

6) Enterprise Forum Chapter Programs and Events

ITEMS TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING CHAPTER ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS:

- Determine purpose and goal of all/each program(s)
- Provide an equal proportion of event types: networking events, educational events
- Determine quality vs. quantity in number of events planned
- Analyze best time of year, time and day of week, and location of events
- Study your membership interests and demographics of your members. Are you offering the types of programs your membership is interested in?
- Review the strengths and weaknesses of last year's program. Keep in mind the feedback you received from your members.

Thorough planning is essential to successful events! The following information will assist you with all aspects of planning social, educational and recreational events.

ORGANIZING AN MIT ENTERPRISE FORUM CHAPTER EVENT

Successful Enterprise Forum Chapter events will reflect the interests of Chapter constituents and the general character of the Chapter's surrounding city or geographic area. Ideally, Chapter leaders should meet in late spring/early summer to plan the next year's program and then announce it in advance—i.e., late summer/early fall. This provides for a coordinated schedule which allows for a wide and balanced variety of events.

It also alerts the Chapter's constituency to the overall schedule, allows for long-range planning, and provides incentive for members not only to become interested and active in the Chapter's annual activities, but also to pay dues!

As part of the planning, identify dates for your regular events. Also review the strengths and weaknesses of the prior year's programs for repeat events or those to avoid. Such a plan serves to focus the energy of the volunteers on thoughtful planning and thorough execution, and minimizes the chance for less popular or ill-prepared events or volunteer "burnout." Identify a chair or co-chairs for each event, and team experienced volunteers with the less experienced.

In general, the Enterprise Forum staff can help a Chapter with:

- Event ideas
- Attendance strategies
- Mailing procedures and labels
- Providing faculty and administrators as speakers

Requests for speakers should be made at least 6 months in advance of the desired date in order to allow adequate time for recruiting, publicizing, and receiving reservations.

The following information should serve as reminders, guidelines and hints to make the process more manageable.

BEFORE THE EVENT

Decide on the date, time, place, and price for your event early—well before the newsletter deadline (all of this information needs to go into your event announcement). Sometimes it takes longer than expected to plan an event and find an appropriate, available meeting site—two or three months would not be unusual. Coordinate your event’s schedule with the VC of Programs and other appropriate officers to avoid conflicts with other chapter activities.

Publicize it—there are a number of simple things that can be done to consistently draw larger audiences to your events. These include:

- preparing a schedule of coming events and distribute at each meeting
- planning activities with other university/colleges
- plan one event with a member of the MIT faculty or Senior Administrator that involves a current topic of national or world importance
- try to have press coverage at the events so there is subsequent publicity, including announcements of MIT meetings in local paper
- use an Alumni Association sponsored email list to announce events to MIT alumni
- use a chapter Web page to announce events; chapter Web pages may be hosted by the Alumni Association on the Alumweb server.

Determine the type of notice to send—self-mailer or envelope—and postage—first class or non-profit, bulk-rate. Factors to consider are: the type of meeting, its desired impact, required lead time, and cost.

Establish a back-planning calendar—See addendum for Seattle Flight Plan

CREATING AND SENDING YOUR EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT

The most important tip about your announcement is: use it to SELL YOUR EVENT!!! This is your only chance to make your event attractive to prospective attendees. Be creative as well as informative.

Stress the event's benefits. Is it educational, informative, relaxing, thought-provoking, a chance to make new friends, broaden horizons, etc.? Access to a special location can be a benefit. Think of your audience—

The following information should be in EVERY announcement:

- **Title**—something which will interest people.
- **What**—write one or two short paragraphs describing the event and its benefits, exactly as you want them to appear in the notice.
- **Where**—name and address of the meeting place, including meeting room, if known. A small map can be helpful and will often fit on the back of the flyer. In some cases, there is not enough space for detailed instructions and you will want to send follow-up directions or a map to people who sign up.
- **Price**—see “Pricing Guidelines.”
- **RSVP**—provide a deadline for response. If you will need to send information (e.g., a map or tickets) ask them to include their email address with their response. This is for your convenience, and it keeps costs down. Don't forget to include the mailing address.
- **Coupon**—When possible, combine the RSVP with a reply coupon requesting payment due at the bottom of the notice. This gets a more definite commitment—and a check—for the event. All checks should be made out to the “MIT Enterprise Forum of _____.”
- **Contact for further information**—your name, work and/or home phone numbers.
- **MIT Branding**—the downloadable MIT logos, seals and their use are available on <http://web.mit.edu/graphicidentity/index.html>

Design and send your event announcement to the Chapter newsletter editor by the printing deadline date. All newsletter submittals should be typed, word-processed, or sent on disk, depending on the editor's technological resources. To minimize the number of phone calls you may have to return as people respond, you may want to change your personal answering machine message temporarily to provide an event date or details (e.g., “If you are calling about the MIT event, plenty of room is still available, leave name/phone/address and number of attendees,” etc.)

