



American MENSA®

Gatherings Handbook

Revised, May 2008

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Revised May 2008

Introduction

The *Gatherings Handbook* is intended as a reference for all Mensa members who wish to plan, conduct, or take part in gatherings at the local, regional and national levels. This Handbook is intended to transmit information and best practices and is not intended to create a contract between American Mensa, Ltd. (AML) and its members or guests.

The policies and procedures contained in this edition of the *Gatherings Handbook* replace and supersede all policies and procedures in *Gatherings Handbooks* previously issued by AML, Local Groups or members. It is accurate at the time of publication but is subject to change from time to time as deemed appropriate by the American Mensa Committee (AMC). The AMC expressly reserves the right to deviate from the provisions in this handbook and to add, alter or otherwise make changes at any time in terms and provisions in this handbook. Any such changes may be implemented without prior notice and, unless specified otherwise, are effective when made.

Mensa members who wish to access this Handbook online will find it available on the American Mensa Web site¹. Printed copies in this handbook, including a compact disc containing references cited, are available from AML's National Office.

Users in this handbook please note: this Handbook contains many references and many online links. The online links provide examples or additional information and are cited by footnotes on each page with corresponding reference codes. URLs referenced may change over time and could be out of service for any number of reasons. Broken or unusable links should be reported to the National Office so that appropriate changes may be made in future editions in this handbook.

Each of the report references cited is provided with the *Gatherings Handbook* online. Any or all of the referenced files are available upon request from the National Office.

Please note the parenthetical reference code in the footnotes in this handbook when referencing documents online.

If you have recommendations or suggestions for additions or corrections to this Handbook and its associated electronic files, please send your comments to Handbooks@us.mensa.org.

¹ www.us.mensa.org/handbooks (ref. L1)

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2 – Gatherings Overview

Many people think our gatherings are Mensa's most important member benefit. In particular, gatherings are fundamental to one of Mensa's three purposes, namely "to provide a stimulating intellectual and social environment for its members."

Today, there are more than 60 gatherings of various types at a Local Group, regional or national level scheduled each year throughout America, and more internationally. Each type of event caters to different needs or interests of the members or to Mensa as a whole. Attendance varies from less than 20 for a local officers retreat, from about 70 up to about 600 for a Regional Gathering to more than 1,500 for American Mensa's Annual Gathering.

Many resources are available to you from the National Office; contact the National Groups Coordinator at LocalGroups@americanmensa.org. The American Mensa Web site² is a particularly rich source of up-to-date information concerning gatherings. Quite a few of the references in this handbook are on InsideAML³, American Mensa's officer resources Web site. A concise general guide to gatherings is the document *A Gatherings Primer*⁴. Yet another general guide to gatherings, this time from British Mensa, is *Notes for Event Organizers*⁵. At the World Gathering in Orlando, FL, in 2006, an international panel met at a Leadership Development Workshop session to discuss common questions and issues pertaining to gatherings, and the *Weekend Gatherings PowerPoint*⁶ and the *Weekend Gatherings Handout*⁷ were products of that collaborative effort.

In order to update, extend and expand this Handbook regularly, it is designed in sections, so it can be updated in sections.

As with all of American Mensa's handbooks, the *Gatherings Handbook* will be posted on InsideAML in complete form⁸. As subsections are updated, they will be incorporated in latest version in this handbook, while new exhibits, resources and examples will be separately posted to the associated *Gatherings Handbook* Web page. Please note the parenthetical reference code in the footnotes in this handbook when referencing documents online.

The mission in this handbook is to document the "tribal wisdom" built up over the past 60 years by the people who have put on these Mensa Gatherings all across America and to provide valuable information that will help members plan for successful events by sharing what has worked for others up to now. Please note that the current release of the *Gatherings Handbook* is not the final word. We want to continue building on this base of information so it can be shared with our event volunteers, both rookie and highly experienced.

² www.us.mensa.org (ref. L2)

³ www.us.mensa.org/officerresources (ref. L3)

⁴ *A Gatherings Primer* (ref. R1)

⁵ *Notes for Event Organizers* (ref. R2)

⁶ *Weekend Gatherings Powerpoint* (ref. R3)

⁷ *Weekend Gatherings Handout* (ref. R4)

⁸ www.us.mensa.org/handbooks (ref. L1)

3 – Glossary

ABM: Annual Business Meeting

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act

AG: Annual Gathering, the annual national convention of American Mensa

AMC: American Mensa Committee, the National Board of Directors

AML: American Mensa, Ltd., the legal name of Mensa in the United States

ASIE: Actions Still in Effect, decisions rendered by the AMC or local ExComm

BML: British Mensa Limited

DIM: Direct International Member

GCC: Gifted Children's Coordinator

GCP: Gifted Children's Program

LG: Local Group, a geographically defined local chapter of American Mensa

LDW: Leadership Development Weekend, also Leadership Development Workshop

LOTS: Local Officer Training Session (now LDW)

MC: Mensa Canada

MERF: Mensa Education & Research Foundation, now simply the Mensa Foundation

MG: Mind Games[®], a type of National Gathering

MIL: Mensa International, Limited

Ms: Mensans

RG: Regional Gathering, what Local Groups call their regional conventions

RVC: Regional Vice Chair, an elected member of the American Mensa Committee

SIG: Special Interest Group, composed of members who share a specific interest

TG: Themed Gathering

WG: World Gathering, Mensa International's Convention, held every 10 years

YM: Young Mensan, a Mensan under the age of 18

Area Coordinator: An appointed volunteer who helps provide services on behalf of the Local Group in a limited geographic area within its boundaries

Colloquium: Mensa Colloquium, a type of National Gathering

ExCom or **ExComm:** Executive Committee, generally the board of directors of a Local Group

Event Chair: Person with overall responsibility for an event

Hotel Liaison: Primary contact between the gatherings committee and the event venue

Hospitality: A Mensa Gathering tradition of food and drink at events

Hospitality Chair: The person who organizes and oversees the Hospitality Suite

LocSec: Local Secretary, equivalent to the President of the Local Group

Mommy Letter: Information letter provided to registrants before a gathering

Program Chair: Person who is in charge of the planned activities at a gathering

Publicity Chair: Person who creates and distributes information about the event

Registrar: Person who registers attendees and passes out event credentials at a gathering

Treasurer: Person who handles the money for a Local Group or a gathering

Volunteer Chair: Person responsible for recruiting volunteers for a gathering

4 – Types of Gatherings

Mensans love to get together with other Mensans, and gatherings are central to our purposes. The World Gathering, Mensa International's convention, is the premier gathering of them all. The WG is held every 10 years and had always been in Great Britain until 2006, when it was held in the United States. American Mensa's national event, the AG, was first held in 1963 and has grown substantially in size and complexity over the years. Since that time, many other gatherings sprang up as members found other ways to get together between AGs. Once gatherings happened and were found to be fun and successful, they happened again and again, and many of them quickly became much anticipated regular events. The idea of an RG spread from group to group, and today there are dozens of RGs throughout the country each year. The other national events, Colloquiums and Mind Games[®], took longer to develop, but their success stems from the fact that each of them provides a uniquely enjoyable way for Mensans to get together. What the latter events do have in common is that participants focus on specific tasks and subjects, as opposed to the wide range of activities and opportunities to socialize at an AG or an RG.

Here is the way we think of American Mensa gatherings in the 21st century:

- **WG – World Gathering**
- **AG – Annual Gathering**
- **Mind Games**
- **Colloquium**
- **RG – Regional Gathering**
- **Themed Gathering**
- **Mini-Gathering**
- **Gatherings with Children**
- **Leadership Development Weekend**
- **Local Group Retreat**
- **Other Gatherings**

WG – World Gathering

As noted above, the WG is Mensa International's convention. The WG came to the United States for the first time in 2006, in celebration of the 60th anniversary of the founding of Mensa. For more information about the 2006 WG, please see the *WG2006 Final Report*⁹.

⁹ *WG2006 Final Report* (ref. R5)

AG – Annual Gathering

The AG is American Mensa's annual national convention. Always the biggest and most spectacular event on the calendar for American Mensa, the AG provides members the opportunity to take part in the business of the organization, to attend presentations by well-informed speakers on scores of subjects, to experience the attractions of the host city, and to renew friendships and make new ones among the many Mensans in attendance.

The AG typically takes place around the 4th of July weekend, in no small part because we can get great deals at excellent hotels during an otherwise slow weekend. The actual window in which the AG must be held is between June 1 and July 15 of every year, according to the American Mensa Bylaws (the 2006 World Gathering, which incorporated the AG, was a rare exception to this rule.)

Following is the list of AGs since 1975:

1975 San Antonio, TX
 1976 Valley Forge, PA
 1977 San Diego, CA
 1978 Cleveland, OH
 1979 Kansas City, MO
 1980 San Francisco, CA
 1981 Louisville, KY
 1982 Trenton, NJ
 1983 Phoenix, AZ
 1984 Washington, DC
 1985 Milwaukee, WI
 1986 New York, NY
 1987 Dallas, TX
 1988 Montreal, QC
 1989 Atlanta, GA
 1990 Orange County, CA
 1991 Kansas City, MO
 1992 San Francisco, CA
 1993 Orlando, FL
 1994 Cambridge, MA
 1995 St. Louis, MO
 1996 Houston, TX
 1997 Birmingham, AL
 1998 Cincinnati, OH
 1999 Long Beach, CA
 2000 Philadelphia, PA
 2001 Dallas, TX
 2002 Scottsdale, AZ
 2003 St. Paul, MN
 2004 Las Vegas, NV

2005 New Orleans, LA
 2006 Orlando, FL (World Gathering)
 2007 Birmingham, AL
 2008 Denver, CO
 2009 Pittsburgh, PA
 2010 Detroit, MI
 2011 Portland, OR

In addition to three to five tracks of guest speakers, an AG hosts a series of Leadership Development Workshops sessions, meetings of Local Group officers, meetings of SIGs, meetings of members participating in online forums, meetings of Mensa's national committees, a meeting of American Mensa's board of directors aka the American Mensa Committee (AMC), and the Annual Business Meeting (ABM). Many AGs have over 200 different scheduled events in their programs at the primary location, as well as a number of official tours and other events outside the AG venue.

An AG typically includes sit-down meals with featured speakers, an awards ceremony, a formal dance, a wide variety of entertainment, a game room and tournaments, and other events that make it a superb vacation value for members and their guests. Children are especially welcome at the AG, and to help them get the most out of the experience, there is a track of programming entirely devoted to the needs and interests of children ages 4-12 called "Kids Trek." The teens also have their space in alcohol-free rooms set aside for them, and they plan their own events such as talent shows, volleyball games, game console tournaments, dance classes, movie nights, card games and scavenger hunts.

The Hospitality Suite is an extremely important part of any Mensa gathering, including the AG. The Hospitality Suite provides snacks and beverages, and it is the main venue for attendees to sit and converse between other programmed activities. Near the Hospitality Suite is the Games Room, which also serves as a focal point for attendees.

There are many resources within American Mensa about AGs. Listed are several resources that are worthy of note:

The current AG Web site¹⁰
 The AG 2004 Final Report¹¹
 The AG 2005 Final Report¹²

¹⁰ www.ag.us.mensa.org (ref. L4)

¹¹ AG2004 Final Report (ref. R6)

¹² AG2005 Final Report (ref. R7)

The AG Bid Packet¹³

The AG Bid Guidelines, see Appendix 11 of the Actions Still in Effect (ASIE)¹⁴

For another view of what is required to put on a national gathering, *British Mensa's AG Handbook*¹⁵ provides interesting reading.

Mind Games®

American Mensa's national Mind Games® began in 1990, and it is currently held in April of each year. Local groups are invited to bid to host MG, and the Marketing Committee selects the host group with input from the National Office staff, Site Selection Committee and the event's Chair and Chief Judge. Between 150 and 200 Mensa members and their guests come and play 60 or more different games submitted by game manufacturers. Each Mensa member in attendance at MG is a judge, and under the guidance of the Chief Judge, they select the top five games entered that year based on originality, game play, play value, aesthetics and instructions. Winning games carry the Mensa Select® seal. There are legal and PR issues connected with this event, therefore local event coordinators work closely with both the National Development Officer and the National Office Marketing team. More information is available through these resources:

The Mind Games® Web site¹⁶
 The 2004 MG Final Report¹⁷
 The 2005 MG Final Report¹⁸
 The 2006 MG Final Report¹⁹

Colloquium

First proposed in 1980 by the Chairman Gabe Werba, the American Mensa Colloquium was intended to be an annual event. Werba's idea was "to stimulate within Mensa a climate of intellectual excitement in which concepts can be explored,

¹³ AG Bid Packet (ref. R8)

¹⁴ www.us.mensa.org/ASIEs (ref. L5)

¹⁵ British Mensa AG Handbook (ref.R9)

¹⁶ www.mindgames.us.mensa.org (ref. L6)

¹⁷ 2004 Mind Games Final Report (ref. R10)

¹⁸ 2005 Mind Games Final Report (ref. R11)

¹⁹ 2006 Mind Games Final Report (ref. R12)

dialogues can be started and ideas can be generated that will move us in new directions."

