



How to Host a Successful Open House

One of the best ways to attract visitors to your club is to host an Open House. An Open House is a party given by a club with the goal of drawing guests who will, hopefully, become members.

An Open House doesn't have to be a complicated or costly affair. With the cooperation of the club members, some word of mouth, and a little good PR

work, your Open House can be a huge success and reap many interested visitors and future members.

Here are a few suggestions to help you host a successful event.

Get the buy-in of your club! An Open House is a big event. You need the agreement and commitment of your club members to make your event a success.

Choose a date for the event. The club should agree on a date that is at least a couple of weeks away (you want to give yourself time to plan).

Recruit a volunteer in your club to be the coordinator for the event. Remember members can receive credit in their Competent Leadership (CL) manual for coordinating and helping with this event (see Projects 6 and 10 under "special club events")

Determine a location. Will you hold your Open House at your club location or at another venue? Sometimes security, lack of parking, or a remote location may make your club meeting place less attractive for your event. How about the local library? Or a special room at a restaurant? AND, don't forget to reserve the location!

Order promotional items from Toastmaster like the pamphlets "Find your voice" and "Confidence: The voice of leadership." What about printing a stack of membership applications. NOTE: Some promotional items are available through the Club Growth Director, or by ordering from the TI website at <http://www.toastmasters.org/>

Decide whether to invite a guest speaker or have someone from within your club give a speech illuminating the benefits of joining your club.

Choose a refreshments coordinator, decorations coordinator, and set-up / take-down crew.

An advertising coordinator should write a one-paragraph press release describing the event. That person should send the release to a local newspaper and place it on any event websites every week until the event. Don't forget to add it to your club website and Facebook page!

Design and print copies of a flier to announcing your event. Then have club members distribute your flyer to local businesses, schools, libraries, anywhere you think it might attract someone attention.

Ask three or four members of your club to volunteer to give one- to two-minute speeches about what Toastmasters means to them. (You might want to include this in your Table Topics session.)

Develop an agenda for your Open House. In addition to your guest speaker, will you have any other speakers? If so, how many? How about Table Topics? How many minutes will you allow for each section? Will your meeting be an hour? 1.5 hours? Will you allow time for questions from the audience?

Don't forget to print copies of your agenda and have them available at your Open House. Be sure to include your club meeting information and club contact emails and phone numbers.

Refreshments are always popular at Toastmasters meetings. What kind of food you will serve? Will it be catered, purchased, potluck? Will you need plates, flatware, cups, tablecloth, etc.?

What about door prizes to help visitors remember your club? (If you opt for door prizes, don't forget to include them in your budget, or get volunteers to solicit and collect donations from local businesses.

Set a budget and stick to it. Don't forget to include money for materials ordered from TI, food, decorations, any printing needs, door prizes, etc. Anytime you can solicit volunteer services and donations, do so, but sometimes it will be necessary to purchase what you need.

Have a member volunteer to be the official club photographer for the day recording your event for your club website, Facebook page, and follow-up PR activities.

Assign members to act as greeters to make the Open House guests feel welcome.

Solicit a volunteer to bring name tags (if you want them) and to write a name tag for each guest as they arrive.

You may also want to prepare a guest book. Be sure to collect guest names and contact info (email addresses, phone numbers, etc.,)

TALK UP YOUR OPEN HOUSE! Every member should talk up your event, inviting as many guests as possible. Word of mouth is a great recruiting tool.

Poll members to get a feel for how many guests are coming and make sure you have enough food and materials to cover your potential guest list.

One the day of the event, ask your members to arrive early and stay late. Before the meeting, they can assist with last minute preparations and to greet and talk with guests as they arrive and before the meeting begins. After the meeting, they can linger to talk with guests, answering any questions they may have, and assist with clean-up.

Don't forget to thank your guests for coming and let them know that, whether they joined that day or not, they are welcome to attend your regular meetings.

Follow up with your guests. See if they have any questions? See if they want to join?

It often helps to do a follow-up at your next club meeting. Ask your club members how they thought the Open House went. Discuss what went well and what didn't. What could you do better / differently next time? Did you have enough food? Was the location conducive to guests?

DON'T FORGET TO CELEBRATE AND THANK YOUR CLUB MEMBERS FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT! Remember, your club members are the life blood of your club. They've put in extra time and effort to make your event a success. They deserve your praise and appreciation!