You may also wish to have a chapter answering machine that gives up-to-date information about chapter events and will record reservations.

LOCATION

Details to inquire about when choosing a location (as appropriate):

- number of people the facility can accommodate
- appropriateness of layout for the type of event (e.g., dining area big enough for a sit-down meal, adequate circulation space for a reception, space for chairs for a speaker event, etc.)
- bad weather plan/alternate location
- rental fee; deposit; always negotiate, some spaces may be donated
- hours facility is available (including set-up and clean-up)
- adequate area with tables and chairs available for registration
- flowers/decorations
- who is responsible for set-up and clean-up
- adequate parking; self or valet parking and charge (possible subsidy)
- is security needed; cost
- coat check; cost
- availability of audio-visual equipment, podium and microphone, piano, dance floor, etc.; charge for use
- special requirements or restrictions, especially regarding food/beverages
- special fees or additional charges (including tips and taxes)

For some locations other than hotels and restaurants, you may need to bring in equipment such as tables, chairs, canopies, and garbage cans, as well as arrange for catering, sound equipment, set-up, and clean-up. Check to see what equipment and services the facility provides and what your group needs to provide.

Be certain to determine all costs involved when using any facility, and ask for a written confirmation of all agreements.

If the event involves a speaker or speaking program, ensure that the room is private and away from outside noise.

PRICING GUIDELINES

A well-planned event should never show a loss unless there are unique circumstances (i.e., unusually stormy weather; an earthquake). When setting the price for an event, develop a rough budget of expected income and expenses (see the Event Budget Worksheet). This is the best way to get a handle on pricing. Here are some additional hints and guidelines:

- Estimate expected attendance. Determine if the event should be run to generate a surplus or if it should be subsidized.
- Beware of large fixed costs (e.g., renting a room, etc.) and be wary of signing binding contracts. Since it is difficult to predict turnout for a specific event,

planning your event so all costs can be adjusted to match actual turnout is important. A corporate or public facility may be just right.

- Remember to include costs of room rental, cleanup fees, copies and postage, or recognition/speaker mementos.
- Food is expensive. While food is essential for some events, there have been many successful events without food. Or consider hors d'oeuvres, or dessert and coffee, instead of a full-service meal.
- Charge a significant differential for non-members—in the 25%-50% or \$10-\$25 range depending on the event cost and type. If members pay \$20, non-members should pay \$30. This is a good recruiting tool!
- In pricing your event, remember that you are providing something of real value to the attendees. Some chapters set a minimum price of \$10—a way to turn a no or low-cost event into a “money-maker” to help subsidize other events. A minimum price also adds perceived value to the event.

CATERING AND BAR SERVICE

The event chairperson should contact the catering manager of the facility or, if there is none, several independent caterers to obtain menus and prices. To develop a cost proposal for an event, the caterer will need to know the approximate number of attendees and the type of service (hors d'oeuvres, buffet, etc.) you have in mind. Remember that tax and a tip or service charge is usually added to the listed price of the food. (Often this will add 20% to your bill.)

A caterer typically requires an updated attendance estimate a week to two weeks before the event to order food. The final guaranteed number is usually required 48 to 72 hours before the event; however, this may vary, and you should discuss this with your caterer. Generally, a 5% leeway is allowed for the guarantee; again, this can vary, and should be confirmed with the caterer.

Be sure to determine all costs, including tax and tip, service charges, and equipment charges (linens, china, etc.). Once the details have been finalized, get your agreement in writing.

FOOD CHOICES

Hors d'oeuvres are a good choice if you want to maximize the opportunity for mingling at an event. They are also an option if the facility that you want to use cannot accommodate your group for a sit-down meal. Hors d'oeuvres can be less expensive than buffets or sit-down meals; however, depending on the type, variety and quantity you choose, the cost of hors d'oeuvres can often approach that of a seated meal. With hors d'oeuvres, it is best to arrange for periodic or continuous serving to keep the selection consistent, as well as to accommodate late arrivals.

Buffets allow for more mixing than a sit-down meal, but less than hors d'oeuvres receptions. Buffets do involve some time standing in line; therefore, make sure that there is an adequate number of serving stations so that your group will not have to wait long. If a selection on the buffet requires a knife, you'll need to provide tables for the participants.

A sit-down meal is typically the most expensive catering option. It involves a minimum of an hour to complete (including coffee and dessert). Be sure that enough servers will be on hand to provide quality, timely service.

