10 Steps for a Successful Chapter Meeting

While IRS regulations and the MSA Chapter By-Laws require that a minimum of one chapter business meeting must be held per fiscal year, that doesn’t mean the event has to be all business!

MSA chapter meetings are a great opportunity for networking with colleagues who share many of your regionally specific concerns, sightseeing and visiting museum stores in the area (this is a great way to recruit and retain members!), as well as providing professional development via valuable educational programming. You’ll want members to leave the event feeling that they have increased their knowledge and can apply some of the ideas presented in their own museum stores.

The Chapter President is responsible for coordinating the budgeting, planning and promotion of the event. Most chapters hold this meeting in the fall, but if you are not sure what time is best for your members, consider sending out a planning survey. Many chapters now hold their meetings in conjunction with a regional tradeshow for the additional perk of product sourcing while on location.

Here are 10 steps to ensure that your chapter meeting is a success and will keep members coming back for more the next year. (Don’t overlook the bonus step at the end!)

**Step 1: Event Planning**

When planning your chapter event, follow these five steps:

1. Select a location.
2. Select the dates and time.
3. Plan the educational content with topics and speakers of interest.
4. Plan any meals/special events.
5. Prepare the event budget.

**Step 2: Location**

Ideally, your event sites should rotate among different cities in your chapter’s geographic area each year. There are no specific or required locations for any chapter event as long as the site/space is centrally located and large enough for the anticipated attendance. In addition to the educational programming, consider other attractions that might normally draw members and increase attendance such as:

- Major wholesale gift shows or regional arts and crafts shows
- New and/or remodeled museum stores
- Special interest exhibitions
Step 3: Event Timing
September and October are popular months because they are traditionally slower months for museum stores, coming after the busy summer months and before the holiday rush begins. February and March are also good options for chapters where weather is not a major travel problem.

Chapters often plan their events over a two- or three-day period that includes a Monday since many museums are closed on Monday and store managers can get away. It is also possible to set up a one-day event with refreshments and a museum tour in the morning, the business meeting, educational session, lunch at a second museum, and a possible afternoon tour of a third site or additional educational programming.

Step 4: Educational Content
The educational content of the event is more critical now than ever because many attendees, especially those traveling long distances, must document their attendance to justify their expenses and absence. Relevant programming along with a good speaker is a strong incentive to attend a chapter meeting. Program topics can be regional issues of interest, museum retail industry best practices or general retail trends. At least one museum store visit should be planned for the program. The MSA office can also be contacted for program ideas.

When selecting speakers, look for expertise, speaking experience and credibility. The speaker can be:
- An MSA member who has expertise on a specific topic of interest to the industry
- An outside speaker from a local business discussing some aspect of specialty retail sales or management
- Someone from your local university school of business speaking on management techniques
- Personnel from a local specialty store display department doing a workshop on visual merchandising
25 ideas (and beyond!) for chapter meeting education

1. POS systems
   a. Choosing
   b. Utilizing

2. Merchandising
   a. Creative Visual Merchandising Ideas
   b. Coordinating with exhibits

3. Marketing on a budget

4. Volunteers
   a. Working with volunteers
   b. Recruiting Volunteers
   c. Where to use Volunteers

5. In-store events
   a. How to plan an in-store event
   b. Working local vendors/artists

6. Open to buy
   a. 411 on open to buy

7. Fair Trade
   a. Local vendors – How to incorporate them into your store

8. How to motivate staff
   a. Incentive programs

9. Buying local / Made in America
   a. How to find vendors and incorporate into your store

10. Books and the book industry
    a. E-books
    b. Working with publishers

11. Customer Service
    a. The do’s and don’ts
    b. Is the customer always right?

12. In-store signage and graphics
    a. Working with your institution’s marketing department

13. Loss Prevention

14. E-commerce
    a. The basics of e-commerce: Where to begin!
b. Already have an e-commerce site? How to improve and grow your e-commerce sales.

