

An Unforgettable
AFTER-GRAD

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Your guide to creating
and operating a successful
all-night safe, dry, grad event



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For my family
who make every adventure worthwhile
and who continue to teach me the meaning of 'fearless'

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



Why Dry?	
An Introduction To The Dry After-Grad Concept	1
How To Use This Book	5
Making It Unforgettable!	9
Building the Excitement	13
SEPTEMBER	17
Chair	19
OCTOBER	23
Chair	25
Communications & Publicity	31
NOVEMBER	33
Chair	35
Communications & Publicity	40
Finance	46
Volunteer	50
Transportation, Operations & Safety	51
Decorating, Food & Beverage	58
Entertainment, Games & Contests	63
Fundraising & Prizes	67

DECEMBER	73
JANUARY	75
Communications & Publicity	77
Volunteer	77
FEBRUARY	79
Chair	81
Communications & Publicity	84
Fundraising & Prizes	85
MARCH	87
Chair	89
Communications & Publicity	90
Finance	90
Volunteer	91
Transportation, Operations & Safety	93
Decorating, Food & Beverage	94
Entertainment, Games & Contests	95
Fundraising & Prizes	96
APRIL	99
Chair	101
Communications & Publicity	101
Volunteer	102
Transportation, Operations & Safety	102
Decorating, Food & Beverage	103
Entertainment, Games & Contests	106
MAY	109
Communications & Publicity	111
Volunteer	113
Transportation, Operations & Safety	114
Decorating, Food & Beverage	117
Entertainment, Games, & Contests	121
Fundraising & Prizes	124

JUNE	129
PRE EVENT	131
Chair	131
Communications & Publicity	132
Finance	132
Volunteers	133
Transportation, Operations & Safety	134
Decorating, Food & Beverage	135
Entertainment, Games, Contests	136
Fundraising & Prizes	136
THE AFTER-GRAD EVENT	138
POST EVENT	142
AG Committee Debrief Meeting	142
ACTION ITEM CALENDARS	
September	18
October	24
November	34
December	74
January	76
February	80
March	88
April	100
May	110
June	130
APPENDIX – FORMS	145
Volunteer Form – September	146
Venue Questions – October	147–148
Event Flow – November	149
Survey – November	150
Survey Report – November	151
Quote Sheet – November	152
Supplier Contact List – November	153
Event Budget – November	154–156
Supplier Questions – November	157
Food Provider Questions – November	158

Performer Questions – November	159
Prize Solicitation Letter – November	160
Tuition Solicitation Letter – November	161
Grad Attendance Agreement – February	162–163
Guest Attendance Agreement – February	164–165
Event Schedule – March	166–171
Volunteer Grid – March	172–174
Installation Schedule – March	175
Floor Plan – April	176
Master Attendance List – May	177
Master Guest List – May	178
Supplier Agreement – May	179
Food & Beverage Order – May	180
Performer Agreement – May	181
Bus Escort Script – June	182
Budget Analysis – June	183
Author Bio	185



How to use this book

My intent in writing the book was to provide an easy-to-use and informative resource, as well as a support as you work on a project that may seem daunting at times. I hope that some of the ideas inspire you, and that the information will help you stay on track, while making it a manageable and enjoyable process, one that you can be proud to be a part of, and one that helps create a truly memorable event for your graduating class.

Each year, when we begin our After-Grad work in September, we look forward to having ten months in which to create a truly memorable event. Whether you have the luxury of time or have just picked this book up in March, I will take you through the process from beginning to end, providing you with a step-by-step approach. I use the same approach to every event, breaking down the project into small, very manageable chunks. This is especially important because if you are like me, you already have a job, a family, a life... and you are working on the After-Grad in your “spare” time.

This book does not make any promises or provide you with any guarantees that your event will be successful, that nothing will go awry, or that you won't encounter challenges along the way or during the event. What it does provide you with is a framework, a place to start, and a process to follow – one that works, and one that has brought us tremendous success for the past 5 years.

As most After-Grad events are designed and operated by a volunteer committee or

Dry Grad Society, this book has been designed using a committee approach, listing various tasks and duties assigned to sub-committees and coordinator positions. We've used the following icons to identify the recommended eight positions and sub-committees:

Chair	Communications & Publicity Co-ordinator	Finances Co-ordinator	Volunteer Committee	Transportation, Operations & Safety Committee	Decorating, Food & Beverage Committee	Entertainment, Games & Contests Committee	Fundraising & Prizes Committee
							

Within this book, each monthly section begins with a calendar filled with action items for that month, listed by committee or coordinator, along with a suggested weekly order for completing those items. You may, of course, complete the “action items” in any order you like, however, keep in mind that other committees or individuals may depend on your completing one task before they can move on to another on their own list, hence the calendar concept. Follow the book, or move along at your own pace, include some, all or none of the suggestions, but however you decide to make it happen, the monthly calendar will serve as a reminder of where you are in the process, and while your event may look very different than ours, many of the components and ‘action items’ will most certainly be on your list too.

