

2024

Workplace holiday party trends, unwrapped

ezcater

Holiday party playbook

Discover what's fueling employee excitement (and driving attendance) for holiday parties this year.

It's the most wonderful time of the year: holiday party season — specifically, workplace holiday party season. In the spirit of celebration, ezCater surveyed 1,007 full-time employees and 608 decision makers who are involved in the planning process to learn how today's workers feel about their company holiday parties. Are they “enforced fun” or highly anticipated opportunities to connect with colleagues off-the-clock?

ezCater's research revealed that employee party attendance is on the rise, party-planning budgets are trending up, and it's food — not alcohol — that motivates younger workers to join in on the festive fun.

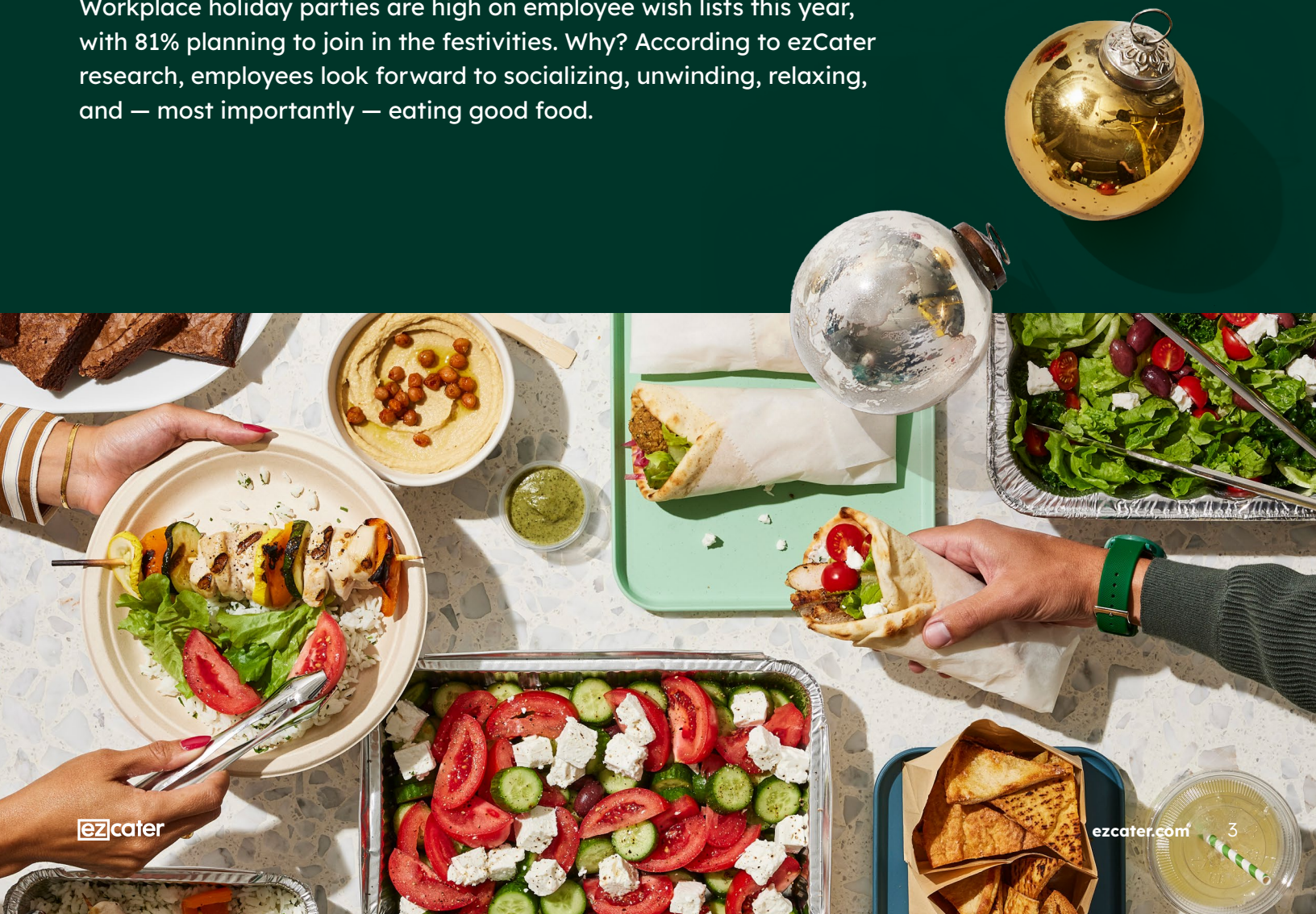
Dig in to learn what employees really think about workplace celebrations, discover how the right food can fuel excitement (and fill rooms), and see how decision makers' plans align with what workers want.



