

# HOSTING AN OPEN HOUSE

**Audience:** Membership committee, with club members' participation where designated

When your members love their club, they'll want to share that experience and invite others to be part of it. An open house is one such opportunity. Showcase your club to your community, and focus the club's efforts on inviting potential members with these three simple steps.

## STEP 1: PREPARE

### Two months before: Choose your team

Surround yourself with people who are committed to making the club bigger and better. And consider involving members of your club's sponsored Service Leadership Programs clubs. Then seek approval from your club's board of directors to conduct and fund an open house. (Costs could include postage, printing programs and food and beverages.)

Appoint individuals to take on these tasks:

- **Project lead.** Coordinates the entire program, orients the team members to their responsibilities and monitors their progress.
- **Attendance.** Develops the prospect list, arranges for printing and mailing of invitations and ensures the attendance of members and guests.
- **Venue.** Establishes the meeting time, place, setup and materials (including name tags and applications) and identifies greeters.
- **Program.** Arranges speakers and sets the agenda.
- **Public relations.** Writes press releases and promotes the event in the community.
- **Follow up.** Reaches out to invited guests after the event to answer questions and assess their interest in joining.

### Team members:

Project lead: \_\_\_\_\_

Public relations: \_\_\_\_\_

Attendance: \_\_\_\_\_

Follow up: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue: \_\_\_\_\_

Greeter: \_\_\_\_\_

Program: \_\_\_\_\_



### Two months before: Create handouts and purchase supplies

If you distribute at least 50 invitations, you may get as many as 15 to 20 guests attending your meeting. Determine the quantities of your materials according to the number of invitations you're sending and how many people you want to show up. And then:

- **Order copies of the *Join Us* brochure from the Kiwanis Family Store.** This free resource includes a membership application. Contact the store at +1-317-875-8755, ext. 411, or order online.
- **Develop a brochure or handout describing your club's activities.** Use our templates and branding guidelines, available at [kiwanis.org/clubbrochure](http://kiwanis.org/clubbrochure).
- **Purchase envelopes, stamps and pens for invitations.** A customizable invitation can be downloaded at [kiwanis.org/allin](http://kiwanis.org/allin) and mailed or emailed to guests.

### Six weeks before: Plan your event

You're getting closer. Here are some things to get done:

- **Pick a date and time.** Avoid competing with other high-traffic community events or scheduling too close to other club activities. Your club's normal meeting day and time is ideal.
- **Pick a venue.** Select your normal meeting place unless it's too small to accommodate the expected influx of people. Consider community gardens or restaurants that have enough room to showcase what you do and project the right image for your club.
- **Pick a theme.** Think of something catchy and exciting.
- **Plan your agenda.** Consider the following agenda:
  - 1. Welcome (5 minutes).** Make introductions and give an overview of the event. Ask members and guests to state their name and profession if appropriate.
  - 2. Introduce your club and Kiwanis (20 minutes).** Ask a dynamic speaker in your club to share information about your club, its cause and the community it serves. You may also choose to play a video that helps guests understand the impact of Kiwanis on those who serve and are served. For example: "A Portrait of Kiwanis."
  - 3. Share your club's impact (5 minutes).** Ask a dynamic speaker in your club to talk about your club's impact in the community. You could also ask members to explain what Kiwanis means to them in one word, as the members in the video do.

### SHOWCASE YOUR CLUB

Tell your club's story with a showcase exhibition. Here are a few ideas:

**Photos.** Select 10 to 15 photos (depending on the size of the location and the expected crowd). Include service projects, fundraisers and fellowship moments. Enlarge the photos for more impact, and consider adding captions or descriptions. Choose action photos instead of "grip and grin" shots.

**Key items.** Display your club's story. For example, include a T-shirt from a recent walk-a-thon, an invitation to a fundraiser or a certificate from the mayor thanking your club.

**PowerPoint.** Prepare a presentation of your club's best photos. It could loop before the event or during a social time.

