

## **Making Arrangements for a Guest Speaker at Your Neighborhood Meeting**

Just a little advance planning and clear communications will go a long way toward ensuring a successful meeting with a guest speaker. Here are a few tips:

- ✓ First and foremost, select speakers and topics of interest to your members. A program topic may be tied to a particular challenge or opportunity facing your organization. Also, stay tuned to issues and concerns expressed by your neighbors, and set aside time at the end of your meetings to ask for program ideas for future meetings.
- ✓ Contact your speaker as far in advance as possible — three or four weeks if possible.
- ✓ There is nothing worse than having your speaker show up on the wrong day, so double-check the date and time of the meeting, and the location. Even then, confirm the arrangements by telephone or email a day or two prior to your event.
- ✓ Ask for some biographical information so that someone in your organization can introduce the speaker. The introduction does not have to take more than a minute or two. Focus on the biographical details relevant to your organization or the topic at hand.
- ✓ Will your speaker supply needed audio-visual equipment? What about extension cords and outlets? It's a good idea to meet the speaker well before the start of your meeting so that you know the equipment is working before the meeting begins.
- ✓ Be sure you and your speaker have agreed on all of the details about the program itself, including the topic(s) to be covered, whether there will be questions and answers, and the total amount of time that can be devoted to the topic, including Q&A.
- ✓ Try to narrow down the focus or topic that you're asking the speaker to address. It's difficult for a speaker to know what to do with a topic that's too broad; be as specific as you can about what aspects of the subject you'd like addressed or what points you'd like covered. (This can be worked out in a single conversation with the speaker.)
- ✓ Some details can be covered in writing. Ask if the speaker will bring hand-outs to supplement the presentation.

- ✓ If you will be describing the upcoming presentation in a flier, newsletter, or program, it's best to ask your speaker for a title and description of what they will cover. They may ask you to go ahead and write it, but if possible ask them to approve the wording. Their understanding of what they have to say may be very different from yours! Do you have the speaker's name and title spelled correctly?
- ✓ Provide your speaker with information he or she may need about your group: how many people to expect, needs or interests of your membership, and anything else they could use to plan their presentation to best meet your needs.
- ✓ Designate one of your members to be on the look-out for your speaker, escort him or her to the meeting room, and address any needs (e.g., water). This can be the same person who introduces the speaker.
- ✓ Is there enough time for your speaker/program AND any other business you need to conduct at your meeting? Advance planning helps ensure you do not run out of time.
- ✓ Do not expect a guest speaker to run your meeting. For example, the meeting facilitator should know how much time is available for Q&A. If there is time for just one more question, say so.
- ✓ The speaker may be comfortable fielding questions, but it is the responsibility of the meeting facilitator to make sure the speaker is treated with respect and is not subjected to more than one question at a time.
- ✓ Decide in advance whether the guest speaker will go before or after your regular order of business. This decision may depend on the speaker's schedule and the length of your agenda. (For example, many neighborhood groups allow police officers to go first so they can get back on their beats.)
- ✓ If your speaker goes first, give this person the opportunity to leave after her presentation, if there is no reason she needs to sit through the rest of your meeting.
- ✓ It's a nice gesture to send your speaker a thank-you card following the event.
- ✓ Consider forming a "program committee" to handle these tasks so that they do not fall on a single person.
- ✓ Do not take these tips as gospel. Every situation is different, and not all of these steps necessarily need to be followed. If you are clear why you need to do things differently, go for it!