

# ***So You Want to Be an Autocrat When You Grow Up***

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For all who read this please note that this is a guideline written in my own perspective and is based on my little area of the Known World. It is in no way meant to be an official document on how to autocrat an SCA event. I have tried my best to include as much information as I could based on my own experience as well as the observance of others.

## **Purpose:**

The first step in event planning is to determine the purpose of the event.

- 1) Some events are required to happen annually or bi-annually. This depends on whether it is at a Canton, Baronial, Crown Principality or Kingdom level. There are Crown, ratten, arts and sciences, fencing and bardic championships (and perhaps others) that must happen on a regular basis for different levels of the society. These events are always looking for someone to autocrat them because they simply must happen. If you are not sure which events these are, contact your seneschal for the area.
- 2) Some events tend to happen on an annual basis simply because people like them and they become part of what we look forward to. For example, in the Canton of Seashire we tend to have a "Herne the Hunter" and event annually even though it is not absolutely necessary. With that said, various Cantons, Baronies, etc. must hold a certain NUMBER of events each year even if it is not related to a championship. Again, contact your seneschal for more information.
- 3) Some events happen just because someone had a really good idea.

Once you have determined what category (or categories) your event idea falls into, you can start planning.

## **When and Where:**

The next step is to determine the date and location of the event.

- 1) When would you like to hold your event?
- 2) Does your event need to happen at a certain time of year? (Examples: Twelfth Night is usually held in January, Ruantallan Baronial Investiture Anniversary is in early fall, War Camp is the beginning of summer, etc.) If you are not sure, please contact your seneschal.
- 3) Are there other events nearby that are being held at the same time as you would like to plan yours? It is best not to compete with other events held regionally.
- 4) Are there other events that are being held further afield that would conflict with your preferred date? (Examples: Pennsic is an annual summer event that many people attend in Pennsylvania,

Crown Tournaments may be scheduled during your preferred time, the Shire of Lyndhaven usually holds their annual "Middleground" event on the Victoria Day weekend.)

- 5) What are the available hours for the hall you would like to book?
- 6) Are the people you need to attend the event going to be available? (For example, if you are holding Ruantallan Baronial Investiture Anniversary you have to make sure the Baron and Baroness are free for the date you prefer.)
- 7) Do you need indoor space, outdoor space or both?
- 8) Is this a camping event?
- 9) What are the available weekends for a campground you wish to use?
- 10) What are the needs of the kitchen?
- 11) How much space is needed for each aspect of the event?
- 12) How many people are expected to attend the event? Is there enough room?
- 13) Is there enough space to hold court if there are court proceedings?
- 14) Do you need private space for dignitaries such as the Baron and Baroness or the Royals?

Figuring out when and where your event is being held are the two most important aspects of event planning. You can't have one without the other. Once you have made some decisions on the type of space you require, you need to start looking for the event space as soon as possible. Many halls book up quickly and well ahead of time. It is never too early to book a space. 3-6 months is a fair amount of time ahead but some very large events are booked years in advance. Most halls require a rental agreement to be filled out and some require a deposit. Pay attention to cancellation policies as well.

### **Staff and Other Key People:**

The next step is to determine your staff and other important people who need to be at your event. This step is best done concurrently with the determining when and where your event is being held as you may have to coordinate with others. You are the "autocrat" or "event steward" but you can't do it all yourself! Please note that if this is your first time autocratting it is highly recommended to have someone who has experience as an autocrat be your co-autocrat.

- 1) Do you need a head cook/feastocrat? Unless you are holding a potluck you will need someone in charge of food. Even with a potluck it is a good idea to have someone in charge of the kitchen area in case there is a need for heating up and/or refrigeration. Please refer to the separate section on food for more information.
- 2) What dignitaries are you expecting to attend your event? If you need certain people present (such as the Baron and Baroness) you need to coordinate dates with them. Even if you don't need the Baron and Baroness to attend you should send them an official "invitation". Also, keep in mind that Royals may attend your event even if you weren't expecting them.
- 3) You need at least 1-2 people to be in charge of the gate. You may choose to have registration e-mails sent to your gatekeeper.
- 4) If there is fighting/fencing/archery, etc. to be held, you need a marshal.