Bar Service: The event committee should decide whether beverages/alcohol will be included in the price of the event, or if they will be provided on a no-host basis. We recommend that you offer a no-host (or cash) bar so that people who do not drink will not be subsidizing the costs of those who do. Your caterer can recommend the amount of beverages to order for your group.

If your facility has its own bar, you'll need to discuss the logistics with the facility manager. Details you should inquire about include:

- Hours bar service is available (e.g., cocktails before dinner, bar open after dinner, etc.)
- If the bar is operated with cash or drink tickets; if drink tickets used, does the facility handle sales?
- price of drinks (including soda, water, beer, wine, and hard liquor)
- bar minimum
- bartender charge; cashier charge
- number of bartenders used
- bar snacks (peanuts, etc.) provided/available for a charge

Be certain to check any local regulations and/or restrictions regarding serving alcohol at off-site locations. Make sure to provide non-alcoholic beverages at each event; coffee is recommended for evening events.

ATTENDANCE

If your attendance numbers seem low, phone calling is an effective way to encourage people to attend. Set up a phone tree with members of your Board. Often members just need a little encouragement or a reminder of an upcoming program. You also might consider having one Board member call and invite new members to an event. Designating a “hospitality” committee or person to greet new members and introduce them to others at the event will make them feel more welcome. If you are having attendance problems consistently, consider the types and suitability of events you are planning. You might survey your members about their interests. Think again about the activities you are offering. Are your programs too expensive? Are your invitations arriving three weeks in advance of your programs, so people are receiving adequate notice? Brainstorming with your Board might give you new ideas.

Keep track of the contact information for everyone who signs up for your event. You might have to contact them in the event of a cancellation or a late change in time or place.

EVENT BUDGETS

A budget worksheet can be very helpful in planning for an event (note sample worksheet). Copy it for each program and distribute copies to event chairs. This type of worksheet is very easy to use and can be helpful especially to those who have not planned an event before.

Complete the “fixed costs” column first. These are all the costs which the event will incur regardless of how many people attend. By calculating this total and dividing it by the number of attendees (be sure to use a conservative estimate) you will know the cost you must add to any other per person costs. Be careful to add only those costs which will NOT change to the fixed costs column. The more costs you calculate on a per person basis, the more accurate your budgeting and per person cost will be.

DURING THE EVENT

Have someone welcome attendees as they arrive, record their names (a sign-in sheet may suffice) and confirm payment. Have membership information/forms available to recruit new members.

Provide name tags and pens—they help to break the ice. A special colored dot or other mark on the tag can distinguish newcomers to the chapter to alert Board members to introduce them to other members.

Determine who will sit at the table with the speaker and make sure all seats are filled. This table should have a reserved sign on it. Unless the event is formal, most

chapter events benefit by having an informal head table with the speaker and several key officers and spouses/guests.

Warmly introduce the speaker/host to the audience before the presentation. Ask the speaker beforehand about items of particular interest he or she would like mentioned. Usually a few highlights from the biography, plus informal comments to relate the speaker or topic to the group are better than an exhaustive narrative of the speaker's history. After the speech, end the event after about 20 minutes of questions and answers or earlier if questions taper off or the hour is late. Don't embarrass the speaker by making him or her do it. And, finally, thank the speaker on behalf of the chapter, and most chapters present a gift or token of appreciation. Introduce Association/MIT staff if they are present and offer them the opportunity to speak.

- Take digital photos for the newsletter, or to use if the event is repeated.
- Thank other volunteers and publicize future activities.

AFTER THE EVENT

Send the Treasurer all of the checks, expense invoices/receipts, and a note with the following information:

- Name of Event
- Number of attendees
- Number of MIT Alumni
- Total income received
- Number of checks enclosed
- Itemized expenses

Clearly indicate which of the invoices have already been paid and which the Treasurer should pay directly. Do not enclose cash; keep the cash and write a personal check for the amount of the cash to the "MIT Enterprise Forum of _____." Do not offset your out-of-pocket expenses with cash receipts—the chapter needs an accurate account/audit trail of income and expenses. Summarize your expense receipts and submit for payment by the Treasurer.

Send follow-up letters of thanks to your guest speaker/host and others. (*See Sample Thank You Letter to Speakers section.*)

Send the list of attendees to the appropriate chapter officer (i.e., the VC for Membership) for future reference. They represent a pool of interested people for future leadership, and highlight the popularity of events.

Give your Chapter Chair or appropriate officer a brief update on the event -- event name, number of attendees, how the speaker was received, who the contact for the event was. Providing the leadership with the details as you go will help them to

compile the data at the end of the year for annual reporting. When using the Alumni Association's Speakers Bureau, a response to the evaluation form is required.

Hold a thank you reception for all event planners at the end of the year in somebody's home. Not only does it thank people for a job well done, it also gives potential planners an incentive to hold an event the next time around.

