

THE EZCATER GUIDE TO PLANNING OFFICE

# HOLIDAY PARTIES



**ez** cater

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# Welcome to Office Party Season



It never fails. Every year, as soon as summer is over and sweater weather is in full swing, the holidays sneak up on us. Believe it or not, it's time to start thinking about bringing a little seasonal cheer to the office. Although last year's fall and winter office celebrations looked a lot different from years past, with many offices still fully remote and those that weren't adhering to pretty strict safety protocols, this year things are starting to feel a little more normal. There are still plenty of reasons to celebrate.

This guide will help you get organized, whether you're just beginning to brainstorm ideas or figuring out the final touches. And if you're just getting started, don't panic! We've got advice for [last-minute office party planning](#), too.



# Start with a Master Plan



## Creating an office party season calendar

First things first: think of the big picture. While the traditional holidays tend to grab the spotlight, there are dozens of creative opportunities to celebrate with your colleagues throughout the holiday season. It's a good idea to take a holistic approach to your plans for office events from fall through the new year, which is the prime office party season. Here are some considerations for events you might want to include.

### November events

Thanksgiving is a perfect time to show your appreciation for your employees, and people love a good 'ol fashioned traditional Thanksgiving meal. But why not mix things up a little? How about a vegetarian Thanksgiving for a change of pace, or you could choose an entirely different kind of cuisine, like Mexican, Chinese, or Italian. Go ahead and have some fun making your own rules. You might be surprised to know which six dishes are the most popular for holiday catering. It's also important to consider any dietary preferences that people on your team may have. Working within dietary constraints isn't as hard as you might think, especially if you're prepared up front.

But no need to limit the celebration to Turkey Day. Check out this list of other food holidays in November.

#### NOVEMBER FOOD HOLIDAYS

Calzone day

Sandwich Day

Hot Sauce Day

Nachos Day

Cappuccino Day

Fried Chicken Sandwich Day

Vanilla Cupcake Day

Sundae Day

Pickle Day

Fast Food Day

Baklava Day

Gingerbread Cookie Day

Eat a Cranberry Day

Cake Day

French Toast Day

November is also Career Development Month, and what better way to say thank you than to put some focus on enhancing the team's skills and talents? How about hosting a "Lunch and Learn" day for employees to spend some time strengthening a skill of their choice over a nice boxed lunch?

## December events

The annual office Christmas party is something everyone looks forward to, bringing some much needed festive fun as the days grow colder and shorter. But there are many opportunities to celebrate other cultures and traditions at this time of year, too. There's Diwali, India's festival of lights, followed by Hanukkah and Kwanzaa in December.

Of course, there's no need to wait for a traditional holiday to celebrate. December is also overflowing with food holidays, from National Cocoa Day to National Fruitcake Day.

### DECEMBER FOOD HOLIDAYS

Pie Day

Cookie Day

Gazpacho Day

Brownie Day

Pastry Day

Cocoa Day

Cupcake Day

Maple Syrup Day

Pumpkin Pie Day

Fruitcake Day

Bacon Day

Looking ahead, we've cooked up the ezCater [Food Holidays Calendar](#) to inspire you year-round with food celebration opportunities. It's available as a free pdf download or digitally for Google/iCal. Get it now and never miss National Burrito, Bagel, or Bacon Day again!

Not everything has to require a supporting calendar event, however. A tray of cookies arriving out of the blue on a random December day will never fail to delight your team and bring on the holiday spirit.

# Budgeting



If you're planning several company parties over the course of the season, you will likely want to keep a close eye on your overall budget so that you don't blow it all on the first shindig. From meal and decorating tips, to the best way to handle the bar, we've got [budget-conscious party planning](#) tips to help you stretch your dollar as far as it will go. For example, don't assume you have to go with a pricey main course to impress. It can be more cost effective and fun to build your menu around bite-sized appetizers. **Here are a few other guidelines that can help you keep spending under control:**



**Side Salads** When accompanied by entrees, order a side garden salad for just  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{2}{3}$  of your headcount. If the entree is large or already includes sides, reduce the side salad even further. Of course, if some people are vegetarians, adjust accordingly.



**Other Sides** When ordering pasta/broccoli/potato salads by the pound, remember that some foods are much more dense than others. A pound of potato salad will look much smaller than a pound of pasta salad, and it will not stretch as far.



**Chips** Not everyone eats chips, but some people eat two bags. Order for at least 85% of your headcount. Pretzels or baked chips are often appreciated, but be aware that they can cost more.



