

G. Club Program and Events

Plan an annual program planning event in late spring to brainstorm ideas for the next fiscal year. Such a plan serves to focus energy of the volunteers on thoughtful planning and thorough execution, and minimizes the chance for less popular or ill-prepared events that can cause volunteer “burnout.” Publicize this event broadly using your newsletter, email list, web site and phone calls. Keep the following suggestions in mind when planning this event.

- Find a location that is friendly, convenient to get to
- Offer light refreshments (i.e., pizza, sandwiches and beverages)
- Encourage all to play a role in an event or program. Include a list of previously planned events
- Build excitement with prizes for ideas or willingness to help with an event
- Keep an eye out for newcomers and make them feel welcomed.
- Keep an open mind for new ideas
- Prepare handouts with planning notes and job descriptions
- Emphasize team work so events don't look too overwhelming to plan
- Identify a chair or co-chairs for each event, and team experienced volunteers with the less experienced.

WHEN PLANNING CLUB ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

MIT Club events provide opportunities for MIT alumni, their friends and families to connect with each other, learn about interesting subjects, and show support of the Institute. Successful Club events will reflect the interests of Club constituents (members and/or all alumni in the area); the general character of the Club's surrounding city or geographic area, and the careers of Club members. Here are some tips to remember when planning your events:

- Establish purpose and goal of program
- Provide an equal proportion or combination of social, educational, civic, professional, cultural, newly admitted students, family, young alumni, and MIT-affiliated events
- Make sure that you provide top quality events instead of many events.
- Analyze the best time of year, time and day of week, and location of events. Rotate events to different parts of your Club area
- Study your membership interests and demographics of your alumni at large. Offer programs your membership is interested in
- Research local community events and activities to sponsor
- Review the strengths and weaknesses of previous year's programs

Remember MIT traditional events such as the summer picnic event for students including the incoming freshman class, holiday gathering, faculty event with admitted students, etc.

Inform your Club constituents about your upcoming schedule of events. You don't need to lock in the specific dates but a general idea of the time of year or month would suffice. Post it on your website, announce it in your newsletter and send it out on your listserv. An annual schedule of events provides a coordinated schedule that shows a wide and balanced variety of events. It also alerts the Club's constituency to the overall schedule, allows for long-range planning, and provides incentive for alumni not only to become interested and active in the Club's annual activities, but excited to become members!

EVENT PLANNING TIPS

Decide on the date, time, place and price of your event early—Depending on the event, two to four months would not be unusual. Sometimes it takes longer find an appropriate and available location. Please allow enough time for marketing and publicize your event at least twice. Consider carefully event costs and establish appropriate pricing. (see Pricing Guidelines, for additional help). If your event involves a speaker, send your request to the Association Alumni Education group (see Appendix for list of Association staff) no later than three months prior to the desired date.

Publicize it—Whatever purpose or goal you set for your event, it is important that it reaches maximum participation and breaks even. Here are some suggestions on how to market your event.

- Send an email Save the Date immediately to the Club area's email list
- Regularly Update your website as details get confirmed
- Depending on the nature of the event, consider inviting other university/college Clubs or the local community
- If your speaker is a recognized leader in his/her field or is involved in a current topic of national or world importance, send notice of the event to the local papers
- Always include your speaker's biographical details and picture in your notices and announcements.
- Arrange for press coverage at the event

Determine the type of event announcement to send—There are various options for you to consider depending on the budget and the scope of the event.

- Self-Mailer with a Reply Card
- Regular Sized Postcard
- Large Postcard
- Regular Invitation with RSVP card and return envelope

Figure out how much each of the options would cost to design and print. Don't forget to include the cost of postage. First class postage gets your mailing to the recipients sooner but non profit bulk rate is cheaper. Are you mailing to the whole population or do you want to mail to a selected population only (I.e. members only)? Do you want to mail to only those who do not have email addresses? Use the "Lists and Labels" service on the Infinite Connection to get contact information for all alumni in your area or ask your AAO to obtain them for you.

