



Chapter Interest Group Guide

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Welcome

ATD encourages chapters to establish interest groups to meet the needs of their membership.

In this guide you will find information on how to start an interest group within your chapter – including special interest groups (SIGs), geographic interest groups (GIGs), and student interest groups (student SIGs). The purpose of these groups is to provide your members an opportunity to network and learn from one another.

CHAPTER INTEREST GROUPS

The idea of an interest group may originate from a number of sources including your chapter board, a group of members, or an individual. Interest groups are specialized forums for on-going professional development, sharing of innovative ideas and experiences, and exploration of challenges. The formation of chapter special interest groups (SIGs), geographic interest groups (GIGs), and student special interest groups (student SIGs) are optional and at the discretion of your chapter based on the needs of your membership.

NOTE: Chapters may use different terms to describe groups within their chapters designed to meet the needs of its membership (i.e. subgroup, special interest group, professional development networks, etc.).

Forming a special interest group can fulfill the following needs:

- Serve as a conduit for members to integrate into chapter activities
- Provide opportunities for members to discuss and share a special professional interest
- Provide non-board members the opportunity to get involved in a leadership role within the chapter
- Provide leadership development opportunities for members
- Expand knowledge and promotion of chapter, which could increase membership.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

Special interest groups are informal groups that provide your members opportunities for exploring professional development in specific areas of interest; opportunities for sharing their expertise with other members; and opportunities to network with colleagues. Chapters may form a SIG when strong interest exists within the chapter's membership.

Geographic Interest Groups (GIGs)

Geographic interest groups are designed to extend your chapter's programs to areas beyond its current location. Many chapters, especially those serving large geographic or metropolitan areas, have GIGs. These groups allow the chapter to serve a larger area without forcing members to travel long distances to attend functions. GIGs provide meetings at convenient times and locations so individuals don't have to miss valuable time away from work.

Best practices to follow when forming an interest group:

- Identify a group leader/manager.
- Have the SIG/GIG leader report back to a board member such as the VP of Programming or Director of SIGs and GIGs.
- Treat a SIG/GIG meeting as you would a normal chapter meeting.
 - If you charge for general membership meetings, charge for the SIG/GIG meeting.
 - Develop a strategic plan for the group.
 - Ensure there is quality programming and the needs of the members are being served.
- Charge a premium for non-members (the idea would be to require membership).

Student Special Interest Groups (Student SIGs)

A student SIG is an effective way to create a membership pipeline and to establish a strong presence in the community. Many chapters partner with local colleges and universities to establish a student SIG that meets regularly.

Best practices when working with student SIGs:

- Designate a faculty advisor or chapter member to head the group and report back to the chapter board.
- Charge a reduced membership rate for student members.
- Establish a mentoring program with current members and students.
- Create a student scholarship program.
- Gather internship opportunities from your chapter members and communicate opportunities to local faculty members.
- Establish a student relations committee and/or director position on your board that is led or held by a student member.

More information on how to engage students can be found at www.fd.org/students

FORMING AN INTEREST GROUP

Your chapter board should first determine the type of interest group(s) that would best meet the chapter's needs. Once a determination has been made, the next step is to form the group(s). See sample guide below. Remember, this process may differ depending on the unique needs of your chapter.

Identify Need

The idea for SIGs may originate from a number of sources such as the local chapter board or a committed group or individual. If there is a substantial number of professionals in a certain field or functional areas, than there may be a market for a SIG. Nevertheless, it is important to assess the various options and to determine if a SIG is the answer.

Formation

Once the need for a SIG is identified, the next step is to form the group. It can be established almost immediately if there are enough people committed to its success.

The idea to form a SIG usually comes from a single individual, however having more than one committed person to work as the core leadership group is recommended. The extent to which those initial people are committed will determine how quickly and how well the SIG forms.

If no individual or group volunteers to form the SIG, one has to be found. You may consider asking a former chapter leader or past president to help establish the SIG. Active chapter members and successful local professionals in a specific field are other individuals who may be interested in leading the SIG.

The chapter president and board should be notified verbally and in writing of the intent to form a SIG, and of the commitment of the individual or group pursuing the idea. The board will determine whether to approve the SIG based on the documentation provided. Since a SIG provides new benefits for chapter members and may bring in new members, one may be able to gain support of chapter leaders. Board members can be of help if they are kept informed of the SIG's process. There should be an executive board liaison appointed to each SIG. In some cases, the idea to form a SIG comes directly from the chapter board. In this instance, a member of the board may be elected to run the SIG.

Develop a Mission Statement

Once the formation of the SIG is approved by the chapter board, the core group must prepare a statement that answers the question, "Why should this group exist?" The mission statement will also help recruit members for the SIG, since it will answer the question, "Why should I join?"

Establish the Needs of the SIG

After completing a mission statement the group must then identify the needs and interests of members to properly plan activities and events. This can be done by surveying the chapter members, prospects, and others who may be interested in joining the SIG and asking for their input and feedback. The leaders of the SIG should review the collected data and use that information as a starting point when planning events. This may also be a good time to revise the mission statement, if necessary.

By keeping a list of individuals who are interested in the group or have provided feedback, the SIG will have a prospect list to communicate with when getting started.

PLAN ACTIVITIES TO MEET THE SIG'S NEEDS

Special activities should be planned to meet the needs and interests of the SIG. Most SIGs start small and expand over time and as awareness of the group increases. Some SIGs may start by having different members host informal meetings at their workplace. At these meetings, the host may explain the mission of the SIG and call for volunteers. Decisions should also be made about how often to meet. The group may find meeting bimonthly or quarterly better suits its needs.

Before finalizing any planned activities, be sure to notify the chapter board's programming chair to avoid scheduling conflicts.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in a SIG is voluntary. All SIG members continue to belong, pay dues to, and receive benefits from the chapter. SIGs may charge dues, but nonpayment should not carry any punitive action or affect the individual's chapter membership status. It is important for the chapter and the SIG to discuss the disposition of all SIG revenue, and decide if funds go back to the chapter or remain separate.

PUBLICITY

It's important to market upcoming events to promote the SIG and its activities.

Do as many of the following as possible, and think of additional creative ways to let people know about the SIG and its events:

- Inform all chapter members of the SIG and its mission
- Include SIG information on the chapter website
- Announce details about the SIG in the chapter newsletter
- Announce details about the SIG at chapter meeting
- Promote the SIG to other organizations in which talent development professionals may want to participate
- Include messages about the SIG on various social media outlets