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For more information about our services, contact the Utah office at [SaltLakeCity@EmployersCouncil.org](mailto:SaltLakeCity@EmployersCouncil.org) or 801.364.8479.

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## Holiday Party Considerations aren't "All Legal"

November 2018 / Employers Council

In the Employers Council's 2018 Miscellaneous Benefits & Pay Practices survey, 88 percent of respondents indicated that they are providing some type of all-expenses-paid holiday party. The majority, 46 percent, said the event would be for employees and a "plus one" of their choosing, and 31 percent of respondents indicated that the holiday event would be for employees only, exclusive of non-employee guests. The remaining 11 percent indicated that their event included employees' families, above and beyond the "plus one." This all adds up to many employers throwing many holiday parties, and while legal considerations exist, there are other aspects for employers to think through before employees arrive at their respective events.

Consider this simple question first: "Why have a party?"

As an employer, are you celebrating the holiday season or bringing employees together to further a team environment? Perhaps the party is meant to be a benefit by offering employees an opportunity to do something different, such as dining at an exclusive restaurant. Your reason(s) for hosting a party may be a combination of these and other factors. Keep in mind that employees often feel holiday party attendance is obligatory, so if an employer's intent is solely to provide an opportunity for employees to gather socially and attendance is optional, make sure the language on the invitation reflects the elective nature of attending the event. If the primary goal of the party is to thank employees, then be sure employees know that the party is a "thank you" directed at them. The holiday party should be an event that employees treasure and enjoy. Alternatively, ask the question, "Would employees appreciate an afternoon off more than a party?"

Additional considerations include the following:

- Does planning a party add work to the extensive duties of an already busy person or group?
- Can party planning be done by a group of people rather than an individual? And who is going to clean up, particularly if the party is at the worksite? Are the planners responsible for planning, implementation, setup, and clean up, along with any eventualities that may arise during the course of the party?
- Could something different energize employees and be more in keeping with the season? For example, consider a toy drive for kids in need or an opportunity as a group to serve meals at a homeless shelter. Perhaps a staff gathering or celebration can take place before or after a charity event.
- Is providing employees the opportunity to socialize with others outside of their usual professional group a key objective of the party? If so, put some thought into how that might be done effectively, as employees frequently congregate at parties with those that they already know. Would a fun "get to know you" activity fit in with your culture? An activity like giving employees a question to ask each other, such as, "If you could be in the movie of your choice, what movie would you choose and what character would you play?" may spur conversation. Well considered and implemented "icebreaker" events or questions may be the key to opening up and expanding your employees' usual professional groups.
- Be sure your invitation to the party comports with the actual event. For example, an email informing employees of the occasion would be contrary to a formal dinner and dance. Make your invitations a priority and execute them in the spirit of the event.
- What type of refreshments and food will be served? Make sure the party organizer has considered allergies, including any religious objections to certain foods. Also, if vegetarians, vegans, or others with special dietary needs will be present, consider appropriate menu options beforehand. Nothing communicates being "left out" more than not having a viable dining option provided at a "thank you" holiday party.
- Will alcohol be served? If so, consider engaging professional bartenders and providing employees with alternative transportation after the party. Will there be a designated last person to make sure everyone gets home safely? Does the holiday party comply with any policies on alcohol consumption during work events? Either way, you may wish to inform employees that alcohol is to be consumed responsibly pursuant to your company policies, should you maintain them.
- What about music, dancing, and other entertainment? Again, what fits your corporate culture? Magicians, comedians, mind readers, or even a photo booth with fun costumes can add to the party atmosphere.

The holiday season is a unique time of year, so ensure any celebration you plan adds to the good cheer!