

## Communicating with Members and Prospective Members

This section focuses on proper communication techniques and mailings (U.S. Postal Service, e-mail and faxes) necessary to promote the chapter within the community. For new chapters, and those who have been established for a short period of time, your communications should focus on internal needs. That includes implementing a plan to maintain timely announcements of meetings and chapter events. The chapter should also focus on creating timely newsletters that provide useful information about industry issues, announce upcoming chapter meetings, and highlight changes in membership. This section helps chapter leaders effectively promote the chapter activities in national AFE publications.

For chapters that have been established for a number of years, it is assumed you already have internal chapter communications mailed on a regular basis. In order to expand the outreach of the chapter and generate new members, the chapter must implement an external communications plan. That includes mailings of press releases about chapter events to local newspapers and TV stations, as well as announcements of new officers appointed to chapter positions. Let us begin with basic communication vehicles - chapter meeting notices.

### INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

#### Chapter Meeting Notices

A meeting notice should be mailed, e-mailed or faxed (blast faxing is fast and inexpensive) to all chapter members, group directors, regional vice presidents, and AFE Headquarters every time a chapter meeting or event is planned. This meeting notice should include the following information: who the meeting is designed for, what is the topic to be discussed, where the meeting or facility tour is to be hosted, when participants should arrive, and how they should get there (directions to the meeting site). Any other pertinent information such as fees, equipment needed, spouse information, and other related details should be clearly stated. Chapters can also consider including a phone or fax number for members to call and confirm they will be attending. This is sometimes used for facility tours where attendance is limited. See Communications appendix for samples of electronic meeting notices.

A meeting notice can be printed on a sheet of chapter stationary, so that the chapters contact information is clearly stated. When using e-mail, you can either make the meeting notice an attachment or just add it to the body of the text. The same format can be used in faxes. Chapter members who need more

information, or want to inquire about special accommodations should know who to call within the chapter.

A meeting notice should be sent no later than three (3) weeks before a scheduled meeting. Anything less than 3 weeks does not give an individual enough time to plan the event into their busy schedules, and the chapter runs the risk of not having a strong attendance.

It is highly recommended that chapter's plan their meeting's one-year out, and try to hold them on a consistent day of the month. For instance, many chapters will schedule a chapter monthly meeting on the second Wednesday of every month. By knowing this in advance, members become accustomed to keeping their schedules clear on that particular day, in anticipation of a chapter meeting being held.

#### Chapter Newsletters

A chapter newsletter is the most prevalent form of communications to its membership. It is probably the only method available to the chapter officers that has the capability of reaching every member of the chapter. Since most newsletters are sent to the chapter members, even those members who don't attend chapter meetings can be kept advised of chapter events. If done correctly, the newsletter can serve as a key member benefit and will ensure the retention of members for years to come. It can also serve as a recruitment piece to convince a new member to join the chapter. To save the cost of postage, many chapters are moving toward e-newsletters. See samples in the Communications appendix.

How often have you heard an inactive member explain the reason for inactivity as lack of information about chapter activities? Too many members slip out of the mainstream of chapter activities because the chapter hasn't told them what is going on or how they can benefit from becoming personally involved. A newsletter can be the communicator that solves this problem. The most effective newsletters are issued at least monthly. With this frequency, newsletters provide timely information. This keeps members advised of local activities as well as regional and national happenings in AFE.

In actuality, the more frequently newsletters can be issued the better. The average member will absorb information more readily if it is provided in relatively small doses. A strong, vital chapter has a lot of information to share with members, which can be handled most effectively by a regular series of newsletters or bulletins.

If the chapter is fortunate to obtain volunteers who like to write, then a newsletter editor should be identified as an official officer of the chapter. Their duty is to write, edit, create and mail a regular newsletter to members. This newsletter should contain information about what the chapter is doing on behalf of its members. It can contain the following information:

**1. Filling the Pages.** One of the first questions that the newsletter editor is likely to ask is "what do I do to fill all those pages every month?" To answer these probing questions, ask yourself what you would like to read if the newsletter were coming to you from someone else. The most successful newsletters combine the information members want to know with the facts they need to know. A few examples of items that might be included in a newsletter are:

- Notes from the president — A brief column written by the chapter president can be used to highlight important chapter activities, provide a chapter status report, and highlight important regional or national happenings.
- New Members — A brief profile of each new chapter member is an excellent way of introducing a new member to the chapter.
- Officer Profiles — Some chapters run regular profiles of an officer in each issue so that chapter members get to know who they are and what they do. The officers' views on matters of current interest can make for interesting reading.
- Happenings on the Job — Members can share on-the-job experiences which might benefit others.
- Education Information — In addition to announcing upcoming chapter programs, announcements of conferences and seminars of interest to the members can be included.
- Regional and National News — Comments and announcements from the chapter's regional director should be included in each issue of the newsletter.
- Feature Articles — Some chapters include a feature article on a technical or management subject of interest to members. Most articles are written by chapter members or reprinted from other AFE publications.
- Job Announcements — Newsletters, especially those issued at least monthly, can carry "Positions Available" and "Wanted" listings. This is a valued member service.
- Information Exchange — This column gives the members an opportunity to request help with on-the-job problems. Other members with particular expertise in the problem area can contact the member and suggest solutions.