Keep in mind that our event examples are based on a group size of 200; you will need to adjust if you have a smaller or larger graduating class or if your event includes multiple schools.

Along with the monthly action items, I have also included samples of the forms I use each year to help make the process easier. They are all available to download from the website – www.safegradevent.com

- ✓ You may decide to simply use them as a guide, and create your own forms, or
- ✓ download the Word and Excel versions and change the sample information to suit your unique event needs, or
- ✓ download the PDF version if you don't have Word or Excel.

- ✓ How about uploading the forms onto an online sharing site so that everyone has access to them and you can revise them as you move along? Some forms are used by more than one committee so sharing them can be a very useful tool, especially the calendar which can be updated and seen by everyone at all times.

We've learned a lot along the way, and are pleased to share it all with you. And, remember that while this graduation year will go by far too quickly, the memories of the After-Grad you are creating, really will last a lifetime. It's such a worthwhile and meaningful journey, and I wish you a truly successful and unforgettable event!

“Linda has established the ‘after-grad template’ for new parent organizers to go forward with. And not just for Parkland, but other high schools are learning from her talents and her experience.”

— Heather McAughtrie, Catering and
Conference Manager, University of Victoria
Students' Society



Making it UNFORGETTABLE!

What makes an After-Grad unforgettable? Community support; a safe & secure environment; exciting, interactive and fun entertainment; fabulous food & beverages; and fantastic prizes. Add to that mix: a group of dedicated and supportive parents to organize and run the event, and you have the makings of a truly memorable After-Grad. And while no two events are ever exactly the same, there are certain components that are a “must” for an After-Grad to be truly unforgettable!

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Whether it’s the school administration, grads and their parents, or the community at large, you cannot go it alone. A safe, dry After-Grad is a daunting prospect for anyone who is trying to run their first event, and you need support. You must spread the “positive” message of the value and importance of the event, and what it means to everyone involved.

SAFETY & SECURITY

An After-Grad must take into consideration the well-being of everyone in attendance – systems and measures need to be established to ensure the best possible environment. Having both a Security and a Wellness Team as part of your event ensures the necessary level of safety, security and comfort.

It makes sense to partner with your local police department and/or fire department, a professional security firm, and medical personnel including doctors, nurses, first responders, and emergency medical support/paramedics. A professional security firm will have their own thoughts on how to handle the registration and security check, but be sure to also make your expectations known along with any unique concerns or considerations related to your guest group.

ENTERTAINMENT

For an After-Grad to be the one “party” that Grads *want* to attend, the entertainment has to be exciting, interactive, energetic, awesome, cool, amazing, fun, outrageous, memorable.... you get the idea – they must be “entertained”!

To ensure the highest level of enjoyment, we believe you need to include a range of activities and different kinds of entertainment. This generation of teens is used to a high level of interaction and instant gratification. A selection from the following list of activities will go a long way to keeping your grads and their guests “engaged” for the entire six or more hours:

- ✓ roaming and stationary “live” entertainment – magicians, jugglers, fortune tellers, tattoo artists, caricaturists, actors, dancers, street performers, stilt walkers
- ✓ performances – comedians, hypnotists, skits, cultural performances



BUILDING THE EXCITEMENT

Here's a description of a theoretical After-Grad that you can use to “paint a picture” of what's possible if your parents, school administrators and grads have no experience with a safe, dry, unforgettable event.



YOU ARE INVITED TO...

An Unforgettable After-Grad

As you leave your graduation dinner/dance with your fellow graduates and guests, a parent volunteer checks your name off the attendance list and hands you a coloured wristband – allowing entry to an unforgettable all-night fabulous experience. You make your way to the awaiting double-decker bus. Onboard, finding a selection of coloured bandanas, beachcomber hats, sunglasses and flashing rings, you pick out something that goes with your outfit, and sit back and relax, while your tour guide takes you on a little journey to your ‘island paradise’ where the party is waiting!

Everything is black outside – it's 10.30 pm after all. As you listen to the tour

guide announce all of the great things there are to do tonight, in the distance you can just make out the edge of a huge flashing 'Welcome to Paradise' sign, and then more lights, hundreds of lights, the building is aglow. Arriving in style, walk the red carpet walkway, under a lighted archway of flowers, over the bridge and through the doors, all while the tropical music is blasting through the air. A mermaid hands you a lei, and a pirate – parrot and all – hands you some gold doubloons from his latest ship raid.