Establish a back-planning calendar—Begin from the date of the event and reverse it chronologically. Allocate the appropriate amount of time for each step. Sticking to the deadline will keep you from being overwhelmed at the last minute and allow you time to actually enjoy the experience. A sample is provided below.

Date of Event

Final count due to venue	3-5 days prior to event date
RSVP deadline	5-7 days prior to final count due date
Reminder email for RSVPs	7 days prior to RSVP deadline
Invitation Receipt Date	4 weeks prior to RSVP deadline
Mail date (first class)	1 week prior desired receipt date to alumni
Mail date (non profit, bulk rate)	2 weeks prior to desired receipt date
Printing/mailing	1 week prior to mailing
Information gathering	1-2 weeks prior to date to the printer
<i>(speaker and location selection/negotiations, draft notice)</i>	

In summary allow yourself 10-14 weeks prior to event date to do all the necessary steps for a successful event.

CREATING YOUR EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT

The most important thing to remember about your event announcement is that it should be used to sell your event! Make it attractive so people are inclined to open it. This is your only chance to make your event attractive to prospective attendees. Be creative but keep it simple and easy to read. Be careful about using too many fonts and graphics that distract the interest of the recipient from the purpose of the mailing.

Stress the event's benefits. Is it educational, informational and/or thought-provoking? Is it purely a chance to meet and mingle with other MIT-affiliated people? If the location is of special significance locally and or nationally, use that as an added attraction. Think of your audience—why would the event be of interest to a young or a more senior alum? Is the event aimed at families or individuals? Is the topic of national or local significance? What about the timing? Is it appropriate for the time of the year, the state of the economy or the world?

The following information should be in EVERY announcement:

TITLE—Use a heading that distinguishes this mailing from other mailings

WHAT—A short description of the event and its benefits.

WHERE—Name and address of the location including specific meeting room if applicable. Directions would be helpful if there is enough space. A web address will also be helpful.

PRICE—Always list member and non-member prices. Include pricing for guests of members. See Pricing Guidelines for more information

RSVP—Contact information of person taking the RSVPs and deadline for all reservations.

SMARTTRANS LINK—Encourage pre-registration through SmarTrans™

COUPON—When possible, combine the RSVP with a reply coupon requesting dues or include link to your Membership Dues page

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION—Name and contact information of person who can answer or provide more information regarding event.

MIT BRANDING—the downloadable MIT logos, seals and instructions for their use are available on: <http://web.mit.edu/graphicidentity/index.html>

Send your event announcement to the Club newsletter editor and your webmaster to be uploaded onto your web site. Time your web announcement to go live on the same date the printed piece arrives in people's mailboxes. This is especially important in cases where you expect sold-out attendance and events with a maximum number of spaces and registration is accepted on a first come first served basis.

Ask the event contact person, to consider changing his/her personal answering machine greeting to provide an event date or details to minimize the number of returned calls they may have to make. A sample greeting would be: "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 Club answering machine that gives up-to-date information about Club events and record reservations.

LOCATION

Be creative when selecting a location for your event. Consider using a location that is not typically accessible to the general public. People enjoy going somewhere they haven't been before or where they normally wouldn't or couldn't go on their own. Consider using a facility which already has entertainment or some other value added to it such as a famous winery, museum, aquarium, performing arts facility, or culinary academy. Check to see if any of your members belong to private Clubs or have access through their work to any unique facilities. Take advantage of your nonprofit, educational service group status to open some doors. Keep track of suitable, interesting sites/venues for future use.

