

As food trucks grow in popularity, they are appearing at more private events, fundraisers, community events, state fairs, and festivals. Food trucks offer a convenient way to provide a variety of food options, can arrive and set up quickly at nearly any location, and often help generate added attention and interest for events.

The Mobile Food & Beverage Association of Marion County is a non-profit organization that partners with you to assist with the planning and booking of food vendors. We are often contacted by organizers looking for help locating and hiring food trucks, determining how many trucks are needed, and understanding how food truck fees are determined. We have spoken with numerous food truck operators who help organize large food truck events. We have also attended many food truck events and consulted with the event organizers responsible for securing food trucks.

The answers to these questions are often event-specific and can vary by city and by event. Still, based on our conversations and experience, we have put together the following basic tips as general guidelines.

Number of trucks that should attend an event: Mobile food vendors often recommend one food truck for every 200-300 attendees when the event is focused around eating. If the event is not primarily an “eating” event, that ratio should be closer to one food truck for every 400-500 attendees. For food trucks to have a successful event, they generally need to average at least 40-60 customers per hour. This number can vary depending on many factors, but when deciding how many food trucks to have at your event, consider not only the total number of attendees, but also how many attendees you expect to eat over the course of the event.

Attendance estimates: Mobile food vendors often begin ordering and preparing for large events several days in advance. Food trucks work hard to prepare and have the proper amount of food for the number of attendees they expect to feed. As the event date approaches, it is important for the organizer to communicate to each truck whether the expected attendance has gone up or down from the original estimate. Ideally, these updates should be provided one week in advance and again 48 hours before the event.

Fee structure: When hiring or requesting a food truck or mobile vendor for your event, trucks and vendors can be compensated in several ways.

By the event organizer: This is similar to hiring a caterer. The organizer contracts with the food truck to serve a certain number of people within a set budget, by a designated menu, or by a combination of both. This is the most commonly used method for private events and special occasions.

By the attendees: This is similar to street service. A truck or vendor is requested to provide service at a specific location or event, and attendees pay the truck or vendor directly for their food. Keep in mind that, in this scenario, most food trucks need to make 45-60 sales or more per hour. This payment method is most common for larger events or locations with significant foot traffic, where many people are looking for a variety of food options.

By guarantee: *This is often the best solution for smaller events* or for occasions where you want to have multiple food trucks. Attendees pay for their food directly, but the organizer agrees to guarantee a certain amount of sales. If actual sales fall below the guaranteed amount, the organizer pays the difference.

By vendors paying a fee: If you ask a food truck or mobile food vendor to pay a flat fee to attend your event, keep in mind that the truck or vendor will need to earn about 10 times the amount of that fee. A reasonable and often preferred alternative to a flat fee is for the food truck to pay between **5-10%** of their sales at the event in lieu of the flat rate. If you are holding an event that charges admission to the general public, and you expect food trucks to be a major attraction that helps draw crowds, there should not be a fee for food trucks to attend.

Types of food: Close consideration should be given to the types of food each truck serves. If it is determined that you need five trucks for an event, having the right balance of food options is essential to the success of the event. If there are too many trucks serving the same type of food, without enough variety, your attendees may not have a good experience, and the food trucks may not have a successful event.

Pre-event requirements: When attending events, food trucks expect that all event licensing, permitting, and fees are being handled by the event organizer. If there are any special licensing, insurance, or permitting requirements for the trucks to complete before the event, those requirements should be communicated well in advance of the event.

Load-in times: Preparation and set-up time varies by type of food, type of vehicle, and many other factors. To prepare for an event, most food trucks will arrive 60-90 minutes before the event's start time. If additional time may be needed for special inspections, licenses, or permits, please communicate those details to the food truck well ahead of the event so the operator has sufficient time to arrive, set up, and meet the additional requirements.

Layout of trucks: Event organizers usually have the best sense of how to lay out mobile food vendors. The layout is often determined by the size of the event space, the number and type of vendors, and the other activities and entertainment scheduled. In many cases, parking food trucks together leads to the greatest success because it makes the experience easier and more exciting for attendees.

Keep in mind that no food truck wants to work on an incline, and many cannot. Food trucks should be parked on flat surfaces. If trucks will be parked on any incline, please communicate this in advance. Inclines on the approach to a final parking position can also create problems. Trucks may be over 25 feet in length and can bottom out on particularly steep driveways. In addition, many trucks are 12-15 feet tall. Be mindful of low-hanging wires and tree branches. Upon arrival, communicate any areas of caution to the truck driver.

Waste facilities: Food trucks generally supply their own trash cans. For larger, well-attended events, adequate public trash cans, recycling bins, and restrooms should be considered. Conveniently located restrooms for food truck operators are always appreciated.

Most food trucks are available for private parties and offer catering services. In these cases, you should work directly with the food truck to determine the menu and pricing.

We hope these tips are valuable to you. The Mobile Food & Beverage Association of Marion County is here to help with your planning every step of the way. Please consider this non-profit organization for your next event. There is no charge for our services if food vendors from our association are hired. Call or text us during the early stages of your event, and we will partner with you to help make it a success.

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