

Tip Sheet: Planning and Hosting an Effective Event

There is an art to being a great host—to keeping your guests happy and creating conditions that make them want to come back again and again. If an event is planned and executed effectively, guests will understand where they are and why, and will be given ample opportunity to engage in the chapter more deeply. When you plan an event, think about what the experience of an attendee will be from the moment they arrive. Think about why they attend, what they came looking for and what they want to leave with.

This is not a tip sheet about how to write a budget or get [event insurance](#). This sheet is about how to welcome people in, capture their enthusiasm, and turn them into regular event attendees and volunteers.

Purpose:

1. **Know why you are doing this:** Will this event inspire members? Inspire new people to get involved? Will it help members of Slow Food and members of your community make a food system that is better for people, and better for the environment? Think about how it reflects the work your chapter does (and then make sure you convey that to event attendees).
2. **Goals:** What are the 2-5 outcomes that you seek to achieve? (Make them measurable so that you can use them to evaluate after the event).

Plan:

3. **Cost:** Once you know the scale and scope of the event, carefully plan how much it will cost to run it, and how much you can anticipate bringing in from an entry fee. When setting an admission fee, do your best to keep the price low – high prices are a big barrier to getting new people involved. Make sure that there are several events a year that are free to attend, because those are the events that will bring people in.
4. **Picking a location:** Try to vary your locations to reach different parts of your town/city.
5. **Choose the right room:** Err on the side of small – you want the room to feel full and lively, and you definitely don't want it to feel empty. If you'll be seated, put in fewer chairs than you think you will need, with more chairs nearby for when the crowds grow.

6. **Outreach:**

- a. Let your mailing list know via Facebook, emails, web site, twitter. Send them a reminder email the week before, and another reminder email the day before. On average, only 20-30% of people open an email, so send early and often.
- b. Publicity is important for reaching new audiences. We'll have another Tip Sheet on Media & PR soon.

Welcome people in:

7. **Have a clear check-in point.** Don't make guests wait in line; arrange for volunteers to handle the opening rush. Signs help, as do plenty of greeters.
8. **Give everyone a nametag.** Nametags have been proven to facilitate conversation and increase intimacy at gatherings. Chapter leaders should indicate themselves so people know who to approach with questions.
9. **Introduce yourselves.** Let people know where they are and who their host is (i.e. the local, *volunteer-run* Slow Food chapter that is part of a national non-profit).
 - a. Let them know how this event fits the mission of your chapter; be specific.
 - b. If it is a fundraiser, let them know what event proceeds (if any) will be spent on; or if its not a fundraiser, have a good speaker do a pitch for why folks should make a donation (e.g. pass the hat).
 - c. Take time to thank volunteer leaders who are working hard to put on events and manage the chapter day-to-day.
10. **Smile, make your passion contagious:** Communicate that their attendance is fundamental to our success. Stick around at the end and chat with people, answer questions, etc.

Provide pathways for getting involved:

11. **Have an email sign up sheet.** If you don't get email addresses, it's hard to invite people back again! Share the names with SFUSA staff so that we can send them national updates.
12. **Invite people to return, and ask them to volunteer.** Mention specific volunteer opportunities, and give people a name and/or email address to contact. Re-state your chapter's volunteer opportunities in a follow-up email.
13. **Ask people to become members.** Let them know that Slow Food is a membership organization and that they can support the movement by becoming members. Provide them

with web links and/or membership sign-up forms.

14. **Take pictures.** Get a picture with everyone together, facing the camera and smiling. (Otherwise it's hard to see how many people were there.) You can use these pictures in advertising future events (i.e. look how much fun we had last time!). Also, for national days of action like Dig In, pictures are a huge part of showing what happened that day.

15. **Thank them for coming.** You can do that in person at the end of the event, but also you can follow up with an email that includes links to your web site/Facebook page; a link to the SFUSA membership page; and links to photos that you took the day before. Congratulate people who helped out, and summarize what was successful about the event. And, if you can, invite them to the next one – or ask for volunteers to host the next one!