Toting your change of clothes, you make your way through the main entrance doors, pass through the security check, where you are met by more pirates (friendly ones, thankfully) and two local police officers who pat down everyone and may use a breathalyser (don't want any alcohol or drugs spoiling this once-in-a-lifetime party!). Next, three merry buccaneers serve everyone a 'welcome mocktail' along with a canapé or two. Leaving your personal belongings at the coat check, you head to the commemorative T-shirt table and the signing begins – it's a sight to see, hundreds of grads, all signing their fellow classmates' shirts, with thoughts and expressions about graduation, friendship and future wishes, creating a souvenir to last a lifetime. Donning your T-shirt, beachcomber hat and lei, you are 'in theme' and ready to try out one of the over 23 activities available tonight.

A walk through the tropical lounge and it's the karaoke you hit first (who says you don't sound like Celine Dion?). Behind the karaoke, there is a continuous loop of After-Grad digital images showing... oh and look, now there's one of Celine. Get inside the photobooth and take a picture strip of you and your friends, play a little pinball or Pac Man, take a stab at foosball or air hockey, and then a little competition among friends playing the XBOX or Wii. Among the palm trees, fishing nets and sea shells, the buffet table is loaded, so grab a little some-

thing on your way out, maybe a mini-wrap, some veggies and a bottle of water, and then it's off to see what else the evening has in store. Just before you head out, game to try the limbo or hula hoop contest, anyone?

Moving along the hallway, you find a hot dog vendor and fresh hot popcorn – hmmm, maybe later, more to do first. The magician is doing some unbelievable sleight-of-hand tricks or how about a caricature of you and your best friend, one that will last forever? You can leave the finished masterpiece at the coat check, and then move on to the temporary tattoo stand where you can have your arm airbrushed with a beautiful tropical flower. A little further down the hall, join in the beach relay contest, and then head straight into the casino.

This noisy place is filled with the sounds of tropically-clad dealers and lots of hopeful players, looking for Lady Luck. Huge tropical palm trees, grass-skirted tables, and all kinds of casino games await, so why not try your hand at blackjack, the wheel, poker, or maybe a little bingo or a game of billiards, all with faux money and real fun. Another buffet means more snacks, a bottle of juice, and now it's time for a little dancing in the nightclub.

The nightclub is bouncing with lots of flashing lights, videos playing on floating screens, and glow sticks for everyone. Dancers are joining in the contests and requesting their favourite dance tunes. It won't be long now until the live band takes over and after that you won't want to miss the hypnotist's performance.

You are back in the main hallway, fresh hot pizza is being made to order, and friends are playing Rock Band. It's been hours since you first arrived, so how about a little break – you can freshen up with the washroom amenities that have been provided, drop into the wellness room if you need to rest, or head down to the buffet for a hot cup of coffee and a little dessert. This has been an amazing night, and it's not over yet ...



NOVEMBER

November may be the start of cooler weather, but it's also when event preparation starts to heat up. Having established your sub-committees, you can get down to surveying the grads, determining a theme, and developing a working budget. This month is about research, sourcing suppliers and building the actual event. I try to accomplish a lot in November, because December includes school vacation and a busy holiday season. If you find yourself getting behind by the end of November, you can always use a few days in December to catch up so you are ready to move forward again in January.



FINANCE

Create New AG Account/Books - week two

Depending on how involved your school or Parent Council is with the After-Grad, you may need to set up a separate bank account for the event and related funding. You will need to keep accurate records of income and expenses as well as have the ability to write cheques on the account (keep in mind that the total budget may be in the tens of thousands of dollars). If you need to establish society status, and have not started that ball rolling, now is the time to get that up and running, so everything is in place once funds start rolling in. You may want to contact the Canada Revenue Agency or your state or federal tax agency for information on establishing a charitable organization or society.

Develop a Working Budget (a work in progress) - week four

While grad class sizes will vary from coast to coast and school to school, most AG events will include similar components to ours. Our event is based on a group of approximately 200; you will need to adjust your planning to accommodate your group's size. We have developed a budget formula that works with whatever our grads tell us to include each year – we believe this formula will work for any size of group.

Some schools wait several months before setting a budget, watching to see how fundraising efforts are going and how the dollars are looking. Still others, like ours, determine a tentative budget early on, selecting a possible ticket price amount, and using that figure to set a conservative budget, we monitor it throughout the year as fundraising continues and then settle on a final ticket price closer to the event date.

Our budget formula is based on allocating the highest dollar amounts to the most important event components. Since most After-Grads span several hours, many taking place after an already long and emotionally charged day, ...