The first Colloquium was held in October, 1982, citing as its purpose: "To offer a forum for any interested Mensan to explore, debate, evaluate and offer judgment on a major issue of long-range importance to society." In particular, the idea of the Colloquium was to stimulate the intellect, focusing less on providing entertainment and opportunities for members purely to socialize. Although the vision of an annual Colloquium never came to pass, the event has continued irregularly due to the combined efforts and interest of those who are committed to carrying on the idea of a more intellectual stimulus for the members of American Mensa.

Until 2007, each Colloquium was jointly sponsored by the Mensa Foundation, AML, and a Local Group. Following a motion approved by the AMC in March, 2007, any subsequent Colloquium will be an American Mensa, Ltd., event, sponsored by the Mensa Foundation and presented by a host group or groups. The Mensa Foundation will assume financial responsibility for national Colloquium events and reporting of Colloquium activities on its Federal and state tax filings. Host groups will be responsible for development of the program, identification of speakers, promotion of the event and delivery of the actual program (Program Administration). The Mensa Foundation will reimburse host groups for Program Administration.

Following is a listing of each Colloquium held since 1982. An up-to-date listing can be found on the Mensa Foundation Web site²⁰.

Forecasting a Valid Tomorrow: Destination A.D. 2000

October 29-31, 1982
Copley Plaza Hotel, Boston, MA
Kay Grant, Chair

The Gifted in Society

November 23-25, 1984
Scottsdale Conference Resort, Phoenix, AZ
Marilyn Rollins, Chair

The Impact of the Arts on Civilization

November 14-16, 1986
Seelbach Hotel, Louisville, KY
Rose Lee Crutcher, Chair

Science & Society: Our Critical Challenges

October 7-9, 1988
Capitol Marriott, Austin, TX
Mike McCormick, Chair

Gifted Children: Identification, Education and Nurturing: Where Are We Today? Where Will We Be Tomorrow?

May 18-20, 1990
Ramada Hotel O'Hare, Rosemont, IL
Russ Kratowicz, Chair

The Politics of Politics

October 4-6, 1991
Marc Plaza, Milwaukee, WI
Marcy Hotz, Chair

Medicine in the 21st Century

October 8-10, 1993
Holiday Inn Center City, Philadelphia, PA
Steve Slepner, Chair

Consciousness: Thinking on the Edge

August 16-18, 2002
Northfield Hilton, Troy, MI
Debbie Gleason & Steve Goodhall, Chairs

Earth in Mind: Fueling the Future

March 4-6, 2005
Sheraton Tucson, Tucson, AZ
Joanna Soper, Chair

Revolution in Cosmology

October 6-8, 2006
Albany Marriott, Albany, NY
Judy Keating and Harry Ringermacher, Chairs

Aspects of Humor: The Art and Science of Laughter

March 23-25, 2007
Sheraton Arlington Heights, Arlington Heights, IL
Chris Edwards, Chair

As noted, each Colloquium focuses on a different issue. In addition, each host group has a singular set of challenges to face in order to put on the event, and each program has differed not only in the way it was presented, but in the sort of participation that attendees experienced at each event. What all Colloquiums do have in common with other types of gatherings in American Mensa are the planning and execution of site selection, publicity, Hospitality, and all the other elements of putting on a gathering.

As handling of Colloquiums has evolved, please contact the Mensa Foundation

²⁰ www.mensafoundation.org/colloquium (ref. L7)

regarding hosting information, including responsibilities and timelines.

RG — Regional Gathering

An RG is a gathering hosted by one or more Local Groups. It typically runs from Friday afternoon to Sunday afternoon, unless held over a three-day weekend, in which case the extra day is generally used. Most often, an RG takes place in a hotel, with many Mensa members from the local area checking in for one or more nights. What makes it a “Regional Gathering” is the fact that members are attracted from nearby Local Groups as well as the host Local Group. However, in recent years RGs have drawn members from all over the country, and they are advertised in national publications with the approval of the Regional Vice Chair.

RG attendees expect a Hospitality suite, well stocked with finger foods and beverages, and a place to sit and talk. For the protection of everyone involved with the RG, food safety certification is now a requirement of a member of the Hospitality volunteer staff, and National Office staff members check for certification before an RG may be advertised in a national publication or the AML Web site. Speakers are typically offered, sometimes in two, three or four parallel tracks. Games rooms are pretty standard, and some groups also have movie rooms. Saturday evening’s meal is often an opportunity to have a keynote speaker, followed by entertainment, a dance, and/or a scholarship fundraising auction. Sunday morning activities usually include brunch, followed by a speaker and the presentation of awards to the winners of games and contests held throughout the event.

Most RGs provide an optional meal package, but some include meals in the admission, either as a sit-down catered by the hotel or as part of the Hospitality offerings. Breakfast foods may or may not be served in the Hospitality Suite on Saturday morning, often depending on the amenities offered by the hotel. Breakfast foods are not generally served opposite the Sunday brunch.

Many elements are critical to the success of RGs, including such things as locating a suitable hotel, contract negotiation, hotel relations, planning and budgeting, Hospitality, program, publicity, proper handling of funds, registration, the effective recruitment and employment of volunteers, security, updating the Local Group Web site, providing training to those who will have key responsibilities in future RGs, and keeping the

Local Group board or executive committee informed of the progress and the results of the event. These elements will be discussed in turn in the appropriate sections of this handbook, along with examples of resources developed by Local Groups who have put on successful RGs in the past.

Themed Gathering

These are very similar in format to RGs but their content is different. In the case of a TG, a theme or subject is chosen and virtually all the activities are directly related to that theme. This provides the attendees with a concentrated exposure to material on that theme in a one-weekend time-frame and a congenial setting. One was built around a traveling Rameses II exhibit, another was all about Theater. Any theme could be used for which a group feels it has local resources in the way of speakers, events, or attractions, such as museums or other field trip sites, to support the topic. Speakers need not be Mensans and may be paid or not as the TG Committee decides. Even a small group can hold a successful TG by drawing on the resources of its area.

Another type of TG is a Special Interest Group Gathering. SIGs are voluntary associations of Mensa members, operating independently of Mensa, who have joined together in pursuit of their special interests. SIG-sponsored events are listed in the national publications as a courtesy and are the responsibility of the hosting individual or entity. Mensa is not responsible for actions taken by or on behalf of SIGs, nor for their financial liabilities.

Mini-Gathering

Many groups have staged low-budget camp-outs or Mini-Gatherings. Sometimes a Mini-Gathering is a preliminary to planning a full-scale RG or TG, other times it is an end in itself. A Hospitality area is customary for hotel based events. Mini-Gs are often relatively unstructured, but an organized program of events may be provided by the members sponsoring the event.

Gatherings with Children

When Mensa gatherings have children in attendance, their special needs, interests and extra security required are important to plan for their programs. At the AG, there is a special program track devoted to the needs and interests of Young Mensans. The definitive source within

American Mensa for information about event planning and execution for YMs can be found in the *Gifted Children's Program Handbook*²¹, published in March, 2005.

Leadership Development Weekend

Leadership Development Workshops are the way we provide training for members currently holding an office or contemplating holding an office and to allow Mensa volunteers to network. They provide standardized courses and information relevant to the needs of local officers in order to help them to better serve the Local Groups. LDWs are program-specific working weekends and are financially supported at the national level.

In 1992, the AMC adopted guidelines for Local Officer Training Sessions, the forerunner of today's LDWs. LDWs are planned by RVCs and their appointed LDW Coordinator, usually chosen from the Local Group in the area where the LDW is to take place. Very often the Assistant RVC in a region will take the lead on planning and conducting an LDW. Proposals for LDWs are then submitted to the National LDW Coordinator, who, prior to giving approval, reviews the plans to make sure that they are in accord with the guidelines set by the AMC. Once approved, the RVC, Assistant RVC and/or LDW Coordinator may proceed with contracting for space to hold the event, arranging for publicity, purchasing supplies and materials, and making all other necessary arrangements, according to the budget approved by the National LDW Coordinator. Leadership Development funds may also be requested for LDW programs in connection with RGs and Local Group Retreats or in other formats.

The LDW itself is usually held in a hotel in a major city within a given region, and every effort is made to attract Mensa members from throughout the region, as well as from neighboring regions. Typical attendance at an LDW varies from about 20 to about 40 members. For more information about LDWs, please see the *Leadership Development Workshop Guide*²² published in June, 2007. A summary of the experiences of a first-time LDW Coordinator²³, published in *InterLoc* in January 2005, may also be helpful.

²¹ www.us.mensa.org/handbooks (ref. L8)

²² www.us.mensa.org/handbooks (ref. L8)

²³ *InterLoc LDW Article-January 2005* (ref. R18)

Additional documents and forms that are useful for LDWs include the following:

The *LDW Needs Analysis Process*²⁴
*LDW Attendance Form*²⁵
*LDW General Information*²⁶
*LDW General Information for Set Up*²⁷
*LDW Guidelines*²⁸
*LDW Participant Evaluation*²⁹
*LDW Proposal*³⁰
*LDW RVC's Report*³¹
*LDW Suggested Workshop Topics*³²

Local Group Retreat

A Local Group Retreat is a structured discussion that creates teamwork and focus. A retreat brings together the leaders of a Local Group, including at minimum all elected and appointed officers, and provides them with the opportunity to plan group goals in a systematic way. The participants may develop a shared vision for the future and improve their ability to coordinate their efforts. In particular, this event can give Local Groups a chance to do the following:

- Create a purpose statement for the Local Group that outlines its mission.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Local Group's operations.
- Set team goals from which the Local Group can launch focused, manageable improvement efforts.
- Set a follow-up plan and timeline describing when and how movement toward goals will be reviewed and adjusted.
- Iron out conflicts and re-energize the Local Group leadership.

²⁴ *LDW Needs Analysis Process* (ref. R19)

²⁵ *LDW Attendance Form* (ref. R20)

²⁶ *LDW General Information* (ref. R21)

²⁷ *LDW General Information for Set Up* (ref. R22)

²⁸ *LDW Guidelines* (ref. R23)

²⁹ *LDW Participant Evaluation* (ref. R24)

³⁰ *LDW Proposal* (ref. R25)

³¹ *LDW RVC's Report* (ref. R26)

³² *LDW Suggested Workshop Topics* (ref. R27)

It is possible for LDW funding to be granted for LG Retreats through your RVC. In such circumstances, prior approval must be sought from the National LDW Coordinator, as discussed in the section above. Local Groups can also fund their own Planning Retreat. Costs may vary, depending upon the facilities used, the materials required, and on whether or not meals are provided. For more information about LG Retreats, please see the *Retreat Planning Guide*³³ published in April, 2006.

Other Gatherings

As Mensans create new ideas to for getting together with one another, this list of events will grow. If you have a great idea for a gathering, try it out – it just might end up as a national tradition.

³³ www.us.mensa.org/handbooks (L8)

5 – Roles and Responsibilities

In American Mensa, the host group for a gathering usually appoints a committee to take on the responsibilities associated with the event. The members of a Gathering Committee then divide up the responsibilities with each member of the committee assuming the appropriate role and title. Sometimes a single volunteer will serve in multiple roles, but it is preferable to have someone assigned to each role as soon as planning for the event is underway. Not infrequently the Event Chair, the Local Secretary, the Board of Directors or the ExComm will find it necessary to recruit volunteers to fill key roles which were left open at the time that the gathering was approved, or which opened up due to the unforeseen loss of one or more committee members, but every effort should be made to fill these positions as quickly as possible.

The Local Group's Role

The Local Group has the ultimate financial responsibility in the success or failure of any local gathering it may sponsor, since the group will reap the benefits of success or the costs of failure.

The Local Group's ExComm has at minimum these responsibilities:

- To appoint a competent Event Chair and Gathering Committee,
- To require regular reports and updates from the Committee,
- To assist the Committee in carrying out its duties,
- To help recruit volunteers, and
- To give direction to the Committee when requested or in case of emergency.

The Local Group's ExComm should clearly state at the outset of planning what the financial philosophy of the gathering will be – that is, whether the group will attempt to make a profit or not. (The decision regarding how the projected profits will be spent, however, need not be made in advance.) The Local Group should also instruct the Event Chair and the Gathering Committee about any local customs or rules they wish to have incorporated into the gathering.

Events may also be co-sponsored by a SIG, a region, a consortium of Local Groups, or a consortium of individuals, depending upon the

type of event. In particular, ASIE 2007-023³⁴ requires that an AG bid must have approval from the governing body of the Local Group whose territory encompasses the site proposed for the AG by the bidder.

