



ENGAGE

A Guide to Alumni Chapter Events

Table of Contents

What it Means to ENGAGE.....	3
Importance of Events.....	3
Purpose and Type.....	4
Coordination.....	4
Scheduling.....	5
Budget.....	6
Communications.....	7
Messaging.....	7
Frequency.....	8
Registration and Cost.....	8
Event Planning Timeline and Checklist.....	9

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What it Means to ENGAGE

Engage: to “occupy, attract, or involve” and “participate or become involved in” and events are one mechanism that aides in that effort.

An engaged, supportive alumni network is crucial:

- To the success of collegiate and alumni chapters.
- As a component of a positive fraternal experience.
- To the fulfillment of the mission of Sigma Nu.

Events play an important part in maintaining an active and engaged alumni base. A varied events program should appeal to a broad range of alumni, helping to strengthen their connection to the collegiate and alumni chapters, the Fraternity, and fellow alumni. **The purpose of this resource is to provide guidance on how to plan, execute, and replicate, an effective and enjoyable event for Sigma Nu alumni.**

Importance of Events

Today, people are connected more than ever through numerous digital platforms; however, arguments could be made that we are more detached, in terms of meaningful, in-person interaction. Alumni entities, such as alumni chapters and alumni clubs, play a vital role to the ongoing development of relationships between alumni, the collegiate brothers, and the Fraternity through the planning and hosting of events.

Putting together a successful event is simple but does require attention. Consider these five components for every event.

1. Purpose and Type
2. Coordination
3. Scheduling
4. Budget
5. Communications



Purpose and Type

When the decision has been made to host an event, the first thing to be determined is why.

- Why host that event?
- What purpose does it serve?

The answers to these questions are a critical component to the likely success or failure of the event because these answers will compel alumni to attend, or not.

Alumni are not likely to attend an event where the purpose is to stand around and talk with people they do not know. However, if they understand the purpose of the event and see personal value in the event, then the probability of their attendance is notably higher. That is not to say that a networking event will not be attended, or that "homecoming" is too generic and, therefore, not worth doing. The real question is, "*What do the alumni get out of coming to that specific event?*"

Complementing the purpose of an event is the type of event to be held. Type can have multiple meanings, in the context of an event:

- Time of year (e.g., annual, quarterly, holidays, etc.)
- Scale (e.g., class reunion, alumni only, alumni and families, etc.)
- Chapter focused (e.g., initiation, career development for upperclassmen, etc.)

The importance of identifying an event "type" is to help focus the planning of the event. An annual alumni dedication, at homecoming, is significantly different than a career advice panel of alumni focused of graduating seniors.

Coordination

Possibly the hardest part of hosting an alumni event is coordinating all the moving parts. Why? Because to do it well, may require more than one person, and that is not always easy to come by. That said, how many people need to be involved in planning an event is fluid – planning a class reunion probably does not require the same number of planners as a major chapter anniversary.

For larger, formal events a three-person event planning committee/team should suffice:

- Site Coordinator – Venue, food & beverage, entertainment
- Communication Coordinator – Event marketing and promotion, registration process
- Budget Coordinator – Manage all transaction with vendors and collection of registration fees, if needed

This committee / team might reach out to individual alumni for assistance with specific tasks in the planning process. For example, asking notable chapter/area alumni to serve as a member of the host committee, or requesting a specific alumnus to emcee the event.

Event Planning Team

- Site Coordinator
- Communication Coordinator
- Budget Coordinator

Scheduling

In a perfect world, planning for an event should begin about one year in advance. That timeframe can change depending on the scale / size of the event, though.

