

ORGANISING SUCCESSFUL OPEN-HOUSE MEETINGS

PURPOSE OF AN OPEN-HOUSE MEETING

An Open-House Meeting is a fun and celebratory club meeting, to tell more about Toastmasters to members of the public and show them Toastmasters in action. Its organisation fulfils a number of core purposes:

- ▶ Raising the profile of Toastmasters in the your area.
- ▶ Raising the club's profile within its immediate vicinity and community.
- ▶ Attracting a large number of guests to the club, the more the merrier!
- ▶ Encouraging guests to take an active part in an energetic meeting.
- ▶ Amplifying the recognition of achievements and participation by everyone present.
- ▶ Inspiring guests to join the club and become members of Toastmasters.

A successful open-house meeting will require a fair amount of prior preparation, which is covered in this document. A big measure of success of an open-house is to have an audience that's highly engaged with the meeting itself so that it sees the benefits of Toastmasters first-hand.

An open-house meeting can last anywhere between 1h and 2h but **must include** the following segments:

- ▶ Testimonials about Toastmasters, these can be done as part of the prepared speeches.
- ▶ Interactive speech evaluations involving the whole audience. These are complementary to evaluator delivered evaluations.
- ▶ 'Card game' Table Topics session.
- ▶ Strong meeting close to inspire and persuade the guests to start their Toastmasters journey.

Our District will support open-house meetings by sending a box containing almost all the materials needed to run a top quality meeting **including marketing and promotional flyers**. **Additionally**, up to EUR 100 of room-hire costs and/or marketing costs will be refunded. **Finally**, marketing templates will be provided.

MEETING PLANNING

Logistics

"Amateurs talk about tactics, but professional study logistics" as the saying says. The first step in organising an amazing open-house meeting is to arrange the basic logistics of the meeting. Exact arrangements will vary somewhat between community and corporate clubs but this step is essential for all clubs. Organising an open-house meeting can be done either by the club's committee or an "ad-hoc" organising team.

It is essential to engage and inspire the whole club in this endeavour. **If each club member brought one guest with them, usual meeting attendance would be doubled and with two guests per member trebled!**

Key things to plan for are:

- ▶ Meeting date and time – **This step should be done 4 weeks beforehand. The meeting can either be an additional meeting or take place in-lieu of a normal club meeting.**
- ▶ Meeting length – **Meeting length can be anywhere between 1h and 2h but don't forget to plan extra time for networking and post-meeting debrief and questions. As a rule of thumb add at least 15mins either side of the meeting itself for this.**
- ▶ Securing a venue – **This requirement only applies if the open-house meeting will be held in a venue that's different from the usual one. If an alternative venue is needed, find one that will seat around 50 people, offer provision for using audio-visual equipment and be of the highest possible standards of neatness and cleanliness.**
- ▶ Catering and refreshments – **This is optional but recommended if possible. Budget conservatively and remember that not providing enough drinks or nibbles can tarnish a positive first impression.**

Marketing

It is an imperative to market an open-house meeting as much as possible and to reach out as far and wide as feasible. **Templates for posters and flyers can be ordered or obtained from www.toastmasters.org and you also have to the possibility of designing your own fliers or posters as well. Just remember to adhere to the Toastmasters brand guidelines.**

All marketing should be "you" focused and heavily emphasise the benefits that a new member will gain by joining Toastmasters. Using second person "you" is also far more direct and catchier.

COMMUNITY CLUBS

- ▶ Use the club's website or create one – **An invitation to attend the meeting should be prominently displayed on the main page of the website and provide basic details. If your club doesn't have a website, the meeting is a perfect occasion to launch one!**
- ▶ Create a promotional video – **This is very powerful and definitely worth the effort. Length wise a couple of minutes are enough. Make it as professional as possible and include basic details about the meeting.**
- ▶ Use Meetup.com – **Create a special event, promote it heavily within the network and make sure as many members and guest sign-up to attend it. The more attendees there are, the higher the event's ranking will be!**
- ▶ Eventbrite event – **Useful to track attendance and can be linked to or from a website and turned into a Facebook event to reach out to a wider audience.**
- ▶ Social media – **Use and abuse them! Facebook and Twitter are the best platforms. Note that it is possible to schedule posts on Facebook over a period of weeks to promote an event or page. Ask attendees to invite their Facebook friends and contacts to the event!**
- ▶ Invite local media – **Contact local media as early as you can and invite a journalist to the meeting.**

- ▶ Invite your local MP and Councillors – **While there’s no guarantee that they will be able to attend.** Local politicians have lots of contacts and may spread the word via their own channels.
- ▶ Use community noticeboards – **They are the perfect places to put a promotional poster in.** Noticeboards are typically present all over the place from churches, to supermarkets, to post offices and pubs.
- ▶ Using existing clubs and networks – **These can be local gyms, choirs, religious groups and any other group that you can think of.**
- ▶ Leafleting – **Nothing prevents you from putting leaflets in letterboxes in a neighbourhood or leaving them in shops and cafés.** However, this method is very labour intensive.