The roles common to large gatherings are:

Auction Coordinator
 Audio-Visual Coordinator
 Event Chair
 Games Chair
 Hospitality Chair
 Hotel Liaison
 Program Chair
 Publicity Chair
 Registrar
 Tour Coordinator
 Treasurer
 Volunteer Coordinator
 Webmaster

Larger events may also have these roles:

Decorations Coordinator
 Information Desk Coordinator
 Kids Trek Coordinator
 Leadership Development Workshop
 Coordinator
 Program Book Designer
 Rental Coordinator
 Security Chair
 Logistics Chair
 Speaker Shepherd/Coordinator
 Vendor Coordinator

Common Roles and Responsibilities

Auction Coordinator

An Auction Coordinator is responsible for collecting donations of goods and services prior to an event, and setting up and conducting silent and live auctions at an event. Additional volunteers will be required for either type of auction. An Auction Coordinator must work closely with the Program Chair to plan for and put on the auction, and with the Registrar or Treasurer to make sure that any monies collected during the auctions are accounted for properly and handled safely. The most common example is probably a silent book

³⁴www.us.mensa.org/ASIEs (ref. L5)

auction, with proceeds going to a Local Group scholarship fund.

Audio-Visual Coordinator

An Audio-Visual Coordinator works with the Program Chair to provide and over the set-up of any equipment that is required for the event and is not the responsibility of the staff at the event venue. Laptop computers, computer projectors, slide projectors, overhead projectors, screens, microphones, cables, mixers and other equipment brought to the event may require the services of an AV expert prior to, during, or after any of the program sessions. An AV Coordinator maintains the inventory of the necessary equipment as determined by the Program Chair, makes sure it is available and operates when needed according to the program schedule, and sees to its return to the proper place after its use.

Event Chair

An Event Chair's job is to organize and coordinate the work of the rest of the Gathering Committee and to provide regular reports and updates on the progress of the gathering planning to the Board of Directors or ExComm of the host group. The Event Chair must be responsible and reliable, good at working with people of all personalities, and be able to withstand a great deal of stress. As noted above, sometimes a single volunteer will serve in multiple roles on the Event Committee, but this is inadvisable for the Event Chair due to the demands of the position.

The Event Chair is responsible for the entire event. He or she must therefore monitor the status of each role and usually has the ability to appoint and dismiss volunteers for any and all positions on the Gathering Committee. Ideally, each role will have one or more primary volunteers, and at least one backup/assistant. With RGs, the lead assistant may be considered an "apprentice," with the implication that this person will take the lead role in the following year. It's a nice way to build succession into event planning.

As the leader of the Gathering Committee, the Event Chair must set the agenda and determine when and where the committee should meet. Any decisions that need to be made by the Gathering Committee as a whole should be made with the guidance of the Event Chair. Such tasks as finding a suitable location for the event and negotiating the contract with the venue, choosing a theme for the event, designing a logo, setting the prices to be charged for registration and meals, and approving the event budget will inevitably require the involvement of the Event Chair.

Games Chair

A Games Chair has the responsibility for planning and monitoring activities in the Games Room. He or she will work with the Hotel Liaison to arrange the room set-up. Usually, the Games Chair is also responsible for finding copies of games to bring. The Games Chair is generally responsible for scheduling games tournaments and contests, reporting to the attendees the names of the winners, and providing the prizes that they are to receive. If gambling activities are to take place at a gathering, the Games Chair may have to obtain a license even when the proceeds are for charity, so it is important to check this out well in advance.

Hospitality Chair

A Hospitality Chair is in charge of every aspect of providing food and beverages for a gathering. For larger gatherings, typically one or more rooms or suites are dedicated to food and beverages to attendees and providing attendees with a place to sit and talk. Provisioning a gathering can be a huge job. For more detailed information, see section 8 in this handbook.

Hotel Liaison

A Hotel Liaison is the person in the group who is the primary contact for the event venue. Many times the Hotel Liaison takes on the role after helping to conduct a search for the appropriate venue and participating in the contract negotiations. (However, it must be noted that only the LocSec can bind a Local Group to a contract, and all contracts can and should be run by the AMC Corporate Counsel before signing.) The hotel or other venue will typically want to have one main person to deal with prior to the event, but it is much to the group's advantage to have several people at the event with the authority to ask the hotel staff for services. The Hotel Liaison should arrange formal introductions between the Hospitality Chair, Program Chair and the hotel contacts a week or more before the event to go over the plan, and to be certain that the hotel understands who is authorized to make changes to the plan during the event.

Program Chair

A Program Chair is responsible for all of the activities that are scheduled to take place during an event, with the common exceptions of what will take place in the Hospitality and Games Rooms. Areas of responsibility may include:

- Planning and conducting mixer activities,
- Recruiting speakers,
- Scheduling speakers,
- Greeting and shepherding speakers,
- Procuring and scheduling AV equipment,

- Producing event signs,
- Producing program booklet,
- Producing mini programs, usually special tracks or activities within the overall program,
- Planning for entertainment, such as dances, and
- Planning and conducting fundraisers, such as auctions.

When there are enough volunteers, it makes sense for some of these roles to be delegated, particularly during the event. For larger gatherings, it is a very good idea to have several individual volunteers with the responsibility for one or more of these areas, usually reporting to the Program Chair.

Publicity Chair

A Publicity Chair has the task of marketing the gathering to local members and members of other Local Groups. This primarily involves the creation and distribution of flyers, newsletter advertisements, and e-list notices. A Publicity Chair should also take the responsibility for following up with the Event Chair and the RVC to make sure that the gathering is included in official AML lists. The rules and procedures for listing gatherings and the gathering listings request form³⁵ are located in the Events section on the American Mensa Web site. Contact the National Office for more information about listing your event.

Flyers should be printed and distributed at local and nearby events. For the regions of American Mensa that border Canada, publicizing to Mensa Canada is also a good idea; do this by sending an email to Mensa@eventsmtg.com. Advertisements in both text and graphic form should be distributed to Local Group Newsletter Editors to be used as inserts.

Registrar

The major duties of the Registrar may include:

- Receive and record all registrations,
- Turn over money to the Treasurer,
- Mail out confirmation letters or emails,
- Prepare registration envelopes,
- Prepare a list of pre-registrants,
- Write and mail out the "mommy letter" to all registrants prior to the event, and
- Supervise the Registration Desk during the gathering.

Many Gathering Committees have broken this responsibility into two parts, with one person dealing with the job before the gathering and another (known as the Onsite Registrar) who would be responsible during the actual event. Although it is not uncommon for a smaller group to have one person serve as both Registrar and Treasurer for an event for ease of record-keeping and the handling of funds, American Mensa discourages the practice. Since these two roles are the only ones who handle the money for an event, it is wise to split these roles between two people, though it is natural and necessary for them to work very closely together.

An example of the combined duties and the close coordination required of the Registrar and Treasurer is included in *Oregon Mensa RG Registrar and Treasurer Tasks*³⁶.

Tour Coordinator

A Tour Coordinator is generally responsible for making all arrangements for tours that have been preapproved by the Event Chair and/or the Gathering Committee. Usually tours are a pay-as-you-go addition to an event, chiefly designed to provide an extra benefit prior to the formal beginning of the festivities. They are always optional, but they can be a very nice bonus for early arriving guests, and they can help tremendously in the marketing of the event. As there are many decisions that are required in order to put together a tour, it is recommended that this job be turned over to a volunteer with experience in this area who can be trusted to follow through with the task in accordance with the specifications of the Event Committee. Another alternative would be to use a local tour company and have them designate a particular tour for Mensans.

Treasurer

A Treasurer deposits all funds promptly, makes all payments authorized by the Event Chair, and prepares a financial report. Since receipts of thousands of dollars may be involved, the selection of the Treasurer should be done carefully. Some groups get a performance bond on the Treasurer. Both the Event Chair and the Treasurer should be authorized to sign checks on the gathering account. See the reference *Oregon Mensa RG Registrar and Treasurer Tasks* for more information about Treasurer tasks.

³⁵www.us.mensa.org/gatherings (ref. L9)

³⁶*Oregon Mensa RG Registrar and Treasurer Tasks* (ref. R49)

Volunteer Coordinator

Very often, it is advantageous to have a Volunteer Coordinator who is assigned the task of obtaining volunteers for a gathering and assigning them to help with the most appropriate jobs. Usually it is Hospitality that needs them the most. The Volunteer Coordinator will want to solicit as many helpers as possible prior to a gathering, but sign-up sheets at the gathering itself are very useful. It is also smart to ask people to check off on their registration form if they are willing to help at a gathering, and the Registrar will then be able to supply names in advance to the Volunteer Coordinator for follow-up.

Webmaster

A gathering Webmaster is responsible for producing one or more Web pages to promote the gathering. General information pages are the minimum. Extra value can be delivered in the form of:

- Online registration and payment pages,
- Maps and directions,
- List of programs,
- Event site map,
- Hotlink to event hotel page,
- Hotlinks to local attractions,
- Airline / Amtrak / bus transportation information,
- Mommy letters online,
- Photos of the venue, or
- Photos from prior years' events.

Additional Roles and Responsibilities at Larger Events**Decorations Coordinator**

Many gatherings have decorations that reflect the theme of the event and/or highlight some of the activities. A Decorations Coordinator can provide valuable assistance to the Program Chair in designing, obtaining or creating, setting up, and removing decorations that enhance the setting of the gathering.

Help Desk / Information Desk / Action Desk

The help desk is where people can go with their questions or concerns. This desk is usually located near registration. It's also an ideal spot for attendees from other Local Groups with upcoming gatherings to put out flyers, and where members can display literature of varying interest and maturity.

This is **not** the same thing as: the volunteer desk, the speaker check-in desk or the registration desk.

The action desk is used most frequently during the first two to three days of the AG, when there will be a large influx of people needing a sense of direction and purpose.

Kids Trek Coordinator

AGs always have programs for young children, teens and pre-teens. The Kids Trek Coordinator is a major role, responsible for planning and producing all of the activities scheduled for the Kids Trek program at an AG. A children's track is rare at RGs, but there's no reason to not start or continue them with your RG team.

Leadership Development Workshop Coordinator

At an AG there is always a program track on Leadership Development. Appointed by the AMC, the AG/Leadership Development Workshop Coordinator works with the AG Program Chair. At regional LDWs, the Leadership Development Workshop Coordinator is most often both Event and Program Chair. If an RG has an LDW track, the LDW Coordinator will work closely with the Program Chair for the gathering.

Logistics Chair

At AGs, the Logistics Chair assigns all space, schedules all events, and coordinates all audio-visual needs. Some of the events and times are preordained; most are not. This person works with the program coordinators who arrange time slots according to a given speaker's schedule, and, when necessary, with the representatives from the AV rental company. The Logistics Chair provides the final program schedule and speaker bios to the program booklet editor, and he or she provides final room setups to the Hotel Liaison, who in turn works with the hotel staff to make sure that the hotel sets up the various spaces correctly. American Mensa is working with a Web-based software package that may assist in scheduling programs for future AGs. If you are interested in this software, please contact the National Office for more information.

Program Book Designer

While the Program Chair has the overall responsibility for the program, including signs and handouts for the information of gathering attendees, many Gathering Committees will find a talented graphic designer to assist the Program Chair in putting together a program book for the event. The program book typically features the event logo, the program schedule, messages from the Gatherings Committee, and bios of the speakers, and it is very often combined with a

pocket version of the schedule for the convenience of the attendees.

Rental Coordinator

At some gatherings there is a need for rental equipment beyond what the hotel can provide. In such cases, a Rental Coordinator is a useful volunteer role, providing assistance to the Hospitality Chair and Program Chair as needed.

Security Chair

Security is an informal role at most RGs and a formal role at AGs and at the larger RGs. The Security Chair reports directly to the Event Chair, and he or she has the responsibility for taking control on behalf of the host group in any situation where the enjoyment or well-being of gathering attendees is threatened.

Vendor Coordinator

The very largest gatherings attract vendors who would like to sell products and/or services to attendees. At those gatherings, it is very handy to have a Vendor Coordinator to make the arrangements with the hotel to provide space for the vendors, and to contract with the vendors themselves.

6 – Hotel Relations

Relations with the hotel begin when you start looking for a place to hold your event. Once you have a short list of properties, you must negotiate your contracts. During the event you need a designated liaison or liaison team to tell the hotel teams where, what and when you want them to do things.

The Gathering Research Team will encounter sales agents for the properties, who will give the tours, space maps, and bids. At some point a decision will be made on the property and your Hotel Negotiator will go to work. Your Hotel Liaison will be especially important as your group makes various demands on the hotel and its staff during the event.

Hotel Liaison

In a simple world, the same person would be leading the hotel research, negotiations and on-site event / hotel liaison. Ms rarely do things the simple way, and it's ok if these roles switch between multiple individuals. It is vitally important that the hotel people know who they need to talk to once serious negotiations begin and during the event, so you need to tell them clearly and without ambiguity.

In addition to the primary liaison, one or two backups are a very good idea. Two to four people during venue research is not unreasonable. Since the Event Chair has ultimate responsibility, he or she will often be the liaison with the hotel during the event, or first backup.

When it comes time to negotiate the hotel contract, dress in business attire, carry a briefcase or folder, look confident, and arrive early. You may want to take the RG Chair and Hospitality Chair with you. The hotel sales representative needs to see and talk to one person in the lead role, regardless of how many members of your committee come along.

Venue Research

The local Convention and Visitors Bureau should have a publication which can narrow down your search. The Chamber of Commerce will also have a list but only of their members. Hoteliers need "heads in their beds," and most have sales people whose mission is to get your business. Expect to be offered free lunches just for touring the sites and other goodies.

