



Ribbon Cuttings and Groundbreakings Special Event Planning Guide



Congratulations on Your New Business or Location!

The Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce has compiled this Special Events Planning Guide to make executing your event easier and more successful.

Ribbon cuttings and groundbreakings can be simple, stress-free celebrations or you can plan a more comprehensive event that might involve a large number of guests and more extensive planning.

The most important part of planning an event occurs before you make your first phone call. This packet will help you organize, prioritize and prepare for your event.

The Chamber Ambassadors would like to be involved in all of your company's events; however, we must limit our active participation to:

- Ribbon cuttings/groundbreakings for new businesses in our community
- Significant expansions of existing businesses
- Groundbreaking ceremonies for new locations
- Relocation to a new location within the last three months

Please feel free to extend an invitation to other events and we will attend as your guest if available. If you have questions, please call Kim Gronniger at the Chamber office, 785.234.2644.

Ambassadors

Ambassadors serve as the public relations team for the Chamber, which has 1,100 firm members and 1,800 individual members. Ambassadors represent corporations, small businesses and non-profit organizations and care deeply about our Topeka community.

If you would like to become an Ambassador, contact Kim Gronniger, kgronniger@topekachamber.org.

Contact Us

Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce
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Topeka, Kansas 66603
785.234.2644 Fax 785.234.8656
www.TopekaChamber.org
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Ribbon Cuttings/Groundbreakings

Ribbon Cuttings/Groundbreakings

- The Chamber will provide ribbon and scissors or up to 12 gold shovels.
- The Chamber will present a congratulations or first dollar of profit plaque.
- A Chamber staff member or Ambassador will serve as emcee of the ribbon cutting ceremony, recognizing the business owners and other officials present. (optional)
- One or more Chamber staff members will attend.
- The Chamber will invite the Chamber Ambassadors and Diplomats to attend.
- The Chamber will inform the media of the ribbon cutting/groundbreaking. (Business owner needs to contact the business editors to ask for a full story.)
- Events will be set up between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. (No weekend or after hours events)

Member Cost: Free (benefit of membership)
Non-Member Cost: \$100

Additional Services Available	Member Cost	Non-Member
Scissors and Ribbon/Shovel Rental	No Cost	No cost, based on availability
A picture of the ribbon cutting or the business owners in their place of business will be included in the Chamber's monthly newsletter, Topeka Business	No Cost	Not available
Purchase of Labels for Entire Membership (approximately 1,800)	\$50	\$200
Purchase of Labels for Main Firm Contact (approximately 1,100)	\$25	\$125
Lists: Major employers, business leaders, elected officials, civic organizations, media	Upon request, no cost	Upon request, no cost

To arrange for a ribbon cutting/groundbreaking, contact Kim Gronniger, Chamber vice president, marketing, 785.234.2644. *Ribbon cuttings and groundbreaking events must be scheduled at least 10 business days before the event.*

A Simple Event

You've just opened your new business or are planning to commence construction for your new building. You want to celebrate and have the community recognize your business's growth.

- 1) As you get ready to open your business—or as you get ready to start construction—set a date for your celebration.
- 2) Call Kim Gronniger at the Chamber office, 785.234.2644, and confirm availability of Chamber Ambassadors and staff.
- 3) If you'd like the mayor to attend, call his office, 785.368.3895, and coordinate with his scheduling assistant.
- 4) Set the time of your event based on the availability of your staff, the Chamber Ambassadors, the mayor and other officials (if applicable).
- 5) Chamber staff will invite the Ambassadors and Diplomats to attend.
- 6) Invite your family, friends, employees, vendors and neighboring businesses.
- 7) For media coverage:
 - Call Megan Hart at the Topeka Capital-Journal, 785.295.1111, and make sure the paper knows about your new business and/or new construction. Invite her (or one of the staff) to attend the event.
 - Chamber staff will notify the media about your event.
- 8) You might want to plan light refreshments for the event based on the event's time of day. This is a nice touch, but certainly not a necessity.
- 9) A Chamber staff member or Ambassador will serve as emcee. Be prepared to tell about your business and to introduce your key staff members and others important to your business. Brief remarks are best.
- 10) Chamber staff will bring the ribbon and scissors (or shovels) and a congratulations plaque. If the firm is a member, we'll take a picture for the Chamber's newsletter, Topeka Business.

A Special Event

Step 1: Set a Date

Selecting a date is one of the most important decisions you will make as you begin the process of planning and staging a successful special event. It can affect all aspects of the outcome and is worth very careful thought. Here are some important things to consider:

Allow plenty of time for preparation. If possible, give yourself at least two weeks to a month to make all your arrangements. After you've chosen a day/time and expect to have Chamber involvement, please call Kim Gronniger at the Chamber to confirm availability of Chamber Ambassadors and staff, 785.234.2644. Ribbon cuttings and groundbreakings must be scheduled at least 10 business days before the event.