15. Social media to promote store

16. Additional streams of revenue
   a. What are others doing and how to make it work for you

17. Influencing decision makers
   a. Working with your CEOs, CFOs, etc

18. Product sourcing
   a. International Product Sourcing – Working with vendors overseas
   b. Local Product Sourcing
   c. Working within your institution’s mission

19. Developing the visitor experience
   a. How to make your store the destination
   b. Stay-cations

20. Exhibition stores

21. Renovating or revitalizing your store
   a. Where to begin
   b. Peer success stories

22. Product development / wholesaling
   a. Is it for you and your institution?
   b. The Basics – Where to begin?

23. Trends
   a. Colors
   b. Spending

24. Outsourcing your store
   a. What are the facts?
   b. Who else is outsourced?

25. Inventory
   a. Management
   b. Time-savers
Step 5: Meal Planning

Expenses such as refreshments, meals, tours and transportation must be covered by a registration fee collected from the attendees and guests. Don’t forget to add in any "free lunches" for speakers that need to be covered by this fee. If you are dealing with a caterer, you will need to give them a head count in advance of the meeting and make a firm commitment for a set number of meals. Sometimes the host museum may be willing to donate a continental breakfast or provide coffee and juice. Transportation companies will want a signed contract as well as a deposit for their services. Usually the host museum will make these commitments and pay the bills in advance. Reimbursement will come from the registration fees collected.

Step 6: Budget

Your budget is the record of your projected expenses for the chapter meeting. It helps you determine what programs you can reasonably expect to offer based on your projected attendance figure. It also helps you set an appropriate registration fee.

Two to three months before the meeting, the Chapter officers should complete the Budget & Expense form (template in the chapter handbook). This will help with planning and setting registration rates.

Chapters are responsible for any Chapter Meeting related expenses.

Step 7: Setting Your Registration Fee

Chapter meetings should generate sufficient revenue through the registration fee to cover all expenses. Below are two formulas to assist you in setting your event fee and determining the number of attendees required to break even for your event.

Determine Your Meeting Registration Fee

Note: Project attendance on the conservative side and be sure to look at the history of past meeting attendance as a guide.

\[
\text{Fixed cost} + \frac{\text{Variable cost (per person) + Profit}}{\text{Expected attendance}} = \text{Registration fee}
\]

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\]

Where fixed cost = a cost that does not vary depending on attendance levels and variable cost = a unit cost which varies and is directly proportional to per person attendance levels.

Example: Your fixed costs are $700 (postage, printing, speaker fee), the variable cost per person is $25, and your expected attendance is 50 people.
Determining Your Breakeven

Breakeven is the point at which neither a gain nor loss is produced; profit is your revenue minus all costs.

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\frac{\text{Fixed costs}}{(\text{Per person}) \text{ price} - \text{Variable costs}} = \text{Number of registrants (Breakeven)}
\]

Example: Your fixed costs are $700, the per person fee is $45 and variable costs per person are $25.

\[
\frac{\$700}{\$45 - \$25} = 35 \text{ registrants}
\]

Remember to be flexible when planning your registration fee. Pricing psychology shows that fees ending with a 5, 9 or 0 (i.e., $45, $49 or $50) get better results! If your registration fee is more than what you think attendees can/will realistically pay, start cutting expenses or negotiate for items to be donated (i.e., food and beverage). To make the most use of donated items, seek out donation of items you would otherwise need to pay for yourself. For example, a donation of lunch is more valuable than a donation of pens. The meal donation lowers actual expenses.

Step 8: Meeting Promotion

Once your budget has been set and meeting date(s), place and speaker(s) are confirmed, you will want to begin promoting your event. At least two months before the event, officially notify members of the meeting by e-mailing promotional materials. Be sure to send the meeting details to MSA right away for inclusion on the MSA website.

To help you increase attendance at the meeting, request an up-to-date chapter list from the MSA office. Please note that all lists are for chapter use only and may not be altered, copied or distributed. The Chapter Secretary can request the mailing list by contacting the MSA office. You can also promote your chapter meeting via your chapter group on MyMSA.

When assembling your promotional materials, consider the following ideas:

- Include a detailed agenda and description of each educational session.
- Refer to the meeting in all communications as a “Professional Development Workshop” as opposed to a “chapter meeting.”
• Reinforce quality programming by highlighting key speakers, museum tours, special attractions and anything else of interest near the site location that may attract attendees.

• In your materials, specifically address these key elements:
  o “Here is what you will learn from this event… 1)… 2)… 3)…”
  o “How you will benefit from attending… 1)… 2)… 3)…”

• Be sure to include a registration form that can be easily faxed, e-mailed or mailed. The template is provided in the chapter handbook.

