



CONTACT

Colleen Madden Blumenfeld

Office: 312-422-5074

Mobile: 314-807-1568

colleenmadden@challengergray.com

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2021 Holiday Party Survey Report

IN-PERSON PARTIES STAGE A SMALL COMEBACK, BUT 22% STILL UNSURE HOW TO CELEBRATE YEAR-END

CHICAGO, November 12, 2021 – For the second holiday season in a pandemic, U.S.-based employers are grappling with how to connect their employees for year-end celebrations. While 26.6% of companies are planning to hold an in-person holiday party, up from the 5.33% who reported they would last year, another 22% are still unsure what their plans will be this year, according to survey results released Friday by global outplacement and business and executive coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

The annual survey on holiday party plans, in its 17th year, was conducted online in October and November among 182 human resources executives at companies of various sizes and industries across the country. Of all respondents, 5% will hold their events in-person without any precautions, up from 1.3% in 2020.

Another 7% of respondents reported they were having virtual events this year, down from 17% who reported the same in 2020.

Meanwhile, 8% are having in-person parties and modifying it due to COVID, up from 4% last year. However, of those who are modifying their events, 62% are still unsure what modifications will occur.

“There appears to be even more uncertainty surrounding company parties this year than last. Most companies simply canceled the event in 2020, likely hoping it would be a one-year issue. Now that we’re entering the second pandemic holiday season, companies want to celebrate and connect their teams, but are not quite sure how to do it,” said Andrew Challenger, Senior Vice President of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

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Will your company hold an in-person holiday party this year?	2021	2020
No, we had one last year, but we are not holding one this year due to COVID.	1.70%	44.00%
No, we had a party last year, but not this year due to cost cutting.	3.00%	5.33%
No, we never have holiday parties.	10.00%	4.00%
No, other reasons.	1.70%	1.33%
No we did not have one last year, and are not having one again due to COVID	18.20%	N/A
Each location will make a determination according to local COVID mandates and public health guidance.	10.00%	12.00%
Unsure at this time.	21.67%	10.67%
We are hosting a virtual event due to COVID.	7.10%	17.33%
Yes, we always hold holiday parties, but it will be modified due to COVID.	8.30%	4.00%
Yes, we always hold holiday parties and will not modify it due to COVID.	5.00%	1.33%
Yes, we are having one after one or more years of not holding one due to COVID	13.33%	N/A

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. ©

Overall, 34.6% of companies will not hold an event this year, down from the 54.6% who said they were not holding any kind of event, even virtual, in 2020. Of those, 18% of companies canceled plans specifically due to COVID. Another 3% report they are not having a party due to cost cutting, while 10% report they never hold holiday parties.

Vaccines may be a reason for the comeback of in-person events, though companies are not mandating their workers receive their COVID vaccinations. In the November survey, 34% of respondents were awaiting enforcement of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) rule, while 25% reported they were mandating the vaccine across the board or only for workers to work in-person. This is up significantly from when Challenger first asked respondents this question in a March survey of 201 human resources executives, when just 3% reported mandates.

Are you requiring workers to be vaccinated?				
	November	September	July	March
Yes.	14.06%	16.00%	3.63%	3.08%
No.	40.63%	28.00%	44.74%	33.85%
We are strongly encouraging team members to receive the vaccine.	N/A	44.00%	52.63%	59.62%
We are awaiting guidance from OSHA.	34.38%	N/A	N/A	N/A
We are requiring the vaccine for team members to work in-person, or they will be subject to testing and masking.	10.94%	12.00%	N/A	N/A

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. ©

Meanwhile, many companies report they have not brought all their workers back to the office in-person. Though over 26% have returned all employees back to the office, nearly 36% are giving their workers a choice on coming into the office, up from 15% at the end of 2020. Another 13% are making other arrangements, usually hybrid options or location-based decisions.

Have you brought back workers into a physical office?		
	2021	2020
All our employees are back in the office.	26.49%	8.22%
We have essential functions in-person, but are keeping the majority of our staff working from home.	15.65%	54.79%
We have reopened offices and given our workers a choice to return.	35.94%	15.07%
We have a certain percentage back in the office	N/A	9.59%
We are an essential business, and all our workers must be in-person.	3.13%	6.85%
All our workers are still working from home.	6.18%	5.48%
Other	12.72%	1.37%

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. ©

“Employers are very concerned about an exodus of talent and ability to hire. Many are modifying roles and auditing positions to eliminate roadblocks that may cause hiring managers to miss talent. This includes allowing flexible schedules and remote work,” said Challenger.

Indeed companies are hiring. Over 68% of companies reported they will be hiring in 2022, up from 28% in 2021. Just 2% are reporting soft demand, down from 21% a year ago. Meanwhile, 12% say they are experiencing a skills shortage, double the 6% who reported this at the end of 2020.

Which statement best describes your company’s hiring outlook for 2022?		
	2021	2020
We increased hiring in 2021 and expect to continue adding workers in 2022.	63.33%	20.90%
We have been holding off on hiring, but expect it to increase significantly in 2022.	5.00%	7.46%
Demand is still soft and we have concerns about the future economy, so hiring will be slow in 2022.	1.67%	20.90%
We would love to hire more, but we are experiencing a skills shortage.	11.94%	5.97%
Hiring at our company is likely to decrease in 2022.	3.33%	7.46%
We are planning to bring in more contract workers in 2022.	1.67%	0
The current uncertainty makes it difficult to predict hiring needs in 2022.	8.35%	25.37%
Other	4.71%	1.49%

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. ©

Additional Survey Data

Of those having in-person parties, what modifications will you make to your in-person party?

	2021	2020
We are limiting the number of attendees.	27.27%	66.67%
We are holding the event outside.	9.09%	33.33%
We are requiring masks.	9.09%	100.00%
We will take temperatures at the door.	9.09%	33.33%
We will maintain social distancing.	9.09%	100.00%
We will encourage hand washing through signage or verbal reminders.	18.18%	
We will not have food or drink.	0.00%	
We will require proof of vaccination to attend.	0.00%	
We are not requiring proof of vaccination, but are asking all to be vaccinated.	9.09%	
Unsure	62.15%	
We are making no modifications.	1.49%	

If you are having a party, will you be: (Check all that apply):

	2021	2020
Using caterer, event planner or other outside service	68.42%	25.00%
Holding the party on company premises	42.11%	75%
Serving alcohol	47.37%	50%
Inviting employees only	21.05%	75%
Inviting family/spouse/partner to attend	52.63%	
Holding party in evening or on weekend	42.11%	25%
Holding party during workday or near end of workday	36.84%	50%

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Other (please specify)	4.71%	1.49%

How are business conditions as you enter 2022?

	2021
Business conditions are worse than last year.	9.84%
Business conditions have improved since last year.	55.74%
Business conditions are on par with last year.	21.31%
Some segments of our business are up while others are down.	11.48%
Other (please specify)	1.64%

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. ©