HOW TO DO AN ANNUAL PLANNING MEETING FOR YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY

In youth ministry, we all know what it's like to leave our planning to the last possible second. Maybe you started planning that big event of yours a few weeks too late and now you're scrambling to get it all done. Or maybe you're halfway through the school year when you realize…*Wait, when's the last time I sent a parent email?* Or maybe it's Saturday night and you're frantically Googling, "free no-prep ministry lessons."

We've all been there, but let's be honest. Procrastination is the worst. It's stressful and time-consuming and we always, always, regret it. So how about we try something different this year? **How about we start planning our ministries an entire year at a time?** It only takes one day each year, and it's going to make the other 364 days of your year so much more fun, peaceful, and effective.

If it sounds too good to be true — well, it's not. It's actually possible with the Grow system and strategy! And it all starts here: **schedule an annual planning meeting.**

BEFORE YOUR ANNUAL PLANNING MEETING

1. SCHEDULE THE MEETING

Try to plan your meeting at least a month before your school year begins, but if your ministry year is already in progress, then just schedule your meeting as soon as you can!

2. INVITE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Think about inviting your staff, key volunteers, fellow ministry leaders, or even your lead pastor to be a part of this meeting with you. Invite people who understand strategy, ministry, and the teenagers you lead. Don't do this alone!

3. MAKE A PLAN

To make sure you're not wasting anyone's time, come up with a game plan in advance. (And, no, asking the question, "So, what do you all want to do this year?" is not enough of a game plan.) Instead, here's what we suggest **— identify the areas where your ministry needs an annual strategy.** You already know your ministry needs a strategy for planning your year (that's what this meeting is all about), but here are the other six things that need to be strategized:

- **DISCIPLESHIP:** This year, how will you strategically help students grow spiritually?
- **TEACHING:** This year, how will you teach students what they need to hear, when they need to hear it?
- **WEEKLY ENVIRONMENT:** This year, how will you keep your weekly environment fun and engaging?
- **EVENTS:** This year, how will you leverage special events to invest in students?
- **VOLUNTEERS:** This year, how will you recruit, train, and invest in your volunteer team?
- **PARENTS:** This year, how will you engage, connect with, and serve parents?

Imagine the impact you'll make this year if you strategically develop an annual calendar for all six of those areas! Not only will you be helping your group grow, you'll be helping your entire ministry grow as well. Once you've got a plan, it's time to think about the logistics.

©2023 Stuff You Can Use. All rights reserved. www.stuffyoucanuse.org

4. PREPARE YOUR BOARD

This annual planning meeting is meant to be interactive and engaging! To do that, we suggest actually building a board together that helps you visualize everything you plan to do during the year.

We love using large (48" x 48") **color-coded creative boards** for our annual calendar planning for a few reasons. First, it's easy to see your entire year at a glance. Second, it's easy to move things around once you've placed them on the board. And third, it's a great way to visually map your entire ministry strategy — not just your calendar.

You can purchase a board like this or if you're feeling crafty, you can make your own.

Once you've got the board, you're going to want to establish a color code for your calendar cards. (If you're using Grow Curriculum, you can print and cut the cards we've provided in your downloads. If you're not, you can always purchase blank cards like these.)

Our color code looks like this:

- **DISCIPLESHIP:** Orange
- **TEACHING:** Red
- **WEEKLY ENVIRONMENT:** Yellow
- **EVENTS:** Green
- **VOLUNTEERS:** Blue
- **PARENTS:** Pink

You'll also want to keep some blank white cards handy for headers or unplanned additions to your calendar.

5. BUILD YOUR CALENDAR

Across the top of the board, place twelve white cards (one for each month of the year) and label them, beginning with the start of your school year or whatever month makes sense for you.

In case you need a reminder in the middle of your meeting, you might also want to create a color key at the top of the board to help you remember which color equals which category. Place small squares of each color at the top with the title of the category those colors represent.

6. DON'T FORGET THE FOOD

If you want people to stay engaged during this meeting, don't forget to feed them! And caffeinate them too, while you're at it.

DURING THE MEETING

We suggest structuring your meeting (and filling in your annual calendar) in this order...

1. PLAN YOUR DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGY

Begin your meeting by talking about your big-picture discipleship strategy because, once your discipleship strategy is determined, you can strategically plan your teaching, weekly environment, and events to complement the timing of your discipleship efforts.

Break your year into four quarters, then assign one spiritual habit to each quarter. We assign Spend Time with Others to the fall, Use Your Gifts to the winter, Spend time with God to the spring, and Share Your Story to the summer.

If you want to understand the strategy behind why we placed those spiritual habits where we did, check out this article about our annual discipleship strategy.

©2023 Stuff You Can Use. All rights reserved. www.stuffyoucanuse.org

2. PLAN YOUR TEACHING STRATEGY

Each year, it's important to plan ahead the topics and Scripture you plan to cover. When we fail to plan ahead, we run the risk of missing big important ideas, teaching only the topics that interest us most, and failing to give teenagers a full and holistic view of God. So plan ahead! It's important.

First, establish a bank of topics or books of the Bible that you want to cover and when you'd like to cover each of them. Once you know those topics, place them on the calendar in the months that make sense. If you need some extra guidance, check out this article about our annual teaching strategy.

When you're deciding when to schedule each teaching topic, be sure to consider what else is happening that month, both in your church and in your students' lives. You'll be much more effective when you time your teaching topics to align with the experiences of a teenager and your overall church strategy.