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 (i.e. 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)
- Who is responsible for set-up and clean-up
- Adequate area available for registration table and chairs
- Flowers/decorations
- Adequate parking; self or valet parking and charge (possible subsidy)
- Is security needed; charge
- Coat check; charge
- Availability of AV 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)
- Does the location have a liquor license?
- Location and accessibility of bathrooms
- Location of handicap access

For some locations other than hotels, clubs, 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 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

The primary objective of an event is to provide the Club members with an enjoyable and valuable experience. Ideally, however, events should generate some surplus to help defray mailing costs and other expenses, planned and unplanned. A well-planned event should never show a loss unless they are unique circumstances (i.e. unusually stormy weather). When setting the price for an event, develop a rough budget of expected income and expenses (See the following 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. Since it is difficult to predict turnout for specific event, plan your event so all costs can be adjusted to match actual turnout.
- Beware of large fixed costs (i.e. renting a room, etc) and be wary of signing binding contracts. Look for a corporate or public facility that does not cost you anything.
- Include cost room rental, cleanup fees, copies, postage, or speaker gift.
- Food is essential to the success of some events. However, there have been many successful events without food. Consider hors d'oeuvres, or dessert and coffee, instead of a full-service meal.
- Charge a significant price differential for non-members—in the 25-50% or \$5-10 range depending on the event cost and type. If members pay \$10, non-members should pay 12:50-\$15.00. There are, of course, obvious exceptions to this rule. For a symphony event where the basic cost is \$45 a person, it wouldn't be prudent to charge non-members an additional \$20. The maximum differential for non-members should be about \$10. Guests should pay the same as their hosts.
- Remember that you are providing something of real value to the attendees. Some Clubs set a minimum price of \$5 or \$10—a way to turn a no or low-cost event into a “money-maker” to help subsidize other events. Even free events have a mailing cost. A minimum price also adds perceived value to the event.

CATERING AND BAR SERVICE

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, linen and china charges. **Get a final detailed agreement in writing.**

FOOD CHOICES

Hors d'oeuvres are a good choice if you want a simple reception style of event. It is also the best option if you want attendees to network with each other. Sometimes, it is the only option if the facility 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 cost as much as a seated meal. 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 involve some time standing in line; therefore make sure that there is an adequate number of serving stations so 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. Estimate 20 minutes to serve and consume one course. For an event with a guest speaker, think of pre-setting the salad and the dessert. This cuts down on the servers coming in and out of the dining area and distracting the program.

Bar service

Decide if 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 alumni who do not drink will not be subsidizing the cost 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 (i.e. cocktails before dinner, bar open after dinner charge, 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, waters, 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 (coffee for evening events.)

MUSIC

Music can be a nice addition to an event. The type of music might be a pianist, a string quartet, a disc jockey, a square dance caller, a big band orchestra, a rock group, or a jazz band. High school and college music departments are often excellent sources of good affordable music as well as town/city arts councils that may offer contact assistance. Most musicians require an advance deposit and full payment on the day of the performance.

MAXIMIZING PARTICIPATION

Phone calling is the best 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. Depending on the program, consider inviting your local community or other Universities alumni in the area.

What you do at an event can make people want to continue to come to other Club events. Make sure to designate a "hospitality" committee or person to greet new members and introduce them to others at the event to make them feel more welcome. Some groups have a "singles hour" or a "MIT10 hour" during the first hour of an event. This allows this group a chance to mingle and get them to create new friendships and networking contacts.

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.

DURING THE EVENT

Have a registration table at the entrance to the event. Have someone welcome attendees as they arrive, ask them to sign in, confirm their payment information if applicable. For walk-ins, make sure to take all of their contact information. Have membership information/forms available to recruit new members and volunteers. Make sure the event has an MIT feel. Ask your AAO to send you MIT nametags, banners and posters.

Provide nametags. A special colored dot or other mark on the tag can distinguish newcomers to the Club to alert members to make a special effort to make them feel welcome and introduce them around.

If you are hosting a speaker, consider having a headtable speaker and make sure all seats are filled. This table should have a reserved sign on it. Most Club 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 provided by the Association, plus informal comments to relate the speaker or topic to the group are better than an exhaustive narrative or 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 Club. Most Clubs present a gift or token of appreciation. Introduce Association/MIT staff if they are present and offer them an opportunity to speak.

