

Program planning and assessment

Starting from scratch to create a program for your chapter can be the most exciting possibility. Sometimes that possibility is also stressful to consider once the reality of starting without a blueprint or chapter oral tradition sets in.

At the same time, chapters are doing many programs just for the sake of doing them. The same fund raisers, the same activities for the band program, the same membership education activities, without considering whether these are the right activities for the chapter and bands now.

This issue focuses on how to plan and assess programs. (We're using the word "program" to describe any type of activity your chapter may plan during the year.) Our Brothers are learning leadership as they go, and that means that sometimes they don't have experience with this type of planning. This is a great way to start, and useful advice in other settings as well.

As always, if you have questions, contact me at mmatney@umich.edu. Your work can make for great new programs this year.

Malinda

How do we get started if we want to try a new program?

Whether your program is a fund raiser, a service project, membership education, a constitutional revision, or a small chapter gathering. Working through a few steps will force the chapter to organize a program and know what is taking place at each stage.

The big headings are those used by educational programming and theory experts. Some people study these issues as a profession, but our goal is to make this information work for our chapter efforts. All successful programs have these elements, though in varying sizes; a chapter gathering does not need the same elaborate planning as a district convention.

Throughout these steps, keeping notes helps greatly. If a program works, you will want the winning formula to repeat it. If a program fails, you will want to know what went wrong; conditions may change, another chapter may be able to make the idea work, or your chapter may need a reminder when the idea resurfaces.

Stage I: Initiating a program

Program ideas don't land in your lap fully formed – brainstorming takes work!

1) Create an idea. It may pop into someone's head ("Let's put on a show"), or may arise from a need ("We need more percussionists. What will we do?").

2) Assemble a planning team. Make a few people responsible for program management. Even if every chapter member participates, each program should have a clear leader and specifically assigned tasks.

3) Assess needs, resources and constraints.

Look at your chapter's current situation:

- *Needs:* Does the chapter have financial resources for this program? Someone with connections? Publicity? Organization?
- *Resources:* What does your chapter have? Money? A supportive sponsor? Volunteers? Enthusiasm? A lot of spare paper plates?
- *Constraints:* Do you have a deadline?

Certain rules to follow? Are some working relationships strained? Will national policies or university regulations, such as those regarding substance use or hazing, need special attention?

4) Identify targets and purposes. What does the chapter want? Be specific. For example, "The chapter wants \$600 for two Brothers' National Convention costs."

5) Select a program. Use your information to select the most effective and practical program. Be creative – a new program may be more practical than an often used one.



Kappa Kappa Psi

PO Box 849
Stillwater, OK
74076-0849
800-543-6505

Malinda M. Matney, Ph.D.
National Vice President
for Colonization and
Membership
mmatney@umich.edu

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So we have selected a program. What now?

Selecting a program to do is a strong first step, but it is only the first step. It isn't enough to decide on a program idea. Deciding what you want out of our program, and how you'll decide if it was a success, is the next task.

Stage II: Planning program objectives, delivery and evaluation

- 1) Select program goals and objectives. What specific accomplishments will make the program successful? Are there longer term program goals? For example, in a membership education program, your goal may be initiating ten new members who know fraternal history and policies and will remain active until graduation.
- 2) Develop training methods for actives. How will you teach

actives to participate properly? Will a sign work? A whole chapter meeting? What information do actives need? This step avoids the pitfall of hearing actives complain that "I didn't know anything about it."

- 3) Plan method of interaction with participants. Plan in advance how people will participate in the program. Anticipate difficulties (such as rule violations, poor attendance, weather changes, other hazards).
- 4) Plan program assessment. How will you decide that this program succeeded or failed? Who will make this decision (the chapter, chapter officers, program leaders, sponsor, band director)? Prepare questions to answer after the program takes place.

We have a plan. How do we move forward? What happens later?

After you have a plan, it is time to test it, particularly for larger endeavors.

Stage III: Presenting and evaluating a pilot program

For smaller programs, a pilot program might be the program itself (such as a chapter gathering or a low-risk fund raiser). For large programs that involve risk to chapter finances or reputation, a pilot program will test for minor problems or fatal flaws before risking a lot of chapter resources.

- 1) Design program publicity. How will people learn about the program?
- 2) Review pilot program implementation. Even if the pilot program is the program itself, for chapters who repeat programs, each program influences future programs. For larger programs, the chapter may rehearse parts in advance. For example, to throw a tie-dye party for 250 people, make sure that your chemicals work, that your method of storing 250 wet shirts is effective, and that you give participants accurate information about care for their new creations.
- 3) Assess evaluation and program future. How did the pilot run go? Is the program good, only needing

small adjustments? Is the program wrong for the chapter in design or usefulness?

Stage IV: Refining the program

The program is not over when the event is. Whether a success or failure, the chapter needs careful records.

- 1) Refine training procedures and materials. What prior information helped program participants? What information would have improved the program?
- 2) Plan for continued education. Create a written record and share results with the chapter. All the notes you've collected through these steps will shape this record. Make sure the notes take some permanent form, whether in chapter minutes or in a special program notebook.
- 3) Train future leaders. Give program information to new officers, program leaders and committee chairs.

Back to Stage I . . .

Every time you finish a program, evaluate. Does it still help the chapter or bands? Is it efficient? Is it fun or profitable? Most importantly, does it emphasize fraternal values as stated in the preamble? That final question is the true test of success.