SECTION 1

Employees are eager to gather this year — and food is a big reason why

Workplace holiday parties are high on employee wish lists this year, with 81% planning to join in the festivities. Why? According to ezCater research, employees look forward to socializing, unwinding, relaxing, and — most importantly — eating good food.



Holiday party attendance is trending up

69% of employees attended last year's holiday party, party planners estimate

81% of surveyed workers plan to attend this year's holiday party



Millennials are 11% more likely to say that they're excited about the upcoming holiday party compared to other generations

RSVP dealbreakers

When deciding whether or not to attend, employees want to know who's coming and where the party's happening.

56%



of workers are influenced by who else is attending

52%



of workers are influenced by the party location



But it's food that fuels the most excitement

What employees look forward to the most from their company holiday party, ranked:



78%

Food



55%

Camaraderie and socializing with colleagues



50%

The chance to unwind and relax from work duties



48%

Drinks and festive cocktails



41%

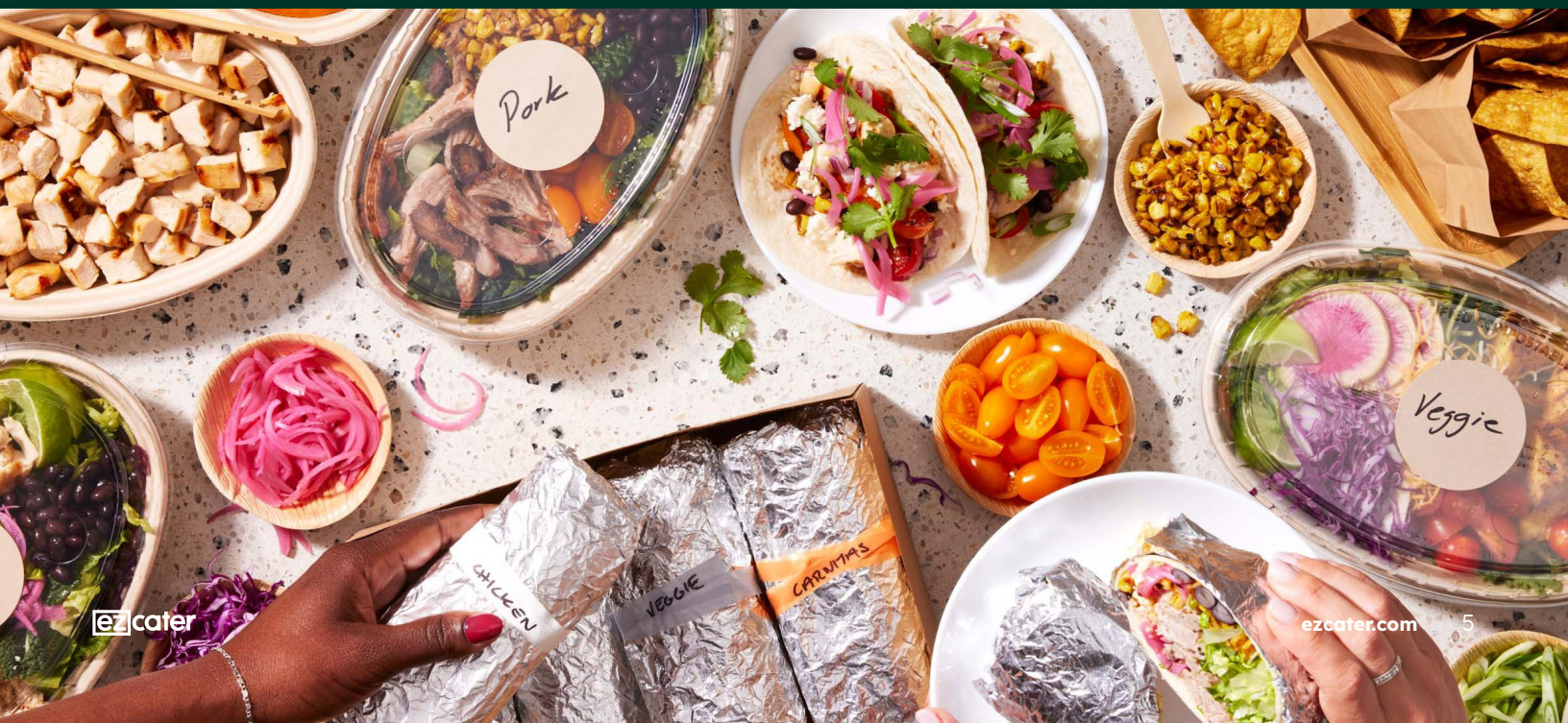
