

FREE PLANNING WORKBOOK

Wedding Guest List Decision & Finalization Workbook

Define who belongs on the list, set consistent guest policies, reduce the count fairly, and finalize a guest plan that fits your venue and budget.

DECIDE • TEST • REDUCE • FINALIZE

Build the Rules Before the Final List

This workbook is for guest-list strategy and decisions. Use your master spreadsheet for names, addresses, invitations, RSVPs, meals, seating, and final operational counts.

1 SET THE CEILING

Define the target and absolute maximum before invitations become commitments.

2 DEFINE THE RULES

Agree on consistent policies for relationships, children, plus-ones, parent guests, and invitation waves.

3 FINALIZE

Apply the rules, run a fairness check, and transfer the decisions into the master file.

CORE PRINCIPLE

REDUCE BY RULE BEFORE REDUCING BY INDIVIDUAL. Consistent criteria are easier to apply, explain, and maintain than one-off exceptions.

OUR FINAL GUEST-LIST GOAL

Ideal guest count: _____ Absolute maximum: _____ Current rough list: _____ Seats to remove: _____

Start With the Number You Actually Need

The target should reflect both venue capacity and budget capacity. Use a working range if either is still being finalized.

Constraint	Working number	Hard limit	Notes
Venue capacity			
Budget-supported count			
Comfort / experience target			
Catering or service threshold			
Other structural constraint			

WORKING RANGE

Preferred range: _____ to _____ guests

THE GAP

Current rough-list count: _____ Absolute maximum: _____ Seats to remove before invitations: _____

Capture the People Under Real Consideration

This is not the final guest list. Use it to see where names originate before applying priority and policy rules.

Source / group	Approx. names	Must-haves	Flexible	Notes
Partner 1				
Partner 2				
Shared relationships				
Partner 1 family requests				
Partner 2 family requests				
Wedding party / role-based				
Community / work / other				

INITIAL OBSERVATION

Which group is creating the most pressure against the target count?

Use the Same Four Filters for Every Guest Group

The goal is not to score relationships mechanically. It is to make decisions consistent enough that the final list reflects your real priorities.

Filter	Ask this question	What a strong Yes means
Relationship	Is this person actively part of our life now?	The relationship is current, not only historical.
Meaning	Would we genuinely notice their absence?	Their presence materially adds to the day.
Consistency	Are we using the same rule for similar people?	Comparable relationships receive comparable treatment.
Constraint	Can the venue and budget absorb the seat?	The invitation fits without displacing higher priority.

GRAY-AREA GUEST

Name / relationship: _____

Relationship: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

Meaning: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

Consistency: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

Constraint: ☐ Fits ☐ Does not fit

Protect the Core, Then Define Group Standards

Agree on the people whose absence would materially change the wedding. Once the true must-have group is locked, do not reopen it whenever the list feels uncomfortable.

PARTNER 1 MUST-HAVES

PARTNER 2 MUST-HAVES

SHARED MUST-HAVES

Guest group	Invitation standard	Exceptions?	Seats affected
Immediate family			
Extended family			
Close friends			
Broader friends			
Coworkers / former coworkers			
Parents' guests			

Turn Parent Requests Into a Defined Allocation

A fixed allocation is easier to manage than an open-ended request list. If requests exceed the allocation, the requesting side prioritizes within its own group.

Allocation	Seats available	Seats requested	Final seats	Who prioritizes?
Partner 1 family				
Partner 2 family				
Shared family / community				

RULES FOR PARENT-REQUESTED GUESTS

- ☐ Does the couple know or value the relationship?
- ☐ Would this person displace someone higher priority?
- ☐ Does the invitation fit the agreed allocation?
- ☐ Will the same rule apply to comparable requests?

FINAL ALLOCATION RULE

Choose the Child Policy Before the Exceptions

Select one core approach, then test it against wedding-party children, infants, venue rules, catering, seating, and capacity.

Policy	Best fit when	Main tradeoff	Choice
Invite all children	Family-inclusive event; many close families	Higher count and more meal/seating variables	☐
Selected children	A clear category can be defined	Requires consistency and narrow exceptions	☐
Adults-only	Lower count / adult-focused event	May affect some families' ability to attend	☐

EXCEPTION MAP

- ☐ Wedding-party children
- Capacity impact: _____ seats
- ☐ Immediate-family children
- Catering impact: _____
- ☐ Infants / babies
- Seating impact: _____
- ☐ Venue-specific exception
- Final wording note: _____
- ☐ Other narrow exception

Separate Named Partners From Open Plus-Ones

Spouses, fiancés, and established partners are named guests. Open plus-ones are flexible seats offered under a defined policy.

