How to Plan Network Events

Event Ideas

Network activity ranges from one reception a year to as many as one or more events a month, and from social networking to educational and professional development. What each network takes on -- how much and how often -- depends on what you and your volunteers would like and have time for. The activities each network takes on will also depend on its volunteers, the demographics of its alumni network and the unique circumstances present in that particular town, city or country. Your Alumni Relations Manager can provide you with this breakdown.

A varied menu of events will ideally attract alumni across all ages and professions. Your ability to attract a range of alumni to a variety of events rather than the same group all the time will be one of the measures of Network success. It's important to remember, though, that you can't please everyone!

Types of Events

1. Social Networking

    - monthly get-togethers at a regular location, day and time
    - golf, tennis, croquet, softball or other athletic tournaments
    - theatre, symphony, comedy club nights
    - boat cruises
    - day hikes, family picnics and sports days, cross country skiing or snowshoeing
    - pub or restaurant nights
    - attend football, baseball, hockey games (when a Vancouver--UBC or professional-- team is in town)
    - Canadian or B.C. theme nights
    - skating parties, beach parties, BBQs
    - museum and gallery exhibit tours
    - annual brunches, dinners
    - wine and cheese parties; winery tours
    - holiday theme parties
    - potluck dinners

2. Career and Professional Development

    UBC alumni together possess very rich and diverse expertise in a wide range of disciplines. Alumni can take turns leading informal seminars or giving informal presentations drawn on their work, interests and background. Alumni gatherings provide a multidisciplinary group of individuals who can network and share expertise:

- establishing professional or business networks
- professional development seminars
- special guest speakers
- Supporting faculty, school or department of graduation
- breakfast or luncheon speaker series
- career panels for young alumni with alumni speakers

3. University Related Events

- UBC athletics and post-game receptions (Alumni Affairs can assist in obtaining blocks of tickets to athletic events)
- hosting visits from UBC faculty, administrators, visitors
- UBC musicians
- UBC videos, slide shows for meetings
- co-hosting events with other BC or Canadian university alumni (particularly relevant for international regions with smaller numbers of UBC graduates)

4. Mentoring and Student Cultivation

- welcoming new grads to the region or network
- acting as a resource for recent grads as they get their careers started
- job network nights
- participating in mentor programs
- establishing regional scholarships
- career day programs at secondary schools
- organize student send-offs
- support ISI and domestic recruitment efforts where possible at school education fairs, welcome events and yield events.
- Education fairs (particularly relevant for international regions)

5. Community Service

- create teams for charity runs
- work for food banks
- hold events for disaster relief

Tips for Holding Great Events

The greatest resource that you share as UBC alumni is each other. Visit our website for various links and contacts to communicate with and learn from the wisdom of those who are currently running networks. Reach out to the leaders of other networks, through their experience you can build up a strong and vibrant community, which can guide other networks as we develop around the globe.

Here are some suggestions to assist you with organizing successful and rewarding events:

Location. Creativity is essential when selecting a location for your event. Consider using a location that isn't typically accessible to the general public. People enjoy going somewhere that they haven't been before or where they normally wouldn't or couldn't go on their own.

Look for facilities that already have an entertainment focus built into them (i.e. wineries, museums, aquariums, historic sites, performing arts facilities, or culinary academies). Check to see if any of your committee members have access to any unique facilities or sit on the boards of local museums of organizations. You might be surprised at the wealth of resources in your own backyard. Use your status as a non-profit, educational service group to open doors.

Boosting Attendance. If your attendance numbers are low, you may want to set up a phone tree with members of your committee. Some alumni just need a little encouragement or a reminder to attend an upcoming program. Consider having one committee member contact those that have expressed interest in getting involved with the Network.

The Personal Touch. The greatest concern most alumni have before attending an event is whether they will know anyone there or not. If network volunteers go out of their way to make people feel welcome, they will greatly increase the chances of alumni attending future events. As simple as it sounds, some networks forget to welcome guests as they arrive, introduce attendees to one another, and engage "wall-flowers" who are standing alone.

Alcohol. In most cases a no-host (cash) bar is preferable to an open bar so that alumni who do not drink will not be subsidizing those who do. This will also help you keep the price of your event down and attract more diverse attendees.

After the Event. Keep records about your event. Post-event reports not only reduce last-minute uncertainties and problems, but also provide valuable information for the chair of the next event. This information is also valuable for identifying new volunteers. As well it will be needed to help keep accurate data with updated contact information and help track successes. As follow up, discuss what worked, what didn't, and what you might do differently the next time. Good, consistent planning and evaluation will result in top-quality, successful events time and time again.

General Event Planning Checklist

This list may assist you in keeping track of your event details. Note that not every item will apply to a particular event.

❏ Determine if you have enough time to plan and publicize the event. If not, consider rescheduling to avoid low quality or poorly attended events. In general, you will need approximately 10 weeks to plan an event and invitations should be sent out 6 weeks ahead of the event date.

10 weeks prior to the event

❏ Identify event chair (provide them with this checklist).
❏ Select day of the week/time of the day that best suits the event.
❏ Identify potential conflicts (religious/government holidays, school vacations).