CORPORATE CLUBS

- ▶ Avoid using “club” – **Do NOT describe Toastmasters as a club but rather as “skills development platform” or a “leadership development programme”.** Match your language to the one used internally by your/the company and emphasise the professional and corporate benefits Toastmasters would bring to your/the company.
- ▶ Invite executives and senior management – **Provide them with an opportunity to speak for a few minutes at the beginning of meeting (they may have other commitments shortly afterwards).**
- ▶ Use internal publication and newsletters – **This may require permissions but is a good way of reaching out to a large number of people quickly.**
- ▶ Reach out to HR – **Ensuring buy-in from Human Resources or Training departments is a good way to build up momentum for the club and its benefits.**
- ▶ Reach out to apprentices and graduates – **This may not be relevant to your organisation but if specific training schemes exists, use them to emphasise the benefits of learning public speaking skills early-on in one’s career.**
- ▶ Use internal networks – **Women networks, ethnic minority networks, and LGBTI networks may exist in your company.**
- ▶ Use posters and hand out flyers – **The more the merrier if possible.**

It is worth remembering that marketing an open-house meeting should be complementary to ongoing and already existing Marketing and Public Relations efforts of the club. However, an open-house meeting does provide a strong opportunity to restart these from a new base if needed.

Meeting Agenda & Roles

The open-house meeting will be very similar to a normal club meeting. However, some roles will be done a little differently and the agenda will be planned with the objective of giving guests opportunities to actively take part in the meeting.

The Table Topics session must be after prepared speeches and evaluations have been held. This is in order to achieve increasing levels of audience interaction and to ease guests in taking part in the Table Topics session.

- ▶ **President’s Introduction – The President need to start the meeting on a high note and to briefly explain the history of Toastmasters and emphasize how the Toastmasters educational programme helps everyone to improve their public speaking skills.**

- ▶ **Toastmaster of the meeting – An experienced Toastmaster should facilitate the meeting to keep it as smooth as possible.**
- ▶ **Harkmaster – Replaces or run alongside the grammarian role. This role is far more interactive and involves someone asking questions to the audience on what happened during the meeting. For example who said what in a speech/evaluation, any interesting factoids etc. The Harkmaster rewards correct answers by giving a sweet or chocolate.**
- ▶ **Speakers – Ideally two speakers should speak during the meeting, one of which should speak about how Toastmasters has benefited them. Aim to have a mixture of levels, so the first speaker can be a relatively new member of the club, while the second speaker maybe close to complete their Competent Communicator manual or Pathways Level 2 or is already an advanced speaker.**
- ▶ **Evaluator – Seek out the club’s best evaluators for the task. Each evaluation which be divided into a standard evaluation of up to 3mins and an interactive evaluation of anything from 3mins to 7mins facilitated by the evaluators.**
- ▶ **Table Topics Master – The Table Topics session will follow very specific rules (see below) and an experienced Toastmaster should conduct it.**
- ▶ **Sergeant at Arms (multiple) – Anyone can help here but ensure that all of them are appropriately brief beforehand.**
- ▶ **Reserve Functionary – Must be able to set-in and do any of the above roles at short notice if needed.**

All the other meeting roles such as General Evaluator and Table Topics Evaluator can be included if time permits. **Leaving up to 25mins for the Table Topics section is recommended, Table Topics Evaluations could consequently be spread between one Evaluator covering even speakers and the other odd speakers.**

It isn’t recommended to have more than 3 prepared speeches during an open-house meeting. Remember that this meeting objective is to get the guests to speak!

DURING THE MEETING


Sergeants at Arms

A team of Sergeant at Arms should set-up the room at least 20 mins before the meeting is due to start and pay particular attention to the following aspects:

- ▶ Meeting room signs and direction signs if needed.
- ▶ Introductory leaflets on each chair if available.
- ▶ Agendas on each chair.
- ▶ Joining instructions and forms on each chair.
- ▶ Club banner displayed and visible.

Someone should stand at the door to greet guests as they arrive to the meeting and provide them with a badge. Guests contact details should already have been received by that time, but could be checked and/or integrated. Walk-in guests should be registered and a badge produced on the spot.

As the guests come into the meeting ask all of them to fill in the card below:

	
Name:	
Please write something about yourself that is very interesting, adventurous, unique or that you are proud of:	

Collect all cards before the meeting starts, these will be used later in the Table Topics session.

