



FACULTY OF  
EDUCATION

# EVENT PROMOTION REFERENCE GUIDE



Education. **Rethought.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Event planning is a time and energy consuming exercise. We work hard to ensure that our speakers, performers, panelists, and exhibitors make a fruitful connection with their audiences. That's why a lower than expected turnout, while sometimes unavoidable, can be very disappointing.

The situation is doubly challenging for many units where staff are often obliged to promote public events on a very limited budget. This means we have to get creative – as many of you do each year, identifying a variety of new, often ingenious ways of getting the word out. The following document is a first attempt to summarize some of the most effective (and cheapest) methods.

In addition to these promotional strategies, we have a planning checklist designed to assist you with the many other aspects of event organization (see page 8). Promotion, after all, is only one part of the process!

It's a draft document, and an organic one. Many of our faculty members will no doubt see gaps and recall great strategies not mentioned here. When you do, we ask that you contact the Office of External Relations ([education.alumni@ualberta.ca](mailto:education.alumni@ualberta.ca); 492-7755) in order to update the document and share these best practices with colleagues in other units.

## EVENT LISTINGS ON CAMPUS

Internal audiences, including faculty members, staff and students, are often the most loyal and enthusiastic participants in our events. Be sure to explore these low cost options for internal publicity:

- (a) The first step in promoting any event is to visit the Faculty of Education website at <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/education/> where Events within the Faculty will be listed. To place your event in this listing, contact the Office of External Relations at [education.alumni@ualberta.ca](mailto:education.alumni@ualberta.ca) or 492-7755.

Events submitted will appear in numerous places, at your request, including:

- The Campus Events page on the University of Alberta web site (<http://www.ualberta.ca/>)
  - The Event listings in *Folio* (not published during the summer months) (<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/publicaffairs/nav01.cfm?nav01=11571>)
- (b) The Students' Union runs a listing of events of interest to students. These appear on the SU website and in "Happy Bob Knows", the Gateway's free event listing section. Enter the information at <http://www.su.ualberta.ca/postAnEvent>
- (c) Don't forget to take advantage of your own resources. Department / institute web pages, newsletters, listserves and memos are all tremendously important, not only as promotional tools but also as sources for those who are actively seeking information. Be sure to mention, in e-memos to faculty and staff, that they are welcome to spread the word to friends and family.

## OFF CAMPUS EVENT LISTINGS

Is your event open to members of the community? If so, consider the following low cost options:

- (a) The *Edmonton Journal's* Ten Best / Ten Rest listings, printed in the "What's On" section each Friday, are free of charge. To be considered for inclusion in the Ten Best, an event must be taking place on the weekend; but other activities, held throughout the week, can be advertised in the Ten Rest section below. Deadline for submission is noon on the previous Monday. Send your event details to [imah@thejournal.canwest.com](mailto:imah@thejournal.canwest.com)
- (b) *See Magazine* runs free event listings each Thursday (deadline the previous Friday). Fax your announcement to 432-1102 (Attention Silas).
- (c) *Vue Weekly* offers a service similar to *See Magazine* (b) above. Fax your announcement to 426-2889 (Attention Event Listings Editor).

