

FIVE THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING YOUR IDEAL LEARNING VENUE





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Has your learning delivery evolved from the traditional classroom setting?

While the classroom is still a good choice for some learning programs, there are now a wide range of room formations and teaching styles to choose from—along with a host of venues claiming to offer the perfect setting for your program. However, in reality, the venue that was perfect for your executive outing may not work for your experiential learning programs.

So how do you select the venue best suited to facilitate your specific needs?

After decades of working with the nation's top learning organizations, the expert team at The National Conference Center identified five key factors to consider when searching for the ideal venue for your learning program:

1 Prettier is not always better:

Hoteliers take great pride in being at the forefront of design—interior designers introduce the latest colors, trendiest furniture and most creative lighting. While these make for a beautiful setting, they do not necessarily complement your learning program. Look instead for a venue that offers versatility and can be modified to fit your specific needs.

Studies show select colors can impact everything from your concentration to your diet. This understanding inspired the “white space” concept.

A conference center, similar to The National, can help you determine the best room formation, provide ways for you to brand the space, or even put up walls to build entirely new areas. It's all about what would work best for the client's needs.



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2 Yes/no is just a mindset:

If you hear one rule after another during a site visit (“this space is used for this,” “no, we don’t allow that,” and “the space is yours from 8am to 5pm only”), it might not be the right choice. Yes, all venues must have rules, but great venues have a “whatever it takes” mentality.

It’s common for venues to become set in their ways. They will simply go through the motions with you instead of asking how you plan to use the space and what they can do to facilitate the most positive outcomes. Look for a planning or sales team that begins with these questions on the first site visit and then collaborates with clients to deliver the ideal setting for their needs, even if they have to color outside the lines to make it happen. Look for flexibility.

3 Experiential learning should be multi-dimensional

Experiential learning, or “learning through reflection by doing,” has become a standard in learning programs, but the top learning and development experts incorporate several forms of experiential learning throughout their programs. Make sure your venue provides versatile spaces that can handle whatever experiential initiatives your program might need, from hands-on activities to role-play scenarios to teambuilding sessions.

Look for a facility that offers both indoor and outdoor spaces for experiential exercises, along with custom teambuilding and leadership development programs such as an outdoor challenge course. Plus, an in-house bar keeps teams social after hours often with live music and karaoke nights.

4 Themes are awesome, if done well.

If you plan to theme your program, you’ll want to incorporate the theme in everything. Imagine a camping themed program that has one sign and a few PowerPoint slides with the title, “Out of the Woods.” Now imagine a camping themed program with a huge tent set up indoors, a seminar set-up with camping chairs, signs everywhere leading attendees to their breakout sessions titled “Campfires,” and social time with s’mores around the firepit after dinner.

Select a venue that’s eager to help you reinforce your messaging throughout the program, from the refreshment break menus, to inventive receptions and well-planned lighting, audio and visual effects that can be integrated into your programming.

Imaginative spaces help learners think creatively and tackle problems with innovative solutions. Look for a venue that has a menu of fun, outside-the-box designs for meeting room set-ups and teambuilding activities. At The National, clients can unplug in the Zen room with calming music, water fountains and yoga mats; go back to basics in the Color room with blocks, Legos, crayons and Play-Doh; or work with the planning team to invent a new setting that ties in program messaging and learning objectives.



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5 Fine dining isn't just for small groups.

It's no secret that at any event or meeting the food matters. Not only to productivity, but also to the overall experience and enjoyment of guests. Many small venues offer 5-star restaurants while large venues often provide something similar to an elementary school cafeteria. But even if you have a group of more than 1,000, you should expect more from your venue's food and beverage program. Your guests don't always need white tablecloths, but fresh, quality food is a necessity.

Look for a venue that works with local and regional farmers to provide everything from produce to protein to treats, like farm-fresh jellies and jams. The National's executive chef takes pride in his work, providing daily menus with healthy options and constant variety. Continuous refreshment breaks keep guests energized all day long, and the in-house bar and grill gives them a chance to "go out" for drinks even if they don't feel like leaving the building.

No matter your objectives and no matter the size of your meeting, training or event, there is a venue out there that can meet your needs.

It's just a matter of finding the right one. As you go through your search, consider these five factors and remember that what's most important in a venue is the staff's eagerness to make your program the best it can be.