One Final Suggestion:

Keep detailed records about all aspects of your event. Good, accurate records not only reduce last-minute uncertainties and problems, but also provide valuable information for the chair of the next event. Get your committee together for a post-event evaluation and discuss what worked, what didn't work, and what you might do differently the next time. Good, consistent planning and evaluation will result in top-quality, successful events time and time again.

Sample Thank You Letter to Faculty Speakers

January 22, 2004

Dr. Robert S. Langer
Professor of Chemical and Biomedical Engineering
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
77 Massachusetts Avenue
Room E25-342
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Dr. Langer,

On behalf of the entire MIT Enterprise Forum and MIT Alumni Association, may we express our gratitude for your participation in our Satellite Broadcast on January 21st. The success of each of these programs lies solely with people like you who volunteer time out of their busy schedules, and put the effort and energy into getting on the Kresge stage and imparting their knowledge and experiences to our entrepreneurial audience, both in Boston and around the country and globe.

The feedback we have received from many in attendance has been excellent; with more than a few saying they felt this was our best broadcast ever. Your support of the MIT Enterprise Forum's mission makes it that much easier for us to continue to provide the high-quality programming that we do.

Please accept this gift as our thanks for a record-breaking night (over 630 in attendance in Kresge). Thanks again.

Sincerely,

Signature
Name
Volunteer title

(Always Cc: Head of Department)

Example Event Budget Worksheet

Event: _____ Date: _____

Based on _____ number of attendees.

	Variable Costs (per person)	Fixed Costs
A.		
Location rental	_____	_____
Equipment:		
- tables and chairs	_____	_____
- tablecloths	_____	_____
- canopies	_____	_____
- garbage cans	_____	_____
Coat check	_____	_____
Parking	_____	_____
Security	_____	_____
A/V equipment	_____	_____
Set-up/clean-up	_____	_____
Other:	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
B.		
Food (include tax and tip):		
- hors d'oeuvres	_____	_____
- meals	_____	_____
Bar:		
- bartender charge	_____	_____
- hosted bar	_____	_____
Beverage (include tax and tip);		
- beer/wine	_____	_____
- non-alcoholic	_____	_____
Music	_____	_____
Entertainment	_____	_____
Flowers/Plants	_____	_____
Decorations	_____	_____
Favors/souvenirs/gifts	_____	_____
Miscellaneous	_____	_____
Marketing Costs	_____	_____

Totals: Fixed costs: _____ Variable costs: _____

attendees planned _____ x per person costs \$ _____ = _____

Fixed costs/# attendees = _____

Name of Event: _____

Date & Time of Event: _____

Event Planner: _____

Planner's Phone Numbers: Home: _____ **Work:** _____
Mobile: _____

Anticipated Attendance: _____ **Maximum Attendance:** _____

Event Location

1. Address of event: _____

2. Is a contract required to use this location? YES NO
If yes, do you want to have the contract reviewed by a local professional? YES NO

3. Does the location need a special setup? YES NO
If yes, who will do the set up? _____
Please describe the setup:

4. Is any special equipment needed? YES NO
If yes, please circle what equipment:

podium table microphone slide projector screen TV/VCR

laptop Water for speaker other _____

Please describe the arrangements for obtaining the equipment:

5. Is the location accessible for the handicapped and elderly? YES NO
Please be sure to check the entrance to the building and the room, and the locations of telephones and rest room facilities.

Guest Speaker(s)

1. Name(s) of guest speaker(s): _____

2. Is a contract required for the services of the guest speaker? YES NO
If yes, do you want to have the contract reviewed by a local professional? YES NO

3. Does the speaker have any special needs? YES NO
(e.g., A-V equipment, podium, etc.)

If yes, how will those needs be fulfilled? _____

4. Who will meet, greet, and escort the speaker? _____
5. Who will thank speaker and present gift? _____

Food and Drinks

1. Will food and/or drinks be provided at the event? YES NO
 If yes, what food and drinks? _____
 Who is the caterer? _____
 Caterer's address _____
 Caterer's phone _____
 Is a catering contract required? YES NO

If yes, do you want to have the contract reviewed by a local professional?
 YES NO

Insurance

1. Is insurance coverage required for this event? YES NO
2. If insurance is required, you should have the contract reviewed by a local professional to determine if additional coverage is desirable.

Hospitality

1. How many greeters are needed? One Two Three Four Five Six
2. Special instructions for greeters:

3. Items needed for the event:
 Attendance List (Pre-registrations) Masking Tape
 Attendance Sign-In Sheet Nametags
 Banner Pens
 Evaluation Cards
 Other items: _____
4. Special Notes for Hospitality Committee: _____

Total event costs:

Event reserves (income - expenses):

Signature: _____

Date: _____