Print the newsletter on chapter stationery, or in a designed format that includes the official chapter

name and appropriate AFE logo. At minimum, produce a newsletter quarterly. In addition, it can be sent to non-members with a cover letter from the chapter's membership chairman inviting them to become members of AFE.

Some chapters have turned their newsletters into revenue-generating projects by selling advertisements to local vendors. Your newsletter can contain space on a page to accommodate a business-card size advertisement for local shops as well as engineering related companies/organizations. The cost of a business card size ad depends on a number of factors - how many read your newsletter, how often it is mailed, what size ad is provided, etc. It is best to contact other chapter officers in your area that offer paid advertising in their newsletters. They may be able to help you develop a pricing strategy of your own.

**Chapter and Region Web Sites:** See the AFE National site for web site links.

#### Developing a chapter directory

**1. Importance.** A chapter directory is another important chapter publication. Most directories are published annually at the beginning of the new administrative year. Although the contents of the directory vary from chapter to chapter, the most common elements include a series of items designed to make the Chapter Directory a highly personal, usable item. Typically, chapter directories should include these five key sections:

- Roster of Members — A complete roster of chapter members with their full names, titles, company addresses, and telephone numbers makes it easy for members to communicate among themselves throughout the year.
- Chapter Officers — Most directories include a special listing of the chapter officers for the administrative year. A two- or three- sentence description of the duties of each officer will help members identify the proper person to contact when they have questions or problems.
- Regional and National Officers — Names, addresses, and telephone numbers for the chapter's group director, regional director, and other national officers should be included in the directory. The address and telephone number for AFE Headquarters should also be included.
- Calendar of Events — A complete calendar of activities for the year should be included. In addition, dates of important regional and national activities can also be listed. Some chapters also choose to include community activities, conferences and seminars which would be of interest to members.
- AFE Profile — Because the directory will most likely be used with prospects as well as members,

it should include a description of AFE, its mission and objectives, and the basic requirements for membership. This information is usually found in the beginning of the directory and serves as an introduction to the remainder of the publication.

Since most chapter directories are published only once each year, it is important for the chapter to provide members with periodic updates of information. A list of new members as well as changes in employment, address, etc., of existing members should be distributed so that members can update their copies of the directory and maintain an accurate contact list.

**2. Advertising is a Must.** The chapter directory provides another opportunity for the chapter to sell advertising space to suppliers. Like the newsletter, the directory can place a strain on the chapter's budget. Advertising will not only pay for the production and distribution of the directory, but can also provide extra funds to finance other chapter activities.

Members of the chapter who represent suppliers are usually willing to advertise their products or services in the chapter's directory. Non-member representatives of suppliers call on members regularly and may be willing to take out an ad in the chapter publication. This type of involvement may also lead these non-members to seek membership in the association.

Before beginning to solicit advertising, the chapter must determine how much ad space will be available in the directory and what the price of that space will be. In general, the pricing of ad space is determined by two factors: the size of the ad and the total distribution of the directory. For example, a one-half page ad in the directory distributed to 150 members would be more expensive than a similar ad in a directory distributed to 50 members. A simple way to determine the size of an ad is to divide a page in the directory into quarters. Potential advertisers would then have the option of purchasing an ad which would fill one quarter of the page, one half of the page, three quarters of the page, or a full page.

When fixing a price for the ad space, most publishers provide a "discount" for larger ads. For example, if a one-quarter page ad costs \$25, the price for a one-half page ad might be set at \$45. (Five dollars less than two quarter-page ads.)

Too many ads can detract from a publication, but the chapter must exercise caution when attempting to limit the number of ads in a directory or other publication. Member and non-member suppliers should be given an equal opportunity to advertise. All potential advertisers must have "equal access." However, the advertising rates charged to

non-members can be higher than the rates charged to members.

**3. Distributing the Directory.** The directory is another chapter publication which can perform a number of important functions. Naturally, every member of the chapter should receive a copy of the directory each year. Copies should also be sent to the group director, regional director and AFE Headquarters.

