

The Rain Plan: Organizing an Outdoor Ceremony during a Nor'Easter

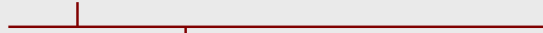
- ### Presentation Goals
- How to create a comprehensive Inclement Weather Plan for an outdoor ceremony
 - How to create sufficient flexibility to adapt the Plan as needed
 - How to communicate the various elements of the plan prior to and during the implementation of the Plan
 - How to create a decision making structure to ease the implementation of the Weather Plan
 - How to have fun while you are standing up to your ankles on the flooded field where the ceremony is supposed to be taking place in less than 24 hours

- ### Overview of Ceremony
- HLS - 750 graduates, approx. 5,000 guests
 - Harvard University - 6,700 graduates, 35,000 guests
 - Two Days of Activities
 - Class Day (Program and Reception)
 - Commencement Day (2 University ceremonies, Law School Diploma ceremony)
 - Unique elements – diploma distribution simultaneous with luncheon (grads sit with families until designated time)

Timeline for Creating HLS Rain Plan

Prior to 2002

No plan existed – If it rains, we pretend it isn't



2002

The rain came...
and we decided to
create a Rain Plan



HLS Rain Plan

➤ FACTORS

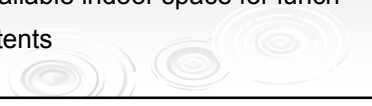
- Insufficient indoor space
- Ceremony and lunch must be completed within 2 hours
- Maintain community atmosphere



HLS Rain Plan Overview

➤ 4 Indoor ceremonies in 2 locations

- Allows time for set-up and crowd turnover
- Keeps ceremony moving (prevents long pauses between ceremonies)
- Assign graduates and guests to particular locations (2 tickets per grad)
- Use every available indoor space for lunch
- Make use of tents



Timeline for Creating HLS Rain Plan

Prior to 2002

No plan existed – If it rains, we pretend it isn't

2004

Rain was forecasted
5,000 plastic ponchos were purchased

2002

The rain came...
and we decided to create a Rain Plan

2006

Rain was forecasted
A major Nor'Easter slams Cambridge...
Winds of 30+ mph, heavy rains, lightning

Rain Plan Implementation

- RAIN PLAN = Worst case scenario
 - Forecast for ceremony indicated that rain would let up, winds would die down, no lightning
 - BUT, field had 6 inches of standing water

Intermediate Rain Plan

- Keep ceremony outdoors, move lunch indoors
 - Guests could be outside while their graduate walked across the stage
 - Guests could eat comfortably indoors and watch majority of ceremony on screens

Elements of the Rain Plan

- Have a plan and know your plan
 - Work with all involved parties to develop a plan in advance of the ceremony
 - Dean of Students, Events, Registrar, Academic Dean, Facilities, Dining Services
- Review the plan yearly to make necessary changes
 - Have new spaces become available?
 - Do new participants have better ideas?
 - Can technology help?
- Spend time and money on the plan

How to Develop a Rain Plan

- **Be Realistic**
 - If you don't have space, you can't recreate the exact same ceremony indoors
- **Be Specific**
 - Outline every detail
 - Assign tasks to particular individuals, name members of committees, create responsibilities

How to Develop a Rain Plan

- **Be Creative**
 - Elements of the ceremony can be split up or performed in different ways
- **Be Flexible**
 - Develop a plan that allows for unknown variables
 - Consider developing an intermediate rain plan

How to Develop a Rain Plan

➤ Be Sensitive

- Despite the bad weather, guests will expect pomp and circumstance
- This may be your “plan B”, but this is their *only* graduation from your school

➤ Be Prepared

- Create signage ahead of time
- Consider tenting open fields

Implementing the Rain Plan

➤ Start early

- Remember Junior High Meteorology
 - Look at multiple weather forecasts
 - www.accuweather.com
 - www.intellicast.com
 - www.weather.gov
 - www.weather.com
 - Monitor forecasts beginning 10 days before ceremony
- Accept that forecasts are often wrong and that things may get better or much, much worse

Develop a Clear Decision-making structure

➤ Decisions need to be made quickly

- If the decision needs to be made by committee, have a mechanism in place to convene the committee
- If the decision is made by a particular individual, have all of the contact information available for that person

➤ Collect as much information as possible to make the decision

- What is the hourly forecast? (more rain, lightning, high winds?)
- What are other schools doing? (be consistent with University plans)
- Are there other factors? (Is the field flooded? Can the water be pumped out? Are pumps available?)

Create Two Plans

- External for distribution to graduates and guests
 - distribute with commencement materials
 - make additional copies in case the plan is implemented
- Internal for staff and volunteers working on ceremony

Communicate the decision to all parties

- Externally
 - Include info on where to get notification about implementation of rain plan in commencement booklet
 - Website, Phone line (we use our snow line), E-mails (to graduating students)
 - Information Booth
 - Signs on stage, Notification screens in dining hall and classroom buildings

Communicate the decision to all parties

- Internally
 - Create a "phone tree" for notification
 - Collect contact info for everyone (be aware that not everyone will have access to e-mail)
 - Designate a central location for impromptu meetings (at Info Booth or in particular office) but only call meetings if absolutely necessary
 - Use volunteers – and have method for recruiting new volunteers (either through all staff e-mail or by asking volunteers to find friends)

Add special touches

- Provide free coffee
- Provide ponchos
- Make additional viewing rooms available
- Add more indoor seating



Make it Fun

- No “I” in Team (ignore the “I” in rain)
- Empower Staff
- Create a “We’re all in this together” environment
- Don’t lose your smile