**There's no limit.** Your club showcase exhibition will tell your story in a unique way. It should serve as a conversation starter – so make sure club members are ready to share Kiwanis stories.



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**4. Discuss club plans (3 minutes).** Ask the club president to talk about upcoming projects and goals.

**5. Offer a new-member perspective (3 minutes).** Ask a new member to give his or her thoughts and observations about the club.

**6. Sell the Kiwanis experience (5 minutes).** Leave the final word to your club's best salesperson – someone who can leave guests happy to fill out an application. He or she could say something like:

*"Today, we are inviting you to step up, stand up and be part of the Kiwanis Club of \_\_\_\_\_. You've heard our members, Kiwanis means (repeat the words stated earlier). You've heard the difference we are making in our community. And we invited you because we want you to be part of this. All you have to do is complete the application at your table. Our members can answer any questions you may have."*

**7. Allow members and guests to mingle.** Be available to ask and answer questions and to follow up with guests who complete a membership application.

Event information:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

### STEP 2: INVITE

#### A month before: Develop a prospect list

Check out the Chamber of Commerce list of businesses or conduct a roster analysis. However, the people most likely to join are those your members know well, such as:

- Friends
- Co-workers
- Clients
- Neighbors
- Family members
- Business professionals
- Community leaders
- Church members
- Parents of SLP members
- Local educators
- Community partners
- Event sponsors

A good rule of thumb: Aim for at least 50 names. (Generally, only a third will attend.) You'll need each prospect's full name, address, email address and phone number. Consider offering a prize to the member who can provide contact information for the most prospects.



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### Three weeks before: Mail out the invitation

Mail or email a high-quality invitation or postcard to each prospect, including details about your club's open house.

### One or two weeks before: Extend personal invitations

After the letters have been sent out, divide up the list of invitees so that members can follow up with each person to extend a personal invitation (referencing their referral) and answer any questions. Keep records of follow-up communications. Ask the member who made the referral to make reminder phone calls to each attendee a day or two before the event.

### On the big day

- **Focus on hospitality.** Position sociable and outgoing greeters at the door to thank everyone for coming and to collect their contact information.
- **Print name tags.** Aid conversation by including guests' organization name. Visually distinguish their name tags from members' tags to help them discern who can answer questions.
- **Practice.** Train members to share the Kiwanis message and address concerns or questions.
- **Be prepared.** Set each guest's place with an inkpen, a Join Us brochure and a club brochure.
- **Keep it positive.** Leave club business for another meeting, and remind members of the importance of first impressions.

## STEP 3: FOLLOW UP

### One week later: Touch base

Within a week, touch base with every guest by phone, email or a personalized card to thank them for attending. Do the same for everyone who said they'd come but didn't, inviting them to the next event. Remember, the best person to invite a potential member is a new member.

### One month later: Welcome new members

It's time make new members feel welcome – and make their membership feel like a significant event. Here are some tips:

- **Plan an orientation.** New-member orientation helps new members understand what a great organization and club they're committing to. Download the one-hour program from [kiwanis.org/newmemberorientation](http://kiwanis.org/newmemberorientation) and personalize it to reflect the club's activities.
- **Install the new members.** Focus the meeting on their installation, with a sincere welcome and an emphasis on getting to know them. It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience – so why not treat it that way?
- **Assign mentors.** A mentor is often a stabilizing force – someone who serves as a familiar face and can encourage the new member to learn about the club, meet others and get involved with projects. Find a member (maybe the sponsoring member) who will take a special interest in helping the new member stay connected, especially in the first few months.



### **Don't forget: Plan your next event**

Now that you have refined the process, you can start planning the next membership event.

- Establish a timeframe for your next event.
- Add to your ongoing prospect list. Include the names of those who said, "Maybe later" or who were out of town.
- Consider making your SLP club(s) – or the need to establish one – the focus of your meeting. Include parents, teachers and school administrators in your list of invitees.

For membership resources, visit [kiwanis.org/membership](https://kiwanis.org/membership). If you still have questions, call 1-800-KIWANIS and ask for your district's area director.



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