

Planning An Effective Annual Meeting Checklist

Annual shareholder meetings are crucial to securing continued and future investors. Therefore, the utmost regard must be given to ensure a flawless presentation. The meeting planning process involves much more than merely setting an agenda and choosing speakers. The following checklist provides a comprehensive strategy to planning an effective annual meeting, so that no details will be overlooked.

- **List every goal that the meeting must accomplish.** This list will set the agenda for the meeting.
- **Identify the themes you wish to present.** Choose the main messages to present, along with current and potential issues that should be communicated. Keep the number of themes small, to present a unified message.
- **Prepare an annual meeting script.** From start to finish, script every detail of what must occur and when, down to the minute. This will ensure that all goals are met while maintaining control and preventing the meeting from running long, which is sure to displease shareholders and guests.
- **Detail task assignments.** Record all task assignments in a timeline and a check-off format, showing deadlines and the organizer responsible for completion. Software can automate this record keeping and print updated assignments and reports on demand.
- **Select and brief presenters.** Select the presenters and work with them early to outline their scripts.
- **Prepare a list of questions.** Listing questions likely to be raised and preparing thoroughly researched answers will help presenters at the annual meeting.
- **Create a control book.** The Control Book is the central repository for all information regarding the annual meeting and all related events before and after it. It should contain, at minimum, the date, time, and location of the annual meeting; script; agenda; all speeches; motions; press releases and other public communications; proxy arrangements; every arrangement with vendors; contact information for all participants, planners, and vendors; and task assignments. The Control Book serves several purposes—to ensure that all organizers are working from the same "play book," to make critical information available to all organizers at all times, and to be a guide for future annual meetings so that organizers don't have to "reinvent the wheel."
- **Make contingency plans.** A flawless event is rare, if not impossible. What will happen if a key presenter becomes ill? What will happen if the meeting is disrupted by a fire alarm, loss of power, or other emergency? What will organizers do if a piece of AV equipment fails? Spending some time to make backup plans is well worth the effort.
- **Create agenda books.** The agenda books are used by all persons presenting, making, or seconding motions, or otherwise participating actively in the annual meeting. Agenda books should contain the agenda and the script, but should also include individually tailored material such as a speaker's delivery text, or instructions for making motions.

Make detailed guest lists. Although shareholders are automatically invited to the annual meeting, other invitees to the annual meeting and to special events such as a dinner or reception will vary.

Tailor registration for good relations and marketing. Keep shareholder kits for those who arrive without them, and additional guest information, at the registration tables. Such simple courtesies are appreciated. Registration recordkeeping should not be seen as just a legal requirement; it can serve as a marketing tool by providing information on shareholders and prospective investors.

Make the annual meeting a quality media event. Free positive coverage of your company can be a great benefit. Invite media members most likely to attend. Prepare media kits with the annual report, quarterlies, press releases, biographies, product literature, photographs or video, and other material you would like incorporated in an article. Offer interviews with officers and directors, and prepare a special room for them. If you anticipate mass media coverage, especially regarding a sensitive issue, get expert help to manage press contact.

Spare no attention to detail in preparing the meeting room. Ensuring shareholders' comfort and a good impression is in the company's best interest. Make certain that all audiovisual equipment, especially the sound system, is working properly, and that presenters can be heard and seen well. All display and other setup should be complete long before shareholders arrive. Catering and other services should not disrupt the meeting.

Rehearse. Participants should rehearse the annual meeting at least once to ensure that they understand their role and their timing. Presenters should use a stopwatch to pace themselves.

Create a follow-up list. Every event will require follow-up actions. A detailed checklist, like the assignment list, will ensure appropriate handling.

Debrief. Document good ideas, successes, solutions, and failures, and discuss them after the event. Prepare a report on lessons learned for the next annual meeting, with recommendations.