**Desserts** Most guests appreciate a treat, and many will thank you for offering smaller portions. Request that brownies, bars, or cookies be cut in half, and order half as many. For cakes and pies that serve "X-Y people," calculate based on the higher number.



**Drinks** A gallon of tea or lemonade serves 10 people at lunch. At breakfast, a gallon of juice can serve 12 to 15 people.

To help keep you on track, ezCater makes it easy to set a per-headcount or total budget for your catering order, with the flexibility to include delivery fee and tip in the calculation. Learn more in our full walk-through, [Catering on a Budget: How to Set Spending Limits on Your ezCater Order](#).

# Details, details

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## Timing

There are a lot of details to handle when it comes to party planning, but probably the first and most important question to answer is, when will your event take place? It might be a good idea to consider hosting it during the last two hours of a normal workday; attendance will be greater if your employees don't have to give up one of their weekends, and they'll appreciate you for it. The first half of December is the most common time frame for Christmas office parties, as many of your colleagues may schedule vacations closer to the holidays.

## Headcount

It's important to get as accurate a headcount as possible, as early in the planning process as possible. This is critical information not just for planning the appropriate amount of food to order, but for other considerations such as team activities and seating arrangements.

## Hybridizing

The rise of the hybrid office is changing office parties, too. It's important to make remote teams and workers feel included. This may mean sending a catered meal to satellite offices, or inviting remote staff to join via Zoom for any key moments such as employee awards, toasts, speeches, or trivia competitions.

It's the combination of all the little details that really make an event come together. What will the event look and feel like? Background music, theme, and even the color of your decorations will all contribute to the overall vibe of your event. Sites like Pinterest can help you find inspiration, and LovetoKnow has created a handy [holiday party planning checklist](#) that will help you with some of these details. And, as always, we're here to help you with the food!

# Food: The Life of the Party



With practically endless menus to choose from, it helps to pick your venue and corresponding theme first, and then plan your food around the environment. If your venue has accessible tables and chairs, you can plan for heartier options that require a fork and knife. If your party locale is an open space conducive to mingling and casual conversation, then bite-sized finger foods might be the way to go.



## How much food to order

One of the most important aspects of ordering food for work is figuring out how much food is enough. You never want anyone to be left hungry. You also don't want to end up with twenty pounds of leftovers. Our restaurant partners will usually include information on how many people a given side or entree is meant to serve, but we've included other useful guidelines below.



Attendees at a social event that includes mingling will usually eat more than folks at a board meeting. The longer the event, the more of a chance people will go back for seconds, or even thirds. A lengthier event might simply require a greater volume of food, or you might consider offering a couple of different courses to refresh what's on offer.

Naturally, guests will tend to fill up more quickly on hearty cuisines like Italian or Mexican than they will on, for instance, salads or other vegetarian dishes. Knowing this, you can adjust not only the volume of food, but also the number of side dishes.

**Here are some general guidelines to get you started:**

- **Proteins like pulled pork or brisket:** 4-5 ounces per person
- **Fried chicken, ribs, or similar dishes:** 3 pieces per person
- **Skewers and kebabs:** 2 per person
- **Burritos:** 1 per person
- **Tacos:** 2 per person
- **Sushi:** 8-10 pieces per person
- **Side dishes:** 4 ounces per person
- **Salads:** 3-4 ounces per person
- **Sandwiches:** if ordered as an assortment, sandwich platter, or buffet, plan for 12 sandwiches for every 10 people.

A good overall rule to follow is to order 1 lb of an entree dish for every three to four people, and then add 4 oz servings of side dishes or appetizers per person to complete the spread.

## When to order

When it comes to the “when” of ordering holiday food, it helps to go with the old adage “the earlier the better.” You will want to order at least two days in advance, but if you find yourself in a bind and in need of caterers who can do last-minute orders, we have some tips to help you out.

First, look to big brands, which will likely be more able to handle large, last minute orders. Popular chain restaurants typically have a large stock of ingredients and supplies, as well as a sizable staff. Also, make sure you choose simpler foods that can be prepared easily over more time-intensive dishes, such as sandwich platters, build-your-own taco bars, and salads.

When trying to order last-minute, it's best to call the restaurant and explain the situation. Reach out to ezCater's [customer service team](#) to enlist our help or call the restaurant directly.

## Dietary preferences

More than 9 million Americans have a food allergy, including gluten, dairy, soy, nuts, shellfish, etc. Many popular diet choices such as Paleo, Keto, and Mediterranean exclude specific foods. Eight million American adults are vegetarian, while 6% of Americans follow a vegan diet. You also need to consider religious restrictions around certain foods or holidays. Balancing all these needs and preferences can be overwhelming if you don't plan ahead.

