This class is a practical discussion on the cooking and service aspects of presenting a feast: how to cook food well for a large number of people and get the food from the kitchen to the diner in the best way possible. We will follow the process from the initial decision to hold the event to the after action report. There are three main stages to the process:

* Information gathering and initial planning
* Communication, preparation, and execution
* After-action analysis.

We will go through each stage, breaking them down into distinct tasks, and talking about the key issues that need to be tackled.

For reference, we will be referring to three types of feasts:

* **Buffet:** A buffet style feast has the food laid out on a series of tables and the diners walk up and serve themselves and/or a buffet server serves the guest.
* **Family Style:** A family style feast has the food served on platters to the tables all at once (also called Ala Francĕ). Then the diners at each table serve themselves from the platters.
* **High Feast:** High Feast is more like a restaurant where the servers bring the food to the individual diners.

We will also be referring to two distinct jobs: the Feast Steward and the Hall Steward. The Feast Steward’s job is to develop the menu, make sure it is feasible within the budget allotted, and oversee the preparation of the food. The Hall Steward’s job is to develop the seating plan and coordinate the service of the food once it is prepared. These two jobs are sometimes tackled by one person. We find, however, that on large feasts, it works better to have the two jobs performed by separate people who work closely with each other. We do not recommend that the Feast or Hall Steward also be the Event Steward as this will be too much work during the day of the event.

**Stage One: Information Gathering and Initial Planning**

In this stage, the Feast Steward and Hall Steward need to gather information about the proposed event, develop an initial strategy to handle it, and then refine that strategy based on experimentation and analysis.

***Step One Initial Data Gathering***

The first step is to sit down with the Event Steward and talk about the event. Basic information needs to be gathered on the site and the event to know where to begin. Here is a list of beginning questions. You may not get all the answers right away, especially on some of the follow up questions.



**For the Feast Steward:**

* **General**
	+ When is the event? [Do you have enough time to plan the menu and test the recipes?]
	+ What is the budget and is there a Kingdom/Group Policy? [Do you have enough money for food, cooking equipment, etc?]
	+ How many people will you be expected to cook for? [Can you prepare enough food in time?]
	+ Is there a special theme [a special century or country or a piece of literature?]
	+ What type of feast do they want? [High court, family style, or buffet? Is this feasible, based on the budget, the size of the hall and the resources available?]
	+ Who and how many can you tap to help as cooking crew?
* **Site**
	+ Has a site been selected yet?
	+ If no, can you have input on selecting one?
	+ If yes, can you go see it?
	+ Where is the event site?
	+ How far do you have to travel to get to the site?
	+ How far are the local stores
	+ Is this a cooking kitchen or a warming kitchen?
	+ Does the site have restrictions on what you can do in the kitchen
	+ How many stove tops are there?
	+ How many burners?
	+ How many ovens?
	+ Are they Gas or Electric?
	+ Are there warming ovens ?
	+ Do they work?
	+ How much refrigerator and freezer space is available?
	+ Is alcohol allowed for cooking?
	+ Is there an ice maker?
	+ Can you borrow Ice chests?
	+ How many electrical outlets are there? Are they all on one circuit or several?
	+ Where is the circuit box?
	+ Will there be a maintenance person from the site if something goes wrong? What is their contact info?
	+ Can you run power cords from other rooms if needed?
	+ When will you have access to the site before, during, and after the event? [How much time do you have for set up, tear down, and actual cooking?]
	+ When is the feast to be scheduled during the event? [Are there activities before the feast that may delay the start time (like court)? Are there activities after the feast the require it to finish at a certain time?]
	+ How much counter space is there?
	+ Is there a place for outdoor grills?
	+ Is there easy parking for loading and unloading food and staff parking?
	+ Are there dish washing facilities?
	+ What cooking equipment (pots, pans, grills, etc.) do you have access to (from the site or from your local group)? [Do you have enough or will you have to buy or borrow some?]
	+ How far is the kitchen from the dining hall?
	+ Is there a staging area near the kitchen?
	+ Is there a pass through window from the kitchen to the dining hall?
	+ Is there a small room where the cook staff can stash their belongings?
	+ Where are the nearest latrines?
	+ Do the sinks have grease traps or garbage disposals?
	+ How many trash cans are in the kitchen and where are the dumpsters?
	+ Where is the Janitors closet?

