

How to Run Successful Section Meetings

Section meetings are the lifeblood of AWS.
Here are some tips to help maximize success.



American Welding Society

Introduction

Section meetings are one of AWS' most important activities. They can be a lot of fun. A good time to learn, to see friends again, to renew old acquaintances, to develop contacts.

They also can be a lot of hard work. But planning ahead can pay off with smoothly run, successful meetings. The members benefit. And the Section benefits too because successful meetings help recruit and retain members. And as your Section grows, so does your capacity to put on even-more successful meetings.

How can you make sure your meetings will be rewarding? Use these suggestions. They outline what you should do, how to do it -- and when.

Why Section Meetings

Regular meetings are the focal point of Section life. They provide the opportunity for:

- Exchanging Knowledge -- Section meetings are the basic vehicle for providing an essential AWS service at the local level. They are the perfect environment to find out what's going on in the industry. People share what they know, while picking up valuable information from their peers.
- Acknowledging Achievement -- Section meetings provide opportunities to acknowledge leaders through election to office, awards and scholarships.

- Retaining current members -- Section meetings help get your members involved in learning and friendship. And the more involved they are, the better the chance they'll continue being members of AWS. For most of them, the Section meetings are their only personal contact with AWS.

- Getting New Members -- Section meetings are an excellent opportunity for potential members to get a first-hand view of what AWS is all about. Prospects will be much more receptive to joining AWS after meeting the members, listening to informative speakers and, in general, enjoying themselves.

So make your meetings attractive and inviting. Show some imagination and innovation in programming and promotion. Experiment with different topics and themes. Be creative, but also be organized.

Get organized well in advance. Plan ahead, a full year at a time. Each meeting should be totally firmed up six months ahead, if only to allow enough time for advance promotion. New chairmen and officers should get started even before the official June 1 transition date.

Planning Ahead

Select the Best Site -- To assure the best turnout for meetings, select meeting sites that best suit your needs:

- Centrally located and easy to reach
- Convenient parking (preferably free)

- Adequate hospitality and meal service
- Adequate audio-visual facilities
- Access for the handicapped
- Flexible room sizes
- Good lighting and ventilation.

The best bets are hotels, motels and large restaurants with private rooms. To get better rates, book for as many meetings as far ahead as possible. Once you've discussed dates and prices, ask for confirmation in writing so you don't run into surprises down the road.

Prepare a Budget

Remember to plan and prepare a detailed budget for the year. Section Treasurers should meet with their Section Chairmen and Budget Committee to decide how much money should be allocated for each meeting and for other activities. Don't forget to budget for your education courses, monthly notices and yearbook.

When preparing a budget for a meeting, estimate all the expenses for each meeting, including room rentals, refreshment and meal costs, as well as costs for visual aids, gifts to speakers and entertainment (if applicable).

Pick Convenient Dates

When determining meeting times, select a regular day and time that seems most convenient for everyone.

Avoid Mondays and Fridays. Avoid conflicts with other local professional and business groups to which your members might belong.

Announce as much as is confirmed about events as far in advance as possible, even if all you can give are dates and locations. Notify members of each meeting at least two to four weeks in advance.

Ask for advance paid registrations and give a better price for them.

Arrange the Best Programming

Most Section meetings feature a speaker. Be sure the speakers' topics will interest your members, with something directly relevant to them as part of the welding industry. While topics may on occasion range from motivational speeches to self-help in financial planning, remember that we are the American Welding Society. Welding is our primary focus. Offer programming your members can get nowhere else.

Be sure to use the AWS Speakers Directory, too. For a free copy, contact the Membership Services Department (see rear cover).

For the sake of variety, consider:

- Spouses' Night
- Students' Night
- Awards' Night
- National Officers' Night
- Past Chairmen's night (include your past District Directors)

- Section Officers'/
Directors' Night

- Bosses' Night

- Joint meetings
with other local technical,
business, educator or
industrial groups.

Consider dinners with a special food theme. Consider at least one strictly social event per year (boat excursion, sports event, holiday theme).

Finally, plan your total line-up for the year to yield a mix of topics and formats that will provide the broadest possible coverage of your members' interests -- new technology, education, demonstrations, basics and just fun.

Have an active Program Committee. Ask for ideas from the general membership. Now you're ready to approach speakers and really plan a year of successful meetings.

Negotiating With Speakers

When negotiating with speakers, discuss:

- Dates
- Time
- Place
- Topics
- Format (straight talk, panel discussion, demonstration)
- Length of presentation
- The type of audience they will be addressing (numbers, regular dinner meeting, special event)

- Transportation, hotel, arrival and departure times and/or directions to meeting sites

- Special guests they would like to bring or invite

- Dietary restrictions or special requests

- Audio-visual equipment needs

- Expense reimbursement (if any, in detail)

- Honoraria (if any).