To a hotel operator, a weekend event with a bunch of sleeping rooms rented and two catered meals in meeting spaces also used for speaker events is a fairly standard package. However, the way Mensa groups like to do Hospitality will be a big stumbling block, and you will need to carefully define what you can and cannot do.

In general, expect to negotiate bringing food and drinks into the Hospitality room(s) but don't expect to serve your foods in their food service spaces. It is unusual to use the hotel's larger meeting rooms with outside foods, unless the hotel has no active food services department. Hotels with banquet rooms, but without catering departments, are not uncommon. Properties are often built with restaurants and catering departments in mind, but as their business evolves, they decide not to continue with those functions and the spaces devoted to food prep and service become available to organizations like ours.

You will have more bargaining power if you use a hotel that offers catering. It's generally easy to get an expensive hotel that will suit your needs, but with careful shopping, you may be able to get a great bargain at a less expensive venue. Lower costs will translate to higher turnout, so it may be worth the effort.

Shopping for a Venue

Most gatherings are held at hotels and motels that have meeting space, but successful gatherings have also been held at college dorms, campgrounds, fraternal organization (Elks) lodges, and so forth. If you are shopping for a new venue, an informal committee is a good idea. Network with your fellow members for suggestions, contact the local Convention and Visitors Bureau, and most of all, make phone calls and on-site visits.

As you make your initial hotel contacts, provide the following information if you can:

- A description of the Mensa Hospitality function,
- Number of people who attended your past few gatherings,
- Number of room nights that were sold in the past few local events – including early arrivals and late departures (called shoulder nights), and
- Number of banquet meals.

If you don't have information from local gatherings because your group hasn't had one in a while, then use stats from neighboring groups.

While touring hotels, do not get too excited and say, "Wow! This is just what we need." Remain low key and say, "This should be okay" or "This may work." When shown potential Hospitality suites for medium size or smaller gatherings, consider how the space will be used. There are numerous considerations that you should keep in mind for the Hospitality rooms; see section 08 in this handbook for details.

Suggested Checklist for Hotel Facilities

1. Can the Banquet Room seat the anticipated number of guests?
2. Will the meeting rooms together accommodate the total attendance?
3. Is the registration space adequate and well located?
4. Will the Hospitality space handle, without crowding, your total attendance?
5. Can you serve your own wine, soft drinks, and food in the Hospitality area/suites?
6. Is smoking allowed indoors, and if not, is there an outdoor shelter to accommodate guests who smoke?
7. Is the facility able to accommodate the needs of Mensans and guests with disabilities? See section 12 in this handbook for more information.
8. Are the meeting rooms and guest rooms all in one part of the hotel, for convenience and so as not to disturb other guests? Ask the hotel to avoid placing any non-gathering guests near the Hospitality site. Better yet, ask that they not place them anywhere on that floor.
9. Will the room reservations be made directly with the hotel, and will members receive Mensa rates? Be sure the hotel will offer the same rates to those arriving early or remaining after the gathering. Most hotels will furnish reservation cards if needed.
10. Does the hotel understand that only one person (or at most two) will be authorized to sign for charges to the master account, and that no bills will be paid without the authorized signature? Individuals should be billed separately.
11. Do you have a written agreement with the hotel for everything?

Banquet Meals

If your event hotel has a catering department, expect to commit to one or two meals to "pay" for the use of the group function space where your speakers hold forth (Don't forget a room for testing, if that is planned.). Generally this is a Saturday Dinner plus either a Saturday Lunch or Sunday Brunch. Your menu selections should reflect pocket books over taste buds, unless you are absolutely positive that your members have gourmet expectations. Buffets should always be considered for variety and volume, plus there are typically fewer servers involved. The hotel may offer a no-host hard liquor bar if you guarantee a minimum sales volume. Most of the time, thirsty Ms will easily meet your minimums, but your mileage may vary.

Some Local Groups have decided that rather than offer banquet meals as an option, they will bundle them in with event registration. This can bring down the price of each meal by guaranteeing a certain (higher) number and be sure of meeting it. It also makes for a more unified event.

Negotiating with Hotels: Reserving Rooms

Contact several hotels that meet your criteria for sleeping and meeting room space in order to compare rates.

Contact the hotel's Director of Sales or Sales Department and make an appointment for a tour of hotel and rate quote.

Note: One rule-of-thumb for estimating number of sleeping rooms is to estimate attendance, then figure two per room (some will be single rooms and some will be quads but they will average out to two per room.) Another approach is if you are expecting 100 registrants, expect 30 singles and 30 doubles and assume 10 will not stay in the hotel. For a two night RG, assume the same number of room nights as registrants. For 130 registrants, guarantee 100 room nights (50 each night) and tell the hotel to expect 130.

Important note: Bring a box of candy for the secretaries because they will be the ones helping you throughout.

Meeting rooms should be complimentary, based upon the number of meal functions that you book. If you don't book enough meal functions, the hotel will charge for the meeting rooms, but remember this is subject to negotiation.

Note: Since meeting rooms come under the jurisdiction of the Food and Beverage or Catering department and some cities have strong culinary unions, all food and beverage items served in those rooms will be required to be ordered from F & B at surprisingly high cost. This is why it is strongly recommended that Hospitality suites for medium or smaller gatherings be operated in the hotel sleeping room suites where you can often bring in your own refreshments (within reason).

Determine how many sleeping room nights must be reserved per each complimentary room. The hotel standard contract usually calls for one per 50. Like most things in the hotel standard contract, this is negotiable. Whatever the outcome, make sure this is spelled out in the written contract.

Note: Many hotel negotiators request that all comp rooms are to be used in adjoining suites for Hospitality. If there are additional comp rooms over and above what is required for Hospitality prep, they can be given to volunteers for their personal use. Usually the first in line is the Hospitality Chair, who will be working on site through the entire event.

Tip: Upon arrival with your Hospitality suite groceries, tip the bellmen when they haul your supplies to the suites. Also tip generously when you order items like ice and napkins from Room Service, and they should then be supplied free. Leave a tip in each suite each night for the maids who clean up. All this tipping is a good investment to assure that you'll have excellent cooperation and probably no additional hotel charges.

Be conscientious about your meeting room cut-off dates and releasing unbooked rooms back to the hotel, per the contract you make with the hotel. This makes a good argument for good discounts on early registrations.

Consider offering the Hospitality suites to a different SIG each day. Or consider booking a third Hospitality suite for a different SIG to take charge of each day, possibly including providing refreshments and maybe even entertainment. Some groups always have a separate smoking room for Hospitality.

If you feel that you MUST have Hospitality in meeting rooms, even though the refreshments might cost you more, consider using your comp rooms for speakers/presenters.

Space planning for the public rooms and the private Hospitality rooms will usually require a hotel to set up furniture such as chairs and tables

and may require that furniture be removed or replaced in some rooms. It is important to know what furniture will be needed and how it should be set up for each room at different times during the gathering.

The hotel will often want to put charges in the contract for the labor involved in moving furniture prior to and during the event; these charges are negotiable. To reduce or avoid these charges, try to minimize the requirements for having the hotel staff move furniture during the event. All requirements for set up of the public and private rooms should be included in the contract.

The hotel contract may require a cash deposit. The cash deposit is a normal requirement, and the Event Treasurer may have to write a check well in advance of collecting any monies for attendee registrations. Consequently, the Event Committee should arrange with the host group for seed money for the gathering for this and any other early costs that cannot be covered by accrued income.

The contract will specify charges that the hotel expects to collect if guaranteed room nights and/or guaranteed catering amounts are not met, or if the event is canceled after the contract is signed. It is critical to avoid penalties for failure to meet the guarantees for room nights and catering charges. The total number of room nights that the Event Committee expects to sell (hotels call this the "pickup") and the total amount of catering charges must be based on realistic estimates of the attendance at the gathering. If you have no history for a particular gathering, it would be wise to work with an experienced hotel negotiator to avoid suffering a loss due to unrealistic estimates. Check with your RVC for more information on who to contact for help before you sign any contract that may put your host group in financial jeopardy.

Negotiating with Hotels: Food and Beverage

Determine meeting room needs and what is required to get them comped (e.g., how many meals and/or room nights sold).

Make sure you get the "inclusive" (including tax and gratuities) price written in the contract. The "plus, plus (or ++)" after the stated price can add 25-30% to the cost.

Note: Most hotel Catering departments refuse to set firm prices until the beginning of the year the event is taking place. They'll slip in a "subject to change" clause.

Even though each item is listed in the menus you are shown during negotiating, make sure each and every item, for the meals you are contracting, is listed in the contract.

Instead of "Prime Rib Dinner" insist upon itemization, for example:

- Prime Rib
- Béarnaise sauce
- Garlic mashed potatoes
- Broccoli with Hollandaise sauce
- Sour dough rolls
- Butter
- Chocolate Volcano cake
- Coffee
- Tea

Note: It is especially important to have every item on a buffet menu listed.

Consider stipulating "cash bar" (one where diners pay for their drinks) and try to avoid guaranteeing a minimum in sales for cash bars. An alternate solution to consider is to arrange for diners to order bottles of wine for their tables at their own expense.

Catering managers practice what is known as "breakage." A guarantee for the number of meals is required (usually four or five days or even a week) prior to the event. Even if less than the guaranteed number of diners show up, you must pay for the number you guaranteed; this is called "breakage." Conversely, it is the practice to set 10% more places than the number guaranteed so that, if you want to add a few more diners at the last minute, the F & B department can accommodate you.

Note: Since their groceries are ordered a week ahead, smaller hotels may not have the same capability as larger ones to accommodate special dietary requests at the last minute.

The unexpected always happens to a certain percentage of diners which forces them to not show up. Sunday brunches generally have the most "no shows." F & B departments commonly order enough supplies to serve an additional 10%. You should ask, when you go over the guarantee portion of the contract, if it's possible to make last minute additions and if so, how many. Therefore, it is a very good idea to practice "breakage" in reverse: guarantee 10% less than the number who have booked the meal function, or at least 5% less, if you want to leave extra room to add more paid diners at the event. Mensans are well known

for procrastination, and there are usually a few who will try to purchase a meal at the event registration, long after the final count is given to the venue.

Do not sign the bill until you have personally counted every diner in the room. Taking tickets from each and every diner will give an accurate count of meals served. Make the Maitre D' change the number of diners on the bill before you sign it. Of course, you'll have to pay for the number you guaranteed, even if you count fewer diners than the guarantee.

Be conscientious about providing room set up configurations and times.

Negotiate providing your own table centerpieces. This could add a lot to the bill if the hotel provides them. Definitely do have some sort of centerpiece, as it adds a nice decorative touch.

Negotiating with Hotels: Audio-Visual Equipment

Audio-Visual equipment is always way more expensive than you expect. The hotel will have a price list for this, and you should go over it carefully to see what you can supply on your own. In some cases, the hotel will charge for services such as hooking up to their sound system, even if you supply your own microphones and mixers.

When obtaining AV equipment for a gathering, you will want to consider other options besides renting from the hotel or a retailer. Often it is possible to borrow equipment from members of your Local Group or from neighboring groups. If your Local Group hosts gatherings every year, it is worth having the group consider the purchase of commonly used equipment that can be very expensive to rent, such as computer projectors.

Note: Whenever possible try to avoid changes to the setup by scheduling, in the same room at different times, all speakers who need the same AV equipment.

Negotiating with Hotels: Final Selections and Negotiations

Once you have a short list on where you'd like to hold your event, it's time to start negotiating terms of the contract. You can continue to compare or just focus your attention on a single property.

You want the hotel to give you a room rate that is at the low end of anything they offer with hotel discount club cards, AARP, AAA or the regional coupon flyer. However, to get that rate, it's good to

know what it is, so shopping the reservations desk before negotiating with the group salesperson is a good idea. If a cheaper rate is available, the registrants for the gathering may register at the cheaper rate and cancel their Mensa reservations. When it is time to settle up, the Mensa group could be told they had not met their guaranteed number of room nights and must pay for the extras.

The hotel's standard contract will have clauses you won't like, so you have to read it, and line out clauses you don't like. You'll probably need an addendum which will detail the special needs of your group. The appendices to this workbook give you actual addenda used by other Local Groups in their hotel contracts.

Only the LocSec can bind a Local Group to a contract, and all contracts can and should be run by the AMC Corporate Counsel before signing. In most cases, event contracts may obligate Mensa for more than \$500. Whenever this is the case, you must provide a copy of the contract³⁷ to your RVC (see the section "Relations with AML and your RVC").

Be sure to include in your contract the individual(s) is authorized to commit the group to further costs. Everything must be in writing because there is a good chance that the person you signed the contract with will not be there at the time of the event; the hotel may even be under new ownership.

Prior to the Gathering

Once the venue contract has been signed, it is important to publicize the hotel information. For a listing in the *Mensa Bulletin*, state the rates for single/double/triple/quadruple rooms, the cutoff date for the guaranteed room rates, whether or not the event venue has issues concerning accessibility, whether or not there are smoking facilities, and whether or not the hotel provides a shuttle to and from the airport. This information is included on the gatherings listing request form³⁸ on the American Mensa Web site.