**For the Hall Steward**

* **General**
	+ When is the event?
		- Do you have enough time to work out the seating plan and organize the servers?]
	+ How many people will you be serving?
		- Can they all fit in the hall?
	+ Is there a special theme [a special century or country or a piece of literature?]
	+ What type of feast do they want? [High court, family style, or buffet? Is this feasible, based on the budget, the size of the hall and the resources available?]
	+ Servers:
		- Who can you tap to help as serving crew?
		- Do you want dedicated servers who will not sit feast or do you want each table of diners to send a volunteer?
		- Can you get enough servers to serve everyone?
		- Can you get Peers to serve Hi Table?
* **Site**
	+ Where is the event? [Has a site been selected yet? If no, can you have input on selecting one? If yes, can you go see it?]
	+ What are the dimensions of the dining area? [Do you have enough room]?
	+ Tables and chairs:
		- Does the site have tables and chairs available?
		- What sizes, shapes, and quantities?
		- Are there extra tables to use for staging the food before serving?
		- Who sets up tables? SCA or Site Staff?
		- Does the site supply table cloths?
		- Will there be a Head Table set up? If so, how many will be seated there?
		- Does the site have stage platforms? What size and shape? [Will the head table be elevated?]
	+ When will we have access to the site before, during, and after the event? [How much time do you have for set up and tear down?]
	+ Is there an area near the kitchen that can be set aside for the staging of the food prior to service? [Is it concealed from the dining area?]
	+ Is there a storage area for the serving ware separate from the cooking equipment?
	+ Will there be off-board diners (non-paying non-diners) as well as paid diners?
	+ How will you keep the food for the paid diners separate?
	+ Will you need to change the setup of the tables and chairs during the day for the various activities of the event?
	+ How much time do you have in the event schedule to serve the food?
	+ Are there activities before or after the feast that may impact the feast (like court)?
	+ What serving ware (platters, tongs, bowls, spoons, tablecloths, etc.) do you have access to (from the site or from your local group)?
	+ Do you have enough gear or will you have to buy or borrow some?
	+ Is there a dish washer or dish washing station that can be used while feast is being served?
	+ Is there wall space available to post instructions for servers

***Step Two Rough Menu and Seating***

The next step is to develop an initial strategy. For the Feast Steward, that means a menu. For the Hall Steward, that means developing a layout of the tables and chairs. Don’t expect to get everything exactly right at first. And don’t expect that there won’t have to be changes made due to new information. Communication is the major key here. The Event Steward, Feast Steward, and Hall Steward need to keep in contact with each other if any changes happen.

*The initial menu.*

The type of service (high court, buffet, or family style) will determine the number of courses and general number of dishes, the level of extravagance, and whether there are any subtleties. The theme of the event can help to narrow down your scope for researching recipes. For example, an Italian Renaissance themed feast will be using difference cookbooks than an early Norse themed feast. A Picnic in the Park would be less extravagant and use different foods and service than a fancy, High Feast with exotic meats and spices. Is the use of historical recipes a priority for this feast?

Also, how the diners eating the food? Are they eating off of plates with silverware at a sit down meal or using their fingers as they circulate and mingle? This will affect the types of recipes you will select.

The kitchen you have access to will help you make further decisions about your menu. For example, if the kitchen only has one residential grade stove top, you won’t be doing a lot of hot, baked goods or freshly sautéed items. So you need to think about what equipment you will have access to and use that to decide if a particular recipe will work. The kitchen will also help to determine if you will be cooking a great deal of the food on-site or ahead of time at another location.

Another issue to think about is what ingredients are available to you? What fruits and vegetables will be in season and therefore not as expensive? What meats are available? Are there hunters in the local group who may be willing to donate game? Are there food wholesalers you can access for better prices (do you know your SCA tax number)? What foreign food markets are available in your area? They often have unique ingredients you can’t find at your local megamart, like galangal, verjuice and whole duck.

Also, think about your audience, the diners. Are they an adventurous lot willing to try things like eel pie? Or are they more conservative, wanting to stick to things they know, like roast beef? Are you trying to make the feast friendly to kids? One way to help make any particular meat more palatable to a wide range of tastes is to offer it with a choice of sauces. If you give a diner a choice of three different sauces, chances are that they are going to find one they like.

You also want to think about the order of the menu to pace yourself during the day. For example, if you are serving multiple courses to a large group of people, you may want to alternate hot and cold dishes so you have time enough to plate the hot dishes in between courses while cold dishes are being served.