- Major Chapter Anniversary – At least one year prior to the event
- Candidate Class Reunion – 8-10 months prior to the event
- Annual event (e.g., homecoming) – 6-8 months in advance if it is the inaugural event; 4-6 months in advance otherwise
- Local event in conjunction with a collegiate chapter (e.g., Initiation) – 3-4 months, though it could vary depending on how much of the planning the collegiate chapter is doing
- Quarterly luncheon with a guest speaker – 8-10 months in advance of the inaugural event; 4 months in advance otherwise
- Monthly Happy Hour – 3-4 months in advance of the inaugural event, 2 months in advance otherwise

In reviewing these timeframes, you may be asking, “Why would it take so long?” First, it is not that the actual work to plan an event takes that long, but time does not stop when planning an event. You must allow yourself plenty of time to account for delays / postponements and procrastination. Moreover, if your event requires other services such as caterers, a venue, or a guest speaker / entertainment, then you do not know how long it will take to get those things finalized. Point is, give yourself enough time for the planning process because nothing kills an event like not paying attention to the details.

Second, these timeframes consider advance notice communications. If your target audience does not have adequate notice, then they are not going to attend.

The section on [Communications](#) will cover this issue more in-depth, but an important aspect in scheduling is announcing your event to likely attendees. Generally, it is important **to announce your event date at least 90 days prior to the event**. For most alumni, their calendars will “fill up” so advance notice is a crucial part to getting on their calendars, even if their attendance is only tentative.

The last component to scheduling is the event itself. Different types of events need different types of event schedules. If the event is connected to homecoming and the only thing being scheduled as “the event” is tours of the chapter house, then there is not any real value to a general alumnus. However, if there are multiple components from which an alumnus perceives value, then the probability of their attendance will increase. For example, an opportunity to sit-in at the annual meeting of the alumni chapter, a presentation on the state of the chapter, and a meal are all components that add value to the event.

Budget

There are a lot of events that can be done with little to no cost to an alumni chapter or club and, most of the time, that is the way to go. For major events, though – large reunions, major chapter anniversaries, etc. – it will be important to identify and set a budget for the event.

Most alumni chapters and clubs do not have a lot of excess cash lying around, so it is reasonable to expect attendees to pay a fee that covers their costs. The important factor is to not overcharge for the experience / value being provided.

For example, an alumni chapter wishes to host an alumni event at the chapter house, during homecoming. This event may be planned to include:

- Catered lunch (\$25 per person),
- Annual meeting of the alumni chapter,
- Presentation on the state of the chapter,
- Group ticket for all attendees to the football game (\$25 per person).

In this instance, it is reasonable to charge each attendee \$50-\$60 per person. The attendees are receiving direct value for their money through the meal and game ticket(s), and they receive additional value through the opportunity to attend the alumni chapter's annual meeting, the state of the chapter presentation, and opportunities to reconnect and network with other alumni.

Again, type and scale of the event will impact the budget but, generally, the following items should be considered when developing the event budget:

- Venue
- Food and beverage
- Entertainment (DJ, keynote speaker, athletic tickets, etc.)
- Gifts / Awards / Guest favors
- Printed materials (program, signage, etc.)
- Audio / Visual (projectors, mics, speakers, etc.)
- Rental equipment and Décor (chairs, tables, podiums, decorations, etc.)
- Communications (email sends, postage for mailing invitations, etc.)

For any event that necessitates a budget, it is important that the budget be established, and agreed upon, prior to announcing the event. Having the budget prepared prior to announcement ensures that any cost needed to be paid by attendees is accurate.

A basic budget template is available from the Fraternity: [Event Planning Budget](#).

Event Budget Expense Items

- Venue
- Food and Beverage
- Entertainment
- Gifts / Awards / Guest Favors
- Printed Materials
- Audio / Visual
- Rental Equipment and Décor
- Communications

A basic budget template to track these expenses and event revenues is available from the Fraternity: [Event Planning Budget](#).

Communications

It is important to have a communication plan for each event an alumni chapter plans to host. Remember, the Fraternity is a point of pride for most alumni and an opportunity to reconnect with chapter brothers is likely to interest them, but it may not be a top priority in their daily lives anymore. To that end, they may pencil the event into their calendar, but it is likely that they will wait until closer to the event date to decide to go or not. A thoughtful series of “reminders” about the event will help to keep it “front of mind,” which can be helpful when they are deciding which event opportunities they will attend.