- (d) CKUA's Arts and Culture Guide promotes selected fine arts and cultural events. It is heard twice daily, Monday through Saturday. To request consideration for placements, e-mail your event details to [arts@ckua.org](mailto:arts@ckua.org) (or fax them to 428-7624) at least two weeks in advance.
- (e) CBC Radio's arts calendar, compiled by Eva Marie Clarke, accepts arts and cultural event submissions. Fax your event details to 468-7419. Other event notices may qualify as public service announcements (PSAs), in which case you can send them to [community-circuit@edmonton.cbc.ca](mailto:community-circuit@edmonton.cbc.ca) or fax them to 468-7421 (Attention Michelle Davio). (For sample announcements, see <http://edmonton.cbc.ca/community/>).
- (f) Two local television stations, Global TV and CFRN, run free community event listings. If your event has "grassroots" appeal, you may want to fax it to them for review. "Out There", compiled by Seanna Collins, runs six times per day on Global (fax 438-8482). CFRN's Heather Carleton compiles the station's community events listing; she can be reached by fax at 486-3959. Try to submit these at least three weeks in advance.
- (g) Major cultural events (especially multi-day events likely to attract very large audiences) can be submitted to a number of on-line events listings for consideration. These include:
- <http://www.edmonton.com> (the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation site, perhaps the city's best and most comprehensive on-line listing).
  - <http://www.edmontonevents.ca>
  - <http://www.edmonton.ca> (the City of Edmonton web site)
- (h) Community and ethnic / cultural newspapers, usually published monthly, offer relatively inexpensive display advertising. To obtain cost sheets, contact these publications individually; visit the "Newspapers and Periodicals" section of the Yellow Pages for telephone numbers.
- (i) In rare cases, the *Edmonton Journal* is willing to feature a university event in their daily "Keys to the City" column. Generally they will not feature specialized or academic events, preferring those that are accessible to a broad cross section of the community. If you have a major event that might qualify, contact Sandra Halme in Public Affairs (492-0442) for advice.
- (j) Shaw TV runs a free community event listings service. E-mail your notice to [shawtvedm@shaw.ca](mailto:shawtvedm@shaw.ca)

## **LISTSERVES**

Listserve are one of the most effective means of communicating with key interest groups and specialized groups both on and off campus. It is normally good etiquette to post just once, though in some cases, a second posting (such as a "night before" reminder) is a good idea.

Depending on your audience, you may want to post to some of the following:

- (a) *E-Trail*. The U of A Alumni Association produces a monthly e-newsletter that is received by thousands of alumni. If you think your event will be of interest to this wide audience, send a notification to [roland.lines@ualberta.ca](mailto:roland.lines@ualberta.ca). Note that here, as elsewhere, the list manager reserves the right to refuse the posting if it doesn't quite fit the scope of the list.
- (b) *GSA Newsletter*. The Graduate Students' Association distributes regular notices to their members. To request a posting, write to [gsa@ualberta.ca](mailto:gsa@ualberta.ca).
- (c) *CommNet*. Communicators in other faculties and units are often happy to distribute information to their constituents. The communicators' list serve, CommNet, can sometimes accept submissions (for major events of interest to a broad audience only). Contact [sharon.mussolum@ualberta.ca](mailto:sharon.mussolum@ualberta.ca).
- (d) *U of A International*. Events with an international or multicultural flavor are of interest to U of A International and its constituents. Share your event plans with Nancy Hannemann ([nancy.hannemann@ualberta.ca](mailto:nancy.hannemann@ualberta.ca)), Global Education Program Coordinator at UAI. She manages a number of listserves and can suggest other means of promotion.
- (e) *Professional / Academic lists*. Departments and faculty members often have access to useful lists of specialists in Edmonton (and elsewhere) who would be keen to participate. Speak with your organizers and presenters to ensure that they post notices on all of the lists to which they subscribe.

## POSTERS

There's no denying the value of electronic communications in event promotion. But it's equally clear that in our visual culture, old-fashioned posters and brochures remain an important medium for spreading the word. Here are a few suggestions:

- (a) *Producing posters (and other print media) for major events*. Organizers of some major events may choose a special visual design for use in posters, brochures and other materials. If you are contemplating this sort of work, remember:
  - Such designs can be quite expensive, so you should ask for a quote early in the process. Try to determine overall size before requesting a quote.
  - Designs that incorporate and reinforce the Faculty and University visual identity are preferable to those that don't.

We suggest that you contact the Office of External Relations ([education.alumni@ualberta.ca](mailto:education.alumni@ualberta.ca) 492-7755) to discuss your interest in a special design.