- 5) If there is a championship competition being held you need to contact the current champion. (Rattan, Fencing, A&S, Bardic, etc.). It is the responsibility of the current champion to be in charge of the competition to determine the next champion. If that person is unable to attend the event he/she needs to appoint someone to run the competition.
- 6) If there is a championship or other competition being held that requires scrolls to be made you should contact your area herald to make sure they are prepared. The current champion may also do this job but you want to make sure it does not get overlooked. It is best for those preparing scrolls to have ample time to create them.
- 7) If there is court being held for any reason you have to make sure there is a herald available for court.
- 8) Do you need someone to be in charge of dancing?
- 9) Do you need someone in charge of children's activities?
- 10) Do you need someone in charge of decorations?
- 11) Do you need someone in charge of gaming?
- 12) Do you need someone in charge of any form of bardic entertainment?
- 13) Do you need retainers for dignitaries attending? (People who would attend to the needs of the dignitaries.)

Think of each and every job that needs to be done for your event and make sure you have someone in charge of carrying it out. Think of each and every person who needs to be at your event and contact them.

### **The Bid:**

You need to write a "bid" for your event to be passed by the Curia that the event is held under. For example, a Baronial event would be sent to the Baronial Curia, a Canton event would be sent to the Canton Curia. If you are not sure which curia to send your bid to, check with your area seneschals.

Things you need to include in your bid:

- 1) Date of event, times if you know them.
- 2) Location: Include contact information for the hall you are booking.
- 3) Event description. It doesn't have to be long and complicated.
- 4) Name of Autocrat, Head Cook, Marshals, other staff if you know them. The Autocrat and Head Cook MUST have a valid SCA membership.
- 5) Site Fees
- 6) Feast Fees
- 7) Supplies/Other Fees
- 8) Budget\* Please refer to the section on budgeting for more information.

## How to Budget Your Event:

There are different ways to add up a budget for an event. I will explain my method:

- 1) Determine the minimum number of people you require for the event to happen: For our area's purposes, 50 is a good number to aim for but if you think it's going to be an event attended by a smaller number of people, choose a lower number. This is the minimum number you need to run the event to cover expenses so you want to aim for a number you think you can easily reach. Some events tend to be on a larger scale, such as Crown Tournaments and any Royal Progress events so you might be able to use a higher number.
- 2) Site Fee: The site fee is the fee that covers the hall rental. For example, if your hall is costing you \$200 your site fee would be  $\$200/50 = \$4.00$ . If you are having a cash bar available, include that in your site fee.
- 3) Tokens/Supplies/Other Fees: These fees would include such things as token supplies, decorations, prizes, crafting supplies, etc. You have to estimate what these fees will be by doing a bit of homework on costs of supplies. Try to think of everything you will need for your minimum number of people attending the event and add up the costs. For example, if your estimated costs amount to \$50, then your Tokens/Supplies/Other Fees amount would be  $\$50/50 = \$1.00$ .
- 4) Feast: These fees would include any food you will be providing to your guests for feast. You will have to check with your head cook for the amount they think they will need to provide what you want. Do NOT scrimp on this number. Make sure you have enough budgeted to provide a good meal for your guests. Your head cook may give you a "per head" number which makes the Feast Fee easy...for example: \$8 per person. Your head cook may choose to give you an overall budget for your event...for example: \$400 for 50 people...therefore,  $\$400/50 = \$8$  per person.
- 5) Sideboard lunch: These fees include any food you will be providing to your guests for lunch. Again, you will have to discuss this budget with your head cook. The fee for a sideboard lunch is often included in the offboard price but it is occasionally part of the onboard price. If you are serving a sideboard lunch only to onboard guests you will have to have some way to make sure the onboard guests are the only ones partaking of the lunch. It is usually best to include it in your offboard fee.
- 6) Factoring in "Free" entrance: There are different rules in different areas but for the Barony of Ruantallan it is a rule that the Autocrat, Head Cook, Baron and Baroness and any visiting Royalty may be admitted to events for free (mind you, there is no rule stating that they can't pay their way into an event!) You have to make sure you budget some way of covering these people...you will likely know at the time of planning who you expect to come to your event. The fees you are concerned about covering are supplies fees (tokens) and food. Site fees should be covered by your minimum number of registrants over and above the "free" entries so you shouldn't need to include this in your factoring.
- 7) Family Cap: Our custom is to include a "Family Cap" amount for those who have larger families. It is usually defined as 2 adults and their dependent children. You do not HAVE to include a family cap but it is customary and people will appreciate it.

