



# Plan Your Meeting Topics

Up to a Year in Advance



Hey! Thanks for your interest in this. Of course, these steps are not written in stone, so please adapt them to what is appropriate or will work for you and your group. In sharing these w/ you, we hope that they are as helpful to you as they have been for us.

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|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
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## Take These Steps — Before Your Meeting

0) **THE GOAL:** Identify topics of most interest to your members so you can schedule a calendar of meeting topics from them up to a year in advance.

1) **BRAINSTORM:** From a variety of sources, you'll want to create a list of potential topics of interest (25-30 is good).

a) **Your Officers:** Reflect on what topics have been well-presented, well-attended, well-received, etc. If you have a calendar matrix of past meeting topics (and presenters), reference it for topics that haven't been presented in a while, that seem to get presented often, or that have yet to be presented at all.

b) **Your Presenters:** Write one piece of e-mail to go to really good past presenters to ask them what topics they might be interested in presenting.

c) **Your Members:** Write one piece of e-mail to go to all your "members" (however you define that) to (i) let them know that at the next meeting they'll be voting on what topics are of most interest to them, (ii) let them know what topics up are for vote so far, and (iii) ask them for their own suggestions. This can also be a webpage people can reference.

2) **DECIDE:** As officers, decide the easiest way for you to conduct the voting, what votes will be counted as valid, and even what to call the night.

a) **For Small Meetings:** For less than 30 people, you may want to do what we do — print the topics up for vote in big letters on legal size paper, tape them up on the wall, give each person five sticky star labels to vote however they want, then during the break we simply tally the stars (write the number right on the paper) and rearrange the topics from highest vote-getters down.

b) **For Large Meetings:** For more than 30 people, getting up to vote may be impractical, and tallying paper ballots may not be the "easiest" way, so you may want to look into online voting and set up a few stations, e.g., Yahoo! Groups has Polls you can set up fairly easily and quickly. Capture e-mail addresses so you know people are only voting once.

c) **On Write-Ins:** For your group, you might accept write-ins (last minute topic suggestions) only via e-mail during the brainstorming step. For our group, we accept them only in the explaining step and not during the voting step. For online voting, this could be tricky w/ updating the choices seconds before you open the polls.

a) **On Valid Votes:** For our group, anyone who shows up (officers, presenters, non-members, etc.) to the meeting can vote, but only members w/ e-mail addresses in our membership database can vote absentee. Absentee voters miss out on your explanations and everyone's comments, clarifications and write-ins, and have their absentee votes voided if they vote in person.

e) **On A Name:** We call our annual event our "Star Search" meeting (the TV show was big when we started doing this six years ago), and we give everyone five sticky "star" labels to identify "star" topics, presenters and officers. We consciously chose \*not\* to call it "Election Night" 'cause that sounded boring and could scare people away.

## Take These Steps — At Your Meeting

3) **EXPLAIN:** At the meeting, briefly explain each topic, issue, and officer position up for vote. Once done, allow a few minutes for questions/ clarifications. Explain any write-ins that are suggested. This is important for an “informed electorate” — people can’t vote intelligently if they don’t even know what they’re voting on, what the topic/issue/position is about.

a) **The Topics:** Briefly describe what each topic could be generally about, noting how it actually is presented is entirely up to the presenter.

b) **Any Write-Ins:** Ensure everyone understands what write-ins are up for vote and what they could generally be about.

c) **Presenters Welcome:** Also stress that each topic is open to presenters, too, so not only vote if you want to see a topic presented, but also add your name somehow if you’d like to present that topic. For our group, in addition to five sticky star labels, we also give each person two “\_\_<insert name>\_\_ is interested in presenting this” stickers.

a) **Issues, Too:** This is a great time for them to vote on other issues on the floor — meeting date/time/place, dues, logo, newsletter, website, etc.

e) **Officers Welcome:** This is also a great time for them to nominate themselves for any open officer positions and fill them.

4) **VOTE:** However you have decided was the easiest way to conduct the voting, this is the moment. Woo-hoo! How exciting! For us, we think the physical getting-up-to-vote aspect is really important, as is getting the results the same night, a sense of real individual and group accomplishment, that “I helped set the calendar of topics for the year.”

5) **TALLY:** During the break, tally the votes (including absentee, if any) and prepare to report the results from most vote-getters on down. Congratulations! You have just had your members identify what topics are of most interest to them, and you should have at least 12 meetings worth to carry you through ‘til next year’s big vote, even if you double-up a few.

6) **CHECK:** Quickly check to make sure you don’t have too many or too few votes. If 25 people voted w/ 5 sticky stars each (or online, etc.), then 125 votes should have been cast. Make sure you’re not too far over or under that number. If some top topics have no presenters, ask now while you’ve got them if anyone’s interested. Likewise about issues and officer positions.

## — After Your Meeting

7) **SCHEDULE:** Between now and your next meeting, write down what your next twelve meeting dates are. If you know what your last twelve meeting topics were, write them down as a guide, then draft a calendar of topics for your next twelve meetings topics from them. Look for patterns and cycles — they makes scheduling so much easier.

8) **CONFIRM:** Hopefully most of the topics of most interest to your members already have presenters who have volunteered themselves to do them. Write each one an individual piece of e-mail to ask them if such-and-such date is okay w/ them. Most will happily confirm, or at least tentatively confirm, even up to a year away! Always have a back-up in mind.

9) **INVITE:** For those topics that don’t have presenters, take a look inside your group as well as outside of it to identify potential candidates and then invite them, letting them know what date you have in mind but also that you are flexible. Digital Cameras? Check your local camera shop. Graphics software? Local colleges. Troubleshooting? Local Mac consultants. Etc.

10) **UNVEIL:** Once you’ve got your calendar of meeting dates, topics and presenters lined up for the next twelve months, you’re free to gloat! Unveil it at your next meeting! Write a press release for your local media. Members \*and\* presenters are happy to know when their topics are happening, and you are relieved of the stress of not knowing what’s happening next month, etc.