

Holiday Parties & Festivities

ERC Survey Briefing – December 2009

Overview

In November of 2009, ERC conducted a survey on organizations in Northeast Ohio to determine if employers have modified their holiday parties, festivities, traditions, and other typical activities this holiday season. The survey sought to explore how holiday practices, specifically parties and gift-giving, at local organizations have changed this year.

Key findings in the survey:

- Seventy-three percent of respondents are having a holiday party this year.
- Thirty-six percent of employers are spending the same amount as last year for their holiday party.
- On average, employers are budgeting 45% less for holiday parties this year.
- This year, fewer employers are inviting spouses/significant others to the holiday party, having it at an external location, catering the holiday party, and serving alcohol at their parties compared to past years.
- Holiday parties are primarily being held during lunch this year.
- Some employers have cut back on providing holiday gifts to their employees.

Holiday Parties

The majority of employers surveyed are planning to still have an annual holiday party this year, however, slightly more than one-third of employers are budgeting less for the event. Thirty-six percent of organizations are budgeting the same as last year for their holiday party and 35% are budgeting less than last year. Nineteen percent of employers are not planning to have a holiday party this year. In terms of industry differences, 25% of manufacturers report not planning to have a holiday party compared to 9% of non-manufacturers. More non-manufacturers, however, report budgeting less than (45%) or the same as (42%) last year than manufacturers budgeting less than (30%) or the same as (32%) last year.

Figure 1 | If your organization historically has had an annual holiday party, is your organization planning to have a holiday party this year?

	Percent
Yes but we are budgeting less than last year	35%
Yes and we are budgeting the same as last year	36%
Yes and we are budgeting more than last year	2%
No we are not planning to have a holiday party this year	19%
Not applicable; we do not have an annual holiday party	8%

Among those employers that have decreased their budgets for their holiday party, the average budget decrease was 45% (median = 33%). Budget decreases ranged from 5-90%. There was not sufficient data to report average increases. On average, non-manufacturers reduced their budgets slightly more (average = 48%, median = 50%) than manufacturers (average = 44%, median = 50%), however, more manufacturers eliminated their holiday parties than non-manufacturers.

Figure 2 | If your organization is having a holiday party, but is budgeting more or less than last year, please specify by what percent you have increased or decreased your budget.

	# Employers	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Percent increase in budget	2	n/a	n/a	n/a
Percent decrease in budget	31	45%	5%	90%

For some employers, holiday party practices have changed from last year and years past. Compared to prior years, this year, fewer employers are inviting spouses/significant others to the holiday party, having it at an external location and catered, and serving alcohol. More employers are having their party on the company premises. These trends were fairly consistent across industry.

Figure 3 | Please select all the holiday party practices that apply to your organization.

	This Year	Historically (Last Year/Years Past)
Only employees are invited to the holiday party	48%	45%
Employees and their spouses/significant others are invited to the holiday party	16%	39%
Employees their spouses/significant others and children are invited to the holiday party	3%	8%
The holiday party is held on the company premises	46%	33%
The holiday party is held at an external location (restaurant, hotel, etc.)	20%	56%
The holiday party is held at a coworker's residence	1%	1%
The holiday party is catered	43%	64%

	This Year	Historically (Last Year/Years Past)
Alcohol is served at the holiday party	25%	46%
Transportation is provided to and from the holiday party	0%	2%

Other changes to holiday parties cited by employers include changing to a simpler menu selection, hosting a potluck, providing a catered luncheon versus dinner, decreasing the size of employee gifts, eliminating raffle or reducing expensive raffle items, cutting back on extra prizes/giveaways, requesting price reductions from caterer, not renting tables/chairs or other equipment, eliminating/reducing entertainment, providing an extra vacation day instead of a party, and holding the party on the company premises.

In 2009, the most common week in which employers report having holiday parties is the third week of December (46% of respondents). The second week of December is also a common week in which organizations host their parties. Fridays and Wednesdays generally are the most common days of the week for holiday parties this year, with December 17th, 23rd, 11th, 18th, and 12th being the top five most common days on which employers are having their holiday parties this year.

Figure 4 | If your organization is having a holiday party, when is it being held?

	Percent
Week	
December Week 1	4%
December Week 2	29%
December Week 3	46%
December Week 4	21%

	Percent
Day of the Week	
Monday	7%
Tuesday	4%
Wednesday	25%
Thursday	18%
Friday	36%
Saturday	7%
Sunday	2%

	Percent
Exact Day	
December 4	4%
December 9	2%
December 10	2%
December 11	15%
December 12	10%
December 14	6%
December 15	2%
December 16	6%
December 17	19%
December 18	13%
December 21	2%
December 23	19%

The majority of employers are hosting their parties during lunch time, further validating the trend towards more employers hosting luncheons versus evening/dinner events in 2009. A quarter of employers, however, are hosting their parties during the evening.

	Percent
Time of Day	
Lunch	61%
Afternoon	14%
Evening	25%

	Percent
Times for employers hosting parties at lunch	
11:30 am	7%
12:00 pm	83%
12:30 pm	7%
1:00 pm	3%
Times for employers hosting parties in the afternoon	
2:00 pm	33%
3:00 pm	67%
Times for employers hosting parties in the evening	
4:00 pm	17%
5:00 pm	17%
6:00 pm	58%
7:00 pm	8%

Holiday Gifts & Festivities

While many employers (40%) do not provide annual holiday gifts to their employees, of those that do, many are budgeting the same or less for holiday gifts or not planning to provide employees with gifts this year. No employers reported budgeting more for holiday gifts in 2009. No industry differences were evident with regard to providing holiday gifts.

Figure 5 | If your organization historically has provided employees with holiday gifts, is your organization planning to do so this year?

	Percent
Yes but we are budgeting less for holiday gifts than last year	8%
Yes and we are budgeting the same for holiday gifts as last year	27%
Yes and we are budgeting more for holiday gifts than last year	0%
No we are not planning to provide employees with holiday gifts this year	24%
Not applicable we do not have an annual holiday gifts	40%

Employers reported other traditions or festivities they previously held during the holidays that have been changed this year. While some are eliminating a traditional gift or bonus provided to employees, a few are enhancing their holiday activities by giving more to charity, adding in a decorating morning with hot chocolate and music, and coordinating a staff gift exchange.

Overall, the results of the survey show that several employers are continuing to have their annual holiday parties and festivities this year, but on a smaller scale.

Figure 6 | Respondent demographics by industry and organizational size

Number of organizations	89
Industry	
Manufacturing	52%
Non-Manufacturing	39%
Non-Profit	8%
Organizational size	
1-50	31%
51-200	53%
201-500	11%
501+	5%

About ERC

ERC is Northeast Ohio's largest organization dedicated to HR and workplace programs, practices, training and consulting. ERC membership provides employers access to an incredible amount of information, expertise, and cost savings that supports the attraction, retention, and development of great employees. We also host the nationally recognized NorthCoast 99 program and sponsor the ERC Health insurance program. For more information about ERC, please visit www.ercnet.org.