Take pictures for the newsletter and your website. Send copies to your AAO for possible use on Association publications.

Always publicly acknowledge your volunteers at events. Make sure to prominently publicize future activities.

AFTER THE EVENT

Enter all walk-ins into your SmarTrans™ registration form or send a final list of attendees to your AAO. Send the Treasurer all of the checks, expense invoices/receipts, and note the following information:

- Name of Event
- Number of attendees
- 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 cash to the "MIT Club of _____." Do NOT offset your out-of-pocket expenses with cash receipts—the Club 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. One of your or the Association's future activities may depend upon their goodwill. (See Sample Thank You Letter to Faculty Speakers at the end of this section).

Keep details for your report to the Board meeting and for your debrief with your committee—event name, number of attendees, number of first-time attendees, how the speaker was received what worked, what didn't work, what you might do differently the next time. Providing the leadership with the details as you go will help them to compile data at the end of the year for annual reporting. If your speaker was facilitated by the Alumni Education group, a response to the evaluation form is required. Good, consistent planning and evaluation will result in top-quality, successful events time and time again.

If you are having consistent attendance problems, consider the types and suitability of events you are offering. You might survey your members about their interests. Think again about the activities you are offering. Do they appeal to couples? Do you have lots of families or singles in your group? Are all events held in one part of your area? Are your programs too expensive? Are your invitations arriving three weeks in advance of your programs, so alumni are receiving adequate notice? Brainstorming with your Board might give you new ideas.

MIT CLUB PROGRAM IDEAS

There are many popular programs Clubs sponsor on an annual basis. These programs provide the framework for the Club's vitality and future. Be sure to plan programs that cater to your Club members' interests, backgrounds and your geographic location. Incorporate into your annual program some of the Educational Council and Parent Connector Activities as listed below:

CLUBS EDUCATIONAL COUNCIL & PARENT CONNECTOR ACTIVITIES

Admitted Student Reception (Spring)—A local reception for admitted students, best planned for the spring break period, which would ideally bring together admitted students and their parents, current students and their parents, and local alumni. Sites for these events must be set by the end of January each year, as the Educational Council Office sends out an invitation to all admitted students and current students making it known to them that a reception will be held in their hometown.

Summer Send Off Event (Summer)—A local event for freshman students, best planned for July or August, which would bring together the new class of undergraduate students and their parents, current students and their parents, and local alumni. Generally, these functions are set in a more casual location, and may be in a picnic or barbeque format. Contact your local Parent Connector to collaborate on this event.

Holiday Reception (December)—Held during the December holiday period. Unlike past years, we no longer invite all applicants to these meetings, these meetings are limited to early action admitted students and their parents (along with current students, parents and alumni).

All three Educational Council events have some logistical details in common: set in an easy to access location (a hotel, function site, or corporate conference room, although most Admitted Student Receptions are held at the homes of Educational Counselors), refreshments, a brief program with a speaker, and plenty of opportunity for the admitted or prospective students to meet and talk to current students and alumni.

Clubs must coordinate the admitted student reception, as well as the holiday reception, with the local Educational Council group and/or the Educational Council office. Summer meetings should be coordinated with the Alumni Office and/or in coordination with your local Parent Connector.

If you need additional information about planning an event with the Educational Council, please contact Michelle Tom at 617-252- 1529 or mtom@mit.edu, or contact your AAO.

OTHER EVENT SUGGESTIONS

Continuing Education Programs

A specific reason some alumni join a local MIT Club is to maintain the intellectual stimulation that they experienced while at MIT. Continuing education programs that include faculty speakers (see Alumni Education for more information), local alumni corporate leaders or entrepreneurs, or MIT Senior Administrators, are a great way to continue the “drink from the fire hose.” Many Clubs have planned seminar series, plant tours, and expert panel discussions.

