

**Guidance on Opportunities:
Inclusion & Engagement
September 2017**

In the previous guidance, we discussed planning the League calendar with a focus on our core programmatic work. This month, we'd like to look beyond the content of the programs to think about the mechanics of the events with a special focus on inclusion and engagement.

While we all strive to reach the goal of engaging our larger community with our outreach and programmatic work, we are not always successful. Like all of what we do, we need to have intentionality in our planning to achieve this goal. Below are some questions to help aid in that process. These questions may seem simplistic, but when taken together, they create a welcoming atmosphere that will attract individuals and keep them coming back.

Meeting venue and format

- Where do we hold our meetings? Are the venues easily accessible for people with disabilities? Are they comfortable for people of different backgrounds or religions? What is the commuting distance for different neighborhoods or communities?
- When are the meetings being held? Are there conflicts with religious or cultural holidays? Is the time of day or day of the week that we hold the meeting a limiting factor to participation?
- What is the cost to participate? Are there sliding scale options or suggested donations vs. a fixed price?

Before the meeting

- What kind of outreach have we done? Is the marketing welcoming and does it use inclusive language?
- Have we talked with other community organizations to make a personal connection? Have we done any targeted marketing?
- Have we used multiple "channels" to advertise or publicize the event?

At the meeting

- Is the room setup welcoming?
- Is there a greeter? Are members reaching out to individuals that they don't already know?
- Is there a time for introductions?
- Are there opportunities equitable participation (i.e., one individual or group doesn't dominate)? Are we creating a safe space for differing opinions and ideas?
- If there is food, does it reflect varied religious and dietary preferences?

A lot of event organisers and advertisers worry about coming off as exploitative or pandering if they contact different organisations directly to tell them about their event, or create other more targeted marketing. This is really a misunderstanding of the issue at hand – if your event really has something to offer, then you have to tell people about it.

<https://blog.swapcard.com/en/event-diversity/>

- Are we using inclusive language in presentations and remarks? How do we plan to discourage or interrupt prejudiced and/or derogatory language?
- Do the speakers or presenters represent our community?
- What opportunities for engagement are we offering?

According to a 2008 ASAE publication about its membership (cited [here](#)), the most common methods of volunteer recruitment:

14.2 percent Invited through a local chapter
13.4 percent Recruited at a meeting
13.3 percent Asked by another volunteer

After the meeting

- How will we evaluate the success of the event?
- What changes or adjustments might we make for the future?
- What follow up will we do with participants, especially those who are new to the organization? How will we engage them in future League events or programs?

Shawna Suckow, founder of the Senior Planners Industry Network, discussed how to design elements of your conference [event] to ensure that your most vulnerable attendees—first timers, introverts, and newcomers—feel welcome and have a terrific experience.

“This is another form of diversity and inclusion,” she said.

Suckow brought up the idea of “tribes,” and the fact that it is human nature to gravitate toward someone you know.

“How do we encourage tribes, and how do we disrupt tribes so [attendees] feel included and meet new people?” she asked.

Excerpted from *Welcome, Everyone: How to Make Your Meetings More Inclusive*; blog by Samantha Whitehorse (August 2016)

Win-Win Scenario

According to the Denver Foundation, inclusiveness can help nonprofits be more effective and better serve their communities. From their [website](#):

Nonprofits are in the business of making their communities healthier, stronger, and more enriching for all members. Whether they are involved in health care, the arts, civil rights, religious activities, or any other worthwhile charitable cause, nonprofits influence the quality of life for people in the communities they serve.

People, by their very nature, experience many aspects of life, from health care to the arts, differently. One of the primary reasons that people experience life differently is because they have different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, when developing their programs and services, nonprofit organizations must take these cultural backgrounds and experiences into consideration in order to have a positive influence on the communities they serve.

Resources:

- AAUW Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit, which inspired many of the questions included above. <http://www.aauw.org/resource/creating-inclusive-organizations/>
- MLD Event Planning Checklist <https://associationsnow.com/2016/02/leadership-ladder-step-step/>