When everything is on the board, you may want to spend some time as a team brainstorming ideas or specific themes for each of the series you plan to teach throughout the year.

3. PLAN YOUR WEEKLY ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

When you begin to develop your teaching series in more detail, you may want to plan some interesting elements for your weekly environment (like special songs, activities, or experiences) to enhance that month's topic. Your annual planning meeting probably isn't the best place for too many details, though. For this meeting, you're going to want to focus on the big picture and start planning your themes for the entire year.

Start by **determining an engaging theme for each teaching series that complements what you're teaching.** Then, create an environment around it! Your theme can help tie all of your teaching, activities, visuals, and experiences together and complement the Bible stories and topics you're sharing. The themes you choose for your teaching shouldn't be random pairings of ideas (like emojis and the Gospels). Instead, your themes should directly complement your teaching in a way that makes the stories come alive and the principles take root.

Remember, we're only focusing on the big picture here. At some point, though, you'll want to set aside time to dive deeper into your themes and start planning through elements like **room design, games, music, graphics, and more.** Check out this article about our annual environment strategy for help planning the details of your weekly environment.

Once your themes are up on the board, take a look at all of together. You might realize…

- *I don't know if this theme will work with our group. Let's swap it for something else.*
- *December is a special church-wide theme, so we should swap this out for something unique to our church.*
- *We can repurpose the supplies we purchase for March again in November!*
- *We have a few pretty similar themes in a row, so we should change one of them.*

You can be a lot more efficient by planning your monthly themes a year at a time. **Now take a break! You've earned it.**

4. PLAN YOUR EVENTS STRATEGY

We're fans of keeping your event strategy simple. You can make a bigger impact by doing fewer events with more strategy. Here's our recommendation for keeping your event strategy simple: do one event each quarter (plus a mission experience and a summer camp if you're doing youth ministry).

©2023 Stuff You Can Use. All rights reserved. www.stuffyoucanuse.org

In the fall, we suggest doing an overnight event to kick off the school year and help teenagers build relationships with their peers and especially with their small groups. This aligns pretty nicely with the Spend Time with Others spiritual habit in our discipleship strategy.

In the winter, remember that families are busy and a little short on cash around the holidays, so do a simple, fun, and free event.

In the spring, when you're focusing on the spiritual habit of Spending Time with God, take your teenagers on a weekend retreat and focus on discipleship.

And in the summer, remember that you've got a busy summer ahead of you (and so do families), so host a simple and fun event that gets teenagers out of the house and having a blast together. If you're in youth ministry, follow that up with a summer camp and a missions experience, either locally or internationally.

You can check out this article about our annual event strategy to learn more.

5. PLAN YOUR VOLUNTEER STRATEGY

We're convinced there are seven ways to invest in volunteers, and all seven of them need to be represented on your annual calendar. Maybe that sounds overwhelming at first, but it doesn't have to be. Promise!

When planning your year of investment in volunteers, you're going to need to consider volunteer **events, meetings, discussion groups, one-on-one conversations, tools, communication**, and **celebration.** You can read more about each of these and see our suggestions in this article about our annual volunteer strategy.

The point is this: have a strategy for investing in your volunteers. You're not just a youth pastor. You're your volunteers' pastor, too.

6. PLAN YOUR FAMILY STRATEGY

You're almost there! The very last thing you need to strategize in your annual planning meeting is the thing we youth pastors often seem to save until last: how you'll engage parents.

When it comes to parents, we could all do a better job of engaging them. Like volunteers, we're convinced the key to engaging and investing parents effectively is to plan an annual strategy in seven key ways: **events, meetings, discussion groups, one-on-one conversations, tools, communication,** and **celebration**. So finish your annual planning meeting by creating a plan for all seven of these areas. You can read more about each of these and see our suggestions in check out this article about our annual family strategy.

Whew. Okay. That's it. Those are all of our suggestions on how to run an annual planning meeting for your ministry. Yes, it's a lot to cover. Yes, it might take all day. *But then you're done for the whole year!*

When you schedule an annual planning meeting, instead of just winging it every month (or every week), here's what we're pretty positive is going to happen:

- You'll be a lot less stressed.
- You'll never have to wonder what you're doing next week.
- Your volunteers, parents, and students will be better cared for.
- Your lead pastor will say things like, "We have the best youth pastor ever!" (Probably.)

You can take a nap once in a while.

And, most importantly, when you have an annual plan to make your vision, strategy, and systems all work together, **you'll make a much bigger impact**. So let's do this. We've got big, important, life-changing ministry to do. Let's put a plan in place so we can make this year the most awesome year yet.

And, hey, whether you decide to use Grow Curriculum

©2023 Stuff You Can Use. All rights reserved. www.stuffyoucanuse.org

and Strategy or not, we hope you steal this strategy! But if you do want to check out Grow Curriculum, you won't just get the strategy. You'll get every resource you need for the entire year — **not just curriculum that you can teach, but everything for discipleship, weekly environments, events, volunteers, and parents too.**

Cool? Cool.

Now get planning!



For even more resources like this one, try a free trial of Grow Curriculum and Annual Strategy for your children's or youth ministry. It's everything you need for a more strategic year of discipleship, teaching, environments, events, volunteers, and families!

©2023 Stuff You Can Use. All rights reserved. www.stuffyoucanuse.org