# *Sample Special Events TimelineTribute Dinner or Luncheon*

In creating an event schedule, use the following guidelines to keep your plans on track:

* The planning work you do to select a venue and date (that doesn’t conflict with other, similar events), identify honorees and committee chairs, hire a caterer, and secure entertainment or speakers is essential to your ultimate success. Don’t rush or skip over these preliminary arrangements. We recommend beginning them **at least six months prior to the event date**.
* Determine the benefits and acknowledgement your major donors and event sponsors will receive. (They might be invited to a pre-reception with your special guest or receive some free tickets and printed or online recognition for their gifts. If they underwrite your event, you’ll want to feature them prominently.)
* **Five to six months prior to your event,** it’s time to organize your mail and email lists. Ask your board members to review the lists and add names of their friends and acquaintances.
* **Four to five months prior to your event,** begin building anticipation with a “Save the Date” postcard and information on your website. At this stage, you also develop a look and design for the event that you will carry through the invitation, program, and webpage.
* **Three months before your event,** begin recruiting your event committee and corporate or individual sponsors. These committee members will begin inviting their friends to attend at least a month before the event takes place. This is a good time to begin contacting magazines, local television, radio, and newspapers with announcements about your guest speaker or honorees. Arrange travel for special guests and honorees if needed. You may want to sign up with an electronic invitation and RSVP service such as EventBrite to collect and acknowledge responses from ticket buyers. (To guide you in choosing the event software, read “A Few Good Tools for Event Registration” at [www.idealware.org](http://www.idealware.org).)
* **Two months before your event,** write the copy and complete the design for your invitation (both print and electronic). You also want to follow up with sponsors and contact wineries, florists, and other merchants to see if they are willing to contribute to your meals and décor.
* **Two months before the event,** begin sending biweekly email newsletters with event development news. It’s time to recruit volunteers to help with the mailing, arrangements, and hospitality. Also find volunteers to help with cleaning up and packing up when the event has ended.
* At least **one month before the event,** mail the invitations — both in envelopes and as emails that are linked to the event webpage. Throughout this period, make follow-up calls to the media. It may be time for a follow-up news release.
* Refresh content on the event webpage at least **weekly**. As you make changes, think of ways to appeal to different kinds of donors. Incorporate photographs and visual elements.
* **Two weeks before the event,** finish the program copy and print programs. Complete your decoration and event production plans and assign roles to staff, board, and volunteers.
* **Three to four days before your event,** confirm all reservations, and check to see if anyone has a restricted diet or needs an accommodation. Organize the table seating.
* **The day before your event,** prepare place cards and nametags. Review guest lists. Make one more round of media calls.
* **Event day!** Make last-minute changes in the guest list and seating; oversee arrangements and décor; pick up special guests.
* **The day after your event,** it’s time to thank people. Personal phone calls and handwritten notes are particularly gracious. Thank your sponsors, chairs, donors, and volunteers. Recognize them in an e-newsletter or on your website. Before you know it, it will be time to ask for their help with the next year’s special event.

**Day of event checklist of things to take/arrangements to make:**

* Place cards, signs, and nametags
* Sound system, lighting equipment, microphones, and any other equipment as needed
* Flowers
* Tables and chairs for check-in, display of information, will-call, etc.
* Displays (if available) about your organization
* Coat check
* Guest list(s) and seating chart
* Guest book
* Printed information about your organization
* Pens and pencils
* Drink tickets
* Cash box and receipts
* Money to make change
* Names of special guests
* Greeters
* Volunteers to assist with décor, arrangements, and checking in guests
* One person assigned to be in charge of problems (such as unexpected guests, seating changes, or late speakers)