

EVENT PLANNING GUIDE WITH COVID-19 CONSIDERATION



We are in a unique time where our decisions directly impact the wellness of others. Our venue does not take lightly our responsibility to create a safe place for people to gather, celebrate and prosper. The purpose of this Guide is to clearly communicate our plans with you and ensure you have resources and industry insight so we may both be prepared - as event partners.

Some event details will be driven by the State's Open Texas Plan, the CDC and local health officials. But other details are up to us – as event partners – to plan together. We have pulled together best practices and useful concepts from a variety of hospitality industry resources and professionals you might consider incorporating into your event.

I hope this document provides you guidance if you need it, as well as confidence in us that we are doing everything we know to give you a safe and comfortable place to meet. Our staff is looking forward to seeing and serving you once again. We appreciate your help in getting New Braunfels – and Texas – Back to Business.

Mandi L. Scott, CTE

Civic/Convention Center Manager

This is how we meet EMPLOYER & EVENT ORGANIZER RESPONSIBILITIES in the Open Texas Plan:

Just as our Clients are considered Employers and Event Organizers in the Open Texas Plan, so is the Civic/Convention Center:

- Training has been provided to staff and is on-going according to established Safety Protocols and a COVID Cleaning Guide with SOPs
- Daily Health Checks with documented Safety Protocols in case of illness
- Center will deliver a clean and sanitized event space and common areas prior to your reservation and regularly apply a disinfectant to high-touch surfaces in common areas such as restrooms, door handles, water fountains, sanitizing stations, lobby furniture, etc.
- Center will provide access to handwashing areas with soap and water as well as hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes at various locations inside the venue
- Center does not provide food service and has suspended beverage service through September 30, 2020
- Work and break schedules are staggered
- Existing signage at the venue includes:
 - Good health practices to protect themselves and others including:
 - Advice to wear a mask when 6' distance cannot be maintained
 - Respiratory etiquette
 - Hand washing
 - Physical distancing
 - Direction to stay home if you are sick
 - Advice to avoid touch your eyes, nose and mouth

July 27, 2020

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EMPLOYER & EVENT ORGANIZER RESPONSIBILITIES *continued*

- COVID-19 symptoms
- Guidance to local public health resources in case testing or treatment is needed
- Center has informed Clients through August 31, 2020 of their Employer Responsibilities via email

This is our plan to DELIVER CLEANLINESS & SAFETY:

- Clients and attendees are asked to wear face masks when 6' distancing cannot be achieved. We ask that Clients provide masks to those that arrive without them or in an emergency for their event staff and attendees
- Center staff will wear masks when interacting with clients and attendees and when a 6' distance from others cannot be maintained. Gloves are voluntary. A limited supply of disposable masks and gloves will be available for use in emergency situations for the public.
- Center will deliver a clean and sanitized rental equipment, event space and common areas using an electrostatic sprayer prior to your reservation. Center will apply a disinfectant to high-touch surfaces in common areas such as restrooms, door handles, water fountains, sanitizing stations, lobby furniture, etc. periodically during your event.
- Clients are asked to disinfect any rental equipment from outside vendors before their use
- Once audio/visual has been setup and tested with the Client prior to the event, Center staff will not enter the room during the event so the health of our staff can be maintained. Items inside the rented areas such tables, chairs, microphones and decor shall be maintained by the Client
- Once the reservation begins, the kitchen shall be maintained by the Client or their Caterer following the guidelines set for Restaurants in the State Open Texas Plan
- For multi-day reservations, staff will attempt to disinfect areas of your rented room daily when possible. We do not want to unintentionally harm décor or your equipment that may be made of paper or other sensitive material. The disinfecting method for large areas requires the moist disinfectant to remain on the surface for 10 minutes to be effective. Specific areas inside event rooms that will be disinfected daily by staff include door handles and Center's rental equipment
- If food or beverage service was indicated as Yes in your Rental Agreement, Center staff will clean and disinfect your kitchen prior to your arrival on the first rental day
- Unused rooms and areas including storage areas will remain locked. For those events that have indicated no food or beverage will be served at their event, kitchens will be not be accessible
- Center will remain locked unless an event is scheduled
- The building will remain locked until one hour prior to each event
- Loading prior to event shall only take place through the loading dock on Castell Avenue
- If the event is the only event in the facility, doors will remain open to the Concourse to increase air flow
- Appointments can be made in advance for tours and planning meetings at 830-221-4011
- If Center receives notice of a positive COVID-19 test result, the Center will notify any clients that have hosted an event that could have resulted in exposure. The Center will also notify clients with upcoming event scheduled within the upcoming 72 hours. Those events may cancel with a full refund.