Early work dismissal



SECTION 2

Gen Z and millennials: shaping future holiday party trends

ezCater surveyed employees of all ages and found some intriguing generational differences. From alcohol preferences to RSVPs and beyond, Gen Z and millennials are attending holiday parties on their own terms (and setting new trends for the future).

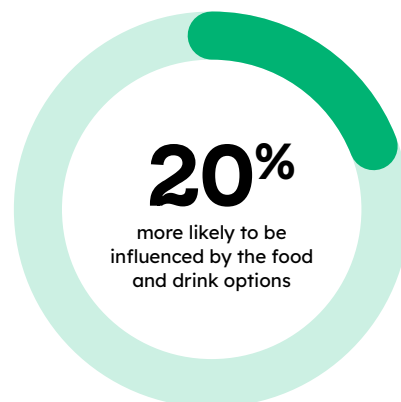
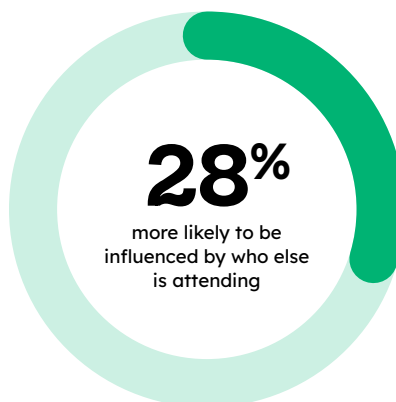
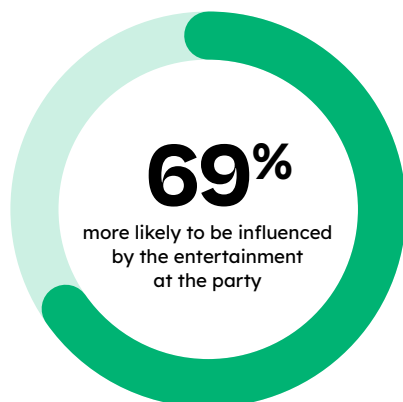


Gen Z and millennials are leading with a yes



Before Gen Z RSVPs, they want to know all the details

When considering whether or not to attend a holiday party, Gen Z is most influenced by the entertainment and the guest list. Compared to all other generations, Gen Z is:

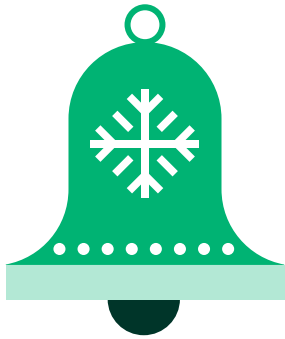


For the youngest workers, clocking out early for their company party is a much-anticipated holiday gift

58%

of Gen Z employees look forward to early work dismissals, and they're 50% more likely to say this than any other generation






Gen Z and millennials are here for a good time, not a long time

Although younger workers are the most likely to attend workplace holiday parties, they're also ready to make a sly exit.