Example of a budget for a bid:

**Total Budget (based on 50 people)**

Site fees (total): \$143.75 incl. tax

Site fees per person based on 50 people: \$2.88/person

Feast/person \$7.50 adults, \$7.00 youth 12-17, \$5.00 children 5-12, Kids <5 FREE

Sideboard/person No sideboard lunch due to later opening of event

Supplies/person \$ 2.12

Other costs, if any N/A

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	Onboard	Offboard
Adults	\$12.50	\$5.00
Teens	\$12.00	\$4.50 Teens will be defined as 13-17 years of age
Children \$10.00	\$4.00	Children will be defined as 12 and under
Kids < 5 FREE		
Family children	\$42	\$17 Family will be defined as 2 adults and their dependent children

\$5.00 NMS APPLIES

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**Food:**

- 1) Feast, Sideboard, Potluck?: You must first determine how you plan to provide food for your event. You may want a formal sit-down feast or a buffet. You may want to include a sideboard lunch or leave that up to your guests. You may want your event to be a potluck meal where guests will bring food for the feast. As stated before, even if you are having something as simple as a potluck it is always good to have someone in charge of managing the needs of the guests for warming food, fridge space, etc.
- 2) Head cook/Feastocrat: If you need someone to be in charge of the cooking you have to find someone willing to do the job. If you are asking someone with experience they will likely be able to take care of most of the feast plans. If you are asking someone with little or no experience they will likely need help from someone who does have experience cooking a feast. The head cook is the staff member you must trust the most. If you have a specific style or time period in mind make sure you indicate that to your head cook. If you have a specific dish you would like served make sure you indicate that to your head cook. Otherwise, do NOT micromanage your head cook! It's a big job and you have to let him/her do it!
- 3) Other kitchen staff: Usually the head cook knows who they prefer to help in the kitchen. However, if there are people who have little experience in the kitchen for SCA events being part of the kitchen staff is an excellent way to learn from the pros.
- 4) Servers for the head table and the general populace: If you are having a formal sit-down feast you will need a plan for service. You may employ one person to take care of finding servers for your event or appoint one person per table to be in charge of service. The most important table

is the head table where the dignitaries sit. It is highly recommended to have one or two servers for this table to make sure the head table receives their portions first. There are events at which you may not have a head table...for example it is tradition for the Baron and Baroness to sit with the populace during a Twelfth Night feast. However, you should always check with your dignitaries before you make any firm plans.

- 5) Kitchen needs: Make sure the space you are renting has a kitchen which will serve your event's needs. It is best to bring your head cook with you when you are checking out a space or in the very least let your head cook know what is available to them in the kitchen...ie: number of stoves, microwave, dishwasher, fridge space, etc.
- 6) Cook's Guild: Cook's Guild refers to the supplies that your area may have available to you for cooking/serving a feast. This may include things like pots, pans, kitchen utensils, serving dishes, water jugs...anything that a cook might need in the kitchen. It is best to check what supplies are available in the cooks' guild before purchasing anything new. Often cooks will prefer to use their own supplies such as knives and other things. Contact your seneschal to find out where the cook's guild is stored. Your cook should be the one to determine his/her needs.
- 7) Garbage/Recycling: This is an often forgotten but very important need for food service of any kind at all events. You need to find out how the facility you are renting wants you to deal with food waste, recycling and regular garbage. You may need to budget for garbage/recycling bags as not all facilities will provide those things.

### **Space Set Up:**

To set up your space you need to take into account every aspect of your event:

- 1) Indoors, outdoors or a combination?
- 2) Area for serving sideboard/feast/potluck
- 3) Combat/Fencing area
- 4) Display area for things such as A&S activities
- 5) Crafting/Children's area
- 6) Dancing area
- 7) Music/Bardic area
- 8) Gaming Area
- 9) Gate entrance
- 10) Throne area
- 11) Court: If there is to be court you need to either have it set up ahead of time or make sure you can move things out of the way and have chairs available for your audience.
- 12) Merchanting space
- 13) Separate "quiet" areas for dignitaries/signing of scrolls
- 14) When setting up for feast, you need to have a plan for tables and chairs including onboard/offboard seating and head table if necessary. Often it is a good idea to have a map available for people to fill in where they would like to sit for feast.

## **Schedule:**

You will need to set up a schedule of daily events for your event. Things to consider when you are making up your schedule:

- 1) Gate opening and closing times.
- 2) Time when event is scheduled to end. Make sure you leave enough time for cleanup if the hall closes at a specific time.
- 3) Tournaments: Combat, Fencing, Arts and Sciences, Bardic, etc.
- 4) Children's and non-children's activities
- 5) Classes
- 6) Sideboard lunch service, feast
- 7) Bar opening
- 8) Dancing
- 9) Court...always at Their Excellencies/Highnesses/Majesties whims, but you should check with them ahead of time.
- 10) Gaming, auctions, any other activities
- 11) Toasts: This is not something that is written on the schedule but keep in mind that for most feasts there will be time needed for toasts. You will likely not have to worry about who is giving toasts...it is usually done by peers (Laurels, Pelicans, etc.) or other people with high standing (court Barons and Baronesses) and if they are in need of others to help them with toasts those people will be notified ahead of time.

