted to bring in external food, beverages or alcohol.

(Food Services Policy D4170, Liquor Service Policy D4180 & Allowable Expenses Policy D4010)

How long will my food be out at my event and can I take the leftovers?

Based on food safety standards from Alberta Health Services Food Service Code, high risk foods (hot or cold) that have been at room temperature for more than two hours must be disposed of by Catering Services staff. These food items cannot be removed from the area by the client or a guest, as the risk of foodborne illness (food poisoning) increases once food has been at room temperature for more than two hours.

How much time do I have to make changes to my event?

Upon receipt of your final order, an order confirmation for your approval will be created within three business days. For last minute orders (less than three business days), contact our Catering Manager directly at 780-497-5028 and we will do our best to accommodate your request

When do I have to finalize my guaranteed (guest) catering numbers?

To ensure the success of your event, we require your guaranteed guest numbers and all special dietary requirements:

- Three business days (M-F) prior to the event for events with less than 100 guests
- Five business days (M-F) prior to the event for events with 100 guests or more

If the event has less attendees than the guaranteed number, the guaranteed number of guests will be charged. Conversely, should the number of attendees during the event be more than this guarantee, any additional meals provided will be posted to your account upon discussion with your on-site contact.

Can I customize my catering order?

Yes, our culinary team enjoys preparing custom menus and quotes. These may take up to five business days (M-F) to prepare and are valid for up to 30 days. Final menu selection must be submitted no later than seven business days (M-F) prior to a function.

How do I make payments for my event and what forms of payment do you take?

All catering services for MacEwan University (internal) events must be ordered and paid for using a MacEwan University Purchasing Card (p-card). After the event there is a three-day period to validate any issues/concerns with our catering manager. After this time the credit card on file will be processed. For external clients, if Conference and Event Services coordinates your event, you will receive an consolidated invoice from the university, which includes all catering, space, services and rentals for your booking.

What is your cancellation policy if I need to cancel my event?

Any cancellation received within 7 business days (M-F) prior to the event will result in a charge of 50% of the estimated food total. Any cancellation received after the final guarantee has been provided (three days prior), will result in a charge equal to 100% of the final amount of the event order(s). For custom menus, where specialty items are required, cancellation after the item(s) have been ordered will result in a charge of 100% of the total amount.

Are linens included in my catered service?

All dining and food service tables for full meal functions are dressed in standard house linen. This also includes up to a maximum of three single tables with skirting and linen for registration tables. Events that require table cloths for non-food functions may be provided for an additional \$5 per standard house tablecloth and \$20 for skirting. Specialty linens will be priced at market value.

How do I contact you and place my order?

MacEwan University departments may order online using the intranet portal. External clients will be contacted directly by our catering manager to plan the menu for your event.

You can email us at cateringmanager@macewan.ca or call 780-497-5028.

What are your office hours?

Monday - Friday 8:00am - 4:30pm

Who do call if I need assistance from MacEwan Catering Services during my event?

On-Call Cell Phone: 587-338-6452 or 780-267-2918

Look for the contact information card with our catering staff and contact numbers on the tables where your catering is placed.

Is there a service (gratuity) charge for catering orders?

All MacEwan (internal) catering orders are subject to a 10% service charge and 5% GST. All external catering orders are subject to a 15% service charge and 5% GST. Service & labour charges are subject to applicable GST only.