Don’t forget beverages! What beverages are you providing: water, ice tea, lemonade, coffee, other? Are you making them fresh or from instant products?

As you are researching recipes, document what you find. . One suggestion is to use flash cards. On each card, write the recipe and make notes about it. Examples of comments are: served hot, sounds spicy, good finger food. Also note where the recipe came from so you can find it again. Then you can move menu items around, pair them up, and see how they sound together.

Next test your recipes by cooking them and making notes. How many servings does the recipe make? How do they taste? How difficult are they to make? How long does it take to make the dish? Must they be served immediately to taste good or can they be set aside and kept warm/cold? Determine which proteins, starches and veggies pair best together. Once you have something that you feel works, organize the flash cards and start working on the final menu layout. Put together a rough per person budget based on the experience you had testing the recipes. Ensure you are not over-budget for the feast.

*The Seating Plan*

This is where accurate dimensions of the dining area are critical. First, work out where your head table is going to be, if there is one. This should be the focus of the room. For high court dining especially, you want the diners to have a good view of the stage.

Next, layout the main circulation, usually around the perimeter: the paths to and from the exit doors, the restrooms, kitchen, and other rooms if there are any. A 5 foot aisle is probably as small as you want to go and still have circulation both ways. A 6 foot aisle is better, especially for people in big, Elizabethan skirts. Keep the fire exits accessible. Make sure to give plenty of space around doors and entries. People always clump here as they meet people. (Note: a fire marshal can shut down an event if they do a spot inspection and find aisles too narrow or there is no clear egress path)

Next, with the information you received about the sizes and quantities of tables available to you, you can start testing different table layouts in the remaining space. You are more likely than not going to have to stage the room for multiple uses. Work with your Event Steward to figure out scene changes from entertainment to court to feasting to dancing. The nice thing about a High Feast layout is the empty space in the center can easily be filled with chairs for court and then cleared out for the feast.

Make sure to give your servers plenty of room in the aisles to bring platters out to the tables. Six feet from table edge to table edge is the minimum space to have diners seated on either side and an aisle down the center for the server to go through. Don’t overcrowd your room or you’ll have people constantly being knocked on the back of their heads by servers carrying trays.

Think about where people are going to stand in line if you are going to do a buffet. Are you going to have people walking along one side of the serving table or both? Are there going to be servers standing behind the tables helping to carve the meats and refresh the platters? Do they have easy access back to the kitchen? Give them at least 5 feet between the table and wall, so they can move in and around each other.

As you are laying out your tables, be mindful of how you are going to divide up your serving staff for high court and family style feasts. How are you going to assign tables to teams of servers? For family style, keep tables in groups of 2-4. For high court, place chairs in the rows in multiples of 4 or 6.

Don’t forget to place tables for beverage coolers. And if you don’t have access to a separate room for the staging of the food prior to service, make sure to allot an area for that. It should be near the kitchen and convenient to the dining area. You may consider using some sort of screening to keep the bee hive of activity hidden from the diners. Fabric walls on self-standing frames work very well for this.

Also, think about if and how you are going to keep paid feasters separate from off-boarders. Are they going to be in the same room? Perhaps, you can use the table shape to clearly identify where people sit: i.e off-boarders at the rectangular tables and feasters at the round tables. Or you can place table cloths on the tables reserved for feasters and leave the rest blank.

If you are not segregating diners from off boarders, then you need to consider how you are going to serve the food only to the paid diners. For example, if you have a table of 8, but only 5 of them paid for feast, do you still serve them a platter with enough food for 8? One option is to have your servers go to each table and verify how many paid for feast. Then make a note of them on your seating chart. You can then coordinate with your platers to adjust the amount of food on the platter depending on which table it is going to. This is a bit of work, but can be done if you are prepared ahead of time.

A fudge factor in the seating arrangements should be allowed. You never know if the local heads of state might have an old royal friend drop in from another kingdom and wish a seat at head table. Also, 64 people will never all fit on 8 tables with 8 chairs. People will arrive and seat themselves in odd numbered groups, sometimes leaving 1 or 2 chairs empty at a table. So try to have at least 1 or 2 tables extra for family style and 1-2 chairs extra per row for high court style. A way to get around this, if space is tight and you want to sell every seat, is to do assigned seats. The diners will have to make reservations as groups and they will each find out on the day of the feast what table or chair they are sitting at. It is up to you to determine if the amount of work to do this is worth it.