An example of an event communication plan may include:

- Six emails
- Six social media posts
- A general announcement in the annual newsletter that precedes the event
- A follow up story in the annual newsletter that follows the event, highlighting the event

One thing to note, the example plan above does not include the mailing of a hard copy invitation / announcement. Our world today involves less communication via hard copy; however, there is still a contingent of alumni who prefer this method of communication or who do not utilize digital communication. The inclusion of mailing an invitation / announcement should not be dismissed. Hard copy invitations offer a sense of formality, which can make them beneficial for large scale, formal events, such as chapter anniversaries. As mentioned, they can also be beneficial to reaching a group of alumni who are not using digital communication. These factors – scale and type of event – as well as budgetary factors, should be considered when deciding the use of hard copy invitations.

Messaging

In developing the communication plan, a vital component is the event’s purpose – Why an alumnus should attend and what value the event will have for them. This information is the primary “selling point;” therefore, it needs to be included in every piece of the communication plan.

Additionally, event communications should identify the type of event they are being invited to attend:

- Brothers only – Ritual ceremonies, alumni chapter meeting, or any event that includes use of *The Ritual*.
- Guests / Family welcome – chapter anniversary celebration, alumni tailgates, alumni reunions, etc.

Other information that needs to be included in the messaging:

- Who is invited (alumni and guests, brothers only, candidate classes from the 1990's, etc.)?
- When the event is taking place.
- Where the event is taking place.
- Dress/Attire (Casual, Business Casual, Coat and Tie, Formal)
- Cost, if applicable.

Frequency

In context to the example communication plan included above, the following schedule is a guide to how frequently event communications could be sent.

- Save the Date Announcement – minimum of 8 weeks prior to the event (email)
- First reminder – 6 weeks prior to the event (email)
- Social media promotion #1 – 5 weeks prior to the event
- Second reminder – 4 weeks prior to the event (email)
- Social media promotion #2 – 3 weeks prior to the event
- Third reminder – 3 weeks prior to the event (email)
- Social media promotion #3 – 2 weeks prior to the event
- Fourth reminder – 2 weeks prior to the event (email)
- Social media promotion #4 – 1 week prior to the event
- Fifth reminder – 1 week prior to the event (email)

Registration and Cost

Having a record of attendees for every alumni chapter event is important; therefore, it is strongly encouraged that alumni chapters utilize some form of a registration process. A registration process does not need to be complicated or fancy, but it does need to collect specific information:

- Attendees' full name
- Mailing address (if applicable)
- Email address
- Phone number
- Chapter designation and badge number
- Guest(s) name(s)(if applicable)

[Eventbrite](#) is an online registration service that offers a wide range of services including registration data collection, payment processing, social media integration, and more. Facebook also offer a simple RSVP process through their Events.

Event Planning Timeline and Checklist

12 Months Prior to Event

- Event purpose established
- Coordination team set
- Event type (brothers only / guests welcome)
- Preferred date(s)
- Preferred venues list

9 Months Prior to Event

- Event budget finalized / set
- Communication plan under development
- Event program outlined

6 Months Prior to Event

- Venue confirmed
- Catering review begins
- Speaker / Entertainment confirmed
- Registration process review

3 Months Prior to Event

- Communication plan finalized
- Registration process finalized
- Event program confirmed
- Audio / Visual needs identified
- Save the Date announcement sent

2 Months Prior to Event

- Social media promotions begin
- First Invite / Reminder sent (6 weeks out)
- Registration opens
- Catering booked and menu selection
- Audio / Visual booked

1 Month Prior to Event

- Second Invite / Reminder sent (4 weeks out)
- Social media promotions continue
- Third Invite / Reminder sent (3 weeks out)
- Event program adjustments (if needed)
- Fourth Invite / Reminder sent (2 weeks out)
- Other Needs: nametags, decorations, etc.

1 Week Prior to Event

- Fifth Invite / Reminder sent
- Final social media promotion posted
- Catering - final food count provided
- Confirm: menu, A/V, setup time at venue

Post Event

- Thank You email sent to attendees (24-48 hours after event)
- Highlights story for alumni newsletter and General Fraternity (include attendee list to General Fraternity)
- Attendee list sent to General Fraternity (headquarters@sigmanu.org)



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**EXCELLING
WITH HONOR**

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