Because the directory also contains a description of the mission and objectives of the association and a complete calendar of the chapter's activities, the chapter may wish to distribute it to prospective members. A well-designed and professionally printed directory which includes a complete schedule of the chapter's annual activities is an impressive publication. It proves to the prospective member that the chapter is a well organized, aggressive organization. The directory can be an important membership recruiting tool.

The chapter should also send complimentary copies of the directory to other chapters in the region. Not only does this facilitate the exchange of information, but the calendar of activities of another chapter can be an excellent source of program ideas for your chapter.

This directory should be published and mailed during the first month that new chapter officers take over. As a source of revenue, advertisements can be sold in the publication to chapter sponsors, corporations, suppliers/vendors, and fellow members wishing to advertise their products and services.

#### **Getting Noticed in AFE publications**

Just like a local newspaper, the AFE communications staff is always looking for articles and information about chapter events and regional activities.

AFE's web site is also open to chapters to include promotions about upcoming meetings, opportunities to serve on a committee, and other local activities and initiatives. If your chapter has developed its own web site, you can link it to AFE Headquarters web page.

**To submit information to AFE, just following these simple steps:**

- Write a short synopsis of your chapter event or program, including information such as individuals to be recognized, purpose of the event, number of members participating, how the event was successful, and any other pertinent information.
- Always include a photo with the article. Be sure to identify each individual.

- In your write-up, tell why you think this is a newsworthy event. You do not have to be lengthy - the important thing is to be clear and concise.
- Include the name, address and phone number of the contact person that AFE staff can call for additional information.

That's it! Do not hesitate to send in an idea. If it is interesting to you, it will probably make for an interesting story to someone else.

## EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

### Obtaining support from the local media

When you think about it, your local newspapers, TV and radio stations have lots of space to fill each day with newsworthy items. They want interesting, entertaining news. Why not get some visibility for your local chapter and its efforts?

This visibility can serve two purposes. One, it can provide publicity to potential non-members in your community that a viable, thriving organization exists in their area. And two, it sends a clear message to local companies that employ AFE members that you are doing good things that reflect on our industry and their company.

Chapters are encouraged to communicate with the local media by sending out news releases about newsworthy events, to announce local chapter awards, and special events at chapter meetings. Do not be hesitant to approach local media. They want to know what is going on and welcome your assistance through news releases. While they may not always use the information offered to them, it still serves a purpose of building a relationship with your local media. It is always helpful to include interesting photographs with an article that can be readily published.

First rule of thumb in generating publicity for your chapter - always try to hit the basic calendar of events in your local newspapers. This will help generate much publicity for very little effort. You never know where a potential member might come from!

### Getting the Most out of the Media

Listed below are some suggestions for how you can get the most out of your local news media and build chapter public relations strategy:

1. Determine your purpose for getting noticed. Your goal should be a single statement, such as getting members to attend your trade show, or ask a reporter to cover your social event and publish in an upcoming issue, or to inform the community about something you have accomplished.
2. Determine the audience - who do you want to reach out to? Fellow engineers, employers of

local companies, students, general community, etc?

3. Contact the local newspaper and introduce yourself. Tell them what you want to send, and ask them for their preferred method of submitting information. Some papers prefer it be mailed, others want it e-mailed, some want it sent to a specific person, etc.
4. Craft your message in a short news release. Be simple and concise. Use active, present tense words where possible. In addition, be sure to include your name, address and phone where the reporter can contact you for more information.
5. Follow-up the mailing of your news release with a phone call. This follow-up should occur about one week before the event.
6. Follow-up your phone calls within a day after the event. Do not be disappointed if you did not receive any coverage prior to the event. Provide the newspaper with a summary of what happened and forward any appropriate pictures showing local community members participating.

Always keep track of the contacts you made and the information you sent. This will be helpful for future mailings.

### How to Write a News Press Release

News releases should be typed, double spaces, on one side of 8 1/2 x 11 letterhead. Do not use odd-size, colored, cluttered letterhead or other nonstandard paper.

Write clearly and concisely using straightforward English. Avoid slang, jargon, or clichés. The first paragraph should include the five W's of news writing - who, what, where, when, why, and sometimes how. Subsequent paragraphs should support the 5 W's with details, in priority order. Make your paragraphs short.

Leave one-inch margins on both sides and sufficient space at the top and bottom for the editor to make notes.

At the top right side of the first page, indicate name and phone number of your chapter contact person.

Drop down a few lines and on the left side of the first page writes "For Immediate Release". Time your mailing or delivery of your release to coincide with the date you would like the article to be printed.

A headline is usually not necessary, but it does not hurt. It serves primarily to catch the interest of the editor and tell what the story is about.