

Wedding Planning Program for the Better Community

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A and B: Statement of the Issue and Research Review

According to Goulet, Goulet and Riddell, they spend 26,000 dollars on average for the wedding in America (2006). This number clearly shows how much people value to have a memorable wedding ceremony. As much as they emphasize on having a memorable ceremony, however, this is not the amount of money one can pay easily. Even though the couple might not pay the full amount, it should still be an intimidating number for engaged couples. Unfortunately, these couples increasingly do postpone their wedding years later, simply because they think the planning process takes too much of their time. Money is another big issue. Those who are on limited incomes suffer even more, because they must save money in order to have a ceremony that they will feel satisfied with (Brown, 1990).

Just because they would not have time or money to have a wedding does not mean that they do not deserve a wedding of their dreams. How can they afford it then? What can wedding planners do to realize their dream? It is clear that there is a certain need for wedding planners to develop a program to provide affordable wedding ceremonies for people with lower incomes and students, who can not afford lavish wedding ceremonies. This is the reason why we came up with the idea to create a non-profit wedding planner group to help the students and those who have low income to have a wedding ceremony to remember for the rest of their lives.

Usually, wedding ceremony and community development is not associated with each other, since wedding ceremonies are usually prepared by private wedding companies. However, we found out through research that there are many places within a community that could be used as a venue. The venue locations could be various, ranging from a gazebo in the community park to a church that wishes to reach out to its community members ("Rise and Rise of," 2006, p. 35) Using a public facility would lower the budget, compared to having a ceremony at a hotel garden. These public facilities would be perfect for this project, because the money spent on them goes back to the community, enriching the community assets. Also, people in the community could volunteer space or rent it at discounted price for lower income families. Recruiting students for bride's make-up on the wedding day is another way to cut the budget, since hiring professional make-up artists would cost much more. Thus, this wedding project also promotes the couple to interact with people they would not even get the chance to talk to otherwise—meaning that it would increase intergenerational interactions in the community and strengthen their tie.

Research also indicates that there would be a lot of people who would be interested in this low cost wedding program we would like to offer. Interestingly, according to the study of Knox, Zusman, McGinty, and Abowitz with college student, the number of people getting married is actually rising in spite of the high divorce rate.

In spite of media attention to what is described as an "alarming" divorce rate, the divorce rate is actually decreasing and the marriage rate is increasing (National Center for Health Statistics, 2001). College students continue to value "having a family" (American Council on Education

and University of California, 2002) and getting married continues to be the event toward which courtship eventually moves. (Knox, Zusman, McGinty & Abowitz, 2003)

Thus, it seems that high divorce rate does not necessarily mean that people are not willing to marry to begin with—people are still willing to have a partner in their lives and this shows that more people would be eligible for getting married through this program and have a wedding to remember with the budget they can afford.

The other research suggests the couple's needs of professional help when planning the ceremony. Many couples have hard time in the process of putting their wedding ceremonies together. "As anyone who has organized a wedding will know, the seamless perfection of the day itself can conceal months of stress, arguments and near disasters. There is also the huge difficulty of finding the time to attend to every little detail" ("Rise and Rise of," 2006, p. 35). No one goes through the wedding planning process so many times that they know exactly what to do. A non-profit wedding planning group can give professional advice to them and make their journey to their day of wedding smooth, not costing a penny at the same time.

Finally, we found out that time was an issue when a groom and bride plan their ceremony. "Time is your most prized possession when your goal is wedding day bliss on a budget" (Brown, 1990). In many cases, grooms and brides both work during the day. Planning can take all of their free time, and it tends to be very stressful. Actually, many couples go through arguments through the process of planning their weddings. Wedding planners are experts, and we would be able to make the planning process much easier by

pooling together the information about community members, volunteers, and resources, which would give clear guidance to the couple. Thus, the couple will not waste their precious time. This would help ease the stress of brides, grooms, and their family members, which would lead to their happy faces on the wedding day.

To conclude, this project will be beneficial to many couples living in any community. It will allow them to actively participate in a memorable moment of their lives by utilizing what their community has to offer. In addition, this will have the added benefit of building a stronger community by making them realize and learn about their community resources, and giving them the opportunities to meet new people in their community. Our job is to provide the best moment of the lives for the brides, grooms, and their families, introduce the newly engaged couple to as many members in the community as possible, and make them realize that community supports the couple's new start of their lives.

C. Survey

We did a survey with married couples to see what they thought about their weddings.

Q1.) When asked why they were unable to have their dream wedding, 8 out of 10 couples replied that they were unable to have their dream wedding due to the fact that they had to pay for other things like finding a place to live.

Q2.) When asked if they would prefer a small wedding held in a park or a larger more expensive wedding held in a hotel, 6 out of 10 people said that they would have a wedding in a park to save money.