If you expect to host members from out of town, see to their needs. In addition to maps and directions for those who drive, arrange airport transfers for those who fly. The hotel may have resources like airport shuttles and maps to offer. All of this information should be in the mommy

letter, and there should be links on the gathering Web site directly to the hotel's Web site.

There are sometimes details that are not spelled out in the contract such as the number of extra chairs needed for Hospitality or meeting room set-up. You will need to meet with the hotel staff at least two more times before the gathering to confirm details like these.

Shortly before the event, final guarantees will be required by the hotel's F & B or Catering department. Usually, a document called an "Banquet Event Order," or BEO, will be given to the Hotel Liaison for signature at a meeting several days before the gathering. The BEO will specify everything that must be done by hotel staff prior to and during the event. The BEO will also specify the catering requirements and the guaranteed number of diners at each meal. Late changes to the program may require some differences in the Banquet Order compared to what was in the original contract; these should be kept to a minimum. Most hotels will be gracious about such changes, particularly when they require no additional work for their staff or no allocation of additional space for the gathering, but both the hotel staff and the Gathering Committee's Hotel Liaison will have to agree to the final plan as specified in the BEO.

During the Gathering

When the gathering is underway, to keep things simple and under control, there should be only a few people authorized to speak to the hotel staff concerning the needs of the group. Most often, these people will be the Hotel Liaison, the Event Chair and the Hospitality Chair. In addition, the AV Chair may need to speak directly to the hotel's AV Department about the use of their equipment, especially if it isn't working properly.

When problems occur, it is important to communicate with hotel security and other agencies as required according to the Event Committee's emergency response plan. Please see the section "Security and Emergency Planning" in this handbook for more information.

After the Gathering

Once the gathering has concluded, clean up the public and private rooms quickly and thoroughly. Be sure to let the hotel know about lost or missing items belonging to the host group and any damage to hotel property or other problems that arose during the event that were not reported earlier.

³⁷ SFRM RG Hotel Sample Contract 2006 (ref. R28)

³⁸ www.us.mensa.org/gatherings (L9)

Following the event, it will be necessary to pay the hotel bill. Arrangements for this should be made in advance with hotel staff. As the bill can be fairly complex, it is a good idea to arrange for payment by several days after the gathering has concluded, to give the Treasurer time to go over the hotel bill in detail and to flag any discrepancies with what the Event Committee expected to pay.

Hotels would like to have repeat business, and they understand that to get it they must always treat their customers well. Likewise, it is important to treat the hotel well and to maintain the best possible relations even if the host group expects to be at a different venue in the future. Pay hotel bills promptly and be sure to thank the staff members who did their best to provide services for the gathering. A gathering should be a win-win situation for all involved and, just as gatherings are one of the best things Mensa has to offer to its members, it should be remembered by the hotel staff as an ideal event as well.

7 – Planning and Budgeting

Three to four years of planning and budgeting is necessary for an Annual Gathering. Ideally, the American Mensa Site Selection Committee will want to consider bids four years in advance, and the American Mensa Committee will vote when a full bid has been submitted and approved by the committee. Bids for Mind Games® must be submitted to the AMC up to two years in advance of the date of the event. Colloquium proposals must be submitted to the Mensa Foundation at least two years in advance of the date of the event. Regional Gatherings or Theme Gatherings should have a year of planning and budgeting and a Mini-Gathering should have at least six months of preparation. LDWs need a minimum of six months to ensure good publicity and attendance.

Pre-Planning

Mensa gatherings begin with a group of folks who are willing to take on the roles and responsibilities described in section 05 in this handbook. In the case of national events, the event committee investigates what is necessary to prepare a bid according to guidelines published for the type of event sought. The following resources give information to help prepare bids for an AG or a Colloquium:

*AG Bid Packet*³⁹
*Guidelines for Mensa Colloquium Host Groups*⁴⁰

For an RG or TG, experienced members of the previous year's committee generally form the core group that begins the planning process for the next Local Group event. Regular meetings of the Event Committee are important, and the Event Chair should be prepared to come to each one with an agenda reflecting what is necessary and most critical to review for each meeting during the time leading up to the event. To assure broad and effective participation in the meetings, efforts should be made to accommodate committee members who are not local. Conference calls and elist discussions are useful adjuncts to face-to-face meetings.

For the sake of continuity and to assure that crucial skills are preserved and passed on from

year to year, it is important to make every effort to attract new volunteers with an eye toward mentoring them in each of the roles required for a successful event.

Budget

As early as possible, draw up a tentative budget, and revise it as your costs and estimates become more accurate. Obtain financial reports from other gatherings as guidelines. Besides normal administrative expenses, the budget should include music, Hospitality, programs, speakers and meals if scheduled. It is sometimes helpful to draw up a multi-tiered budget⁴¹ which would reflect both the set costs (would dictate the break-even point) and the differing amounts that should or could be spent to augment different areas as the number of attendees rose.

Dates

Mensa gatherings of every kind are typically held over a weekend. Holiday weekends are at a premium, so that the extra day can be used to the group's advantage. Many Local Groups customarily hold their gatherings on the same weekend each year. Some neighboring groups alternate years in order to use the same weekend and offset possible volunteer burnout. It is suggested that any new gathering select a date that will not conflict with other gatherings within driving distance that are already on the schedule.

Check with the local Convention and Visitors Bureau when selecting event dates. The Bureau will be able to advise the dates of all major city wide conventions so that you can avoid those weekends. It's easier to negotiate lower prices for a period when no other meetings have been booked.

The *Mensa Bulletin* and American Mensa's Web site have a listing of gatherings⁴²; check whether an event is scheduled this year that might pose a conflict for an event being planned for the next year. If so, it would be good form to check with the group sponsoring this year's event, to see what their plans may be for the coming year. It would also be a good idea to check early with the RVC,

³⁹*AG Bid Packet* (ref. R8)

⁴⁰*Guidelines for Mensa Colloquium Host Groups* (ref. R17)

⁴¹*2007 RG Sample Budget* (ref. R29)

⁴²www.us.mensa.org/gatherings (ref. L9)

who would know if there are any other new gatherings in the planning stage in the region.

Site

American Mensa's national events, such as the AG, Mind Games[®] and the Colloquium, are invariably held in a major hotel. Site selection for national events requires professional planning assistance; free assistance is available for this purpose. The National Events Hotel Consultant is appointed by the AMC and will assist with site selection upon request. Contact the National Office for more information if your Local Group or SIG is planning to prepare a bid for a national event.

Most RGs and TGs are also held in hotels. The expected size of the gathering and the number and kind of activities planned usually dictates the number of rooms and the amount of meeting space required. Hotels always have staff available to plan the best use of the space in the facility, and a site visit is strongly recommended in order to determine the suitability of a hotel for the gathering being planned.

In selecting the hotel, your negotiating position is best before your gathering is actually announced. Convention business is profitable, hotels and motels are competitive, and all prices are subject to negotiation. Consider all available sites, pointing out that Mensa is a prestigious society and Mensans are excellent guests. A downtown location is fine but not mandatory. You should obtain rooms at well below the rack rates with singles and doubles preferably at the same price. Meeting and Hospitality rooms should be free, as well as one sleeping room for every 40 or 50 rooms sold by the hotel. Meals should be negotiated in the same manner, arriving at attractive menus at reasonable prices. Make sure that permission to serve your own food and drinks in the Hospitality areas/suites is included in the contract. Finally, get this all in writing, drafting the agreement yourself if necessary, and always have the AMC Corporate Counsel review the contract before you sign it. Chances are very good that the person you are negotiating with now will not be the person you will be dealing with when the gathering actually takes place. Want something specific? Get it in writing! For more specifics on Hotel Relations issues, see section 06 in this handbook.

Theme

While TGs always have a theme, RGs may or may not have one. When an RG has a theme, it gives

the program a certain definition and leads to expectations on the part of attendees about the type of speakers and entertainment they are likely to find. However, the Program Chair will usually offer much more than just what the theme suggests, as Mensa members are fond of variety in their programs. Most often there will be a track of programming that follows the stated RG theme, and one or more tracks in addition that vary from the theme or run counter to it.

Publicity

The sooner the better! Due to the publication schedule, there is a two-month lead time required before something can appear in the *Mensa Bulletin*. As soon as the dates and site are approved, this information needs to be submitted for inclusion in the *Mensa Bulletin* via the online gatherings request form⁴³. When registration, meals and room costs are set, the original announcement can be updated. Have an artist member prepare a flier with registration and hotel reservation forms. These forms can be distributed by the National Office if requested and also be handed out at other gatherings and events. Most groups and regions have a Web site where this information can be made available as well.

Press releases should be sent to local newspapers and radio/TV stations; visiting Mensa dignitaries and special guest speakers should be booked for interviews (ask them first). One advantage of gatherings is that they provide publicity that will attract new members. Phone-in talk shows are excellent also. Sample press releases and a media timeline are available in the Internal Publicity Guide⁴⁴, which available our online material request form on InsideAML.

T-shirts and Other Logo Items

For publicity purposes, every gathering comes up with a logo, generally a clever takeoff on the announced theme. The logo may not violate the policies regarding Mensa's trademarks and service marks; for more information, see Appendix 8 of the ASIEs⁴⁵. Many event attendees like to purchase souvenirs, and t-shirts printed with the event logo are very commonly produced for this purpose.

⁴³www.us.mensa.org/gatherings (ref. L9)

⁴⁴www.us.mensa.org/materials (ref. L12)

⁴⁵www.us.mensa.org/ASIEs (ref. L5)

As there are many decisions that are required in order to put together an order of t-shirts to be sold at an event, it is recommended that this job be turned over to a volunteer with experience in this area who can be trusted to follow through with the task in accordance with the specifications of the Event Committee. T-shirts also make excellent thank-you gifts for members who have helped put on a gathering, and by adding extra shirts to the order for this purpose, the price per shirt may be reduced overall.

RG Programming

While some RGs have a general theme, RGs invariably offer attendees the opportunity to hear speakers on a variety of subjects. There will generally be a number of social events and activities throughout the weekend as well. Often there are also events scheduled just prior to the RG, principally for the benefit of out-of-town visitors. These are usually booked as pay-as-you-go tours and are not covered by the RG registration fee.

Mensans expect programs to be entertaining and informative, and programs on psychology, sociology and matters of topical interest are popular. Since Local Group officers usually attend the RG, conferences on local administrative matters are often scheduled. Speakers⁴⁶ can be selected from local authorities, from college and university faculties, and from the attendees themselves. AMC members are usually interesting speakers.

Set a time limit for each talk, 30 to 40 minutes followed by a question period. Programs over one hour in length are should be considered unusually long. Speakers at meal functions generally talk for 20 to 30 minutes.

It is uncommon to give an honorarium to a speaker at an RG. Speakers who are not members of Mensa are invariably invited to spend the day at the gathering and enjoy Hospitality at no charge. They may also be invited to dinner or brunch and reimbursed for their travel or lodging at the discretion of the Event Committee.

Prepping speakers is essential to a good talk (so they anticipate the Mensa audience). Advise speakers to leave more time than usual for Q&A, but hold it for the end of the talk.

⁴⁶*How To Be a Speaker Seeker* (ref. R30)

Games' rooms are popular as are contests of various kinds. Ice-breaker games are common on Friday evenings to acquaint attendees with each other. Many gatherings feature costume parties and/or dances. Some schedule special events in the Hospitality areas, often with special foods served. Pool and hot-tub parties are popular.

Many RGs feature a casino night and/or an auction for prizes using "Mensa-bucks" for money. In recent years, it has become popular to hold an auction or other fund raiser to benefit the Mensa Foundation. But, ask the Foundation's permission before conducting any of these fund-raisers. (Any money from such a fund raiser should be clearly distinguished from the gathering revenues and transferred to the Mensa Foundation as soon as possible after the event.)

Here are examples of RG programs:

*Sample RG Schedule-Oregon
Mensa 1999 RG*⁴⁷
*Sample RG program schedule*⁴⁸

TG Programming

A TG has a theme and all speakers should be a part of that overall theme. Within the theme chosen, try to offer a variety of sub-topics so a novice will be able to get a one-weekend overview of the subject, but include programs of substance so that an attendee experienced in the field won't feel the time is completely wasted. It's a fine line between the two, but it can be done. It may help to have an outside event, such as a special museum exhibit, performance, or other "field trip" of some sort to serve as a centerpiece for the presentations and as a common experience for all attendees. The theme can be almost anything for which the Local Group feels it can line up sufficient excellent speakers, e.g., archeology, astronomy, ballet, basket-weaving, computers, dance, earthquakes, education, etc.

Meal Functions

Mensans enjoy good food, and the menu should be carefully selected. The typical RG meal package includes dinner (often a banquet meal) on Saturday and a Sunday brunch. The Saturday dinner is an excellent time for a speaker. The Sunday brunch is usually devoted to "wrap-up" activities such as awards, announcements, and

⁴⁷ *Sample RG Schedule-Oregon Mensa 1999 RG* (ref. R31)

⁴⁸ *Sample RG program schedule* (ref. R32)

farewells. Larger gatherings, such as AGs and Colloquiums, generally have a three-meal package. Meal planning at all gatherings will need to take into account the special dietary needs of attendees, including vegetarians and vegans.