Interactive Evaluation

Its purpose of interactive evaluations is to “prime” the audience to the concept of evaluating speeches and to make them feel that they too can evaluate a speech. The interactivity enables the audience to get more involved in the meeting, ahead of the Table Topics session. Before the speeches, the Toastmaster of the meeting will very briefly introduce the concept of evaluating speeches and ask the audience to listen.

Each speech evaluator will begin by doing a standard speech evaluation. Once it is complete the evaluator will facilitate an interactive evaluation of the speech. The evaluator should put forward suggestions for commendations and recommendations from the audience to the speaker. **The evaluator should emphasise the value of what audience members felt, saw or heard that they liked or which could have been done differently. If you are chairing this section of the meeting don't hesitate to coax and prompt the audience by asking leading questions such as “This speech had a 3 parts structure, why was it so effective?” or “What did you notice about the speaker’s movements on stage?” or even “What did you enjoy the most about this speech?”.**

Table Topics Session

This is where the card that each guest filled in earlier comes into play. Introduce the table topics session as a game that everyone in the room will be playing and briefly explain the concept of table topics and impromptu speaking.

Table Topics shouldn't last more than 1 min 30 secs and ideally even be timed to be just 1 min long. **This is in order to have as many guests as possible taking part in the session.**

The Table Topics Master should then pull out a card at random and read it out loud to everyone present. Once the card is read you should pause for a moment to let the audience guess who

it might be. Afterwards, call out the person that wrote the card by their name and invite them to the stage.

This approach is guaranteed to drive up audience participation and avoids having unfamiliar participants speaking on a topic they know nothing about. After all we all know how to speak about ourselves and this method harnesses this to maximum effect. It is also quite likely that participants may have told this story before to friends and acquaintances, making them even more familiar about the material and confident to talk about it to an audience.

Run as many Table Topics as time allows, ideally a dozen or even twenty if time permits so that as many people as possible get a chance to take part and speak. This “card game” can be run alongside classical table topics questions as well, if so make the questions as easy as possible to answer, or use a technique such as the “bag of tricks” where someone has to talk about an object they’ve pulled out of a bag.

Meeting Close

When closing the open-house meeting bear the following points in mind:

- ▶ Ask the guests for feedback – **Ask each guest to say their name and to describe the meeting in just one word. “Please tell us your name and what you felt about the meeting in one word”.**
- ▶ Thank all guests for coming and taking part –**You can additionally reward them with a certificate of participation or other small gift, or invite them for some drinks after the end of the meeting.**
- ▶ There is more to Toastmasters than just public speaking – **Briefly highlight leadership opportunities and that Toastmastering a meeting is a big deal as it involve leading a 10+ person’s team.**
- ▶ The next meeting is taking place on ... – **This is crucial to invite guests present to take part in regular club meeting and activities.**
- ▶ Take plenty of photographs – **This is for post-meeting follow-up and updates on the club’s website and social media channels.**
- ▶ What’s in it for you – **Have a powerful persuader closing the meeting and invite the guests to begin their Toastmasters journey.**

POST-MEETING

Follow-up

Contact all attendees to the demo meeting the day after the meeting, **thank them for attending and remind them to the procedure to follow if they wish to become member. Additionally, highlight the date and location of the first club meeting and that speaking opportunities will be available in it.**

Thanks all guests who filled-in membership forms and tell them that you would love to process their membership so that they can present their Ice Breaker or be assigned a meeting role.

Should guests not join before the next meeting, send them an invitation a few days before the next meeting. If they don’t join at the next meeting, send them an invitation for the next meeting. Follow-up until they either join or ask you to stop sending them meeting invitations.

Next Steps & Mentoring

Process the membership applications and register the new members on Club Central ASAP. If possible, provide new member packs to the new members with guidance on meeting roles etc. so that they're off to the best start. At the same time, assign mentors to all the new members

Serious consideration should be given to run an orientation meeting. This is a more informal meeting where you talk about:

- ▶ The general Toastmaster processes
- ▶ How to use the manuals
- ▶ Leadership roles, both Competent Leadership and Club Leadership roles.
- ▶ Allow the new members to ask plenty of questions.