Q3.) When asked what they would like to see to help couples who cannot afford a high cost wedding, 7 out of 10 people said they would like to see more aid and resources provided by their community partners.

Q4.) Lastly, when asked how many people had to scale down their wedding due to the costs, 9 out of 10 couples said they could not afford the high cost of their wedding and were placed in debt.

D. Evaluation of the Needs Expressed in the Survey

Q1.) Many people would like to make their wedding very special and memorable, but they seemed to not be able to afford it.

Q2.) It is clear that couples experienced that facility fee took much of their wedding budget. Cutting this cost would save much money and they can use the money for other details if they wish. It will help make their wedding even more special.

Q3.) Obviously, it seems that many people would be interested in this project. It also shows that they would prefer more help in arranging their weddings.

Q4.) Expenditure for a big, fancy wedding can be a serious burden for some people, and easing this would make the couple happier on the wedding day and also after the ceremony. Having less debt would give less stress to the newly weds, and it might lead to a happier marriage life.

E. Description of the Program and Outcomes Expected

1. Description of the Program

This program includes:

- a. Initial Consultation with couples planning on having a wedding ceremony in near future**

This provides the ideas and tips to lower the cost while not affecting the quality of their weddings. Ideas include how to save the rent of the facilities, fees for musicians, meals, flowers, and wardrobes.

b. Planning sessions

Once the couple decides to be married with our program, we would have meetings to actually make their dream weddings come true. Due to the financial issues that would be discussed later on, we would encourage the grooms and brides to do certain things by themselves—such as visitations of the wedding facilities. This, however, does not mean that couples have to spend extra time to plan their wedding through our program. We provide them with the list of available resources in the community they can choose from. All they have to do is choose places of their interest and actually visit there to help them make decisions. After they have learned what the local places have to offer, we would give them professional advice as to what would be the best choice for them from wedding planners' points of view. Once the wedding planners receive the final information about how the couple wants the wedding to be, we would start working as their agents to make sure that everyone who would be recruited to the wedding knows where, when, and how the wedding is going to take place.

c. Final meeting

We would all meet at the place the couple is planning to get married to make sure everything would be flawless on the day of the wedding ceremony. This is the final check to see if the wedding planners understand what exactly the couple wants.

d. Actual wedding ceremony

We would make sure that the wedding goes as it was planned on this day.

e. Evaluation

Wedding planners would discuss the problems to be improved and things that actually worked out great. The groom and bride are asked to fill out the evaluation form after the marriage so we can use the information for the next time. These couples are also asked to participate in the survey to research the correlation of a memorable wedding and their overall happiness with their marriage.

2. Outcomes

- The families of grooms and brides would share a memorable moments of their wedding ceremony
- Couples with low budget would be given the choice to have their own dream weddings.
- Couples will learn what their neighborhood has to offer to help them have low cost weddings.
- Everyone involved in this wedding program would have the chance to meet new local people that they would not have a chance to meet otherwise.
- This would be a great chance to start a research on how a great wedding ceremony affects their overall happiness of their marriage lives.
- Students employed in this wedding program would have a great opportunity to practice what they have learned.
- The public facilities used in this program would benefit from the rent fee paid by the couples, meaning that the city which runs the facilities would have great financial source.
- This program will introduce the idea that public facilities can be used more to increase the revenue for the local government. For instance, California State University, Long

Beach has a Japanese Garden that is open for public to have a wedding ceremony, and many other universities can follow this example.

F. Community Partners

In order to conduct our project of developing a low cost, but memorable wedding for low income couples and students, the participation and support of local community partners is essential to our success. When looking in to what the community offers in this area, we discovered that there are many local companies in each city that can help by donating supplies for the low budget weddings, offering services, and offering potential venues for the wedding to take place.

For example, one of the first community resources that we researched as being a great supporter for low cost weddings was local flower shops. Often times, there are flowers stores that are privately owned and are willing to either donate the bride's bouquet, or offer suggestions and tips on how a couple can make their own flower bouquets for a much cheaper cost (Low cost wedding ideas). In fact, there is one company that sells flowers at wholesale price. This company can be accessed online where the couple can choose beautiful flowers of their preference at a discounted price. This simple detail in a wedding can turn out to be one of the wedding's largest costs, but with the help of local flower companies and wholesale retailers, this simple detail can still be achieved.

Another great way for a couple, who cannot afford to have a lavish wedding, is to look in local magazines or news papers for discounts and coupons. Through the research process, we found one company that was advertising 20% off of a tuxedo rental, which can be the start of great savings (Low cost wedding vendors). Some tuxedo companies

even offer group discounts if the entire Groom's party decides to get their tuxedos from the same company. Often times group sales are a great way to save money.