The preferred seating arrangement is at tables of 8 to 10 people with separate areas for smokers and nonsmokers. Head tables are optional, although less popular recently. It is usually best to have all meals on the premises; buffet meals are acceptable and sometimes less costly. If possible, have the tables cleared before any program begins and have extra chairs available for those who have not bought the meal ticket but wish to hear the speaker. Be sure to provide a podium and microphone and any other audio/visual equipment required. To set the price for the meal, figure all costs (including tax and service charge) and round off to the next highest dollar.

Hospitality

Nothing is more important to the success of a gathering than a comfortable and well-stocked Hospitality area. Adjoining rooms (for smokers and non-smokers) are customary; another option would be a very large room with excellent ventilation where one portion could be assigned as a smoking area. (In many states, however, smoking indoors is no longer allowed and in these states an outdoor shelter to accommodate smokers would be a good idea.) Soft drinks, beer and wine are furnished, along with snacks which could include cheese and crackers, chips and dips, vegetable trays, fruit, candy, cookies, ice cream and local specialties. Groups try to excel in the variety and quality of their Hospitality fare.

Friday arrivals are uncertain, so attendees often prefer to dine at nearby restaurants. Many gatherings offer a light buffet in the Hospitality area so that the attendees will be present for the evening programs; this is especially true at TGs where Friday evening is a good time for a keynote speaker. Complimentary light (or "continental") breakfasts in the Hospitality area are standard on Saturday morning.

Name Tags

The main requirement is that names should be easy to read. The standard size name tag is 3" by 4," which usually allows plenty of room for the name plus a distinctive logo for the particular gathering. If using a paper tag in a plastic sleeve or case, provide tape or a stapler so that the tag will not fall out. Name tags also often include ribbons to identify committee members, VIPs, speakers, etc. and space for "hugging" and/or SIG

stickers. In preparation for the gathering, it's a great idea to print one sheet for each attendee with their name tag, meal tickets and mini schedule all together.

Printed Program

Prepare and distribute a program with schedule of events, event and/or speaker descriptions, directions to meeting and other event rooms, and all other information that may be needed by attendees. If the program is an extensive one, consider providing a one-page summary that can fit in a pocket or purse.

Registration Desk

As the first point of contact the attendee has with the host group, a well-planned, prompt and courteous Registration Desk and staff is key. Some recommendations:

- For RGs, a convenient, visible Registration Desk staffed from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Friday, and from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Saturday.
- Registration envelopes prepared in advance containing name tag, meal and/or event tickets, programs, original registration materials, and notice of money still due.
- Extra members available to welcome guests and speakers.
- A list of pre-registrants available so that new arrivals may sign in or be checked off.
- Notice of where the Registrar can be found after registration is closed, or where late arriving guests may obtain temporary badges from Security or Hospitality.
- Extra meal tickets and money to make change.

Some groups include other "goodies" in the registration packets, including ice-breaker games and other contests, brochures and maps about the locality, and souvenir items. Be sure to have enough of these items to cover last minute or walk-in registrants.

Security

Gatherings are for Mensa members and their personal guests; uninvited guests should not be admitted except to a meeting open to the public. Discourage free-loading; no one should be admitted to a meeting or Hospitality area unless wearing a name tag. If there is a policy on replacement of lost name tags, include that

information in the gathering program. Meeting rooms and Hospitality areas should not be used for sleeping accommodations. If the gathering is very large, consider appointing several members specifically to security duty.

Odds and Ends

Have a bulletin board and message center near the Registration Desk.

Provide an information desk near Registration for handouts, sign-up sheets, and to display various newsletters and fliers for other gatherings.

Know where to reach a doctor and a dentist in case of emergencies.

Be able to prepare signs "spur of the moment" when needed.

Have prizes for winners of any contests.

Make provisions for transportation for air travelers arriving by commercial or private planes as well as those arriving by train or bus.

Have a photographer take candid shots for possible use in the *Mensa Bulletin*, local newsletter or on national and local Web sites.

Let attendees know up front anything that might later cause dismay, such as no smoking inside, whether or not children's activities are going to happen, problems with accessibility for Mensans and guests with disabilities, what the refund policy is, etc.

Summary

While these guidelines should cover the major aspects of a gathering, the experience of attending gatherings held by your own or other groups is also valuable. Most groups and past Coordinators of gatherings are very willing to share their expertise when asked. Every gathering usually has its own distinctive character with its own special attractions. Gatherings can have many advantages for the Local Group: their publicity brings new members; the profits can be used for scholarships or other Local Group projects; they instill a spirit of pride and cooperation in the group; and they have initiated many lasting friendships within Mensa.

8 – Hospitality

Hospitality is at the center of many Mensa gatherings, and it's a huge job. You never get enough *Thank Yous*, so let us start by saying **Thank You!** for your hard work, both in the past and in Hospitality assignments yet to come.

Members expect Hospitality to be well-stocked with finger foods and beverages, including beer and wine, and a place to sit and talk. (It wouldn't be a Mensa gathering without these!) Groups that sponsor events can get rather competitive in exceeding the variety and quality of their Hospitality fare, which of course benefits everyone.

The scope of your Hospitality offerings will be limited by the contract and your budget. Ideally, there will be separate spaces for smokers and non-smokers with food and beverage available in or near both. (Note, however, that in many states, smoking indoors is no longer allowed; in these states an outdoor shelter to accommodate smokers might be a good idea.) Consult with your Event Committee to learn the terms of your contract.

Here are some other things that need to be addressed:

Expected Attendance

Using various guidelines, like membership numbers and density in your Local Group, the number and size of other Local Groups within a 25/50/100 mile driving radius, the attendance last year, and other factors, you can estimate the number of guests that will likely attend. These numbers can be greatly increased by:

- advertising the event in your Local Group's newsletter and online,
- mailing notices to your local members,
- sending out email announcements about your gathering,
- advertising the event in the *Mensa Bulletin*,
- organizing a "phone out" (asking volunteers to utilize their unused evening cell phone minutes to make calls to Local Group members, following a prepared script) to personally invite them to attend,
- sending advertisements to all the Editors in the region for inclusion in their newsletters, and

- submitting an ad to the National Office well in advance for inclusion in the monthly mailing.

Hospitality Budget

Work with your Event Committee to determine the source of funding for Hospitality. If your group has "seed money" from last year's event, from the local treasury, or from a fund-raising effort, you'll know how much you have to start with. Registration fees for the gathering will form the bulk of your available funds as the date for the event nears. Using the multipliers of "X" dollars times "Y" attendees, determine what percentage of the income will be used toward the costs of providing food and drink. Your group's history of offering various levels of service will help you set the multiplier. Some groups, for example, put out sandwich fixings and chips/dip, but don't do anything special. Their multiplier might be \$5.00 per person per day for the weekend. Other groups might want to offer hand-rolled grape leaves and seasoned rice, "midnight sweet treats," and kegs of specialty beers all weekend, and may need \$50.00 per person to make that available.

Timelines and Checklists

If it exists, refer to last year's Timeline for reference. Working backward from the date of your event, sketch in a rough draft for when things have to be done – both macro and micro versions. The macro or global timeline may start as many as three years before your gathering to book the hotel; and then advance in monthly, weekly and daily increments to the gathering date. The micro version may include the "one week count-down" and include hour-by-hour tasks from start to finish of your gathering. You will add to these lists every time you consider one more idea (like soliciting donations from local businesses or taking advantage of bulk off-season purchases for non-perishable items). Build in time for delays, for firm deadlines (like printing the program), and working around the schedules of the hotel catering staff and your volunteers.

Sample Hospitality timelines are outlined in the following documents:

*Hospitality-Sched-When-2-Set-Out-Food*⁴⁹
*HalloweeM Hospitality Timeline*⁵⁰
*HalloweeM Hospitality Checklist*⁵¹
*HalloweeM Hospitality Requirements 2006*⁵²

Food Handling Certificate

In order to have your gathering approved for advertising by AML, you must have one or more people on your Hospitality team who has been certified for food service safety. This certification can be done through a local health department which gives classes for restaurant employees, or through Mensa, with an online book and test. The approved vendors of training and certification will change regularly, so check with the ASIEs and your RVC. Visit InsideAML⁵³ for information on food safety certifying with AML in the Certifications section. Included on the Food Safety Certification page are the following documents:

*Cooking for Groups*⁵⁴, published by the United States Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service
*Cooking for Groups Certification Test*⁵⁵

Contact the National Groups Coordinator for printed versions of these documents.

What to serve

You can get as elaborate as you want, but here's a quick guideline for what categories of food and beverage you might offer. Several sample shopping lists can also be found in the following documents:

*HalloweeM Hospitality Timeline*⁵⁶
*HalloweeM Hospitality 2006*⁵⁷
*RG Budget Supplies 2001*⁵⁸

⁴⁹*Hospitality-Sched-When-2-Set-Out-Food* (ref. R34)

⁵⁰*HalloweeM Hospitality Timeline* (ref. R35)

⁵¹*HalloweeM Hospitality Checklist* (ref. R36)

⁵²*HalloweeM Hospitality Requirements 2006* (ref. R37)

⁵³www.us.mensa.org/officerresources (ref. L3)

⁵⁴*Cooking for Groups* (ref. R38)

⁵⁵*Cooking for Groups Certification Test* (ref. R39)

⁵⁶*HalloweeM Hospitality Timeline* (ref. R35)

⁵⁷*HalloweeM Hospitality 2006* (ref. R40)

- salty snacks
- chocolate
- sweets and candy
- protein
- bottled water
- fruit juices
- home-made goods
- baked goods
- foods donated by bagel shops, coffee houses, candy makers, etc.
- veggies and dips
- soft drinks (diet, too)
- healthy snacks
- coffee
- local specialties
- beer
- theme foods
- wine

In recent years there has been an increasing use of soft drinks at gatherings in preference to alcohol, and in particular a much larger consumption of diet soda over regular. Choosing the right assortment and the right quantities of soft drinks is tricky, but it is a necessity to provide a good deal of variety, including diet and non-caffeine sodas (as a rule of thumb, the first to run out are the diet sodas with caffeine). Overbuying soda need not be a problem, however, as the overage can be returned to the store after the gathering.

No matter how well you plan, you will run out of food, so not to worry. Those with significant Hospitality experience will tell you that some years, guests will eat lightly from the sweets table; but the next year they will voraciously consume every morsel. (Not that there's anything wrong with that.) Just appoint someone to make the inevitable grocery store run. A word of wisdom from HalloweeM: half of the total food will be eaten by midnight on Friday.

How to handle logistics

Six months or more in advance (though if yours is a small gathering, it can be done in less time) plan the overall menu. Know where you will get these items (home-made items, Sam's Club, local grocery store, etc.) and how to pay. Solicit donations from local bakeries, coffee houses, sandwich shops, bagel restaurants, candy suppliers, etc. and offer advertising in your program in return.

Once you know what you need and where to get it, you'll then need to plan for:

⁵⁸ *RG Budget Supplies 2001* (ref. R41)

- shoppers and schleppers,
- storage for items before the event,
- storage for food and cold things at the hotel,
- food prep and storage area,
- transportation vehicles,
- plans for heating food and keeping it hot,
- periodic grocery store runs,
- trash removal and clean up,
- how to obtain ice from the hotel,
- recycling,
- a plan for serving food,
- storage for items after the event, and
- first-aid kit.

You will very likely want to stock your Hospitality prep area with the following items (make sure that those who loan their items have labeled them clearly):

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| • platters | • bowls | • serving utensils |
| • plates | • thermometers | • napkins |
| • pitchers | • Styrofoam cups | • plasticware |
| • food prep gloves | • dish towels | • dish soap |
| • wash cloths | • sponges | • refrigerators |
| • broom | • Dustbuster | • extension cords |
| • paper towels | • freezers | • radio |
| • notepad/pen | • markers | • paper for signs |
| • white board/pens | • coolers | • waxed paper |
| • foil | • Ziploc® bags | • boxes |
| • bins for dirty dishes and utensils | • cutting board | • paper bags |
| • knives (pare/chop) | • trash bins/bags | • cheese slicer |
| • scissors | | |

Volunteer Recruitment

Decide how you want to divide the tasks. If you want some of your volunteers to coordinate home-baked goods, some to do the shopping, some to do on-site food preparation and serving, great! However, before giving these assignments be sure that they will not raise a contract issue with the hotel. The Hospitality plan should be put in writing and signed by the representatives of the facility, and the volunteers who perform these tasks

should have a clear understanding of the facility's policy.

Alternatively, you could recruit volunteer supervisors, putting one person in charge of *everything* for just one day and the others for just one of the remaining days of your event. These supervisors would recruit their own volunteers to help prepare, serve, replenish and keep the food/beverage areas tidy (an often overlooked but very important task!) Those volunteers might also arrange for trash pick up and vacuuming, advise Security of unsafe conditions, make notes for grocery runs, and tell the Hospitality Chair about things needing attention (broken or non-functioning appliances, blown fuses, stopped-up drains, etc.)