The most important thing to note about setting up a schedule for your event is to learn to be flexible. Some activities take longer or shorter than you think. Sometimes you are waiting on people to arrive who are running an aspect to your event. With that said, there should be no such thing as "SCA Time" ...don't show up an hour late for your own event.

## **Atmosphere:**

I cannot stress how much atmosphere makes a difference to your event. When your guests walk into your venue and you are still setting up chairs and tables it does not inspire them to get into the spirit of the day. When your guests walk into a well decorated room with everything organized you have a very good chance at having a good event because your guests will have a smile on their face as soon as they walk in. Things you can do to increase the positive atmosphere at your event are:

- **Decorations:** You do not have to spend a fortune on decorations. You can often make your own decorations with very small amounts of supplies and if you don't feel crafty enough to make them, find some volunteers who will help you with this. Often there will be things available to you that have been used for previous events. Ask around. If you do need to spend money on supplies make sure to include that in your budget when writing up your bid.

- Beg, Borrow and Beg: Often what you need to create atmosphere is absolutely FREE. People may have things they will allow you to borrow that will help with your decorations. Beyond decorations, atmosphere can also be created by things like singing, music and theatrical performance. There are often people out there who are willing to put on a show or lend their music.
- Tablecloths: Most halls we rent use fold out tables, none of which are very period looking. Most people bring their own tablecloths for their own tables so you don't have to worry about that. However, tables that you are using for A&S competitions, food, displays, gate, etc. would look much nicer with a tablecloth on it to cover up the ugly. Again, beg, borrow and beg if you don't have them. It doesn't have to be anything fancy, just a piece of plain fabric will do.
- Lighting: If you can dim the lights in the hall, especially during feast, it adds to the medieval atmosphere. If you want to illuminate other areas of the hall you can use extra candles but if you are concerned about safety, plain white holiday lights work well too...it's always nice to camouflage them in some way though.
- Smile!: When your guests see you smile, they are more inclined to smile themselves! Also, as the autocrat, you are the host of the party so it's nice to try to get around and talk to different people during the day if you have time.

### **Promotion:**

I cannot tell you how important promotion is when you are hosting an event. If you want people to come to your event they need to know about it and they need to know how fabulous it's going to be. They need to NOT want to miss it! Here are the steps you can take to promote your event effectively:

- The first step is to make up your full event announcement. This should include the title, date, time, location, a blurb about your event, small list of staff (autocrat, head cook, marshal, etc.), costs, and registration information.
- A word about the blurb: Your event blurb should sound inviting and should include some of the fabulous stuff about it. If you have trouble writing things like this, ask a friend to help...there are lots of people out there who are very good at wording things like this.
- The event announcement can then be sent to the people who need it to promote it for you. There are different processes in different baronies but for our area this includes:
  - ✓ Baronial Webminister: To create a registration page (if you have a photo you want to include, send this separately).
  - ✓ Baronial Chatelaine: Our baronial chatelaine happens to be the same person who runs our baronial facebook page. DO NOT set up your own event page on facebook. Allow the chatelaine to do it because more people will be able to see this event page. Again, if you have a photo, one can be included.
  - ✓ East Kingdom: On the East Kingdom website click on the "Events" tab and click on "Add New Event". There will then be instructions for you to add this event so everyone in the

East Kingdom can see it. Your event will then show up on the event webpage and will likely be added to the next edition of the Pikestaff newsletter

- ✓ The Ruantallan List: You can post your event information in the e-mail list. Encourage others to forward it to other lists in other areas.
- ✓ Quid Nunc: This is the quarterly newsletter for the Barony of Ruantallan. You can submit your event to be advertised in the next edition to the Ruantallan chronicler.
- ✓ Aurora Borealis: This is the quarterly newsletter for the Crown Principality of Tir Mara. You can submit your event to be advertised in the next edition to the Tir Mara chronicler.
- ✓ East Kingdom Gazette: <http://eastkingdomgazette.org/> : This is a volunteer run blog covering the East Kingdom. You can submit your event to be advertised on this blog.
- Continued Promotion: Sending out your event announcement once isn't going to cut it. People need to be reminded many times in order to get them to register sometimes. One thing you can do is send out small amounts of information periodically leading up to the event registration closing date. Tease your audience with information about activities at your event, contests that may be happening, children's activities, feast menu, etc. And ALWAYS include the event registration information. When it gets closer to the closing date for registration send out even more reminders, especially if your registration numbers are low. If it is two days before your registration closing date and you do not have enough people registered, you may have to go on a "promotional blitz" to get enough numbers registered. I have personally e-mailed specific people to ask them if they want to come and have been surprised to find out that a couple of them thought they were already registered.
- Know when to throw in the towel: With all my promotion of promoting your event, you need to know when to cancel an event. You may not have enough people to run the event and may need to postpone it for another time or even just cancel it. As well, there may be other reasons for cancelling an event such as weather issues or scheduling problems. You don't want to have to disappoint people but you have to do what is best. If you are not sure what to do, ask for advise!