Once you’ve gone through, tested a couple of different layouts and picked the one that works best for the event. Draw it up nice and clean with notes on dimensions, total quantities of tables, and chairs, and total seating capacities. Save this for the day of the event.

***Step Three Refining the Feast and Dining Area***

The last step is to refine your initial strategies. For the Feast Steward, this means doing a test run on the menu and the budget. For the Hall Steward, this means working out what servers and serving equipment you will need.

The Feast Steward should work out with the Event Steward to allow enough time in the schedule and enough money in the budget to perform one test run of the menu on a small scale. Invite the cooking crew over on a weekend to cook all the menu items. Cook enough for a good multiple of the feast, as an example, a table of 8 people. Then have the crew or some willing friends come over to do a taste test. Make sure to have picky eaters as well as adventurous ones to get a broad range of commentary. The test run allows you to test the recipes and see how they taste. Do you need to adjust the spices? How do the menu items taste together? Perhaps this side dish may work better paired with that entrée instead?

You can check the portion sizes as well. Are your test diners still hungry or too full after the meal? Should you only allot 1/8th of a pound of roast pork because there are so many other courses to fill up the diner? You can confirm your original budgetary estimate based on the trial run. If it cost you $X to feed 8 people, is that over or under your food cost estimate?

The test run also allows you to find out how long each item takes to cook. This will let you better schedule the activities on the day of the feast. You can also make notes on the equipment you will need: skillets, pots, rice cookers, etc. It also gives your kitchen crew a chance to practice the recipes. This helps a lot especially if you know some of your crew will be “fresh off the boat” and volunteering on the day of. The crew who attended the test run can now be your assistant or sous chefs, capable of working on their own and running their own team on the day of the event. You can also estimate how many cooking crew you are going to need the day of. Here is a good rule of thumb:

* Dishwashers – 4-6 per 100 diners [2-3 to use during the cooking and serving, 2-3 to use after the feast for cleanup]
* Cooks – 1 cook per 8-10 diners. You can organize your team in a couple of different ways. Look at the experience level of your crew and how much you can delegate to them.
* Gofer – 1 per feast. This person needs to know where the nearest grocery store is and have a car parked near to make any emergency runs needed by the feast staff.

Be sure to invite the Hall Steward to the test run, so that they can make notes on what foods are served together, how the food is to be plated and using what serving ware. For example, a side dish may be very watery and best served in a bowl rather than a platter. They can also make notes how what gets served first in a particular course. For example, the sauces may want to be served before the meat so that the diners don’t eat all their meat before they realize they get sauces as well.

The Hall Steward should go through the initial menu with the Feast Steward to determine serving size and what serving ware is needed. For example, if you have a table of 8 and each person gets 1 cup of soup, you will need a bowl that can hold at least 10 cups and a ladle of some fraction of a cup. You want the greater capacity, so the soup won’t slosh over the edge of the bowl in transport. You also want to have at least one extra portion so the last person isn’t scraping the bottom to get their fill. So if you are feeding 64 people on 8 tables, you will need 8 bowls and 8 ladles just for the soup. Don’t forget the serving ware for the beverages [coolers and pitchers]. Also, don’t forget towels and hot pads for the servers. Some food items may be so hot that it is difficult to hold on to. Think about whether or not you want to provide “yack” buckets for the diners.

Once you have gone through the entire menu and incorporated the notes from the test run, you can then make totals of all the serving ware you will need. You can then get in touch with your local group and verify what you have to work with. If your local group doesn’t have enough serving ware, you have a couple of options. You can check the populace at large and see if they have what you need. If you do this, make sure to have everyone label or otherwise identify their equipment. (The last thing you want is to settle an argument about whose spatula that is.)  You can also see if the site has equipment you can use. You can see if the event has sufficient budget to purchase the equipment you need or if the local group would be willing to purchase the equipment to keep and reuse for other events. Restaurant supply stores are good places to look. Stainless steel mixing bowls are a good option because they are cheap, light-weight, nesting, and they don’t shatter. The down side is they do transmit the heat of the food. So have hot pads or bread baskets that the bowls can sit in for the servers to use. Thrift stores are good sources too, but a bit hit or miss. Another type of serving ware that can work well is melamine (a type of plastic). It is light and durable and crack/break resistant. If you have multiple courses and access to dishwashing facilities, you could have someone wash all the serving ware as it comes back and prep it for reuse in the next course.