- (b) How best to *distribute* posters? The answer depends on your circumstances. If you and your colleagues have some free time after work, you might want to walk them around campus and / or drive them into the community. If not, the costs of paying staff to distribute them can be considerable. Consider the following alternatives:
- The Students' Union Safewalk program distributes and posts items on campus at a relatively inexpensive rate. Contact the program at 492-5563.
  - Some private distributors will post your items in selected Edmonton neighborhoods at a relatively low cost. One such distributor is Mike Wellensick of Main Staple; he can be reached at 468-6962.

### **OTHER ORGANIZATIONS**

At some point, faculty and staff members may choose to organize events in partnership with community organizations. This can be an excellent means of reaching out to the community and building relationships, and it can amplify your promotional efforts. Bear in mind:

- It is important to be aware of the university's past relationship with a given group or groups. Before proposing a partnership, you might wish to contact Lee Elliott, Director of Public Affairs (492-0441, [lee.elliott@ualberta.ca](mailto:lee.elliott@ualberta.ca)) to obtain any relevant history.
- Once a partnership is confirmed, be sure to take advantage of any promotional assistance your partner(s) can provide. Combined efforts amplify results.

Even when we are not working in partnership with other community organizations, we can often benefit from their systems and resources in spreading the word about our events. Consider the following ideas:

- (a) Other educational institutions may be willing to post event notices. This is especially true of departments and units that specialize in an area of work related to the event subject. Call them and see if you can fax or e-mail a notice for posting and distribution. For your reference, Edmonton's post-secondary community includes:
- Grant MacEwan College
  - King's University College
  - Concordia University College
  - NAIT
  - Nor Quest College
  - Newman Theological College
  - Taylor College (formerly NABC)
  - Athabasca University
- (b) The Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) and the Edmonton Catholic School Board (ECSB) each run teachers' mailbag systems. If your event is of genuine interest to teachers and students, consider contacting the EPSB or ECSB communications departments to find out how to submit even announcements for distribution to teachers across the city. It's important not to overwhelm the boards with these requests, so please make sure yours is relevant. Deadlines apply.

- (c) In the past, branches of the Edmonton Public Library have sometimes been willing to display event posters on their notice boards. This takes a bit of work, as it is necessary to fax notices to branches individually. Contact numbers are available in the city telephone directory or on their website <http://www.epl.ca/>
- (d) In some cases, local religious organizations may be willing to circulate notices to members via such media as bulletin boards, e-lists and parish bulletins. Visit the “Church and Religious Organizations” section of the city telephone directory (yellow pages).
- (e) Edmonton is a government town, with thousands of employees working for all three levels of government. Many city, provincial and federal departments maintain effective internal communications systems (electronic and otherwise). If your event seems relevant to the business of one or more of these departments, alert a communicator there. S/he may be willing to publicize the event internally and – better still – to suggest other community organizations that can help you spread your message.

## **MEDIA ADVANCERS AND MEDIA COVERAGE**

The best kind of free publicity is pre-event coverage in local print, radio and TV media. An advance interview on a morning TV or radio show or a short article in the *Edmonton Journal's* City Section can dramatically increase, perhaps double, attendance at a local event. But such free advertising is hard to come by; in most cases, our speakers / topics simply don't fit into the weekly news agenda.

Some departments have long standing and productive relationships with members of the media, and can gauge their interest on a regular basis. For those that don't, the media question can be daunting. How do we know which items to pitch for advancers? To whom should they be sent? For the sake of consistency, we recommend that this sort of media work be referred to the university's Strategic Media Relations team (SMRT) based in the Office of Public Affairs. Dawn Ford and Sandra Halme (Public Affairs) are both members of the team; reach us at:

- Dawn Ford 492-0195 [dawn.ford@ualberta.ca](mailto:dawn.ford@ualberta.ca)
- Sandra Halme 492-0442 [sandra.halme@ualberta.ca](mailto:sandra.halme@ualberta.ca)

We'll do our best to figure out an angle, and to take advantage of the university's strong network of media contacts.