### **Red Tape:**

With all things in life there is red tape. Here are some things that you must be sure to do:

- Registration List: You need to keep track of the people who register for your event, who actually attends the event and who wasn't able to attend the event. Your registration list should include: SCA name, mundane name, phone number, e-mail if possible, member/non-member status with membership number and expiry date, adult/child/etc., onboard/offboard, fees due for site, feast and Non-Membership-Status fees. You must maintain this list as accurately as possible during the registration period. On the day of the event, print off an accurate registration list for the gatekeeper with all the information included. Leave some room at the bottom of the list (preferably with lines!) for unexpected guests or changes.

- Float: Most people are going to be paying with cash so you will need to make sure there is a float available so you can pay them back their change. It's a good idea to have loonies, toonies and \$5 bills on hand. If you have any entrance fees that are for example \$12.50, you will need to make sure to have quarters available as well. Make sure you add up your float correctly and record the number.
- Cash Box: It is normally the responsibility of the exchequer to bring the cash box and everything needed for holding the money but make sure you have something available just in case it is forgotten.
- Waivers: Make sure to print off the waivers you need for your event. This will include waivers for minors attending the event as well as waivers for those who do not have SCA memberships or do not have blue membership cards. You can find these waivers on the EK website.
- Closing the event cash: Once all or most of your guests arrive and all money has been collected you must add up the cash box and check everything off to make sure it adds up. Generally the best idea is to have the gatekeeper do this since he/she was there when the money was collected and can vouch for any mistakes or for any money that was not collected for any reason.
- Closing the event paperwork: This may be done at the same time as closing the cash box. You must meet with the exchequer sometime later in the event day to close up all the event paperwork. You need to have all your receipts, waivers, registration information (including the actual list used at gate), and cash box. Your exchequer is responsible for the financial aspect of the event and to make sure cheques are written to the correct people for things such as food and supplies. You may have had cheques written ahead of time for paying for the hall or paying for food and supplies. YOU as the autocrat are responsible for the registration list (including the actual list used at gate) and the waivers. This paperwork must be delivered to the "Waiver Secretary" as soon as possible after the event. It is possible the waiver secretary might be at the event and you can hand off the paperwork then but if not, you must make sure it is delivered within two weeks of your event. For our area, to see who is the waiver secretary check the Crown Principality of Tir Mara website on the "Crown Principality Deputies" page.  
<http://tirmara.eastkingdom.org/deputies/index.php>
- Little Things: Bring pens, pencils, erasers, pencil sharpeners, calculator, markers, pins, tacs, tape (of all kinds), sticky tac, etc....any and all things you think you might need during the day for decorating and for gate.

### **It's Not Over Until:**

The end of the event is not the end of your job. Here is a list of things you must do at the end of the event:

- Clean up! There are different rules for different halls but make sure you clean up the hall before you leave the building. This may include putting away chairs and tables, cleaning the kitchen, sweeping the floor, dealing with garbage, etc. A good rule of thumb is to always leave a space in better condition than when you found it.

- Lost and Found: There are always things left behind so make sure you gather up any odds and ends so that you can send out a message to the populace to claim lost and found items.
- Paperwork: Again, make sure all the paperwork, receipts and money make it to the correct people.
- Say THANK YOU! I cannot stress how important it is for you to say thank you to each and every person who has made your event a success. The obvious people are your staff members but there are always others who swoop in to help with even the smallest details. I try to keep track of what I see happening during the day and ask who has helped in the kitchen, etc. I like to name everyone who has helped if at all possible but make sure to include a thanks to the anonymous helpers as well. Try to have a thank you message sent to the e-mail list and/or on the event facebook page as soon as possible after the event.

I very much hope I have not scared you off with all this information.

Enjoy your event planning!

YIS

Lady Isolda Fairamay