Are you Getting the Right Information? 4 Ways to Collect Better Meeting Feedback

Your last chapter meeting was well attended, you heard members and guests say they liked the food, and people stuck around after the meeting to chat. That's great. At first glance, you seem to be providing what you members and guests want.

But are you?

People attend meetings and events for a variety of reasons, from networking and getting continuing education credits, to hearing from industry leaders and getting involved with advocacy.

What are the real reasons people come to your events? How well are you meeting those needs? There's a good chance the location, the food, and the side chatter aren't the only reasons they signed up and paid to attend. If you're not giving your attendees what they want, they may go somewhere else to get it.

Here are four ways to better understand what it is members and guests want out of your events (and perhaps even, your chapter) and how you did at meeting their needs.

1. Survey them. Asking those who attended is one of the best ways to gather information. By personalizing your survey respondents are more likely to complete them, as they are more inclined to feel that you really care what they think. Consider a hook or giveaway to improve your response rate, like a drawing to attend your next event for free, or even something as simple as a coffee shop gift card. Just be smarter about what you ask and how you ask it, and you'll get more of the information you're looking for.

2. Ask for feedback from an unbiased observer or a "not-so-secret" attendee.

Department stores do this all the time, using secret shoppers to check employees' customer service and sales skills. Consider asking committee members or someone who's opinion you trust but who isn't a member, like a sponsor or industry expert, to attend and provide feedback around what they thought worked well and what could be improved They can also talk to attendees and ask questions you've developed about why they're attending. By standardizing your questions, you'll know you're gathering similar information, regardless of who asks.

3. Hold a live check in. Ask attendees to stick around for a few extra minutes so you can find out what they thought of the event. You'll gather the information while it's fresh in their minds, which may lead them to give you details they won't remember once they leave. Someone from your event committee can do this, or you could ask someone else in the chapter or from outside the organization to lead this session.

Return on Investment – Theirs and Yours
You can only effectively measure your return on investment (ROI) if you know the real reasons people attended your event. Gathering information prior to it, perhaps by including a required question or two on the registration, is another easy way to do that. Not only will you get the details you need to appropriately measure ROI, but by gathering it beforehand you can adjust as needed to better meet those goals.

Just as you want to know why they attended, you need to be sure you are clear on your goals. What did you want to get out of this event, and who did you want to attend? Were you looking for members to bring a certain number of new guests? More millennials? Set your intentions before the event so you can see how you did against them, if you want to know things like where attendees came from –age, demographic, work history, members versus non-members, etc.

If you don't know what your attendees want, or what you wanted, out of an event, you have no way to see how well you did. Putting in some structure lets you gather the right information before you start, see how well you did after, and adjust as needed for future events, to better meet the needs of existing members and bring in, and keep, new ones.