Note that, even when local media don't agree to do advancers, they are often willing to cover events. This kind of coverage benefits the university, the Faculty and your unit. Some components (including visuals, sounds and student participation) make events better suited to media conventions, hence more likely to attract coverage. Make sure you take this into account early in the event planning process, and feel free to contact the above SMRT people (a) for advice, and (b) for assistance in pitching the story.

## **PERSONAL INVITATIONS**

Direct personal communications are often an effective means of ensuring good attendance. Even if you are not planning to mail out invitations, your organizers, speakers and other stakeholders may well be aware of individuals and groups in the community who are likely to be interested in attending. Make sure they know about the event!

This needn't be a difficult or time consuming process; often it is as easy as a quick e-mail to your contacts, including a personal salutation and note as well as the basic event details (topic, time, location, etc.).

Don't forget that many of the most important contacts are internal. Instructors may be willing to announce the event to their students (in rare cases they will even assign attendance as a class requirement!). Contacting these people individually, rather than relying on regular list serve announcements, can be very productive. Again, it doesn't take much; a quick personal e-mail or a phone call, reminding them of the event and inviting them to spread the word, is often all you need.

This lends itself to a final suggestion: effective record keeping. In addition to following an events checklist, you might want to create a running list of promotional contacts and keep that document in an easy to reach position in your event file. It's a simple step that makes promoting your next event a whole lot easier.

### **A FINAL NOTE:**

This document is a work in progress. We have no doubt missed many effective strategies; and we ask for your help in spreading the word. If you have a technique to share (or if you'd like to revise or qualify any of those we've listed here), please contact Dawn Ford ([dawn.ford@ualberta.ca](mailto:dawn.ford@ualberta.ca) 492-0195). We'll be happy to update the document and share it with everyone.

## ***EVENT CHECKLIST***

1. Verify need for event (Identify Purpose – What are you trying to achieve?)
2. Identify Desired Outcomes
3. Identify Scope of event (size, format)
4. Identify potential pitfalls, or factors to pull event off-track.
5. Identify team involved, general responsibilities.
6. Identify key players
7. Identify key Messages.
8. Identify target audience, desired attendees. (Who are you trying to reach?)
9. Set a budget
  - No planning can proceed without a firm budget.
10. Pick the date and place
  - Check for possible conflicts on campus with (Pres. Office, VP Office, relevant Faculty Deans, other events – Web Calendar or Public Affairs, Brenda Briggs, 492-5044)
  - Check for possible conflicts off campus, City of Edmonton, EDE, Chamber of Commerce, Arts/Culture events, hockey games, BioAlberta, relevant industry ...
  - Check for holidays (all religions, nationalities)
11. Confirm availability of key players and their roles (speakers, dignitaries, guests, award recipients ...).
12. Secure appropriate venue that fits needs of format, size, a/v capacity, seating ...
13. Identify all needs. (Identify, but don't DO yet).
  - Promotions to target audience:
    - Letter invites
    - Card invites
    - Posters
    - Advertisement (Folio / daily newspaper / other)
    - Other
  - Invitations to key people (speakers / UofA representatives / sponsors / MPs ...)
    - E-mail from organizer
    - Letter from Dean / Chair / President ...
    - Save the date card / e-mail
    - Other
  - Event Presentations:
    - Visuals (Power Point presentations, video clips, photos ...)
    - Speeches
    - Handouts
    - Awards or certificates ...

Preferably  
TWO months in  
advance

But at least one  
month plus one  
week.