Situation	Named guest?	Open +1?	Our rule	Seats created
Spouse / fiancé	Usually yes	No		
Established partner	Usually yes	No		
Wedding-party member	If known	Consider		
Traveling alone / knows few	If known	Consider		
Single guest with social group	If known	Optional		
Other				

PLUS-ONE CAPACITY TEST

Named guest count before open plus-ones: _____ Flexible seats remaining: _____ Maximum open plus-ones we can offer: _____

See What Each Policy Does to the Count

Guest-list policies become easier to evaluate when you can see their cumulative seat impact.

Policy / rule	Seats before	Seats after	Capacity change	Keep / adjust?
Children policy				
Open plus-ones				
Parent allocations				
Coworker rule				
Extended-family rule				
Relationship recency rule				
Other				

CURRENT RESULT

Projected count after policies: _____ Target: _____ Still over by: _____ / Available room: _____

Cut the Guest List in Rounds

Large reductions are easier when category rules solve the broad problem first and gray-area individuals are reviewed last.

ROUND 1 • CLEAR MISMATCHES

Remove names that clearly do not meet the agreed relationship standard.

ROUND 2 • CATEGORY RULES

Review coworkers, distant family, children, plus-ones, and parent allocations.

ROUND 3 • GRAY-AREA INDIVIDUALS

Only after category rules are applied, evaluate the remaining borderline names one by one.

RESULT AFTER THREE ROUNDS

New count: _____ Target: _____ Difference: _____

Test Each Reduction Rule Before You Apply It

A useful rule should save meaningful capacity without creating a fairness problem larger than the space it solves.

Rule	Guests affected	Seats saved	Relationship impact	Fairness risk	Decision
Current relationship					
Coworkers					
Distant family					
Children					
Open plus-ones					
Parent allocations					
Other					

BEST COMBINATION OF RULES

Which combination reaches the target with the least damage to the relationships you most want represented?

Run the Fairness Check Before Finalizing

Review the rules side by side, not only the remaining names.

☐ Did we apply the same relationship standard to both partners' guests?

☐ Did we keep household, child, and plus-one rules consistent?

☐ Did parent allocations stay within the agreed number?

☐ Did any one-off exception quietly create several more exceptions?

☐ Does every remaining seat feel more valuable than the guest it displaced?

☐ Are we still inside both the venue and budget ceiling?

EXCEPTIONS WE ARE KEEPING

FINAL FAIRNESS RESULT

☐ Ready to finalize ☐ Needs one more review ☐ Policies need revision

Should You Use Invitation Waves at All?

A B-list is a capacity-management tool, not a public ranking. Use it only if second-wave guests can still receive a normal planning window.

- ☐ The venue has a hard guest ceiling.
- ☐ The A-list can be invited early enough to generate real declines.
- ☐ Second-wave guests will still have reasonable time to respond.
- ☐ Travel guests will not receive impractically late invitations.
- ☐ Every B-list guest is someone we would genuinely be happy to host.

OUR DECISION

☐ No B-list ☐ One B-list wave ☐ Multiple controlled waves Reason:

STOP RULE

If the second wave would feel like emergency seat-filling or create an unusably short RSVP window, do not use it.

Plan Invitation Waves Before Anything Is Sent

Capacity should determine when seats actually open. Do not assume declines in advance.

Wave	Guests	Seats	Send date	RSVP deadline	Seats released
A					
B1					
B2 if used					

WAVE-SPECIFIC RISKS

Save-the-date issue:

Travel-sensitive guests:

Latest acceptable invitation date:

Do not invite after:

How will released seats be confirmed before the next wave?

Record the Final Guest-List Policy

This page becomes the decision summary you can reference whenever a new request, exception, or pressure appears.

TARGET COUNT	
ABSOLUTE MAXIMUM	
MUST-HAVE COUNT	
FAMILY RULE	
FRIENDS RULE	
COWORKER RULE	
PARENT ALLOCATION	
CHILDREN POLICY	
PLUS-ONE POLICY	
A/B LIST POLICY	
FINAL INVITATION CEILING	

Move the Decisions Into the Master Spreadsheet

The workbook ends when policies are settled. The spreadsheet becomes the operational record for invitations, RSVPs, seating, and the final count.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Every considered guest entered | ☐ Household assigned |
| ☐ Priority recorded | ☐ Invitation status recorded |
| ☐ Children policy applied | ☐ Plus-one eligibility applied |
| ☐ A/B status applied | ☐ Address collection ready |
| ☐ RSVP fields ready | ☐ Final decision owner identified |

MASTER FILE

Spreadsheet / tool location: _____ Who maintains it: _____
Last policy review: _____

HANDOFF RULE

From this point forward, status changes belong in the master guest record - not in this workbook.

Use this space for decisions, unresolved questions, family requests, and policy changes that need to be documented before they enter the master list.