Once you've decided how to organize your volunteer assignments, start recruiting your local members. Emphasizing the social aspects for gregarious members (and the reduction of discomfort for shy persons), solicit volunteers from your Local Group. You might consider these methods:

- put a request for volunteers right on your registration form
- write a series of fun, upbeat articles for your local newsletter
- put a request for volunteers in your national advertising
- send email requests to your registrants
- recruit volunteers personally at Registration and in Hospitality
- ask your volunteers to recruit a friend or assistant for themselves
- put volunteer sign-up sheets at the Registration table and on the wall in Hospitality for "impulse" volunteers.

Evaluate Hospitality Space

Prior to signing a contract with the hotel, the Hospitality Chair should work with the hotel negotiators to make sure that the space allotted to Hospitality is what and where it needs to be. The Hospitality Chair and key members of the Hospitality team should inspect the space and ensure it is big enough to accommodate the total expected attendance without crowding. Imagine it filled with people. How far away is the restroom? Is there a source of running water? Make note of these items, too:

- Determine the overall size of room in square feet.

- Make a layout sketch showing architectural features (pillars, windows, number and location of electrical outlets, etc.)
- Check the brightness of the lighting sources (too bright/dim?)
- Note the furniture size, location, number, and look for any problems (like Ming vases or sharp table edges?)
- Ask the hotel to disallow outgoing calls from the telephones in these rooms
- Estimate how much open space will remain after the room is set up according to specifications in the contract (enough to allow easy conversations?)

Plan for how people will move through the Hospitality area. Where will they enter? How will they leave? Is there room for more than one serving line? Consider placing the condiments away from the main food serving lines to speed up serving. (It takes more time to spread butter than scoop up mashed potatoes.)

Contract Issues

Before the contract with the hotel is signed, the Hospitality Chair needs to make sure that it specifically states which appliances and equipment you can bring into the hotel if you should desire, including:

- refrigerator
- coolers
- soft drink machine
- microwave
- popcorn popper
- toaster
- freezer
- beer keg
- sofas
- use Sterno cups?
- use hotel ice or bring in your own
- crock pot
- hot dog griller
- hot plate
- coffee maker
- chafing dish
- blender
- electric skillet
- pizza delivery
- cook in room?
- burn candles?

Unpack and Set Up

Clean and sanitize any utensils or equipment that will come into contact with food (including anything that has been in storage). Put plates at the start of the line and napkins and utensils at the end. Store extra plates and utensils under or near the serving tables for easy access. Store extra cups near the beverages and put out a few markers so that guests can write names on their cups. If you have a separate preparation area, have as much of the food and equipment there as visible as possible. (Out-of-sight can quickly become out-of-mind.)

Consider placing 6' folding tables atop one another and use the "two shelves" for extra space instantly. Group food and equipment by purpose or expected serving time (e.g., put all breakfast items together so drowsy volunteers can quickly find everything).

Coordinate with Security staff

If your event is big enough to warrant your own Mensa Security staff, coordinate with them to ensure that guests guard their personal property, that no one sleeps in Hospitality overnight, all guests wear name badges at all times, there is no underage drinking, and overzealous Romeos (or Juliets!) are monitored or taken aside (requesting they be more respectful of guests' sensibilities). Otherwise, your volunteers should keep an eye on these aspects of behavior in the Hospitality area.

Closing up on the last day

The clearing away and cleaning up tasks are made lighter with many hands — and a plan. Here are some of the things you might keep in mind:

- dispose of, sell, or give away in Ziploc bags any open or perishable foods.
- pack up remaining consumables for use at another Mensa function
- wash and dry all serving trays/utensils and pack them into *labeled* boxes and bags. Clear plastic tubs with sealable lids also work very well for this.
- place donated equipment in a special area for retrieval by your members
- arrange for final trash pickup
- contact the recycling volunteers for pickup
- plan the transportation of Hospitality supplies to a storage facility or a member's home. Who has the keys? Warning: don't put food (even if it is closed up in a bag or box) into a storage unit. You'd be amazed at how invasive rodents and bugs can be!
- ensure there are enough volunteers to schlep stuff to the vehicle and from it into the storage area

Thank your volunteers

Some groups give out pins, aprons, t-shirts, or ball caps to their volunteers; others have a drawing for prizes, or throw a party (and use up some of that leftover food and beverage stock.) Make sure your volunteers know how valuable they are and that the gathering could not have taken place without them!

Final Report

Submit a written summary of the Hospitality function to your Event Committee. It is invaluable, and will form the basis of next year's decisions on budget, staffing, and organization. Please prepare it while the event is fresh in your mind. See several, excellent examples

*Thoughts of an Exhausted Hospitality Queen*⁵⁹
*HalloweeM Lessons Learned*⁶⁰
*2006 Mind Games Final Report*⁶¹, pp. 6-11

What went well and what didn't? What recommendations would you suggest for next year's team? Include evaluations of food/beverage quantity, quality and variety. How did your volunteers perform? Should there have been fewer supervisors/workers or more? What feedback did you get from your guests and volunteers about the space, ambiance, noise, lighting, food/beverage, seating, etc.? Consider placing Evaluation Forms in the Hospitality area so that guests can give feedback easily. Try to avoid making oneself a de facto, easy target by saying "What improvements would you suggest for...." Instead, say something like "Tell us what we did well" or "What did you like best about the RG?" and "What could we have done better with... (fill in blank)?" You might also wish to use "Rate the (fill in blank) from 1 to 10," which gives you the opportunity to come up with a numerical average. (See the sample Evaluation Form⁶², which could be improved upon by these suggestions.) Your Final Report should also attempt to capture the experience of being Hospitality Chair so that you can pass it along to the next Event Committee.

When all is said, written, and submitted – congratulate yourself on a job well done!

⁵⁹*Thoughts of an Exhausted Hospitality Queen* (ref. R42)

⁶⁰*HalloweeM Lessons Learned* (ref. R43)

⁶¹*2006 Mind Games Final Report* (ref. R12)

⁶²*2007 RG Evaluation Form* (ref. R44)

9 – Programs and Events

American Mensa's Annual Gathering is an extravaganza boasting numerous separate program tracks, including the Annual Business Meeting and meetings of the AMC and its committees, sessions devoted to leadership development, various forms of entertainment such as dances, concerts, variety shows, games and tournaments, SIG meetings, a track of activities especially designed for children, and presentations on a host of topics such as physical and spiritual wellness, science, humor, travel, culture and many others defying categorization. An AG also features prepaid or pay-as-you-go tours before and after the event, especially designed as a bonus for out-of-town visitors.

In contrast, the program for Mind Games® is very simple: attendees are judges, playing a list of assigned games to give feedback to the manufacturers and to award the Mensa Select® seal to the top five games submitted for judging. The Colloquium program can vary somewhat, but generally involves presentations by experts in a particular field with attendees then having the opportunity to ask questions of the experts; often, depending upon the Colloquium topic, there will be breakout sessions in which attendees are able to discuss what they have heard and offer their own take on the subject matter. Program committees for the AG and the Colloquium require extensive preparation and a great deal of lead time for their efforts, with a minimum of one year for a Colloquium, up to three years for an AG.

Regional Gatherings, Themed Gatherings and LDWs generally require six months to a year of program planning and preparation. Publicity is best served and early registrations are more likely if there are some noteworthy speakers and events arranged early on, but the program is likely to be finalized in the last several months leading up to the event itself. *How To Be a Speaker Seeker*⁶³ is a helpful guide for the program volunteers who have the task of finding presenters for a gathering.

Leadership Development Weekends are program-specific events to provide training for members currently holding an office or contemplating holding an office and to allow Mensa volunteers to network. They provide standardized courses and information relevant to the needs of local officers in order to help them to better serve the Local

⁶³*How To Be a Speaker Seeker* (ref. R30)

Groups. LDWs are program-specific working weekends and are financially supported at the national level. Leadership Development Workshop sessions are always included as a separate program track at the AG, and may also be included at an RG. For more information about LDWs, please see the *Leadership Development Workshop Guide*⁶⁴.

Printed Program

Most gatherings will have printed program schedule for the event. The full version of the printed program will list all the activities and speakers and tell when and where everything will happen. There may also be a pocket-size of the program schedule provided to attendees. The printed program will require a certain amount of lead time for production and consequently there will commonly be late program changes that will not be reflected in the printed program. To deal with this, many gatherings print daily listings of changes to the program to be handed out at the event. Printed program updates are usually made available at the message center, information desk, or the Registrar's table.

Example RG programs include:

*Sample RG Schedule-Oregon
Mensa 1999 RG*⁶⁵
*Sample RG Program Schedule*⁶⁶

Signs and Decorations

Once the program is worked out, signs should be printed in advance for posting outside meeting rooms. All signs, banners and decorations that are intended for display at a gathering should be discussed conceptually with the hotel staff during the contract negotiations and again when the final plans for the event are communicated to hotel management. The facility will always have a policy on signs and decorations, and the Event Committee will need to know and come prepared to post signs according to that policy.

⁶⁴www.us.mensa.org/handbooks (ref. L8)

⁶⁵*Sample RG Schedule-Oregon Mensa 1999 RG* (ref. R31)

⁶⁶*Sample RG Program Schedule* (ref. R32)

Pre-Events and Post-Events

The days before and after a gathering give out-of-town visitors opportunities to do some sightseeing in the local area and to attend additional activities with Mensa members from the Local Group. Some such pre-events might be pay-as-you-go, such as a dinner group or pub crawl, while others can be prepaid tours or field trips to various points of interest.

For example, one very successful prepaid tour involved busing a group of RG attendees, on the morning that the Oregon Mensa RG began, to a location where they boarded a sternwheeler riverboat for a ride on the Columbia River. The scenic ride lasted a couple of hours, and it included a champagne lunch. On the return trip, the bus stopped at Multnomah Falls, a premier tourist destination in the Columbia Gorge, and the group returned to the hotel in time for the opening of registration and the Hospitality suite.

Pre-events like the tour described above require additional planning, and it is a good idea to put a volunteer in charge of contacting vendors and making arrangements for any tours. The Tour Coordinator should then report back to the Event Committee for approval. If it is necessary to sign a contract, or to provide guarantees to a vendor, this should be done with a clear understanding of any financial risk involved.

Besides offering tours, field trips or other pre- and post-events, it is a very good idea to provide information to attendees about restaurants, theaters, shopping, and other local attractions. When negotiating room rates at the event hotel, it is customary to ask for "shoulder rates," giving attendees the chance to book a room at the same discounted room rate for several days before and after the actual event. Be sure and include as much of this information as you can in your publicity pieces, as it will definitely attract more attendees to your event.

Kickoff

Typically, events in American Mensa begin with the opening of registration. The registration table should be placed in a prominent position in the event venue, and it should be easy to find with large, appropriate signage. The Registrar will have packets already made up for all of the pre-registered attendees. Each packet will contain the information and materials that they need for the event, including their badge and badge holder, the printed program schedule, a copy of the mommy letter, and some things that are just for fun. There will also be other items of interest on the

registration table, such as handouts, sign-up sheets for activities with limited numbers of attendees, hug dots and decorations for badges, and souvenir items for sale. (At a very large event, such as an AG, there will be separate areas for registration, for information, and for selling souvenir items.) It is also a good idea to have a sign board near registration, as it is a natural place for attendees to leave messages for one another and it is a helpful way to inform attendees about program changes.

Once attendees have registered and put on their badges, they will want to find places nearby to congregate and things to do. At the very least, the opening of registration should coincide with the opening of the Hospitality suite; if there is an official opening activity, it should begin shortly thereafter. Generally, attendance will build toward a peak in the early evening of the first day, coinciding with arrivals at the hotel, so registration should remain open late on that day and programming on the first day of the event should focus on activities from 6 p.m. until after midnight.

Ice Breakers

One tried-and-true method of getting event attendees to meet and talk with one another is by giving them an ice breaker activity. These are often corny gimmicks, but they have a purpose and they are supposed to be fun. The best mixers actually get people competing with one another to complete a puzzle in a creative way; one example is to give each attendee a large Scrabble letter with a point value and then award prizes for groups who combine their letters to spell out the longest word, the highest value word, the most creative word, and any other category you can think of.

Mensans love free stuff and they love word games, so giving out prizes for a silly Scrabble ice breaker is a sure way to get them to mix. You can use your imagination and come up with all sorts of ice breaker ideas, but any one you choose should be relatively quick to do, easy, fun and encourage people to talk with one another; ice breakers that fail in any one of these dimensions tend to fall flat.

Programming/Speakers

Most Mensa gatherings feature speakers who have come to entertain and teach their audiences. Many of the speakers are Mensa members themselves, while others are experts in their fields who have come to share their knowledge on a particular subject. What most speakers at Mensa events have in common is that they are not paid

for their efforts, though they may have some expenses defrayed, they may be invited to dinner, or both. If they are not Mensa members, they will usually be invited to participate in the event as attendees on the day they are speaking, and invited to come to the Hospitality suite after their program session.