This is how we'll MEET OCCUPANCY REQUIREMENTS:

- Maximum occupancies that will be allowed in the Open Texas Plan will be communicated to the client with as much notice as possible and as close to the event as possible to maximize attendance
- Occupancies have been created at 50% based on maximum occupancies approved by Building Code and are posted over existing occupancy signs with approval by the Fire Department

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OCCUPANCY REQUIREMENTS *continued*

- Room layouts will be designed and set with client input and agreement by client signature. Center will not offer provide chairs over the maximum occupancy allowed at the time of the event
- Room templates have been drafted with 6' distancing; client input is encouraged. Templates are based on:
 - 10 chairs may be placed at each round table or rectangle table groupings
 - 10 chairs may be grouped together in a theater or classroom style setting
 - 6' aisles and distance between objects and groups must be maintained
 - 9' between banquet seating tables and 8' aisles between rows of trade show booths
 - Chairs in a theater style seating will not be ganged to allow chairs to easily move to smaller groupings
- It is the client's responsibility to monitor, limit and report room occupancies at any time as requested by Center. Staff will not measure or monitor physical distancing. However, if a complaint is received or obvious violation is perceived, Center will ask client to provide a remedy. If one cannot be reached, an escalation may occur including the closing of the event.

RECOMMENDED SAFETY PROTOCOLS **for client's employees, volunteer, vendors and attendees**

Provide General Health Guidance for Employees

Employees are advised to adhere to the following CDC guidelines to stay healthy at work and home:

- Stay home if they are sick, except to get medical care, and to learn [what to do if they are sick](#).
- Inform their supervisor if they have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 and to learn what to do [if someone in their home is sick](#).
- Wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or to use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. Inform staff that if their hands are visibly dirty, they should use soap and water over hand sanitizer. Key times for employees to clean their hands include:
 - Before and after work shifts
 - Before and after work breaks
 - After blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - After using the restroom
 - Before eating or preparing food
 - After putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings
- Avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or use the inside of their elbow. Throw used tissues into no-touch trash cans and immediately wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Practice routine cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched objects and surfaces such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, and doorknobs. Dirty surfaces can be cleaned with soap and water prior to disinfection.
- Avoid using other staff's phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible. Clean and disinfect them before and after use.
- Practice physical distancing by avoiding large gatherings and maintaining 6' distance from others when possible.
- Consider having all employees and contractors wear cloth face coverings (over the nose and mouth). If available, employees and contractors should consider wearing non-medical grade face masks. For employers who choose to require masks, understand that young children and persons who are unable to adjust or remove face coverings should not be regarded as suitable candidates for wearing face coverings. In this case, the decision is up to the individual or their parent, guardian or attendant.

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Perform Daily Health Checks

Daily Health Checks are required for employees which also includes volunteers and vendors (optional for attendees).

Employees shall arrive through the Loading Dock to perform a Daily Health Check using an infrared touch-free thermometer.

Employees will answer the following questions:

- Do you have a sore throat?
- Do you have a dry, persistent cough?
- Do you have shortness of breath or difficulty breathing?
- Do you have, or have you had, a temperature greater than 100.3F in the last 24 hours?

If an employee registers a temperature above 100.3 using a touch-free thermometer, they should notify a supervisor or the Event Contact and wait two minutes in an air-conditioned space. The supervisor will perform the retest. If two results were above 100.3, employee shall leave immediately and await further instruction from their supervisor.

Additionally, if the answer is Yes to any question above, employees are directed to return home.

IF AN EMPLOYEE OR ATTENDEE BECOMES ILL AT THE VENUE, THE **ATTENDEE** SHALL:

- Separate themselves from others. *An outdoor area is preferred*
- Seek help if needed and contact emergency services for immediate care (911)
- Apply a clean, disposable mask or tissue if unavailable immediately. *Center has a limited supply*
- Leave and seek medical attention from their healthcare professional for triage/screening
- **Report suspected illnesses to Comal County health officials at 830-221-1120.** They can also assist in triage/screening and access to testing
- Sick persons should avoid shared rides and taxis

IF AN EMPLOYEE OR ATTENDEE BECOMES ILL AT THE VENUE, THE **CLIENT** SHALL:

