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MEETING & EVENT PLANNER

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Business retreats should not be business as usual

By Rick Fabrizio

Corporate and board retreats, employee gatherings and other off-site events may not have the “big” feel of an annual dinner or gala, but they are important, and getting things right pays dividends.

Such off-site meetings vary from dozens to hundreds of attendees with formats varied by the scope of the meeting, such as team building or training. A common goal is to provide productive and enjoyable experiences that don’t feel like simply working outside the office. Accomplishing that involves advance planning typically

said. “You can ski right to a meeting room and take your gear off.”

McIver said organizations looking to book an event should consider the type of package they need. Do they need three meals a day, and what is the expected number of meetings rooms and guest rooms required?

“No matter where you are going to stay, that’s the three things people will ask,” he said.

Other key details include whether the group will require audio/visual equipment, if they want to meet classroom style, theater style with no tables and do they have presenters. Also, if they want a red-carpet

style evening to cap the event.

“We try to find out what the group is looking for and accommodate them,” McIver said.

The Lake Estate on Winnisquam in Tilton is a new luxury resort and one of New Hampshire’s newest options having opened in the summer of 2025. Joe Ouellette, director of sales and marketing, said the southern Lakes Region is an attractive option for meeting planners.

“We are 90 minutes from every New England experience,” Ouellette said. “History tells us 90 minutes is that sweet spot for traveling to business events. Even beyond 90 minutes, there’s enough here that it’s

worth it for them to make the trip.”

Ouellette said business retreats differ from large annual dinners and galas, because they often involve smaller groups seeking a more intimate experience.

“They want smaller, more bespoke environments,” he said. “Larger groups still want to break into smaller groups and then connect together throughout the event.”

Meals, especially lunches, are a big part of successful business meetings, as time is of the essence.

The Lake Estate on Winnisquam, which opened in September 2025 in Tilton, hosts business and nonprofit events as well as weddings.

(Courtesy)



beginning with selecting a location.

Business gatherings differ from galas as they tend to span multiple days, so planning includes making accommodations for meetings as well as lodging. There are venues in New Hampshire from the coast to the lakes to the mountains. Location is often part of the experience.

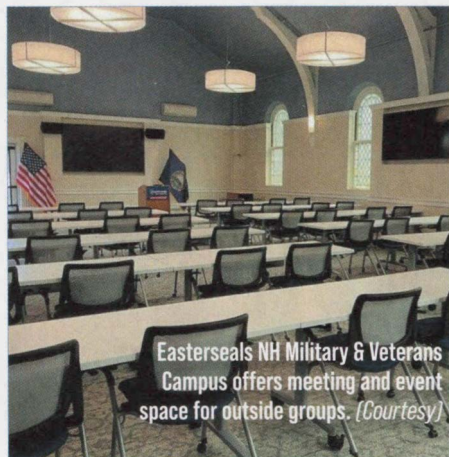
The Mountain Club on Loon in Lincoln sits in the White Mountains and general manager Jeffrey McIver said winter is a popular time for business retreats.

“You’re holding meetings in between ski runs,” he

Sherri Ferns, director of sales and marketing for Duprey Hospitality, which includes the Grappone Conference Center in Concord, said the center's in-house catering can move 200 people through lunch in 20 minutes and 500 people in 30 minutes for buffet-style or plated lunches. It also offers box lunches for corporate events focused on training where attendees don't necessarily stay the entire event. The center also offers dietary options including vegan and vegetarian, something that should not be overlooked by event planners.

The Grappone Conference Center's central location helps make it popular for conferences and its flex-space meeting room layout does see days with multiple groups. Ferns said the center has clients who ask if there will be a competing entity at the center, or they will even rent the whole space.

"If it has anything to do with politics, they will ask," she said. "We are internally mindful and there are times when you have a competing event. A lot of times, venues won't say who but will confirm that there are no competing



Easterseals NH Military & Veterans Campus offers meeting and event space for outside groups. (Courtesy)

interests. Or we say you should consider picking another day."

The Easterseals NH Military & Veterans Campus in Franklin provides a community for veterans, military members, first responders and their families. It also provides a unique meeting and event venue for Easterseals as well as outside groups. The 15-acre riverside campus features recreational opportunities for team building and corporate events including 50-plus miles of rail trails.

"The campus is so beautiful here, and there are so many options," said Ana McKenna,

interim director of Easterseals Military & Veterans Campus. She added that holding a business event at the campus is a great chance for companies and groups to give back and help sustain the campus.

Michele Talwani, chief communications and marketing officer, Easterseals NH & VT, said while event planning and hosting is not a focus for the campus, it helps support Easterseals' overall mission. Easterseals hosts golf tournaments and the Red, White & Brew Craft Beer and Wine Festival to support Veterans Count, which businesses can join as an off-site event.