The Hall Steward should also plan how many serving staff they are going to need and how they are going to work. Remember to look back on your notes from the test run to see if there are any items that may need servers to work in pairs: i.e. one to hold the bowl of soup and one to ladle it out. Here is a good guide to estimate your numbers:

* Servers
	+ High Court Style – 1 server per 4-6 diners + 1 beverage server per 24 diners
	+ Family Style – 1 server per 2-3 tables + 1 beverage server per 6-8 tables (if you are having someone walk around filling glasses with water and tea)
	+ Buffet Style – 1 person per 2 hours per high dollar menu item like roast beef + 1 person per 8-10 dishes to refresh them [Some high dollar menu items you may want to have served rather than have the diners serve themselves. That way you can make sure one person doesn’t take a whole chicken to themselves and cause others to not get any.]
* Plater – 2 per 50 diners [These are the people who will take the food from the kitchen and place it on the appropriate platters/bowls and get it ready for the servers.]
* Master of Ceremonies – 1 per feast if the feast is formal enough [This is the person who will announce each course and add some nice pomp and circumstance to the affair.]

**Stage Two: Communication, Preparation, and Execution**

In this stage, the Feast Steward and the Hall Steward work on how they will be communicating with the staff and with the public, on making their preparations for the event, and executing the event.

*Communication with the Public*

The Feast Steward should make sure to finalize the menu at least two months ahead of the event. This gives you time to request funds to make advance food purchases, publish the menu to the populace via social media and other platforms, and print menu booklets if necessary (this can be used as your documentation and they can be the feast token). Publishing the menu to the populace through social media can act as advertising and can drum up attendance. Make a note if you are willing to accommodate persons with food allergies. Have a couple of copies of the menu and recipes available for the diners at the event to answer any questions they may have, like “does this have peanuts?” If you are doing a buffet, plan on having signs for each item listing the ingredients.

A note on food allergies: Do you want to take the time to accommodate for them? Consider this carefully as there can be much work involved. One option is to prepare these dishes ahead of time in an separate kitchen free of the contaminant.

Some easy accommodations you can make are:

* Using only vegetable broth in your meatless side dishes to keep them vegetarian.
* Try not to mix different meats in a dish like chicken broth and pork dumplings in a soup. Some people have allergies to one type of protein, but not another.
* Look at using almond flour and other alternative flours for thickeners and breading to make your dish gluten free.
* Consider making a special dish just for the vegetarians / gluten intolerant / allergic to compensate for the entrée they cannot eat. Be sympathetic not hostile.
* Make sure to communicate to the hall steward any special dishes, so they know not to place them on the same platter. As an example, don’t put vegetarian mushroom pie on the same plate as the Chicken dish if you are trying to accommodate someone allergic to chicken.

For the Hall Steward, you need to have a discussion with the Event Steward on reservations. First, who is taking reservations for the feast? When will the final number be communicated to the Feast and Hall Stewards? When is the cut off? How many seats do you want to leave available for purchase at the door, if any? How many seats are you comp’ing for Head Table. We highly recommend that if you are doing a High Feast or Family Style, that you take reservations. This will help greatly in avoiding overbuying food.

*Communication with the Staff*

After the Feast Steward and the Hall Steward have worked hard on the planning of the feast, the next major step they need to take is to plan on how they are going to communicate that information to their respective staffs. Don’t plan on being there to tell them what to do at each moment. Remember there will always be last minute changes and problems that occur that will take your attention away from your staff. You can’t be in two places at once or answer two questions at once. So you need to find ways to transmit all the planning and knowledge you have accumulated without you being there. One of the easiest ways to do this is with some form of writing (flash cards, signs, print outs, etc.) and posting them in easy to see places.

For the Feast Steward, the key information he or she needs to transmit is the order of the menu and the individual recipes. So have multiple copies of each printed and ready to take with you on the day of. Also, label everything. Label each cooler, refrigerator, cabinet, and box with the contents (Spices, Lettuce, Spinach, Turnips, Beef, Pork, etc.). Label the drawers with the contents, like “knives” and “spoons.” This is where painters tape and markers come in handy. The tape leaves no residue, unlike duct tape.

For the Hall Steward, the key information he or she needs to transmit is the order of the menu, the plating instructions, and serving instructions. This kind of information changes based on who it is aimed at, so different signs or flash cards need to be created for the platers, the servers, and the Master of Ceremonies, if you have one.