If possible, don't leave collecting dietary information from employees until the day of an event. Making it part of your employee onboarding process (and keeping a record in a master list) saves a lot of time later on. In addition, make sure to advise your caterer of any food allergies or preferences when you place your order. Caterers can often provide customized options to meet various dietary needs and preferences.

When ordering buffet catering for a group with mixed dietary needs, resist the urge to order a different entree for every need. For example, say you're ordering for 30 people and your main entree is pork. If not everyone in your party can eat pork, consider ordering pork for 24 and chicken for 8, which gives you a 10% overage. This should cover anyone who cannot eat pork without creating a two-entree situation that would encourage people to try a little of both (and require you to order much more overall).

Finally, when your order includes meals for people with special dietary needs and preferences, think about what makes sense. Simply ordering green salad for the vegetarians in your group won't leave them very satisfied. If salad is the main entree, look for hearty options that include nuts, sunflower seeds, beans, chickpeas, or tofu (which is a welcome change from the usual cheese, and also vegan-friendly). Quiches, casseroles, and pasta dishes also often come in vegetarian options. ezCater offers filters to search for restaurants that can fill specific dietary needs.

Learn more about [how to manage dietary preferences at the office](#).

## Delivery tipping

In general, tipping 15 - 20% is typical for orders under \$50. For holiday parties, which generally come with much larger amounts of food and therefore a larger overall bill, the typical rule of thumb has been 10%.

## Food stations

If you're offering appetizer-style fare that will be available throughout your event, consider setting up more than one station in key locations around your space to spread the party out. This will help avoid bottlenecks and create a nice flow around the room.

## Maintenance

If your event doesn't have a catering attendant, you'll want to plan on making regular "tidying up" passes on the food areas. Make sure napkins, utensils, etc. are available, and that any drips or messes are cleaned up promptly.

## Wrapping up

Leftovers? Have containers on hand to send people home with them, or if the next day is a workday, refrigerate for snacking.

## Activities



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The activities and entertainment at your holiday office party are almost as important as the food you serve. Planning an event with ongoing side entertainment as well as scheduled main events will flow nicely and keep your attendees engaged. Here are some core elements to consider including.

Fun activities such as a karaoke booth, photo booth, cornhole style games, or simply a popular holiday movie playing in the background will give your guests focal points to congregate around, and something to do in between conversations and sampling the delicious food.

Gift exchanges are a tried and true part of office holidays, from an office Secret Santa to a White Elephant gift exchange. [Gifts.com](#) has a great list of [29 gift exchange game ideas](#) to help get you started.

Holiday parties are also a great time for employee appreciation. How about having an awards show recognizing fun department-specific awards such as "employee of the year" and "coolest Zoom background"? You can also hold raffle-style drawings to give away coveted company swag, or take the opportunity of having most of your staff on-hand to bestow the annual employee gift from the company.

For more ideas, check out [20 Office Holiday Party Ideas That Are Sure to Entertain](#).

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# Post-Event Follow-Up



It's always a good idea to send a "thanks for attending" note after the event. Make it even more personal by including pictures and highlights from your party. You should also invite people to share feedback, either by replying to your email or filling out a survey.

# Make notes for next year



Speaking of things to do as soon after your event as possible, be sure to make notes for the following year. Did people like the games and activities? Was there enough food? Too much? Take note of the headcount and what was ordered so that next year you'll have those details to look back on.

# Conclusion



More than anything, a holiday office party is a chance to have some fun with your team. It's an opportunity to show your appreciation, let your hair down (a little!), and pause for some much-deserved revelry and cheer. Planning everything well in advance will help ensure that things go smoothly on the day of your event. And, with any luck, even you will be able to kick back and enjoy the celebration.

So raise a glass and toast the team for pulling through another not-quite-normal year. And feel free to lean on us for some help finding the perfect caterer for your event. With more than 100,000 restaurants to choose from, you can count on us to feed your next holiday gathering. Getting started is easy at [ezcater.com](https://ezcater.com). Cheers!

# About ezCater

ezCater is the largest national marketplace for business catering with 100,000+ restaurants and caterers and 244+ million people served. ezCater provides companies of all sizes, anywhere in the country, with flexible and scalable food solutions for work. Nationwide, restaurants and caterers use ezCater's platform to grow and manage their catering business.

For more information or to place a catering order, visit [www.ezcater.com](http://www.ezcater.com).



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