Be aware of major holidays and avoid planning your event for those days. Also, if you are trying to attract bankers or government officials, take note of any special holidays when their offices may be closed.

Try to avoid a conflict with major community events and activities.

The best days of the week to get good attendance are Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Mondays tend to be too busy for most people to leave the office and many people take Fridays off (especially in the summer) to start their weekend early.

Avoid planning your event on a Saturday or Sunday. Most people have their own recreation or business plans on those days, and our experience tells us your attendance could drop significantly. The Ambassadors are available during normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. through 4:30 p.m.). If you have an event on the weekend, Chamber member firms are welcome to borrow the scissors or shovels. Just give us a call.

Notes/Questions/Things to Do:

Step 2: Choose the Best Time of Day

The time of day you choose to hold your event is also critical to its success. It's an important step in the planning process and helps determine the type of special event that you'll conduct. Morning functions, for example, will have an entirely different atmosphere and style than a late afternoon event or an evening cocktail reception. Luncheon gatherings will naturally require more food and beverages. Consider the following when making your decision:

Morning events should begin no earlier than 8 a.m. and are often held as a business opens for the day (approximately 10 a.m.).

Luncheon events often turn out well, since most everyone eats a midday meal. However, luncheons require more advance notice in sending out invitations. Many people schedule luncheon arrangements weeks ahead, and they will need to be notified as early as possible to get your event on their calendars.

Late afternoon and early evening functions are popular as they allow people to drop by at the end of the day at their convenience. Late afternoon/early evening events generally start at 4 p.m. and continue until 6:30 or 7 p.m. Unless your event is a major one, few people will want to go home, change clothes and go out again, so avoid starting evening functions after 6. Be sure to designate a time for a ribbon cutting or other special ceremony to lend focus to your event.

A half-day open house or tours of your company are another option. However, if you decide on a half-day event, have a designated time for a ribbon cutting or other special ceremonies to lend focus to your event.

If media coverage is important to you, give serious consideration to their deadlines before selecting a time for your event. For example, electronic media prefer events no later than 4 p.m. so the event can be on the evening news. The newspaper's deadline is generally mid-afternoon for such stories.

If having the mayor in attendance is important, you'll want to call and speak with the mayor's scheduling assistant to confirm his availability. Call 785.368.3895.

Notes/Questions/Things to Do:

Step 3: Develop an Invitation

Your event can be considered a complete success if you do nothing more than invite the right people to attend. The right people will vary depending on the event, but a guest list might include some of the following:

- Friends and family
- Your employees and their spouses
- Potential and current customers
- Suppliers or vendors
- Those who helped you get started—your banker, accountant, attorney and other advisers
- Fellow business professionals in your area
- Representatives from the Chamber—Ambassadors, Diplomats and staff
- Key government officials—the city council member and county commissioner from the district in which your business is located. This list is available from the Chamber; please ask for a copy.
- The media. This list is available from the Chamber; please ask for a copy.

Once you've identified your guest list, here are some tips to remember when inviting them:

- Prepare a nice letter or very basic invitation, but always keep it simple and to the point; make sure all basic information is included: who, what, when, where and why.
- Be sure to include an RSVP. An RSVP will give you an idea about how much food and beverage to provide.
- Allow sufficient notice: between a week to 10 days is ideal for most events, although two weeks would be preferable if you are planning a luncheon or dinner event.
- Be sure to include a good map or very clear instructions on how to get to your event. A street address alone is sometimes not enough.
- If you choose to send a formal invitation, do it right. Get professional help from a graphic artist or designer.
- If spouses are invited, say so. Otherwise, it will be assumed they are not.
- Send your invitation by first-class mail, if at all possible. Bulk mail can take a week or longer, which could seriously hurt your attendance.

Step 4: Serve Food and Beverage

Although it's an added expense that you may prefer to avoid, serving food and beverage of some kind adds a nice touch. Here are some hints:

For morning events, coffee, juices and pastries are perfect. A full breakfast is not necessary.

At luncheon functions, serve some kind of sandwich or buffet meal. It's your guests' lunchtime and they will expect some kind of substantive food.

During late afternoon events, light appetizers or finger foods are appropriate. Chips, dips, cheeses, vegetable plates or cold-cut meat trays work well.

If you choose to have a formal dinner or late evening party, make it exceptionally nice. If you are asking people to spend most of their evening at your event, they deserve something special.

The only times alcoholic beverages are advisable are for late-afternoon or evening events. Many people enjoy an after-work cocktail. Remember to provide some non-alcoholic beverages for guests who don't drink. (Check with your insurance agent about host liability.) You cannot serve alcoholic beverages if your event is open to the public—it must be an invitation-only affair, unless you have a liquor license in place.

Enlist the help of a professional caterer for medium or large events or if you haven't the time, manpower or experience to provide your own food and beverage.