Arts & Entertainments Events

Museum tours, theatre performances, concerts, and winery tours are events many Clubs have implemented successfully. Look for group discounted tickets for the local theatre, music or comedy shows. Museums sometimes offer specially arranged tours and group rate discounts. Some Clubs sponsor a “Monthly Dinner Series,” where members meet at the restaurant of the month. Monday or Tuesday nights give you the opportunity to negotiate a discounted price with the restaurant selected.

Career Conferences, Forums and Breakfasts

Of significant interest for most people is career development and growth. Career forums reach across a wide spectrum of ages and stages because the job market remains volatile and ever changing. Career events can focus on the basics such as resume building, networking, interviewing, and negotiations; or can turn to broader subjects such as career shifting, entrepreneurial ventures, or a particular field and its job market. Additional information about planning a career event is available from the Association.

Community Projects

With hundreds of thousands of local and national charities in the US, there often are many opportunities to gather a group of alumni to “give back” to the community or participate in a cause while providing a social environment. Find out about the annual events in your community, or develop your own ideas based on Club members’ interests. Clubs have participated in events such as the “Walk for Hunger” or “Habitat for Humanity.” Some Clubs use this opportunity to promote the MIT name in their communities by creating MIT type of community projects. For example, building handicapped ramps around the city, or sponsoring a Chess competition to raise funds for a certain project. Many Clubs have also held their own fundraising events to raise money for the Club’s MIT Scholarship Fund.

Entrepreneurial Events

The entrepreneurial spirit of MIT continues among its alumni, who have a remarkable record for initiating start-up companies. If there is a local MIT Enterprise Forum™ chapter in your area, work with that group to co-sponsor events. Many new or well-situated entrepreneurs enjoy the opportunity to meet together and talk about patents, business plans and marketing. There are some Clubs that provide excellent models for such activities as roundtable discussions, networking breakfasts and instructional presentations on protecting intellectual property and finding venture capital.

Family Outings

There is most certainly a group of alumni, often in the classes from 1980s and the 1990s who have young children. It is strongly suggested that each Club study their area’s demographics and develop events specifically for this audience. Picnics, hikes, low-key bike rides, apple picking, pumpkin carving, children’s museum trips, zoo tours, and other family fun outings are suggested.

IVY+ Events

Many MIT Clubs plan events with the Ivy League and Stanford alumni in the area. In many major cities, there is an active IVY+ chapter or IVY+ singles program. Clubs are also encouraged to plan events in cooperation with local colleges and alumni Clubs from other institutions.

Sports

Popular among MIT undergrads, sporting events continue to provide a healthy outlet for Alumni Clubs. Such events that are popular are: sailing, hiking, biking, volleyball, rollerblading, tennis tournaments, golf outings, recreational swimming, mountain climbing and more. Sporting events are usually easy to organize and are inexpensive, and will appeal to a wide variety of alumni. Most alumni follow the New England major league sports teams and some Clubs organize Red Sox or Celtics sports outings.

Student Connections

Events that welcome newly admitted students or offer the opportunity for alumni to meet with current students are enjoyed by the alumni and students alike. You can plan receptions and gatherings not only for students and alumni, but also for the parents of students who would appreciate the local MIT connections. The Parents Association can offer suggestions for events. In addition, the Club should publicize the IAP Externship program, when alumni can host student externs during the month of January.

MIT10 Events

It is vital that a Club captures the interest of the MIT10 and maintain their participation as the years pass. MIT10 events can be simple social gatherings at local pubs, cybercafés, or restaurants. In addition, events

that focus on younger alumni issues, such as topics like, "Buying Your First House," "Career Development" and "Singles Events" have proven popular. In many cities, alumni work together with groups from Ivy League institutions and Stanford to plan such events and programs.

The MIT Alumni Association, in conjunction with clubs, now holds an annual Toast to IAP event each January in an effort to keep recent graduates connected to the Spirit of IAP. Clubs host events regionally, and the MITAA provides invitations as well as an "event box" of event supplies for the program coordinators. For more information on how to participate in a Toast to IAP event, please contact your Alumni Affairs Officer.