- A/V:
  - Data projector, slide projector, TV / VCR, overhead projector
  - Laptop
  - Podium (and podium light and water)
  - Laser pointer
  - Sound system, microphone(s), cords
  - Screens
  - Special lighting
  - Event photographer
- Venue
  - Stage for presenters
  - Décor (flowers, decorations, table cards ...)
  - Displays (Faculty branding, partner booths, event details ...)
  - Stage banner, backdrop, logo ...
  - Podium sign
  - Directional signs
  - Event agenda display
  - Seating display
  - Tables (type, covering), chairs
  - Panelists / VIPs table
  - Registration table and registration form, pens ...
  - Nametags
  - Entertainment, background music ...
- Other
  - Collateral information material (background information / profiles, brochures, handouts ...)
  - Food and drink, supplies
  - Giveaways (pins, buttons, CD, chocolate, lanyard ...)
- Media needs (prepare in consultation with Public Affairs)
  - Media Advisory
  - News release
  - Background information / media package
  - Media feed (audio box)
  - Power supply-video
  - Camera riser(s)
  - Interview area
  - Photo opportunity / unveiling, etc.

Cont'd  
- Two months in advance

#### 14. Develop a time line

(Work backwards from event)

- Include *all* tasks, i.e.
  - Design and printing invitations
  - Booking a photographer
  - Giving a final count of attendees to the caterer
  - Preparing nametags
- Assign each task a deadline
- Assign a person responsible for each task
- Review the timeline daily to ensure you're on track

15. Compile an invitation list

16. Mail, courier, e-mail, or deliver invitations

- At least one month prior to event
- Set up an RSVP mechanism, email, voice mail, reply card (and set RSVP deadline)
- Send detailed program to speakers, MC, award recipients, etc.

One month prior to event

17. Secure event services

- Food
- Flowers
- Photographer
- Entertainment
- Audio visual equipment
- Parking services (alert)
- Campus security (alert if VIPs)
- Reserve your internal staff / grad students etc. to staff the event

18. Confirm the agenda

- M.C.
- Greetings
- Guest speaker(s)
- Presentations
- Include minute-by-minute details such as where dignitaries will assemble (You informed dignitaries three to four weeks in advance of their specific role, how long they have to speak, what other guests will be speaking and for how long etc.)

At least 15 days prior to event

19. Finalize preparations

- RSVP deadlines (at least 3 days prior)
- Confirm attendees
- Receive all printed material (at least 10 days required for printing at offset press)
- Collect banners from printer (at least 2 days prior)
- Finalize and load PowerPoint onto laptop, burn backup CD (at least 2 days prior)
- Finalize speeches (at least 2 days prior)
- Provide final attendee number to caterer for food volumes (at least 2 days prior)
- Compile all copies of finished presentations, handouts, speeches, other photocopies
- Print nametags (one day prior)

Last 15 days before event

Last 2 weeks before event

20. Media advisory and attendee reminder (in conjunction with Public Affairs)

- Send media advisory two days to one week prior to event
- Media call downs (one day before event, call assignment editors, producers, etc. to ensure media advisory was received and to secure event in "day book")
- Send reminder e-mail to registered attendees confirmed time, date, and location about four days prior to event

Final week before event

21. Staff the event
  - Check venue air conditioning
  - Check sound system, visuals
  - Check for and eliminate or mitigate unexpected background noise, other event overlap, service shortfalls, etc.
  - Confirm food and beverage arrival, setup
  - Set up all displays
  - Greeters at the door
  - Greeters for speakers
  - Greeters for non-speaking dignitaries
  - Someone to oversee caterer
  - Someone to set up shots for the photographer
  - Someone to coordinate media (also to send media release on day of event)
22. Debrief
  - Formal discussion with team members: what worked, what didn't
  - Informal discussion with speakers: what was positive, what was negative
  - Measure results against desired outcomes
23. Thank / celebrate / recognize team members who helped produce the event
24. Thank you messages / letters to key players (VIPs, speakers, etc. not attendees)
25. Media follow-up (if required) and/or media tracking (clippings)
26. Event survey of all attendees, preferably online and short
27. Archive coverage, presentations and overview of event on website
28. Archive planning material for future.

Event day

Post-event