• Include all the important details of the meeting, including nearby lodging, directions to the meeting site and contact information for questions.

• Please note that the following terms may not be used in the promotional materials to describe any MSA chapter event: “Members Market” or “Museum Retail Conference” or “Expo.”

**Step 9: Conducting a Chapter Business Meeting**

Utilizing an agenda keeps the meeting on track and allows members to anticipate and participate in different aspects of the meeting. Be sure to start the meeting on time. Introduce first-time attendees and prospective members. Be confident when introducing speakers and express your appreciation for member contribution. At the conclusion, thank members for attending and close the meeting in a timely manner.

When conducting the official chapter business meeting, follow this order of business as outlined by parliamentary procedure:

1. Call to order
2. Reading, correction, approval, or disposition of minutes of previous meeting
3. Reports of officers
4. Reports of special committees
5. Unfinished business
6. New business
7. Announcements
8. Adjournment

For more information on parliamentary procedures you can consult either *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* or *Roberts Rules of Order*. You can also refer to the agenda form in the chapter handbook.

**Step 10: After the Event**

Report back to MSA within 30 days of the meeting with attendance record and meeting minutes. You can refer to the corresponding forms in the chapter handbook. These documents will also be posted on the MSA website.
Since your chapter’s leadership changes, keep a summary of the entire event including your impressions and feedback from members. This summary will assist your successor in the upcoming term with planning the next event. At the conclusion of the event, evaluate the program and make a written summary for your chapter’s permanent records.

How do you define a successful event? Consider these factors to determine if the overall professional development goals were met by the event:

- Were your participants’ needs met by the educational programming?
- Was new information provided?
- Were ideas/practices presented to be immediately implemented?
- Were formats of educational sessions well-suited to the content?
- Were participation goals met?
- Was the program a financial success?

**BONUS STEP! Event Planning Timeline**

And now for the bonus round! Follow these key elements and timeframe for successful coordination of your MSA chapter event. Remember, the Chapter President is responsible for submitting the agenda and registration form to the MSA office no later than three months prior to the meeting date. Allow plenty of time for planning, making arrangements and executing the program. Pay attention to details and communicate with all those involved on a regularly scheduled basis.

**6 to 3 Months Out**

- Determine an educational focus.
- Select a location and date for the meeting. Keep in mind holidays, local events and weather conditions.
- Assemble a planning team. Ultimately the Chapter President is responsible for the meeting and budget. Decide the key planning and implementation tasks and delegate responsibilities to other officers or event city hosts.
- Contact local hotels and visitor bureaus or visit their websites for information.
- Interview speaker(s).

**3 Months Out**

- Select speaker(s), topics and determine necessary A/V requirements.
- Refine programming and agenda.
- Chapter President submits meeting agenda and registration form to MSA office for approval.
- Request chapter member list from MSA office.

**At Least 2 Months Out**

- Inform chapter members of date and place of meeting.
8 to 6 Weeks Out
- Promote the meeting.
- Determine and arrange on-site meeting needs—room setup, signage etc.

6 to 4 Weeks Out
- Determine materials for meeting attendees. Obtain necessary rights and permission for any material you intend to reproduce.
- Refine programming and agenda as needed. Spend time planning for contingencies such as speaker cancellations and unexpected location change.
- Promote the meeting.

2 Weeks Out
- Ship meeting materials to host site if necessary. Track and confirm acceptance and location of materials.
- Prepare name badges for meeting attendees.
- Confirm details with volunteers, meeting hosts, service providers (caterers, bus companies, etc.) and speaker(s).

Final Week
- Verify number of members attending and notify meeting place(s) as needed.
- Submit catering/meal information if required.
- Check inventory of materials shipped to host site.
- Hold a pre-meeting with volunteers. Review last minute changes to agenda and on-site procedures if necessary.
- Check weather reports for arrival delays.

At Event Site
- Set up meeting area(s) as needed.
- Check on room, meal and equipment arrangements prior to meeting.
- Meet and great speaker(s) and guests.
- Staff the registration area.
- HAVE A GREAT EVENT!

Within 30 Days After Event
- Clean up and return any borrowed materials.
- Chapter Secretary submits business meeting minutes and attendance forms to MSA office.
- Send out thank you notes to host facilities and speaker(s).
- Evaluate the program and make a written report for chapter’s records.