

9.0 Build

Community & Social Events

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9.1 Social Events

We asked chapter leaders across the country the same question: “What one piece of advice would you give to another chapter leader?” Time and time again the answer related back to building community. Connor Brown, President of ESW-Buffalo advised to “make it fun.” Troy Salavatore, President of ESW-Pitt, urged leaders to “make friends early and build trusting relationships.” A wise ESW-HQ volunteer once said:

“People come for the name and stay for the community.” What he so poignantly stated is that community is the glue that keeps ESW functioning.

But creating community is difficult. Community is created by both more formal, organized social events and by informal, small interactions with your members. It takes both to build a strong tight-knit group in your org. In this chapter we discuss a variety of ways of creating community through informal social events and general body meetings.

We here at ESW-HQ have heard many chapters lament that no one shows up to their social events. We have also heard that chapters are trying to host more social events to build community. So what is the answer? Which comes first? Building a community to host a social event or

holding a social event to build a community?

The process of building community is amorphous. We can't give you a linear, step by step process for building community, but we can give you some leadership tools to build community.

Hosting a social event is just one tool you as a leader can use to create community among your chapter. A social event is a broad term that encompasses anything you do as a chapter that isn't related to the technical side of things/projects. Social events bring people together in informal spaces to bond, create friendships, and take a well-deserved break from all your hard work. Here we highlight some unique social events from ESW chapters

Social Event Ideas

- movie night
- getting drinks
- preparing for a tabling event together
- having an informal meeting over lunch or dinner
- late night work session
- volunteering as a club
- Fundamentals of Engineering jeopardy review session
- finals study break



ESW-University of Buffalo during their winter camping trip.

9.1 Social Events

Wind Farm Tour

ESW University of Pittsburgh

Field trips were always the best days in elementary school. why not recreate that in college? That's exactly what ESW-Pitt does. Every year ESW-Pitt teams up with ESW-Penn State for an adventure to a local wind farm.

Together the two chapters take tour of the Allegheny Wind Farm in Johnstown, PA. The tour has been a great chance for ESW members to see first-hand what wind energy actually looks,

sounds, and feels like.

But more importantly, the joint field trip allows these two chapters actually get together and see each other.

“[The] experience was a great way to meet the Pitt chapter so when we reunited at the conference we were already friends.”

-Nichole Heil



Kayak Cleanup

ESW UT Austin

Every semester, ESW University of Texas at Austin (ESW-UT) helps a local non-profit, Keep Austin Beautiful, clean up a lake in the major recreational area of downtown

Austin with about 15 members participating each time. Members go out in kayaks and scoop up trash.

One ESW member once won an award from Keep Austin Beautiful for picking up the most unique trash item: she uncovered a bike from the water!



Engineers for a Slacking World

ESW University of Pittsburgh

For a more unique example, ESW-Pitt hosted a slacklining event. It was pretty simple—all they had to do was throw up a slack line between two trees. The informal atmosphere, and the intrigue of attempting such a weird hobby, helped ESW-Pitt recruit more members. By being leaving the engineering building, they were also able to increase their presence on campus.

9.2 Kicking Off the Semester

Using the energy, excitement, and newness at the beginning of the semester is one of the easiest ways to incorporate a social into your ESW planning. We talked about intro General Body Meetings in Chapter X, but here we will focus exclusively on bonding events for the beginning of the semester. First we will go over the importance of officer bonding at the beginning of a new year and then talk about general membership bonding.

Officer Bonding

Your officers, or your eBoard, will be working together as a core group over the course of the year, so it is generally a good idea if they all like each other. Dedicating some time to letting your team have some fun together is a great leadership tactic for ensuring your eBoard will work well together. The possibilities for eBoard bonding are endless, and we have seen everything from as simple as an eBoard dinner to a full on challenge ropes course. The key here is to let your officers come together in an informal space to get to know each other. You may want to combine this

with more formal activities such as leadership training, team strengths analyses, and goal setting, so long as there is time for the team to have fun.

Kick off the Fall Semester

One of the most common frustrations of a Chapter Leader we

hear goes something like this: “We always get a lot of students signed up at the beginning of the year and a pretty good turnout at our first meeting, but then we experience a huge cut off in attendance.” There is no one clear cut solution to this problem, but one strategy is to throw out a social

event immediately after your first meeting—and we mean immediately after. After your first intro meeting, tell everyone you are going downtown for ice cream. Or head out for a picnic. Or go out to a documentary screening. You get the idea. You are killing two birds with one stone here. First, you are keeping the momentum from your first meeting and keeping people engaged with ESW. Second, you are starting to build community among your members.

Kick-off spring semester

Just like “sophomore slump,” the spring semester can sometimes be real sluggish for some chapters. The energy of the fall semester just seems to die out. That is why it is the perfect time to hold another social event. The focus of this event is less on getting to know each other and more on re-starting that ESW momentum. So choose something that gets people excited about the org. Take a tour of a wind farm like ESW-Pitt to get people excited about renewable energy or visit a science museum to pump people up for education outreach initiatives.

Example Board Retreat Agenda

Intro & Overview (5 min)

- name, year, position
- board retreat goals
- agenda overview

Icebreaker (10 min)

- oreo challenge
- find a partner and go!

State of the Org Address (15 min)

- Present: what have we done well?
- Feedback: What do YOU think we've done well?
- Present: current plans for the semester

Goal Setting (30 min)

- pass out sticky notes
- 5 min brain dump around projects, education, community
- +1 ideas we like
- Pick 1-2 in each category to focus on

Event Planning (10 min)

- Present: Review calendar of events
- Feedback: Anything we should add, change, remove?

Projects (10 min)

- Present: Current two idea for projects
- Feedback: Any project ideas to add to the list?

