



## Guest List Game Plan

It's never too early in the wedding planning process to start talking about the guest list. There are many factors involved and the best way to cover all bases is to develop a plan. Before announcing that you're having 250 people and start verbally inviting people, sit down with your fiancé and answer the following questions.

**What are your dreams?** First, make sure you and your fiancé are on the same page. Find time over dinner to share your ideas with one another. Decide if it will be a small intimate wedding or a huge bash. Where does this dream wedding take place?

**Who is so important that you can't imagine getting married without them present?** At this stage of the game, start counting family and your closest friends, and get a sense of how many essential invites you have. If you have 60 essential invites, you should probably forget about the charming chapel that only seats 50. After choosing the reception and ceremony venues, the two of you can start a list based on those capacity numbers.

**Who is paying for the wedding?** If you aren't paying for the reception talk to whoever is about how many people they want to invite. Sensitive negotiation may be necessary as you compare your list with theirs to estimate a preliminary count. Understand what items you are expected to pay for and offer to pay for extras that you really want, but might be deemed as over the top by the bill payer.

**What is your budget?** Develop a preliminary wedding budget that indicates who is paying for what. The key is to develop a list of items that vary per person (food, favors) and a separate section that is fixed no matter the number of people (DJ, ceremony fee). If spreadsheets aren't your expertise have a friend set one up for you. Done properly, the preliminary budget will cause sticker shock so be prepared. Be realistic about how many people can you afford to invite. Remember that some will have conflicts or be unable to travel so the invite list is not the number you will pay for. Consider if it's more important to have lots of people, or to spend more on the experience for a smaller amount of people. No matter what your style, each extra person will add to your bottom line cost.

**What are the criteria for cutting?** With a preliminary budget in hand, the discussion will turn to editing the guest list. Before launching in lay out some ground rules. Depersonalize the discussion. There will be edits before reaching the final list and trimming down is usually part of the process. Decide if you're comfortable with allowing guests to bring a plus one. Consider your policy on children.

Our experience with many couples across all budgets is that most people overestimate the size of their reception on their initial visit. The tendency is to want to share your big celebration with everyone in your life. As you develop a budget and edit your guest list, keep the perspective that virtually all couples go through the same exercise and remember that hard feelings from harsh words with your closest family cause much longer lasting scars than the small slight from a distant friend or family member not being invited so you can stay within a budget.

*Aisle Dish is written by Meredith Thomas, Stoneleigh's in-house Event Consultant. If you would like assistance planning your special day, Meredith offers a complimentary one-hour consultation to all brides hosting their wedding at the Club and is available for further planning services at an additional fee. Contact Meredith at [mthomas@stoneleighgolf.com](mailto:mthomas@stoneleighgolf.com) or 540.338.4653 ext. 303.*