

SECTION 4

CHAPTER MEETINGS

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Why Have Meetings?

- They give members a chance to network and compare ideas and trends.
- They can be educational to the restaurateurs, giving them specific tools to take back to work in their restaurants.
- They can be vehicles for information and news, such as committee announcements, and board votes.
- They are fun!

Tips for Planning Meetings

Four “MUSTS” for planning meetings

1. Set the chapter meeting dates for the entire chapter year during the summer strategic planning session and send to Susan Petty at spetty@tramail.org
2. Choose topics that are relevant to your members. (Don't have a meeting just to meet.)
3. **Send chapter meeting notice information to TRA three weeks in advance of the meeting/event.**
4. Forward the TRA created email notices to promote your event to those outside of your marketing database.

Choose a committee to handle planning the dates, speakers and logistics for meetings and plan out the entire year at the strategic planning session. Try to keep the days consistent, i.e. second Tuesday of the month and identify potential locations for meetings. Look for

private rooms and remember that speakers probably need a microphone.

Generally, try to keep the price as low as possible for meetings to encourage attendance. Don't forget to make arrangements with the treasurer of the chapter to have change for registration. Make arrangements also for handling the bill for the meeting/event.

You also might consider inviting the press to some of your meetings. See the communications and publicity section of this guide for more information.

Scheduling meetings

- **Set the date**
Compare local and state calendars for conflicting activities.
Set a time for the event that is convenient for most members of your Chapter. Afternoon and early evening hours seem to be a good time for restaurateurs; however, occasionally alternating meeting times will attract members who aren't typically able to attend the regularly scheduled meeting. Each Chapter will probably have a favorite time to meet.
- **Select a topic**
Selecting the topic and location that will interest and benefit members may be the most important aspect in planning a successful meeting.
- **Select the speaker**
Contact the speaker to discuss time and topic.

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Get written confirmation and a brief summary of the presentation. One of the most common problems with speakers is a mix-up with time or location so check and double-check arrangements.

Give the speaker a written outline of the program or a copy of the meeting notice and check with the speaker regarding equipment needs, any special diet requirements, transportation, hotel reservations, etc. Make sure the speaker knows when meetings generally end so he or she can avoid running too long.

- **Select a location**

Select a place where interruptions will be minimal. Inquire whether there are extra charges for cashiers, bartenders and audio/visual equipment, such as microphones. Select a member restaurant or location that members want to experience, i.e. new or unique TRA member restaurant

The type of program that will be presented will determine the room size and seating style requirements. Avoid head tables; they tend to separate the board from the membership. Round tables are excellent for promoting interaction among members.

- **Set the price, considering:**

Room charge
Refreshments and/or meal charge
Materials charge (including promotional material)
Postage for mailing of materials
Speaker fee and expenses
Any complimentary meals, such as speaker's

- **Distribute Information in a timely manner**

Provide event information to phone committee to call members the week of the event.

You may want to send a **press release** to the local newspaper's calendar of events.

Prepare and follow an agenda. Give a copy to every individual that has a role for the night. You may also want to provide a program for the attendees.

- After welcoming everyone at the meeting, begin the meeting with an icebreaker allowing attendees to meet those seated at their table as well as being introduced to the entire group. This is very important for recognition of associate and new members. An example of an icebreaker is the "*15 second commercial*." Have everyone stand and introduce him or herself, say their company name and give a 15 second "commercial" or information about their restaurant or company. This can be very humorous and gives all members the opportunity to speak at the event. If you have a large group, then you can have them take turns introducing themselves to the people at their table.
- Consider special introductions from the front of the room for board members & special guests, and provide time to recognize special contributions and/or member spotlight, as well as new member introductions. This is a great time to do an Associate member spotlight.
- Thank the speaker after the presentation. A thank-you letter is also a nice touch.
- **Registration table includes:**
 - Sign in sheet to keep track of who attends and to update addresses and telephone/fax numbers.
 - Name tags, markers and pens - write "member" or "guest" or have pre-printed tags available to publicly identify attendee status
 - TRA membership applications and information
 - Chapter information and possibly a list of chapter officers.
 - Receipts, moneybag or envelope, and bookkeeping system.

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Active member list (for reference at check in if doing member/non member pricing)

Greeting New Members

The first time a new member attends a chapter meeting may be the last time if he or she is not made to feel welcome. This is the primary reason for a hospitality committee. Include restaurateurs and associates on this committee and make it large enough so there will be one member for every five attendees at your meetings. This committee can easily be comprised of past and current board members.

The hospitality committee should greet members as they come in the door and guide them to pick up a nametag. They should visit with the member, introduce them to other members and, if possible, sit with them or place them at a “friendly” table. If time permits, introduce new or first event members to the audience.

Increasing Meeting Attendance

Meeting Notices

The information on the Chapter Meeting Notice form is used to process chapter meeting notices, which allows TRA to market your meetings to your chapter database.

When all information has been obtained for a chapter event, fill out a Chapter Meeting Notice form and to TRA three weeks prior to the meeting. It is very important to give the state office three weeks to process, mail your meeting notices, and alternatively promote your meeting so that your mailing list & members receive information in plenty of time to make plans to attend.

When filling out the Chapter Meeting Notice forms, be sure to complete all of the blanks. It delays the processing of the notices when incomplete information is provided.