Review & Adjourn (1 min)

9.3 General Body Meetings

In ESW, a general body meeting, or GBM, is an opportunity to get all your members from different parts of the org together in the same space. Often times different project groups, event planning teams, and executives branch off during the course of the year. People can end up feeling isolated from the larger chapter. Hosting GBMs are a great way of building community by getting in some face to face interaction with everyone in the org.

There are a lot of ways to run your GBMs, so we will present two case studies: one from a large chapter, UT-Austin, and one from a small chapter, Smith College.

Both use their GBMs as a time to unify the org, but fill the time with different content. UT-Austin uses the time to get in some professional development and share updates with different teams. Smith College uses their GBM time as the main way of getting projects done.



A Look at *UT-Austin*

Members at ESW-UT gather two to three times a semester for food, updates, a corporate speaker, and fun.

Adhering to the golden rule of student clubs, food is offered for attendees. Then to kick off the meeting, a corporate speaker from an engineering company presents. Not only is this an en-

gaging way to begin a meeting, but it provides a great networking opportunity for members.

But the real kicker is this: the speaker pays the chapter anywhere from \$300 to \$500 to speak at the GBM. ESW-UT makes money just by hosting their GBMs!

The GBM wraps up with project updates and any announce-

ments of upcoming events. Overall, the GBM is a casual space for members that usually work separately to come together and chat.

At ESW-UT, members are usually on separate project teams, so the GBM is the only space where they can all come together—and that is necessary for building community.

9.4 Leading a General Body Meeting



A Look at *Smith College*

Smith faces a lot of unique challenges as a chapter: they are a small, liberal arts womens college. Through a trial and error process, ESW-Smith decided to merge projects and GBMS into a hybrid meeting. ESW-Smith meets every two weeks for two hours in the afternoon. The first 15-30 minutes are spent going over project updates and announcements. The President also shares a video or

story that relates to sustainability and leads a short discussion with the members. After this, the project team break up in the meeting space to work on the project. Project leaders can assign work between meeting times or even set up additional meetings, but the bulk of the project is done during these hybrid GBMs. This style of GBM works well when you have a small group of people working on a small number of project. It is also great for building a strong, tight-knit community.

Okay so you have to stand up in front of a bunch of people and get them excited about ESW. This may be a cake walk for some of you, but for others it can be a nightmare. In this section we will talk about the skills and methods needed to lead an awesome GBM.

General Body Meetings are a different style of facilitation than a board or project meeting - you are leading a large group of people, and it's unlikely that there will be as much time for everyone to talk to everyone. The difference is similar to the changes between a seminar-style class and a lecture. Just like a lecture, GBMs can get very boring very quickly.

The key to combating boredom is breaking up the GBM with different activities. Invite a corporate speaker like ESW-UT Austin. Have members break out into small groups to brainstorm potential events. Ask project groups to present. Rotating between presenting and facilitating is a great way to keep people

from spacing out during your GBMs.

More than any other meeting, you need to be enthusiastic when leading GBMs. If new members show up and you go through a series of events in a monotone, everyone will be bored and no one will come to the events, regardless of how exciting they are. Alternatively, if you get up and talk passionately about an upcoming talk, a service event, and the ESW conference, people will learn about new topics, volunteer, and make an effort to get to the conference (which will pay back to the chapter).

Be selective about what you pitch at GBMs - other groups will often ask you to tell people about their events, but if you can't be excited about the topic and its relevance for your members, save five minutes, leave it out of the meeting, and maybe put it in an email instead.

9.5 Leadership Strategies for Building Community

Large formal events are great, but another common struggle chapters have faced is that no one wants to attend their social events. This goes back to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter. Creating community is sort of a chicken or the egg phenomena: you need hold social events and employ leadership strategies to create community. And even then we cannot present a step by step plan for building community in your chapter. So try out some social events and try out some of these leadership strategies presented in this section.

Remember what people said in meetings, remind them of it the next time you chat. During ESW-Smith's sustainability discussion series, the President would take notes of what people would say during discussions. A day or two later the President would email the attendees to expand upon their comment—maybe to question what they said, maybe to agree, maybe to share an article that shared their point. It showed that the President was listening and cared about what was being

said.

Say hi. ESW does not stop existing when a meeting ends! The community is still there in the hallways, in the dining halls, in the dorms. If you see a member, make sure you say hi, or at least acknowledge their presence. If you have the time, stop and chat—it does not have to be about ESW!

Be friends on social media and interact with them. If anything, something like wishing a member happy birthday on Facebook is a small and easy way of building community in your chapter. It is these small interactions in informal spaces that will make your chapter that much closer.

Know their academic interests. If you come across an article that relates to their studies or hobbies, share it with them. This is where being friends on Facebook is a huge help. Not only are you participating in the “Education” part of ESW’s mission by sharing articles about sustainability and engineering, but you are engaging in conversation outside of ESW



ESW-University of Buffalo at the ESW Annual Conference, 2015

meeting spaces.

Host informal work sessions to bring people together. Technically it is an event, yes, but this is an initiative usually led by the President. Set aside an hour or two every week for an ESW work session. People could do ESW work or simply do their homework. It does not matter so long as people are sharing a space together. Bringing food will ensure that you get people to show up.

Give small thanks. You do not have to have a huge formal awards banquet to let your members know that you are proud of

them. If someone in your team has done something well, tap them on the shoulder and let them know. Your congratulations could be as small as a quick email. Or you could make a Facebook post publicly acknowledging their hard work. Get creative with it!

Make work fun. It is okay to mix work and fun, as long as you understand how to strike a balance. We recommend dedicating 5 minutes to each meeting to a fun opening question. You can probably think of other ways to make your meetings and work more exciting!