



ONTARIO TECH

GUIDELINE FOR A HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

Holiday parties can boost morale, but they also carry potential liability for employers, especially if inappropriate behavior, such as harassment or discrimination occurs. Employers may be held responsible even for incidents off-site or after hours. This guideline includes recommendations for hosting holiday celebrations safely and ensuring a positive experience for everyone.

Recommendations

Foster Inclusivity

- Create a welcoming environment for employees of all backgrounds.
- Choose neutral themes.
- Offer diverse participation options.
- Accommodate cultural, religious, or mobility needs.

Reinforce Policies

- Remind employees that workplace policies regarding discrimination, harassment, violence, and respectful conduct still apply.
- Reiterate expectations through a message, meeting, or other communication methods.
- Ensure employees are aware of how to report any concerns or complaints.

Food Considerations

- Provide options for vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, and other dietary preferences to accommodate everyone.
- Clearly label dishes containing common allergens and consider offering allergy-free alternatives.
- Offer a variety of dishes that respect diverse cultural and religious dietary restrictions (e.g. Halal, Kosher, etc.).
- Position foods containing allergens away from other items or display them on a separate table.
- Clearly label foods containing common allergens such as: Milk, Citrus, Eggs, Soy, Peanuts, Wheat, Tree Nuts, Melon, Strawberries, Shellfish, and Fish.

Consider an Off-Site Venue

- Choose a venue away from the workplace.
- Consider a venue near public transit with safe transportation options.
- Ensure the venue is accessible to all employees, including those with mobility or other needs.

Prevent Work-Related Injuries

- Ensure the venue complies with safety regulations.
- Document safety measures and ensure decorations, activities, or games are safe and appropriate.





Check Insurance Coverage

- Confirm your liability insurance adequately covers risks associated with the event.

Keep Attendance Optional

- Clearly communicate that attendance is optional to avoid compensation issues.
- If employees are required to perform work-related tasks, such as cleaning or staffing, they may be entitled to compensation.

Serve Alcohol Responsibly if Applicable

- Hire trained bartenders to oversee service and monitor signs of intoxication.
- Avoid unsupervised or open bars and consider drink tickets.
- Food must be made available if serving alcohol.
- Provide non-alcoholic options.

Provide Safe Transportation

- Remind employees not to drive after consuming alcohol.
- Provide taxi vouchers, UBER credits, Lyft credits, or reimbursement for safe travel home.

Monitor and Support

- Designate a responsible individual to oversee the event and liaise with bartenders to ensure safety and inclusivity.

Promote Health Awareness:

- Encourage employees feeling unwell to stay home.

Protect Privacy:

- Be cautious when collecting or using employee information, such as photographs or personal anecdotes.
- Obtain explicit consent for photos or personal information and clearly communicate how it will be used.

Organizers must reference and comply with the [Expenses Policy](#), [Alcohol Policy](#), and [University-Hosted Event Risk Management and Approval Directive](#). With your help, these recommendations can assist individuals in hosting a safe and enjoyable holiday season. Thoughtful planning will enable your organization to prioritize celebration and teamwork while minimizing risks and maintaining a positive workplace environment.

If you have any inquiries regarding this document, please contact the Office of Risk Management at orm@ontariotechu.ca.