Gen Z is **31%** more likely to only stay for the food (and leave after eating) than all other generations

Millennials are **20%** more likely to ghost (leave without saying goodbye) compared to all other generations

Festive drinks and cocktails top millennial wish lists

52% 
of millennials look forward to festive drinks and cocktails

Millennials are more likely to want alcohol available at a holiday party

(71% vs. 66% of all other generations)




SECTION 3

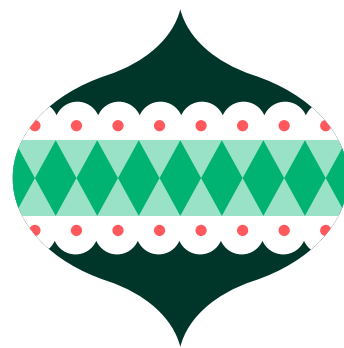
Fueling festivities: food is the life of the party

Food plays a major role at holiday parties, from filling rooms, to building excitement and sparking conversation. It's the not-so-secret ingredient for a memorable bash. Employees agree: nearly 80% of workers surveyed admit that food is what they look forward to the most at these festive functions.



Feed them well and they will come

 **92%** of employees say the thought of attending a holiday party with exceptional food makes them more excited about the event



Some attendees will skip the party because of mediocre food

Of the employees who chose not to attend a party in the past, nearly 1 in 10 didn't go because the food was unappealing

Snacks and meals are the highlight of the party

21%

of employees agree that food is so important, they will attend a party just to eat and leave right afterward

Food is the ultimate ice breaker at parties

85%

of employees say food plays a central role in facilitating social interaction at holiday parties

SECTION 4

Holiday party preview: what to expect at this year's celebrations

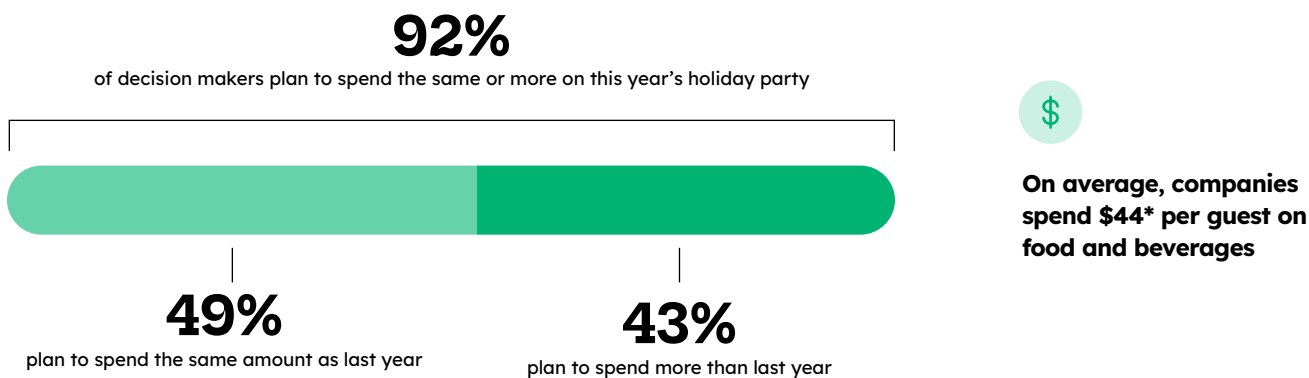


Party planners have made a list and checked it twice. Budgets are increasing, smaller holiday parties are trending, and most celebrations will happen on a Friday afternoon in December (no surprises there).

Something you might not anticipate? Some party planners aren't so sure about the spirits in holiday spirit. More than a quarter don't feel comfortable serving alcoholic beverages during workplace parties — despite employee demand.



Holiday party budgets are trending up



Companies are opting for smaller gatherings this year

54% of companies — including enterprise-level organizations — are planning parties for less than 100 people, and only 6% of decision makers are planning parties for 1,000 guests or more.

