

# A Baker's Dozen Successful Program Planning Tips

*Provided by the North Jersey Local Section*

## **Diversify your programming**

The key to successful program planning is diversification. You won't get everyone to attend all meetings, but you want to put together a program that has something of interest to everyone at some time throughout the year. Try a mix of highly technical meetings, equipment-related meetings, and generally fun and social meetings. For example, some of the "fun and social" meetings North Jersey has held included "The Chemistry of Beer" and "Perfume Chemistry" to Oenology (wine making) meetings-usually held in June right before the section breaks for the summer.

## **Know your section's demographics**

It's important, if not essential, to know your section's demographics. For example, North Jersey has a lot of members involved in environmental and pharmaceutical positions. So, we have at least one meeting with an environmental topic every year. We invite NJ government officials or employees of government environmental agencies as speakers. Also, everyone knows at least one person who would love to speak about a hobby, passion, and/or their professional work at a local meeting. In planning for the North Jersey 2002 Fall Lecture Series, we sent out a survey to collect information on suggested topics. The result was a diversified series, touching upon several chemical engineering related subjects. Stretching the envelope (even to topics remotely related to chemical engineering) helps to keep things fresh and lively.

## **Have some family friendly meetings and events**

It's great to invite spouses and other family members to some non-technical meetings and activities throughout the year. For example, we invited spouses to attend our Perfume Chemistry meeting and all attendees got a free sample of men's or women's fragrance. We also held a raffle at this event for a \$50 men's or women's fragrance package. The holiday season is another great time to hold a family friendly section event, and our annual Holiday Party is just that.

## **Program non-technical career development sessions**

Professional growth is an ongoing, ever-changing process in our lives- which is why section meetings on such topics as effective networking, presentation skills, coaching and counseling staff, career management strategies, etc. attract a large and diverse group of local members and potential members.

## **Invite public officials**

Public officials always seem to be a good draw for attendance. North Jersey's Government Interactions Committee sponsored a meeting with NJ Congressman Rush Holt, which was highly publicized, and a big draw locally.

### **Invite former industry executives**

Former industry executives are also a big draw. The former CEO of Hoffman La Roche gave a presentation on investments some years ago that was very well attended.

### **Invite industry executives**

Inviting (current) local industry executives to be keynote speakers at local section meetings always seem to be of great interest to the local membership.

### **Collaborate with other local professional organizations and other sections**

Hooking up with other local professional organizations helps to increase meeting attendance. North Jersey links up with ISPE (International Society of Pharmaceutical Engineers), NSPE (National Society of Professional Engineers) and other local sections like Tappan Zee and New Jersey from time to time.

### **Tap the resources of local colleges/universities**

For example, faculty, graduate, or undergraduate students might be happy to talk about their research. A local section meeting could also provide someone with the opportunity to do a trial run of their presentation before giving their dissertation to a committee, a regional student conference competition, etc.

### **Rotate meeting venues**

Since everyone has a favorite meeting place, and not everyone has the same favorite, we've found that moving meeting venues around the section helps encourage participation.

### **Get sponsorship**

Getting an industry sponsor and/or holding a meeting on their site is also a great draw, as is a plant or brewery tour, though evening tours may be difficult to arrange.

### **Industry, industry, industry**

Again, holding meetings that are topical to the largest industry(s) in the section (pharmaceuticals in our case) are consistently a big draw.

### **Community and college outreach**

Coupling section meetings with community events and/or college outreach/award ceremonies are good ways to encourage greater and more diversified participation. For example, North Jersey recently began holding our February monthly meeting during National Engineers' Week, where we award scholarships to Stevens and NJIT students. This meeting usually has a great turn out.