SAMPLE AGENDA

19:00	President's Introduction	Florian Bay	03:00	04:00	05:00
19:05	Toastmaster of the Meeting	Jill Segal	02:00	02:30	03:00
19:10	Timekeeper – Explains role	Andy O'Sullivan	01:00	01:30	02:00
19:12	Grammarian – Explains role	John Lynch	01:00	01:30	02:00
19:14	Harkmaster – Explains role	Kavita Madhavi	01:00	01:30	02:00
19:16	Speech: Once upon a December <i>Competent Communicator – 2 – Research Your Topic</i>	Joe Bloggs	05:00	06:00	07:00
19:24	Speech: Facing the Fear <i>Competent Communicator – 10 – Inspire Your Audience</i>	Eleanor Handslip	08:00	09:00	10:00
19:35	Timekeeper report on speeches	Andy O'Sullivan			01:00
19:36	Evaluation of Joe's speech Interactive Evaluation	Mary McMahon	02:00 03:00	02:30 04:00	03:00 05:00
19:45	Evaluation of Eleanor's speech Interactive Evaluation	Terry Pullin	02:00 03:00	02:30 04:00	03:00 05:00
19:54	Timekeeper report on evaluations	Andy O'Sullivan			01:00
BREAK					
20:10	Table Topics Master 15 - 20 Table Topics Speakers	Yvonne O'Garro	02:00 01:00	02:30 01:15	03:00 01:30
20:35	Timekeeper report on Table Topics	Andy O'Sullivan			01:00
20:36	Grammarian report	John Lynch	02:00	02:30	03:00
20:39	Harkmaster report	Kavita Madhavi	02:00	02:30	03:00
20:42	General Evaluator	Pedro Servera	05:00	06:00	07:00
20:50	Guest Introduction followed by Q&A	All	06:00	08:00	10:00
21:00	Meeting Close & Networking				

CHECKLISTS

Corporate Clubs

TASK	DEADLINE	DONE
LOGISTICS		
Arrange meeting date and time	T - 6 Weeks	
Secure meeting venue	T - 4 Weeks	
Order 'Demo Box' from the District	T - 4 Weeks	
Organise catering provision	T - 2 Weeks	
MARKETING		
Invite Executive/Managing Director/Senior Managers	T - 6 Weeks	
Contact HR & Training Dept	T - 6 Weeks	
Prepare flyers and posters	T - 4 Weeks	
Contact internal networks	T - 4 Weeks	
Promote via internal newsletters & intranet	T - 3 Weeks	
Hand out flyers	T - 2 Weeks	
Send reminders and follow-ups to contacts	T - 1 Week	
Invite team members and colleagues	T - 1 Week	
ORGANISATION		
Get in touch with Area/Division/Club Growth Director	T - 6 Weeks	
Assemble organising team	T - 6 Weeks	
Secure speaker & functionaries	T - 4 Weeks	
Brief visiting Toastmasters on travel and security arrangements	T - 1 Week	
Brief and train Sergeant at Arms	T - 3/5 Days	
Final agenda ready	T - 3 Days	
Agendas printed	T - 1 Day	
Membership forms ready and printed	T - 1 Day	
Meeting supplies ready	T - 1 Day	
Room ready	T - 1 Hour	
Visiting Toastmasters start arriving	T - 30 Mins	
POST-MEETING		
Follow-up with guests	T + 1 Day	
Send thank you notes as needed	T + 1 Day	
Collate membership forms	T + 2 Days	
Prepare chartership paperwork	T + 3 Days	

Community Clubs

TASK	DEADLINE	DONE
LOGISTICS		
Arrange meeting date and time	T - 6 Weeks	
Secure meeting venue	T - 4 Weeks	
Order 'Demo Box' from the District	T - 4 Weeks	
Organise catering provision	T - 2 Weeks	
MARKETING		
Club website page created	T - 6 Weeks	
Eventbrite page created	T - 6 Weeks	
Facebook event created	T - 6 Weeks	
Invite local politicians to meeting	T - 6 Weeks	
Identify local websites and community publications	T - 5 Weeks	
Create promotional video	T - 4 Weeks	
Metup.com updated	T - 4 Weeks	
Contact local media	T - 4 Weeks	
Contact local organisations & clubs	T - 3 Weeks	
Begin to publicise on local websites and noticeboards	T - 3 Weeks	
Design and order marketing materials	T - 2 Weeks	
Invite members of neighbouring clubs to attend	T - 2 Weeks	
Send reminders and follow-ups to contacts	T - 1 Week	
Invite team members and colleagues	T - 1 Week	
ORGANISATION		
Get in touch with Area/Division/Club Growth Director	T - 6 Weeks	
Assemble organising team	T - 6 Weeks	
Secure speaker & functionaries	T - 4 Weeks	
Brief and train Sergeant at Arms	T - 3/5 Days	
Final agenda ready	T - 3 Days	
Agendas printed	T - 1 Day	
Membership forms ready and printed	T - 1 Day	
Cards ready	T - 1 Day	
Room ready	T - 1 Hour	
Visiting Toastmasters start arriving	T - 30 Mins	
POST-MEETING		
Follow-up with guests	T + 1 Day	
Send thank you notes as needed	T + 1 Day	
Collate membership forms	T + 2 Days	
Prepare chartership paperwork	T + 3 Days	

USEFUL RESOURCES

Toastmasters Magazine, July 2017, [‘Stir Up Excitement with an Open House or Demo Meeting’](#)

District 50, [Open House Basics](#)