For the platers, make a sign or flash card for each item on the menu. On the card, note what the food is, the serving size, the number of servings per each bowl/platter, and how many bowls/platters, spoons, etc. are needed in total. For example, pork dumpling soup – 1 cup per diner – 9 servings per bowl – 8 bowls, 8 ladles, 8 hot pads. Then number each card or sign in the order of service. Stack the cards in order. In this fashion, the platers can simply go through the stack card by card, assembling each course. Make note of any platters than need less than the usual amount. For example, if you have 7 tables, but one has only 4 people sitting at it, you can make a sign for the plater saying “6 tables of 8, 1 table of 4.”

For the servers, make large signs of each course. On the sign, list each food item in the order it is to be served, the serving size, and how it is to be served. For example, pork dumpling soup – 2 ladles worth per diner – work in pairs, one to hold the bowl and one to ladle. Number each sign. Also, make a large format plan of the dining tables. You can color code the tables to show which serving teams are handling which tables. If necessary, you can indicate a particular path you want them servers to take through the dining area. You can also note how many are at each table, if you need to change the food quantity. As you progress through the meal, strikethrough the items that have gone out.

For the Master of Ceremonies if you have one, provide them a feast timeline with the menu items (with phonetics for pronunciation), so they can know what to announce for each course and when to pause for speeches and other entertainment.

*Preparation in the days before the feast*

There are some things that the Feast Steward should do ahead of the day of the event to help make the day run more smoothly. In the weeks leading up to the feast, start shopping for bargains on dry goods/frozen items. Make sure you have freezer space available before buying. In the few days before the event, prep what food you can. Precook items that can be served cold or room temperature, such as meat pies. Precut your meats and vegetables where feasible. Thaw your meats the evening before the event so you aren’t fighting with rock solid lumps the day of. This leads to partially cooked meats, and that is a bad thing.

The Hall Steward can prepare by going through all the serving equipment and sorting in to piles and bins and wash as needed. They should only need to be rinsed the day of. The more you do ahead of time, the more time you have on the day to deal with unexpected issues.

*Packing for the event the night before*

Assemble all of the equipment and food together to make transporting it in the morning easier. Make sure to have these items staged so they aren’t forgotten.

 *See Night Before Checklist*

*Morning of the Event*

Feast Steward:

* Unload all the items out of the transport vehicles and into the kitchen.
* Place items in the fridge/freezer as needed.
* Clean/wipe down the counters, tables and cabinets as needed.
* Start large pots boiling water
* Clean out empty ice chests and label with tape (don’t write on them till food goes in them.
* Stage the cooking utensils and label where they are
* Hang the whiteboards/cork boards/easel paper on the walls
* Tack the recipe copies to the cork board
* Write out the Menu on the whiteboard and who is cooking each dish (this can change) and when the dish should be started.
* Have a staff meeting to see who has arrived, who hasn’t and start delegating roles
* Start a stew for the staff.

Hall Steward:

* Unload serving gear out of transport vehicles and into the serving/prep area
* Organize, store and label the serving gear by course.
* Meet with event steward to confirm hall layout if done by site staff or supervise hall setup.
* Draw up seating plan on Easel pad and post in serving area
* Post menu signs for servers
* Post flashcard/signs for platers
* Have initial meeting with serving staff discussing serving show times, teams, and server meal time.
* Once above is complete, meet with Event and Feast Stewards to discuss any changes or possible issues for the day.

**Day-of Cooking**

The job of the Feast Steward is not to cook, but to supervise the cooking, to be ready for the unexpected. So the key is to make sure the kitchen crew knows as much as possible without having to ask. Delegate and Communicate! Have someone prep and label the coolers, fridges, and freezers with marker and tape so that your crew knows where food items are: dry goods, dairy, meats, veggies etc. Post the copies of the recipes in an easy to see place. Place the white board in a visible/central location and write out a timeline listing all the dishes and in what order they need to be started. Make sure the whole crew knows who the Sous chefs are and what dishes they are in charge of (note this on the white board). Designate a runner with a vehicle and make sure they know where the nearest grocery store is. If any emergency comes up they can be used to get more stuff. Select someone to be the in charge of the beverages. They can make sure that the coolers of ‘water’, ‘tea’, etc. are always full. Have someone designated to keep up with the dirty dishes, they can pile up quick.