Aside from specialized companies in the community, another way to save is to hand make some of the details for the wedding. For instance, although they are elegant, having wedding invitations personally made can end up being highly pricey, therefore by going to a community store such as Michael's, and buying the supplies needed to make the invitations yourself, that can be a fun and highly cheaper alternative. In fact, local grocery stores and businesses such as Michael's are a great and often overlooked resource. Grocery stores for example are a great place to buy the alcohol for a wedding, as opposed to paying the high cost of having alcohol provided by a vendor. In a survey that was taken on the cost of alcohol for a wedding, it was found that by purchasing alcohol on their own, a couple can save up to 50%, which is a huge estimate especially when there is little money in their budget to start with (Low cost wedding ideas).

There are also certain venues to hold a wedding that are either overlooked or unknown in a community. Most communities have special locations for weddings that most couples would not have even thought could be the site of their wedding (and they are often very cheap). For instance, many parks and recreation facilities offer the option of having their wedding in a garden or special area of the park. And, these locations usually only require a small deposit. One good example would be Exposition Park Rose Garden in Pasadena, which is a non-profit organization linked to the City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks. It can be rented for weddings as low as 250 dollars, if they decide to have a small 2-hour ceremony. If the rest of the details are taken care of by the couple using the low cost tips we mentioned, the result can be a highly elegant but

practical wedding. Another interesting location that we discovered when researching, was having a small wedding ceremony in a library (Wedding at the library). Yes, public libraries are not often considered a common wedding site, however, one library in Apple Valley has been Hosting weddings for quite sometime. In order to hold their wedding in their library, they must simply make a reservation ahead of time, and the cost of a marriage license ranges from \$69-71 dollars (Wedding at the library). This is highly low cost, and then the marriage ceremony itself only costs \$35. And there are various sizes of weddings that can be held there, for example if a couple simply wants the ceremony to be for them only, they can hold the ceremony alone, or a wedding party of up to 100 guests can attend the ceremony. With such flexibility, the public library is an excellent community source that can and should be taken advantage of when trying to find a low cost site for a wedding.

Now what about the music? A great way to save money when it comes to the entertainment for a wedding, is to hire friends or even take volunteers from school orchestra's who know how to play instruments and can earn practice by playing at their wedding. Most young musicians would be happy to play at a wedding celebration out of their own love for playing, therefore, there would probably be many students interested in volunteering their time. However, if they do require a small fee, chances are it will end up being a lot cheaper than hiring a band or professional DJ. Taking advantage of the many resources available in ones community is important in a couple's over all savings.

G. Best Practies

As far as other recreational companies that have already implemented ideas to help low income couples have a nice wedding, there was little we were able to find on

this particular subject. Our thought on this is that many companies probably haven't felt the need to help those who cannot afford lavish weddings like those other luckier couples can. Therefore, we were unable to find any of the "best-fit practices," however, we did find many online resources which offer free wedding budget calculators that can help couples estimate the total cost of their wedding. By using such a tool couples can decide whether or not their budget can account for certain aspects of their wedding and they can decide what needs to be omitted. Then, the company resources we mentioned can become alternative resources for those aspects of a wedding that a couple cannot afford to elaborate on. Overall the internet is another great place for couples to find out what is out there in their community that can help them have their dream wedding on a beer budget.

H. Finance—How To Make This Project Work

1. Grants

Even though it would be great that government supports this low cost wedding program, it would be difficult to achieve at the beginning because there is no research available to show that having a memorable wedding have much effect on the happiness of people as the result. However, the survey we would do with the couples who participate in this program would give us the chance to actually do the research and hopefully show the strong coalition between the memorable marriage and their satisfaction level with their marriage lives. We hope that survey would lead to the future grant by the local governments to give more opportunities to people who would like to have a ceremony but just can not afford it.

2. Sponsors

Sponsors play big roles in the success of the weddings through this program. They would help save the money of the grooms and brides, as well as they would be critical support for wedding planners. For example, the brochures we would make could be printed for free or with discounts through the printing companies who would support this program.

3. Wedding planners

Wedding planners do this program as volunteers. Thus, we will not get commissions for whatever we do. Because of this, we would ask the couples to do maximum of things they can do on their own, such as site visits.

4. Facilities

As far as the facilities used in meetings with the clients concerned, we are going to use the offices of our own, or also meetings at the coffee shops will save the cost instead of renting a place for the meeting purposes.

5. Students

Students are great resource of the community. They are educated, and very skilled in their emphasis of their study. For those who wish to be a wedding planner in the future, this project would be a perfect internship opportunity, and their passion about wedding planning would be a great force to the success of this project.

6. Volunteers

Finally, volunteers to support this program are critical workforce. Not only they can work on the wedding day as waiters/waitresses, they would be able to help the wedding planners to do research, collect information, and take charge of the volunteers working on the wedding day to make sure everyone knows what to do.

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