

# Choosing the Right Speaker

## Clarify Your Event's Purpose

Before you select a topic, type of event or specific speaker, you should establish your purpose in collaboration with any universities or organization(s) you've chosen to partner with. Your purpose might include:

- educating about or discussing a specific topic
- preparing the ground so as to address a challenging topic down the road
- modeling the HxA Way
- discussing or developing a new policy
- decreasing polarization
- "friendraising" or fundraising

What will your topic be? Why this topic and not some other topic?

What type of event is best suited to your objectives? Some options are:

- featured lecture/presentation
- fireside chat in which a featured guest answers questions posed by the host and audience
- professional development workshop
- featuring an author to talk about their book
- an event centered around a day of importance (i.e. Constitution Day)

Who is your intended audience?

How will your event title and description capture your purpose, and invite your intended audience to join the conversation with you in a spirit of intellectual curiosity and openness?

Will it be important for event attendees to sign up in advance of the event?

## Determine the Date, Time, Location, Structure, and Format of Your Event

Setting a date, time, and location for your event involves checking with your organization and other calendars for competing events and holidays, as well as coordinating with your preferred speaker(s)' availability. In-person events typically need at least 2-3 months of planning time to ensure you can secure a venue and to give your chosen speaker ample time to make travel arrangements. By comparison, online events typically only need 3-6 weeks of planning time.

You'll also need to reserve a room/venue that is appropriately located and sized. **Note that a small crowded room is always better than a big room that appears empty.** Venues often get booked

up to a year in advance, so have some backup venues in mind if your top choices are booked.

Given your event's purpose, you'll also need to decide which structure and format would be best. Will this be face-to-face, online, or both? What sort of room and technology set-up will be required? Will there be microphones set up for people who want to ask questions?

[Here is a sample schedule](#) that can be modified for use with different event formats.

Learn and follow all applicable rules at your event space, which might include rules about:

- bringing in food, alcohol, or even water
- event-listing access and protocol
- notifying venue security or other units about your event
- if your event is online, who will have access and how
- if your event is recorded, whose permissions you will need and what tech support you will have

## Cost Considerations and Funding Opportunities

In addition to the speaking fee of your chosen speaker, additional event costs you may encounter include:

- Travel, lodging, and meals for speaker
- venue rental
- event security
- tech support (e.g., streaming and recording services)
- advertising
- refreshments
- a dinner with key people after the event
- event printing costs (e.g., flyers, name tags, stickers, table tents, etc.)

When inviting a speaker through HxA's Speaker's Bureau, be sure to provide relevant information about your event's purpose and what accommodations you plan to provide including your honorarium budget, reimbursement of travel costs, lodging and meals.

Some expenses will need to be paid in advance of your event. Depending on your budget, you may need to find event co-sponsors who are willing to share the costs or donors who are willing to fund part or all of the event.

### Co-Sponsoring Events

When inviting another organization or university to co-sponsor your event, be upfront about the sponsorship cost. It might be simplest to have them pay for a specific thing directly rather than dealing with funds changing accounts or reimbursements. Remember to thank your co-sponsors in your event promotional materials and at the event itself.

# Planning and Promoting Your Event

## Purposeful Planning

If you are working with a team to organize your event, you'll need to be intentional about roles and responsibilities. Some people will, for a variety of reasons, just want to show up on the day of (and such people might agree to be responsible for a task that must be done on the day of).

Identify who is willing to make a successful event happen, and designate one person as the event lead or champion. Put all organizers on a shared document (e.g., Google drive or Microsoft Teams drive) that identifies who will take on which tasks. **Be sure to include deadlines.** A simple chart listing Task, Completion Deadline, and Person Responsible can do wonders! ([Here's a sample chart you can copy.](#)) The event lead will need to follow up with each person who has agreed to a specific set of tasks.

Partnering with other programs, organizations, or institutions could get you help with the event planning tasks and with event promotion.

## Inviting an Audience and Advertising Your Event

Once you have your fantastic event planned and scheduled, be sure to get it listed and promoted as far in advance as possible! If you want any specific people to attend, remember that schedules start filling up months in advance, so you should reach out to them ASAP to get your event on their calendars.

Sharing the necessary information about your event across the appropriate channels will help drive attendance and increase people's engagement with your goals. You should keep a record on your shared planning document of all places/channels you advertised the event in case you have to announce a change later. Any official press releases will likely need to be submitted several weeks in advance. Be aware of any policies your organization has about distributing promotional emails or posting event flyers and any required statements in your marketing materials addressing individuals who need accommodations and whom they should contact. Check with your organization or event venue for disabilities resources or guidance.

## What to Convey in Promotional Communications

- name or title of the event, including name(s) and title(s) of any special guest(s) or presenter(s)
- purpose of your event
- type of event (e.g., presentation, professional development workshop, fireside chat)
- photos of people or things that convey your event's purpose
- format of the event (e.g., in-person, virtual, in-person but also live-streamed)
- date, time, and location of event (including live-stream link if applicable)
- names of event sponsors

- any other info people might need (e.g., event contact person, info for persons needing accommodations, if event is free & open to the public, if event serves food or drink, parking info)
- hyperlinks or QR codes for an event registration form or live-stream link
  - Tip: Asking individuals to pre-register will give you a better sense of the expected audience size and can be helpful to know if your venue has size restrictions or if you're providing refreshments.

## Options for Promoting Your Event to Your Target Audiences

- organizational events calendar
- email announcement list
- submit an advertisement to a local newspaper
  - Tip: Highlight your speaker(s) and keep the ad short and simple with minimal jargon, a call to action (how to register), and important event details such as location, date, and time.
- flyers or posters
  - Tip: when you email a flyer promoting your event, be sure the flyer image is embedded in the body of the email itself and has a link to the registration webpage (if applicable)--do not rely on people being interested enough to click open an attachment
- social media posts (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn)
- digital display screens (i.e., "LCD ads")
- announce at relevant meetings
- press release or other news story
- contact relevant people (e.g., donors or local organizations)

# Executing Your Event

## Ensuring a Smooth Event Experience

No matter how far in advance you've planned your event, you'll need all hands on deck the day of your event. Your team should have a pre-event meeting just to map out day-of logistics.

Day-Of Tasks and Roles to Assign:

- who will take guests from point A to point B, and point B to point C
- who will arrive at the event venue early to check A/V equipment, room/seating arrangements
- who will handle refreshments
- who will serve as a warm and welcoming greeter
- who will introduce the event, set the tone, and explain any ground rules for the event
- who will liaise with tech support
- who will liaise with event security
- who will liaise with speakers
- who will take photos of the event (and get signed photo releases where necessary)
- who will be the point of contact for any media inquiries or interviews (journalists often contact and/or want to speak with event planners the day of the event)

Use a Run-of-Show document to designate responsibilities throughout the duration of the event and to give your team easy access to important links and details. ([Here is a run sheet template you can use](#)).

## Have a Contingency Plan

Have a plan in place in case your event has to be rescheduled due to speaker cancellation, bad weather, or other emergency. These decisions must be made in advance because contingency plans must be enacted very quickly. Decisions to make:

- designate the person(s) responsible for managing contingencies
- decide if you will move the event from in-person to online, cancel the event, substitute a visiting speaker with a local one, or reschedule the event
- determine the person in charge of posting notifications of the new plan (ideally, you have kept a record of all the places you advertised the event so you can use that record to be sure you post notification of the change in plan to all the same channels)
- if you think your event has any potential to generate unrest or disruption, discuss with security and other relevant units (keep in mind that your group could possibly be asked to incur the cost of event security)