After discussing all this, promptly confirm your understanding to your speakers in writing. Also, ask the speakers to send a biography, several black-and-white photographs and a summary of their presentation so you can prepare:

- Introductory remarks
- Advance publicity to local media
- AWS Section Meeting/Event Report to your District Director and AWS for the Welding Journal
- Advance notice in your Section publication.

See last page for a convenient checklist.

Preparing Section Bulletins

Make sure you list all relevant information for each meeting in your Section Monthly Bulletin. Include speaker's name, title, background and speech topic.

Also include more general information, such as the date, time and exact location of each meeting (include a map if necessary). Also, don't forget to include the costs for dinner and/or drinks per person.

Besides announcing upcoming meetings, Section Bulletins provide an ideal vehicle for sharing other information with members, including:

- New member announcements
- Section Officer news
- Educational course information
- Section library information
- Gold, Silver or Life Certificate awardee notices
- Past meeting highlights
- Other items of local interest.

Approaching the Meeting Day

A month before the meeting, assign a Section member to host your speakers and handle last-minute details. You don't need misunderstandings, or speakers getting lost, or nobody knowing how to locate them in an emergency. These host persons should telephone your speakers seven to 10 days ahead to confirm all arrangements -- especially transportation, audio visual needs and meal preferences if any.

About a week before the meeting, plan and prepare a concise agenda. List each topic -- in order -- to be covered at the meeting as well as the individual(s) who will address the topics. Make sure you have plenty of copies of the agenda for the meeting.

An hour before the meeting, have someone double-check the meeting site to be sure the facility is set to meet your needs.

Make sure:

- The speaker can be seen from all seats
- The sound system is connected and working
- The temperature of the room is comfortable, but cool enough to keep everyone awake
- All audio-visual equipment is tested and working (have extra bulbs for slide projectors just in case one burns out)
- An AWS banner or sign board is in place
- The hotel or restaurant function lists and sign boards are complete and accurate
- The menu is as ordered
- Name badges are available and convenient.

Introducing the Speaker

The social period is over. The members and guests are seated. The meeting is underway. The presiding officer has made all the announcements.

He has introduced all the guests and new members. It's time to introduce the guest speakers.

The presiding officer should have prepared an introduction based on the biography the speaker submitted earlier.

The introduction should be brief and informative, emphasizing the speakers' credentials to address the topics listed.

Often times, speakers may want the introduction to contain some specific information that was excluded from their standard biography. If for no other reason, therefore, the presiding officer should meet the speakers earlier to review the introduction.

Remember, the better the introductions, the more comfortable speakers will be, which will ultimately influence their presentation.

Taking Care of Your Members

With all this emphasis on guest speakers, remember your Section members. They should feel as important and comfortable as your speakers. This is particularly true for new or prospective members.

Give new members a good initial impression of your Section. Form a Hospitality Committee to make sure new members feel welcomed.

Committee members should:

- Telephone ahead to specifically invite new members to the next meeting.

- Offer a free drink or free dinner to new members at their first meeting (paid for by the Section).

- Give special "new member" welcome badges.

- Provide new members a special host to introduce them during the social period.

- Be asked by the presiding officer to introduce new members before the main speaker, and ask them to say a few words about their background and business connections (warn them in advance).

- Ask new members about their preferences for Section committee activity; assume that they quite naturally have such an interest.

Make sure new members feel welcome, comfortable and at ease. New members may have something vitally important to add to the Section's resources. Their first Section meeting is a good time to find out.

Encouraging New Members

Section meetings are social and sales events. Use them to help sell prospective members on joining AWS. Consider each meeting a prospect meeting.

- Work with your Membership Committee to urge every member to bring a friend who may be interested in joining.

If you schedule informative and entertaining speakers, prospects can be sold on coming to the meetings.

- Use the social period prior to the meeting to introduce prospects to members. Break up clusters of long-standing members by introducing the newcomers.

- Show off all of AWS. Have plenty of AWS membership brochures and applications on hand as well as a recent Welding Journal, a new Welding Handbook, other

AWS publications and your Section publications.

Closing Thought

Every meeting comes to a close. Again, send your AWS Meeting/Event Report to your District Director and AWS Headquarters. And then, relax until the next meeting.

In the meantime, meet with your Program Committee and Section officers to evaluate past meetings. And continue to plan a year ahead.

Make copies of the form on the facing page, one for each speaker you engage, for a convenient checklist.

Meeting/Event Planning Checklist

Event: _____

Place: _____ Date: _____

Speaker: _____

Title: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Presentation Format: _____

Presentation Title: _____

Speaker Amenities

Travel Arrangements: _____

Special Guests Requested: _____

Meal Requests: _____

Audio/Visual Needs: _____

Honorarium: _____

Expense Reimbursement: _____

Remarks: _____