

Set Your Limit

A wedding budget can be a tricky thing to tackle, whether you have \$25,000 or \$250,000 to spend on a celebration. My first piece of advice is the most important, and sometimes the most difficult to accomplish: Set the max amount you want to spend, and stick to it! To do so, you'll need to determine who is paying for what. Are your parents paying for the wedding, and his parents paying for the welcome dinner? Or are the bride and groom covering all of the costs?

Figuring out who is paying for each event, and how much they are realistically willing to contribute is your first major hurdle. From my experience, putting together a budget for your wedding and/or welcome dinner prior to approaching the people you would like to contribute funds usually helps a lot. It helps these generous people in your lives understand where their money is going.

Get Your Priorities Straight

For some of our clients, their priorities are the same; meaning both the bride and the groom want to spend a larger portions of the budget on the same items. With other clients, the bride and groom have different expectations and different "most important things." We also have clients whose parents are paying that have very specific priorities and thoughts on how the budget should be spent. Once you have your max budget figured out, it's time to create a low to high budget with every line-item a wedding budget should include. Include everything: your shoes, airfare, hair and makeup, suits, tables, chairs, china, flatware, glassware, linens, the venue(s), lighting, generator, restrooms, guest transportation, accommodations, invitations, entertainment, the list goes on and on!

Go Low to High

We recommend setting a low or target cost for each vendor. For example, you could hire a DJ for \$600, but you could also hire a DJ for \$8,000. If the DJ is the most important thing to both the bride and groom, find a DJ you love and make that the high, allowing you to afford that DJ within your given budget. Proceed with this process line-by-line until you have covered all the vendors and items that need to be purchased for the wedding and other events. Remember, the low side of the budget should be below budget and the high should not exceed your budget.

Once you've entered in all the areas, you will probably be way over budget. This will force you to go through each line-item and discuss what things are more important than other. For example, do you really need the \$13.50 rental chairs for the ceremony, or is the chair the venue provides at no cost going to work just fine? You will find areas within the budget you have created where you can cut back, allowing you to spend more money in other areas that are more important to you, your guests, and your families.

Know When to Splurge—and When to Save

The majority of your budget should go to your reception (usually around 40 percent of the budget), meaning the venue, food and beverage costs, and general event decor. Put more money into things that guests touch and are close to. Think about menus, wine glasses, flatware and linens; these are all items your guests will be touching and holding and will have an intimate experience with, so they should be as nice as they can, within reason.

Once you've decided how much the venue, food and beverage, and general decor will cost, then it's onto the other big players: entertainment, photography, and flowers. If entertainment isn't that important to you, hire a DJ instead of a band. If photography is very important to you, but you don't have a big budget, hire an up-and-coming photographer located in or near the area of your selected venue. Flowers can be expensive, so remember to focus floral design on areas where guest will enjoy them the most. Spend less money on flowers in areas where guests spend less time, like the ceremony. If the flower budget is tight, re-use

arrangements from the ceremony area in the dancing area after dinner, or keep it simple, with single stem blooms in a collection of vintage glass bottles as table centerpieces.