- Upon receiving a report of illness if in-person:
 - apply a mask immediately
 - maintain a 6' distance
 - offer the individual a disposable mask if they do not have one
- **Report suspected illnesses to Comal County health officials at 830-221-1120.** The name of the person with a suspected illness MUST be shared with Comal County health officials for contact tracing
- **Report suspected illnesses to the Center at 830-221-4011.** The name of the person is not necessary
- Complete an Incident Report and submit to Center
- Incident Report should AT LEAST contain the following questions posed to the individual with the date:
 - Which area of the venue have you been?
 - Have you come into close contact with others during your shift or event?
 - What is your name and phone number?
- Determine which employees or attendees may have been exposed to the virus based on the schedule
- Inform other employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 at the venue - that another employee is seeking medical attention and testing for potential COVID-19 - but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This communication will also assist in contact tracing
- Stay in touch with the employee or attendee to determine if the COVID-19 test was positive

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Develop Your Communication & Emergency Plan

Clients are encouraged to have a Communication and Emergency Plan. We hope this Guide will assist you in its development. Some items you might include are:

- Drafted attendee messaging to send prior to and after the event, asking event staff and attendees to wear masks, be aware of safety protocols and safe distancing, encouraging staff and attendees to stay home if sick, have underlying medical conditions or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, etc.
- Develop flexible refund policies for attendees
- A list of supplies you'll have on hand for your staff, volunteers and vendors in addition to those the Center is providing including disposable masks, gloves, , sanitizer, blank paper or a list of emergency questions, etc.
- Specific training on cleaning methods and other protocols you have chosen to implement
- Document steps to follow when someone becomes ill during the event
- If you will notify attendees of a positive COVID-19 test result from an attendee known to have attended their event. *Attendee notification is voluntary*
- If so, how will you notify them? *Consider contact tracing and drafting a sample letter in advance*
- If you will continue or suspend the event if there is a report of a recent positive COVID-19 test during your multi-day event. *Clients should plan to consult with Comal County Health Officials to make this decision*
- Contact phone numbers for Comal County health officials: 830-221-1120 and Center staff: 830-643-9209
- Other items

THE FOLLOWING ACTION ITEMS ARE HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Although these are not required, these have been listed by the State of Texas, CDC and WHO as specific ways to reduce the risk of virus transmission

PRE-EVENT

- Review Center's **Recommended Safety Protocols**. *These will assist you in meeting all required Health Protocols for Employees and Event Organizers including training on general health guidelines, daily health checks and what to do if someone becomes ill during the event, as well as your Communication and Emergency Plan*
- Monitor public health data to gain insight for best practices and plan to report suspected illnesses. *Be sure to collect their name and save the number to Comal County health officials for contact tracing if needed: 830-221-1120*
- Communicate healthy practices at event entry. *This can be accomplished using Center's existing signage or creating new signage on easels, digital signage using the video walls or room projections screens, or periodic audible announcements.*
- Monitor occupancies. *Ideas include limiting entry to a single entry and doing a physical count of attendees in and out of the room, limiting access to the number of chairs provided in the room, physically counting guests using "clickers" or manual method while communicating current attendance with your staff at each entry, holding guests in the concourse or outside prior to room or venue entry, or other method*
- Deliver safe food and beverage service. *Ideas include:*
 - *Eliminate standard buffets where food is exposed; consider boxed, covered or plated meals*
 - *If there is a buffet, have food behind a clear barrier with catering staff plating food as desired*
 - *Consider individually wrapped portions and/or individual portions at "chef-manned food stations"*
 - *One-way food service lines with different entry and exit points*
 - *Do not allow pre-set items at tables such as condiments, flatware or food and drink items*

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Recommended Action Items *continued*

- *Pre-prepare items and use the kitchen for food or beverage preparation – away from the public*
- *Provide bottled water rather than water stations*
- *Use prepackaged disposable silverware*
- Ask volunteers, vendors and attendees to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer upon entry
- Hold entry or exit doors open for people entering the building
- Disinfect any rental equipment from outside vendors before their use

THE FOLLOWING ACTION ITEMS ARE OPTIONAL

These are also not required, but are concepts and ideas from a variety of hospitality industry organizations and professionals to lower the risk of virus transmission