Why? More intimate settings promote connection and collaboration among colleagues.

Predicted turnout by company size

Small and medium-sized businesses (1-499 employees)

@ **168 attendees**

Mid-market companies (500-1,999 employees)

@ **396 attendees**

Enterprise companies (2,000+ employees)

@ **462 attendees**

Unsurprisingly, December is the go-to month for holiday parties

86%

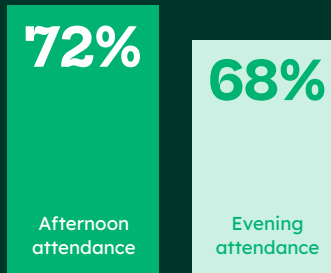
of upcoming holiday parties will happen in December



Company parties will happen on the clock this year

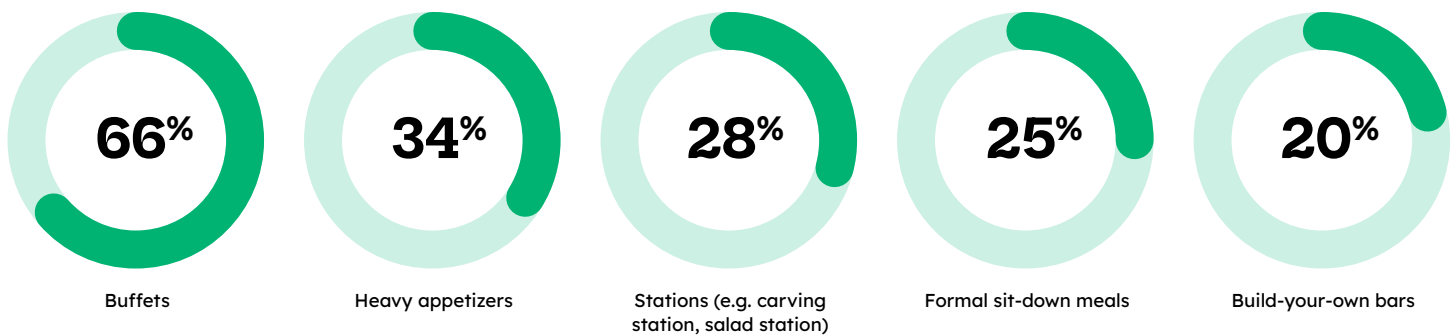
Nearly half (49%) of companies will throw their parties during work hours, between lunchtime and happy hour.

Decision makers report that holiday parties scheduled during afternoon work hours have better attendance than those hosted in the evening after work



Buffets are the dream pick for nearly three in four employees

Decision makers plan to go along with the self-serve food trend, offering:



Not all decision makers are thrilled about an open bar

More than a quarter (27%) of decision makers don't feel comfortable making alcoholic beverages available at a company party.



25%

believe that serving alcohol negatively affects the professional atmosphere

22%

have had negative experiences serving alcohol at holiday parties in the past

SECTION 5

Your recipe for the perfect holiday party

Plus-ones, self-serve food stations, and festive cocktails — employees have their holiday party wish list ready. Here's the winning formula for planning a workplace celebration they'll actually want to attend, all backed by ezCater survey data.



Include plus-ones

More than half of employees (54%) say they are more likely to attend a holiday party if they're allowed to bring a plus-one.



Plan the party on a Friday, during work hours

55%

of employees want the party to happen in the afternoon during work hours

55%

of employees want the holiday party to happen on a Friday

Add a splash of alcohol

69%

of employees would like for alcohol to be available at their holiday party



Let employees pick their meals

64%

of employees would like to select the meal or item they want, rather than have someone else order for the entire group

Keep it simple

You can skip the photo booths, ugly sweaters, and scavenger hunts this year. Holiday celebrations don't need extra frills to build excitement. Less than 25% of employees say they look forward to these party add-ons:



24%

Activities and games



22%

Entertainment (e.g. music, DJ, performance)



16%

Chance to dress up and take photos



9%

Recognition and speeches from leadership