- ❏ Research venue possibilities.

9 weeks prior to the event

- ❏ Estimate attendance to plan a budget.
- ❏ Recruit volunteers to assist with the event.
- ❏ Decide on RSVP method (Alumni Relations Manager can assist) and assign someone to handle questions.
- ❏ Work with Alumni Affairs to design and print invitations.

8 weeks prior to the event

- ❏ Select a venue.
- ❏ Fill out the Event Budget Worksheet to determine admission cost.
- ❏ If sending paper invitations, consider that this may take up to two weeks to process and deliver. Contact the Alumni Relations Manager with that in mind.

7 weeks prior to the event

- ❏ Get all costs from vendors in writing.
- ❏ Secure parking arrangements so you can include that information in the invitation.
- ❏ Visit the site and determine the event set-up.

6 weeks prior to event

- ❏ Mail paper invitations and send email invitations.
- ❏ Give your Alumni Relations Manager event details for the Grad Gazette and Trek submissions.

5 weeks prior to event

- ❏ Track RSVPs.
- ❏ Make onsite facility arrangements (tables, chairs, linens, garbage cans, etc.).
- ❏ Request nametags and other relevant décor requirements from the Alumni Affairs events team.
- ❏ Arrange audio/visual requirements (check with presenters to see what their needs are, and discuss with facilities which are included with venue).
- ❏ Arrange catering requirements.

4 weeks prior to event

- ❏ Track RSVPs.

3 weeks prior to event

❏ Track RSVPs.
❏ Make phone calls to increase attendance if necessary.
❏ Send a reminder email.
❏ Purchase a gift for any speaker(s) or event sponsor(s).
❏ Prepare name tags (Alumni Affairs can assist).

2 weeks prior to event

❏ Track RSVPs.
❏ Confirm orders with all vendors.

1 week prior to event

❏ Track RSVPs.
❏ Confirm numbers with catering.

Following the event

❏ Send thank you notes to speaker and volunteers.
❏ Issue any necessary reimbursements.
❏ Write up a post-event evaluation for network files.

Speaker Event Planning Checklist

The following list may be helpful for networks coordinating their own speaker events. You may also want to refer to the General Event Planning Checklist and Budget Templates in this section.

❏ Clarify with the speaker who's paying for items up front, and know what you can afford going in. We typically offer a budget range by saying, "If a flight is booked now it should cost between $X and $Y." to set expectations and avoid last-minute bookings and surprises. If you are taking advantage of a speaker's pre-existing trip to your area, be clear if and what the network is contributing to travel expenses.

❏ Set a publicity schedule, and have the speaker approve the topic, title and bio before you print anything. To speed up the process and give a speaker the opportunity to edit it, you might consider sending them a published bio found through their organization via the web or appropriate source.

- Are you going to send paper invitations?
  - ➜ When (should be about 6 weeks) and to whom?
  - ➜ Do you need mailing labels from Alumni Affairs (it can take us up to two weeks to pull your list and send labels)?
  - ➜ Does the speaker want to invite guests as well?
- Can you submit the event information for publicity to Alumni Affairs two months in advance to benefit from exposure in the Grad Gazette or TREK magazine?

- Would you like a special email invitation to be sent to all local alumni from Alumni Affairs?
- ❏ Clarify and offer to coordinate speaker travel and lodging:
  - Who is making the travel and hotel arrangements? Can you recommend a good place to stay? Tip: Most speakers will prefer to stay in a hotel rather than in the home of a local alumnus.
  - Will you meet/drop off the speaker at the airport, or are they renting a car or taking a cab?
- ❏ Find out what the speakers audio/visual and handout requirements are, and secure the required equipment with your venue.
  - Do you need a podium?
  - Will the size of the audience or speaking space require a microphone and PA system? Do they prefer a lapel microphone?
  - Do you need a screen?
  - Do you need a slide or LCD projector? Who is bringing the adaptor cable for the professor's laptop, or do you need to rent a laptop?
  - Will they send you handouts ahead of time that you will need to reproduce and bring to the event?
  - Will the professor email you a copy of the presentation to be used as a back-up?
- ❏ Arrange for someone to meet the speaker at the event location and act as point person to the speaker throughout the event. Remember to include that persons name and contact information in the speakers briefing.
- ❏ Have the speaker approve the text of their introduction. Arrange for the introducer or another volunteer to:
  - Watch the clock and manage the question and answer period. For example, that person may need to say, "Last Question" to the group.
  - Manage the speakers' time after the presentation if a lot of people have questions. Make sure the speaker doesn't get stuck. Perhaps offer some food and a beverage if s/he is talking to alumni.
- ❏ Make sure the speaker has a name tag, ticket, meal, etc. as appropriate for the event. Is the speaker bringing a spouse or other guests? Who is paying for them?
- ❏ Follow up with a thank you note as soon as possible after the event.
- ❏ Promptly take care of any travel reimbursements as agreed with the speaker.
- ❏ Send the Alumni Affairs Manager of Regional Networks a final attendance count and a list of all attendees.
- ❏ Write up a post-event evaluation for your network file.