If you decide to provide your own refreshments, be sure to have an ample amount of food and beverage for your guests, as well as sufficient plates, cups, napkins, trash cans and other supply items.

Notes/Questions/Things to Do:

Step 5: Plan a Program

Whether you're staging a groundbreaking or a ribbon cutting for your company, it adds a nice touch to an event to have a brief program of some kind. It provides not only valuable recognition for you and your key people, but it makes the event more purposeful and allows you to explain your business. Consider these suggestions when planning your program or formal ceremony:

- The shorter, the better. People have very brief attention spans at these events, and you might lose an embarrassingly large part of your crowd if the program drags on too long. As a rule of thumb, no program or official ceremony should last longer than 20 minutes, with 10-15 minutes being ideal.
- Your program should be led by a good, effective emcee. He or she can keep your program moving smoothly and inject some humor when needed. If you like, a Chamber staff member can serve in this role.
- Limit the number of speakers and the length of their speeches. People get bored easily when speakers ramble or repeat the same information or thank yous. Set a time limit for all those you ask to take part in the program.
- Speakers taking part in any formal program should include appropriate city or county government representatives, a Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce representative and you and/or your board chairman or designee, if appropriate. Be sure to give each of your speakers a call the day before the event as a reminder.
- Introduce only those who need to be introduced even though the temptation will be to acknowledge nearly everyone in attendance whom you know. You may want to verbally recognize and thank those who have played an active role in your project—banker, contractor, architect, but these people generally don't need to be asked to speak. Often a simple group thank you to your friends and family is adequate.
- Conclude your program with the appropriate ceremonial or symbolic activity to commemorate the event: a ribbon cutting for a grand opening or shoveling the first load of dirt for a groundbreaking. These are nice ways to let guests know the formal program is over and they also create good publicity photos. For groundbreaking ceremonies, we suggest you ask your contractor to have some shovel-ready dirt brought in or dug in advance. That way your dignitaries can easily break ground.
- If your event includes an open house or tour of your facilities, be sure friendly and knowledgeable employees conduct group tours. Unguided self-tours are not nearly as valuable as guided tours.
- While not necessary, if you do plan to give a favor to your guests, designate someone to be responsible for giving them to your guests. As the owner, host/hostess, you have other responsibilities. Favors might be a specialty item, coupon, brochure about your business, etc.

Step 5: Plan a Program Continued

- Send thank-you letters the day after your event to anyone who played a key role in staging it, particularly those who took part in the official program.
- Indoors or out, any group of 50 or less usually does not need a microphone system. More than 50 people usually requires voice amplification. A podium or lectern is often helpful to speakers. If your company does not own a sound system, a small portable tabletop podium can be rented at a nominal cost.
- Always have a back-up plan in case of rain. You can move indoors at your place of business or to a nearby restaurant, hotel or meeting room.

Step 6: Notify Media

You should not rely on the media to give extensive coverage to your special event. It's not that they do not view your function as significant; it's simply a matter of lack of staffing and sufficient airtime or print space to carry your story. The media are often swamped with business community news and are often unable to provide good coverage for them all.

Photos of events for Chamber member firms will be published in the Chamber's monthly newsletter, Topeka Business.

The following are some things you can do to enhance the chances of getting more media coverage for your event:

- Send your invitation to the news directors or editors at least one week ahead of your event and include a personal letter or note explaining some of the details about your company and why your event is different or has some significance to the overall community. A media list is available through the Chamber office.
- Include a brief letter or news release that contains the journalistic basics of who, what, when, where and why. Your letter does not need to be fancy, just factual.
- A follow-up or reminder call the day before your event is a good idea.
- While a Chamber staff member will take a picture for the Chamber newsletter, you'll want to designate one of your staff members or friends to take candid shots of people and happenings at your event.
- Please send a high-resolution eps or jpg version of your logo to Jerrica Winkenwader at Jwinkenwader@topekachamber.org.

Step 7: Roles and Responsibilities

We look forward to working with you to promote and execute your event. Please contact Kim Gronniger, vice president, marketing, at least 10 days before at 785.234.2644 or at kgronniger@topekachamber.org.

The following lists responsibilities for you and the Chamber.

You:

- Pre-plan
- Call Kim Gronniger at the Chamber to confirm a date, 785.234.2644
- Finish plans
- Execute plans

Chamber Contact:

- Get specifics of event
- Contact Ambassadors and Diplomats
- Coordinate specifics of your event with you
- Provide scissors and ribbon for the ribbon cutting
- Provide shovels for groundbreaking events (up to 12 gold shovels)
- Provide a framed plaque

Be sure to ask the Chamber for the following if you need them:

- List of elected officials, Chamber members, media, etc.
- Chamber emcee

For more information about the Chamber,
please visit TopekaChamber.org.