Telephone Committees

A phone committee can raise attendance at chapter meetings by 30 percent and make

members feel welcome at the same time. In lieu or addition to an optional “phone tree” messaging system, a personal telephone call should be made to those special individuals that you want at your meetings.

Tips when calling:

- Provide meeting information and keep calls brief.
- Call during the hours that are best for restaurateurs (i.e. never during lunch rush).
- Make a point to greet those individuals you called who attend the meeting.
- Be sure to tell the individual that you hope he/she can attend the meeting.

Suggested Chapter Meeting Topics

Incorporating TRA

TRA State President Visit

The TRA president makes an effort to visit each chapter during his or her term. Because the president will be visiting all the chapters, it is very important to schedule the visit to your chapter early. Some presidents prefer to visit all TRA chapters in a two or three month period, while some spread visits throughout the year.

The president of TRA is a restaurateur and along with carrying out the duties of his presidency, must also maintain a successful foodservice operation. With this in mind, please consider moving your normal monthly chapter meetings to another weekday to accommodate the president if necessary. To schedule the president's visit to your chapter, please call Martha Wolfe, at 800/395-2872.

TRA Education Foundation Chair Visit

The TRAEF chairman can visit chapters during his or her term, to discuss education opportunities at the state and local level. It is important to schedule the visit to your chapter early. To schedule the chairman's visit to your chapter, please call Sandy Mitschke at 800/395-2872.

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TRA Executive Vice President

Invite TRA Executive Vice President, Richie Jackson to address your chapter about the Association, its activities and its lobbying efforts. Please schedule in advance by contacting TRA's Director of Executive Services, at 800/395-2872.

TRA Member Services

Give members an opportunity to learn about the benefits of TRA, including money saving services available. Also, representatives from TRA-endorsed third-party companies may be available to attend the event. Call Rick Madden to schedule at 800/395-2872.

Restaurateur Education Series

TRA is currently working on providing structured Restaurateur Education events concerning topics important to restaurateurs. Current developments in progress include a Labor Force Training module and a Restaurant Marketing series. More information will be provided as these event outlines unfold.

Supper Clubs

New this year is the Supper Club concept. This event is designed to help your members connect and become more involved with the chapter, as well as provide a relaxed atmosphere to connect with prospective members. This event is usually sponsored, so contact Robert Hale ext. 153 for more information on hosting a Supper Club in your area.

Locally

Current events or issues

Controversial issues and current topics of interest affecting restaurateurs are the best topics for chapter meetings. Make it timely; use your local paper as a resource.

Past Presidents

Honor your past chapter presidents with a special Past Presidents' Dinner. You might invite selected past leaders to speak about the chapter's progression through the years.

Tourism update

Invite a representative from your Convention and Visitors Bureau or Chamber of Commerce to speak to you about upcoming events and conventions.

Hotel/Motel Association

Many chapters work very closely with their local Hotel/Motel Association. Invite the president or an officer of the association to speak to you about their projects and objectives and how you can work effectively together.

Public relations

Invite a representative from a public relations firm or Texas Restaurant Association, to speak to your members about getting the most from the press and media through effective marketing communications and public relations.

Marketing your Restaurant through Advertising

An ad agency or ad representative from your local TV or radio station would enjoy the opportunity to speak to you about advertising opportunities in your city. Use a panel for this topic.

Crime prevention

Your local police department can provide helpful tips on reducing the risk of theft in your restaurants and homes, as well as how to protect yourself from assaults and robberies. Also, you may want to invite a representative from Crime Stoppers.

Economic development

A representative from your Chamber of Commerce or Economic Development Board can talk to your group about economic development plans and opportunities in your city.

University professors' topics

If you are near a university or college, take advantage of the knowledge available there. You may be able to get a professor to speak to your group about any topic you need.

Local coaches

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Again, if you are near a university or college, you could invite coaches and sports directors to discuss their upcoming seasons and the possible role restaurants can take in promoting the games.

Personnel issues

A personnel director from a large hotel or restaurant corporation would be a good choice to focus on personnel issues, such as interviewing prospective employees, team building, discipline, hiring and firing.

Labor laws and employment practices

In most cities, the Texas Employment Commission (TEC) has representatives available to speak to local organizations.

Legislative Affairs (Odd Numbered Years)

Joe McMahan, TRA's Government Affairs Director can bring a legislative update to your chapter. He can provide insight in the key issues facing restaurateurs at the state and national levels.

Public speaking

Invite local Toastmasters club members to give you some helpful tips on public speaking.

Local government affairs

Invite your local city council members or other elected officials to address your organization. Any current issue affecting business in your community will be of great interest to members.

Meet the mayoral candidates

Before elections, invite candidates to address members on critical issues affecting businesses. Give each candidate time to make a brief presentation followed by a Q&A session.

State and national issues

Give your legislators an opportunity to address your membership. Information about your legislators' background and history is available at the TRA Headquarters. Call Joe McMahan for help in this area.

Health department regulations

Representatives from your local health department will be available to speak about health code compliance and inspections.

Vendor Appreciation Night

Recognize your vendors for the support they give your association with the memberships or sponsorships. Consider tabletop displays for local vendors. Or, consider inviting a panel of purveyors to discuss new trends or products.