

Retreat Planning Guide for New Event Planners

This guide is designed to help new event planners confidently design, organize, and execute meaningful retreats. Whether the retreat is focused on wellness, professional development, education, or community building, the following framework will help ensure clarity, alignment, and a high-quality participant experience.

1. Clarify the Purpose and Outcomes

Start with the **why**. A clear purpose guides every planning decision.

Key questions to ask:

- What is the primary purpose of this retreat?
- Who is the retreat for, and what do they need most right now?
- What should participants *feel, learn, or do differently* when they leave?

Tip: Write 3–5 clear outcomes (e.g., “Participants will leave feeling restored,” or “Participants will build practical skills they can immediately apply”).

2. Know your participants

Consider:

- Group size and demographics
 - Physical abilities and accessibility needs
 - Expectations, motivations, and potential hesitations
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3. Set the Structure and Format

Decide how the retreat will flow over time.

Elements to define:

- Length (single day, weekend, multi-day)
- Balance of structured sessions vs. free time
- Group size for activities (full group, small groups, solo reflection)
- Indoor vs. outdoor experiences

Best practice: Build in *margin*. Downtime allows for rest, integration, and informal connection.

4. Design the Program Flow

A strong retreat has a thoughtful rhythm.

Common flow:

1. **Arrival & Welcome** – Orientation, grounding, setting expectations
2. **Connection** – Icebreakers, shared experiences, trust-building
3. **Core Content** – Workshops, guided experiences, learning sessions
4. **Integration** – Reflection, discussion, journaling, creative processing
5. **Closing** – Meaningful wrap-up, takeaways, next steps

Tip: Alternate between high-energy and low-energy activities to avoid fatigue.

5. Select Content and Facilitators

Content gives structure to the retreat. Facilitators shape the tone and impact of the retreat.

Consider:

- Alignment with retreat purpose and values
 - Will you bring your own facilitators to teach participants, use TNP's or a mixture of both.
 - Facilitator ability to adapt in real time and familiarity with audience
 - Comfort facilitating both content and group dynamics
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6. Logistics and Operations

Strong logistics create a seamless participant experience.

Key areas:

- Registration and communication
- Lodging and room assignments
- Meals and dietary needs
- Transportation and arrival instructions
- Supplies, AV needs, and materials

The Nature Place supports the implementation of these logistics.

7. Create a Sense of Place

Environment matters. Thoughtful details help participants settle in and feel cared for.

The Nature Place provides a clear sense of place with everything in one location, plenty of indoor and outdoor gathering places, shared meals, evening downtime areas, easy access to nature and reflection.

8. Communication with Participants

Clear, calm communication builds trust.

Before the retreat share with your participants:

- What to expect
- What to bring and how to prepare
- Schedule highlights
- Travel and arrival details

During the retreat:

- Schedules are posted in TNP's main lobby
 - Meals are provided at consistent times and locations.
 - Coffee and snacks are regularly available
 - Plenty of places to explore, things to do in your down time
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9. Accessibility, Inclusion, and Care

Design with care so all participants feel welcome and supported.

Plan support structures in advance (quiet spaces, clear boundaries, opt-out options). At TNP all facilitators are trained in Challenge with choice concepts, allowing participants to participate to the level of challenge that is right for the individual. Experiential activities are sequences to allow proper growth, development and engagement. Physical accommodations, cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness are important aspects of both our program design and facilitation approaches.

10. Evaluation and Reflection

Learning continues after the retreat ends.

Questions to reflect on:

- What worked particularly well?
- Where did participants seem most engaged?
- What challenges arose, and how were they handled?
- What would you keep, change, or improve next time?

Tip: Gather feedback from participants, facilitators, and staff soon after the retreat while insights are fresh.

Final Thought

A successful retreat is not about perfection—it's about intention, presence, and alignment. When purpose, people, and place come together thoughtfully, retreats can create lasting impact well beyond the final session.