PRIOR TO, DURING & POST EVENT

- Consider a Hybrid or Virtual Event for remote participation – *ask for a copy of our Virtual Event Guide*
- When advertising, use images that show our large space (not crowded photos) – *ask us how we can help*
- Consider using barriers at event check-in or to break up large gatherings – *ask us how we can help*
- If you feel like your event isn't going to be as well attended as you thought, downsizing is an option – *we'll adjust your room rental to include just the areas you're using*
- When thinking about your room layout, consider more "mix and mingle" type layouts using cocktail tables and standing-only areas – *ask us about our free cocktail table rental*
- If you need assistance to help display signage or route traffic, we can offer a limited supply of sign holders, easels and stanchions at no charge – *ask us what we have available*
- We can remove our soft/porous lobby furniture and avoid using drapery since these items are not easy to sanitize and encourage group gatherings - *let us know if you're interested in this*
- Consider using outdoor areas as noted and approved by Center to spread out vendors or merchandise sales – *ask us for specific available locations and Outdoor Event permit information*
- Think about splitting up your large attendance into separate rooms – live or recorded images from one room can be shared to all rooms – *ask us how we can help*
- For large events, consider Regional meetings happening simultaneously where speakers are at one location and all other locations are virtual with everyone from that region sitting in a meeting room – *we can help with this too!*
- In the event contact tracing will be needed after your event, consider a plan for it. *Ideas include capturing registration information, a sign-sheet with a required phone or email, pre-event electronic survey, or other method.*
- Surveying attendees before the event may be helpful to understand what will make them feel safe. Capturing attendee data through these will assist Comal County health officials in contact tracing if needed
- Consider sending a post-event survey to attendees and volunteers to ask about their experience, understand what went right and wrong and determine if anyone feels flu-like symptoms to use for contact tracing if needed
- Arranging for Local Vendors and Keynote Speakers can help reduce required travel. A list of New Braunfels vendors is available on our website, as well as a link to the City of New Braunfels' Speaker Request Form
- If you plan to notify attendees of a positive COVID-19 test, you might want to prepare a sample letter or email to communicate news of illness using your contact tracing

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Optional Action Items *continued*

- Do a venue/event risk assessment to identify ways to reduce 'touching and' shared surfaces; also identify high touch or crowded areas that should be closely monitored
- Advance or online ticketing/payment can produce a touch-free event check-in technology with programs such as Eventbrite, etc. using ticket scanners
- Not receiving payment at the event or using a contactless credit card payment device could be helpful
- Consider not providing single-use programs or agendas and use digital programs instead that can be displayed on our projection screens
- Meeting materials and name badges could be mailed to attendees prior to the meeting
- If possible, stagger registration and event times to manage the demand at event entry
- For trade shows, consider assigning move-in times to reduce occupancy at the loading dock
- You might offer more networking time, with longer breaks or intermission so people aren't rushed to the restroom or back to the room, creating lines
- When cleaning a shared microphone between speakers with disinfectant wipes, try using them well in advance so the smell isn't strong for the presenter
- When trying to build attendance, perhaps show how many other people are already doing it (they'll feel comfortable that they're not alone): "over 100 people are already registered!"
- It's okay to say, "I Don't Know." This is new to everyone!
- Engage your vendors as part of your planning team – they will likely have some great ideas
- Be compassionate – every attendee may feel differently about the health risk of being in public
- Overcommunication can help attendees feel you're prepared and be more comfortable attending your event
- If you don't want to move forward with the event, but have a company event or personal celebration coming up, consider using your reservation for one of those
- To keep attendees from cancelling, find something extra to throw in at no charge such as virtual access, discount to the next event, or a special take-away/gift
- Consider linen rental for Center tables as they often stained and worn from use which may result in uneasy feelings from attendees
- For large events, and especially trade shows, consider wider aisles to accommodate one-way foot traffic or traffic only through assigned doors and aisles to maintain guest separation
- Consider plans for an onsite health professional, especially if you are planning to monitor attendee temperatures
- In breakouts, if possible, rotate speakers through rooms rather than moving attendees
- Consider screening attendees as they enter to ensure they're not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms
- Pulsing Entries might help to avoid overcrowding or congregating in lobbies and concourse: use volunteers to keep people waiting outside until the registration/check-in area inside has dwindled in number
- Pulsing Exits might also avoid overcrowding or congregating in lobbies and concourse: release attendees at tables slowly from the back to front or by table
- Think about having multiple places for attendees to check-in with physical spacing
- Encourage attendees to use recycle bins in venue; if food is served in individual containers for example, the result is much larger volume in regular trash cans, but containers can easily be recycled
- Share your best practices with us and others. Together we can limit the spread of COVID-19!

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ONLINE RESOURCES TO ASSIST YOU IN PLANNING YOUR EVENT

[Open Texas Plan Employer & Event Organizer Responsibilities](#)

[Open Texas Plan Restaurant Guidelines](#)

[FAQ'S and Tips for Event Planners from the CDC](#)

[WHO'S Key planning recommendations for Mass Gatherings in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak](#)

[Comal County Public Health Department](#)

[City of New Braunfels – COVID Update page](#)

[Civic/Convention Center – PLAN page with Local Vendors & Speaker Request Form](#)

[Convention & Visitors Bureau – Meeting Planners](#)