Sanitation is a key issue in the kitchen. Have a talk with your team in the morning. Remind them to wash their hands every time they change a food item they are working on or every time they take a break. Bring a box of disposable gloves and have them use them. Remind them to not touch their hair or face when working and wash their hands after they do so. Encourage your team to wear bandanas or hats to keep their hair up and out of the way. Encourage your team to wear very comfortable shoes since they will be on their feet all day. Discourage your team from wearing fancy clothing with long sleeves or long skirts. If you have a team member show up with a cold, thank them and send them away. You don’t want them spreading their germs. Bring disinfecting wipes and use them throughout the day to wipe down countertops. Wash your cutting boards between different foods, especially raw meat.

 Have your crew prep your ice chests for use as hot or cold food storage. Dump ice into the chests designated for cold storage. Get water boiling in a large pot and fill each hot storage ice chest about 1/3 full with the boiling water. Close the lid and leave it sealed until just before you are ready to fill it with food. Dump out the water just before use.

A simple hearty stew before the feast with first dibs on leftovers usually works well. You don’t want your staff falling over faint from hunger or running off for a burger during your work time..

Have the team lay out the precooked items that need to be defrosted. Time this so the food gets to room temperature just before serving time. As dishes get cooked, have them placed in storage containers or Ziploc bags in quantities that relate to the final serving size. For example, if you need 9 cups of soup for a table, put 9 cups into a bag and label it as “1 bag = 1 table.” That way the platers don’t have to waste precious time measuring. Place the bagged food in the ice-chests (hot or cold depending) and label the coolers.

Periodically check with the various members of the staff to see who needs help. Your world begins and ends in the kitchen, so stay nearby. Keep up with the white board and timeline. Troubleshoot as necessary. Keep monitoring and delegating. Check with the Hall Steward and Event Steward to ensure the timeline is still good.

Once the food is all cooked and stored, it should be near feast time. Start by having ice-chests with the first course items moved to the plating area, then the second, etc. Have the cleanup team begin cleaning and packing items as available. As excess food comes back, have it set aside for the cooks/servers to eat.

The job of the Hall Steward is not to serve the food, but to supervise the service. Place the platers’ flash cards or signs near where they will be working. Hang the map of the table layout near the prep area and use highlighters to indicate which servers are handling which tables. Let the servers know where this is so they can get familiar with it. Also hang up the servers flash cards/signs, so they can know the order of the food and how much to serve. Give the feast timeline to the Master of Ceremonies if you haven’t already.

Find a storage room or set of cabinets or an area you can keep to yourself (and away from the kitchen staff). Label the doors or boxes. Put all the serving ware there and let the platers know where this is. That way they don’t have to hunt for what they need. Organize the serving ware in order of the menu to make it even easier for them if you haven’t already done so. For example, all of the serving ware for the first course is in one cabinet or box.

Try to meet with the servers and platers at least 30 minutes before the feast to walk through the process with them.

For both stewards, don’t forget to bring your crew out to the feast hall at the end of the feast so that they can be publically thanked. They will have worked hard and deserve it.

CLEAN UP CREW

Coordinate a separate after feast clean-up crew, one crew for the Hall and one for the Kitchen. The cleaning crew should be confirmed prior to the event and confirmed during the day of the event to make sure they showed up and that you have enough. The feast and hall steward need to supervise them to ensure the feast and cooking gear gets pack or left on site as applicable. Once cleaned, have it loaded into the appropriate vehicle and then finish cleaning the kitchen.

**Stage Three: After Action**

Next day compile all receipts and organize paperwork and present to the group exchequer. There is a time limit for these, be mindful for it and turn it in on time and reimburse anyone on the staff that gave outstanding receipts.

After you have rested you can tackle the job of unpacking. Return all the equipment you borrowed. Distribute all the leftover food to the crew or to a homeless shelter.

Host an event debrief meeting with your primary crew. Talk to them about what happened, the good, the bad, and the ugly. What went well? What could be done better next time? What went horrible and should never be done again? Be sure to do this a few days after the event, but don’t wait too long. You don’t want memories to fade. Take notes and use them to help write your after action report.

Always write an after action report, even if only for yourself, and keep a copy of it for your files. Make sure to note what worked well and what didn’t. Note how much you spent versus how much you budgeted. How were your portion sizes? Was much food sent back? Did people go hungry?. Write your assumptions and whether they were right or wrong. See if you can figure out how to do it better next time. When prepping for a new event, we often go back to our old reports to refresh our memory of the lessons learned.

Good luck!