

Designing a Brown Bag Series

Introduction

Definition: A Brown Bag series is simply a working name for a discussion group that comes together to discuss a topic of common interest and co-create a solution to a shared challenge(s).

Groups can form around:

1. Affinities

Examples: Type of organization you work for or your field of practice--attorneys, CPAs, etc.

2. Job descriptions

Examples: Major gifts officers, or planned gifts specialists or executive directors

3. Level of expertise

Examples: Beginners, intermediate, advanced)

There is no formal presentation, but a discussion facilitator should be assigned--usually someone from the host facility.

You'll want to have some type of food: bagels and coffee, a dutch treat breakfast or lunch in a restaurant, simple box lunches, or the bring your own "brown bag" that gave the series its name.

Try to have council members take turns hosting the discussions at their nonprofit, firm or company office. Nonprofits can offer tours afterwards to those interested. Most firms and companies are happy to host.

This is an "add-on" to your current council programming. An extra learning and mentoring opportunity.

Keys to Success

- Plan the entire series in advance and publicize it
- Open it up to anyone who wants to participate, member or not (at least on a trial basis)-- these are great exposure to prospective members
- Make sure the facilitator has some discussion questions in advance. Here are some simple questions that can be tailored to any topic to get discussion going.
 - What is your biggest challenge right now?
 - What has been your biggest success?
 - What do you wish you knew more about?

- What have you found to be the best sources of help (what websites, books, seminars, blogs, etc.)?

- Keep the questions broad to start, the discussion will narrow itself.
- Start and end on time--if folks join late or leave early, so be it.
- Encourage participants to bring samples to share if the topic lends itself.

If you can come up with a fun name for the series, that will help with your marketing efforts.

Some ideas:

- Great Ideas Exchange
- Coffee and Conversation
- Rise and Shine