Invitations to speak at a Mensa event are offered by the Program Chair and his or her assistants to anyone whom they think the attendees would be interested in hearing, whether or not the speaker's subject is relevant to the event theme. Happily, most prospective speakers are delighted to have engaged, intelligent audiences, and knowing Mensa's reputation, they are inclined to accept an invitation to speak at a gathering.

It is very important for the Program Chair and assistants to get commitments early on in the event planning cycle to aid publicity efforts, but in any case the program should be filled out in time to produce a printed program for the event that contains all of the relevant information about the various speakers' subjects, as well as their bios. As they are booked, speakers will have to be placed on the schedule, told how much time they are allowed and the subject they are requested to speak about, and be a list of available audio-visual equipment.

At an AG, there will be many tracks of speakers going on simultaneously. Generally at an RG, there will be two or three concurrent speaker tracks in addition to the games and Hospitality activities. Due to the programming choices available at any particular time, some speakers may find themselves with very small audiences. While this may be unavoidable, every effort should be made to make the speaker feel valued in return for having come out to speak to a Mensa audience. Although it is nice to receive a certificate or other token of appreciation, what a speaker wants most is an appreciative audience. With that in mind, it is important to plan to have the appropriate number of speakers, in the right size rooms, all during the event. Admittedly, there is some art to accomplishing this, but pre-planning helps tremendously.

A good way to approach the program is to think about what a typical guest will do during the day and schedule accordingly. For example, consider what time he or she will come to Hospitality in the morning, what time he or she will be ready to hear the first speaker or participate in a group stretching session, what time he or she will want to have lunch, how long he or she will want to hear

speakers in the afternoon, and what time he or she will want to have dinner.

Programming/Activities

Mensans like to do things, as well as listen. It is important to build into the programming mix opportunities for attendees to participate. Karaoke, sing-along's, yoga exercises, dance lessons, trivia contests, Carnelli[®], discussions, charades, fishbowl, cheese/wine/chocolate tastings, joke offs, SIG meetings, singles' mixers and opportunities to meet with local and/or National Officers are all examples of popular diversions which can be programmed alongside the speaker sessions. Activities like these are almost always led by Mensa members, and they are easy to put on the program as there are many members who get a big kick out of sharing their passion for doing things like this with their fellow Mensans.

Special fund raising activities are often a part of Mensa gathering programs. Among the more elaborate and profitable of such activities are silent and live auctions. Auctions are discussed in detail under the topic "Fund Raisers."

Speaker Shepherds

When speakers arrive at the event venue, they should be met by someone who gives them a packet of relevant materials, including their badge and badge holder. The person who meets and assists the speaker is a speaker shepherd, and that person should escort the speaker to the room where they will be giving their session. In addition, the speaker shepherd should be able to answer questions about Mensa and the particular event, help make any last-minute arrangements that the speaker may require, and generally make the speaker feel comfortable, welcome and appreciated. The speaker shepherd may also be the one to introduce the speaker, but this is not always the case.

Paid Meals

National events and larger local events such as RGs and TGs customarily offer attendees one or more opportunities to have meals together. The group meals are important social occasions, and each of them serves as a focal point for the event. In most cases, meals at an event are catered by the event venue, and in combination with room guarantees, the catered meals provide the venue with enough revenue to allow use of meeting space at no additional charge.

Group meals are usually purchased at same time as registration. Shortly before the event, the catering manager will require an estimate of the number of meals to be provided; the purchased meals provide the basis for the estimate. Although the hotel will be prepared to serve 10% more meals than the estimated total, this will leave very few group meals available for purchase at the event itself, except in the case of a cancellation. Sometimes attendees will post notices at the event offering to sell their meal tickets, and this is another use for the notice board near the registration table.

Purchased meal tickets should be included in the registration packets that attendees receive. (A good practice is to print meal tickets on the same sheet as the name badges, saving both time and materials.) At meal times, the tickets should be collected and counted, to make sure that the catering manager is satisfied that the number of meals consumed corresponds with the number of meals guaranteed and paid for. Trusted volunteers should be placed in charge of collecting the tickets and the event committee's Hotel Liaison should communicate the final meal count to the venue's catering manager.

Catered meals are always expensive, and taxes and service charges add to the total. For this reason, catered meals should not be considered an opportunity to raise revenue by the Event Committee, other than to cover the costs of the meals. Catering managers like to work with their customers, however, so the menus for meals can be negotiated to keep costs down. Buffets are very good for offering attendees greater variety, while allowing the catering manager to make lower cost substitutions for some of their standard menu choices.

Since meals bring attendees together and the Hospitality room is generally closed at group meal times, the keynote speaker for the event is usually scheduled immediately after dinner. To guarantee the largest possible audience, provision should be made to schedule the keynote speaker so that those who preferred not to attend the group dinner can still be present. The choice of the keynote speaker is very important; ideally this person should be an accomplished, notable individual who would be of uncommon interest to the majority of attendees. It is often the case that another speaker of interest is invited to speak at a second meal during an event; at an RG, this could be an after-brunch speaker on Sunday, shortly before the close of the event.

Following the Saturday dinner, and just prior to the introduction of the keynote speaker if one is scheduled, it is a good time for announcements, introductions and volunteer recognition. This will provide a smooth transition to the beginning of the entertainment portion of the evening: the aforementioned keynote speaker, a fund raiser such as a live auction, additional entertainment if it is offered, and a continuation of events on the program. On Sunday, the last event after the brunch speaker is often a prize giveaway for contest winners and volunteers, with encouragement to help clean up the venue afterward.

Dances and Entertainment

The AG always features multiple dances, variety shows, and other forms of entertainment, but most RGs will have no more than one or two dances and shows. Dances with live bands are costlier than hiring a DJ to play recorded music and the quality can vary a great deal with a live band, but a good live band definitely makes for a livelier dance crowd. Setting a theme for the dance and encouraging costumes often helps to make it a success.

Some Mensans insist on dancing, but others are just not interested. For those who would rather watch than join in, a better entertainment choice might be a revue or variety show. There are many talented Mensa members, and a low-cost, high quality entertainment choice would be to encourage some of them to perform. "American Mensa Idol" would likely be a popular alternative, for example.

Some members take the trouble to write and perform entire shows; if your group is lucky enough to have quality entertainment of this sort available, the Saturday night program will be a hit. Daniel Gilmore from Mensa of Western Washington has adapted "The Two Percent Show" for several AGs and RGs over the years, and the Pungo Players of Tidewater, VA, are also well known for their shows at Mensa gatherings. Shows needn't feature professional or even experienced performers to be a hit, though; many excellent shows have featured volunteer performers with little or no experience but with a willingness to entertain their fellow Mensa members.

For those who do not wish to have a dance and aren't fortunate enough to have local members to perform, it will probably be necessary to find professionals to put on a show. One of the most popular shows of this type is the professional

magician. Mensans particularly like to match wits with the artist, they enjoy the patter that is part of the show, and usually one or more of the Mensans in attendance will be brought into the act, to the great amusement of their friends in the audience. Magicians tend to work solo or with a partner, and the cost of hiring them is relatively low. It's an excellent choice for a Saturday night show and even better if the magician will agree to wander through the venue as a warm-up prior to the stage show, doing close-up magic.

The overall cost of dances and other forms of entertainment will vary and hiring professionals will require contracts. The most important consideration should be what sort of entertainment will appeal to the attendees, but it's also important to stick to the event budget. In the end, hiring a band for \$500 to \$1,000 will look like a waste of money if only a dozen people stay for the dance; use your best judgment for what will appeal to the crowd and then make it fun!

Games

Mind Games[®] is a national event that is all about games and nothing else but. Attendees at Mind Games[®] are actually judges who play games from an assigned list in order to evaluate them for the manufacturers. At the conclusion of Mind Games[®], the judges choose the five best games, which are then awarded the Mensa Select[®] seal.

At AGs and RGs, games are not the primary focus, though they are very important. Most often, there is a Games Chair at an event who is in charge of setting up and monitoring the games room. The Games Chair may also be in charge of any tournaments that take place, though in the do-it-yourself spirit that is Mensa at its best, anyone can declare and put on a tournament if there is enough available space. (HalloweeM has been known to turn away game tournaments five months in advance; at many other gatherings, a tournament notice can be posted during the event.) For the tournaments put on by the Games Chair, there will usually be prizes. The awarding of prizes to the tournament winners tends to occur at the final get-together prior to the closing of the event, generally around noon on Sunday.

Setting up the games room requires planning for enough space to accommodate various types of gaming activities. The hotel will need to be given a floor plan in advance, detailing the number and size of tables and the desired seating arrangements. There should be larger tables for those who like to work on jigsaw puzzles and for those who wish to play games that may have as

many as eight players, such as Texas Hold 'Em and Quiddler. There should also be some smaller tables for bridge or Scrabble. Some tables will have to be set out as a place to put the games for players to find and use. In addition, it's a good idea to have both a dry erase board with markers and a bulletin board, so that gamers can leave messages for one another about when tournaments will be scheduled.

Monitoring the games room is necessary, since the games are expensive and the games room is usually in a public area. In general, games shouldn't be removed from the games room without the permission of the Games Chair. The gaming tables should also be kept clean and games should be put away when not in use; this task tends to fall to the Games Chair to oversee. A helpful practice in this regard is to put up a sign telling parents to monitor their young kids, as it has happened that six-year-olds have made all sorts of creative things out of game pieces from several games and then wandered off, leaving a huge mess.

As gaming appeals to Young Mensans in particular, the Games Chair will need to make sure that alcohol consumption is strictly controlled in their presence. The security and well-being of all gathering attendees is of paramount concern, but protecting Young Mensans should be given the highest priority; therefore, they should not have the opportunity to pick up a stray glass of beer or wine which has been left behind. The Games Chair should be alert for such circumstances, and do all possible to avoid problems of this nature.

Hospitality

While Hospitality is provided at most Mensa gatherings, usually there are limited program activities in the rooms set aside for this purpose. (A notable exception to this is HalloweeM.) For more information on Hospitality, please see section 08 in this handbook.

Certain types of program activities require a private room in hotels that do not allow unrestricted consumption of food and drink in the public gathering areas. Often, the Program Chair and the Hospitality Chair will jointly offer the opportunity to participate in a wine or cheese tasting, a chocolate orgy, a chili cook-off or other similar activity in the Hospitality rooms.

Many attendees prefer the unstructured environment of the Hospitality rooms to the activities on the program. While this is common, there are usually some who will visit the Hospitality

rooms between activities, so it is helpful if the Program Chair or designated volunteers come to Hospitality to make announcements periodically, especially when one of the prime activities on the program is about to start. It is also a good idea to post the program schedule in a prominent location in the Hospitality rooms as a reminder.

When the event schedule is put together, it is recommended that the Hospitality rooms be closed during the times set aside for group meals. This gives the volunteers in Hospitality the opportunity to attend these important functions and it encourages attendees to participate in the meals with the other guests, though there are invariably some who, for personal reasons, will not wish to come to dinner or brunch provided by the hotel caterers. In any case, it helps bring the attendees together to share a meal with one another and it is usually an important element in making the catered food guarantees that are included in the contract with the venue.

Off-Site Tours

For information on tours, please see the topic "Pre-Events and Post-Events."

Security and Emergency Planning

Security is a major concern at all gatherings. As gatherings scale down in size, security requires fewer volunteers since there are usually not as many opportunities for problems to occur and the area is easier to manage. At smaller events such as RGs, security tends to be provided by those in charge of various functions onsite, usually divided up among the Event Chair, the Games Chair, the Hospitality Chair, the Program Chair, the Registrar and the Hotel Liaison. The Event Chair should pay attention to overall security concerns, while the Games Chair and the Hospitality Chair should monitor their areas. The Program Chair should work with the Audio-Visual Coordinator to keep control of the equipment provided for use at the event. The Registrar has responsibility for supplies, equipment, merchandise, cash, checks and meal tickets, all of which need to be kept secure at all times. The Hotel Liaison should coordinate with hotel security staff, as communication is paramount in the provision of security.

Emergencies can happen at any time when people get together. It is the duty of those putting on a gathering event to be prepared, and an emergency response plan should be in place during the event.

At the very least, the plan should include:

- how the Hospitality volunteers will maintain food safety,
- what to do in medical emergencies,
- how to handle drunken and unruly guests,
- how to deal with cases of harassment or other,
- unwelcome behaviors on the part of attendees,
- what needs to be done to provide for and protect Young Mensans at the gathering, and
- how to handle lost and found articles.

A first-aid kit ought to be part of the standard equipment in Hospitality, and it should be checked to make sure that it is fully stocked prior to the gathering.

When the gathering has concluded, those responsible should make a sweep of the area at the event venue, both to make sure that all the property of the host group is recovered and to note any problems or damage that may have occurred. Hotel personnel may claim, after the event, that the host group has caused damage of various kinds, so inspect the rooms prior to setting up for the event and note any preexisting damage. Take photographs of significant carpet stains, wall damage, or broken furniture in areas to be used during the event, and call it to the attention of the hotel in advance.

Display Tables

At any Mensa gathering it is customary to have space set aside for informational materials as well as items for purchase. Items for purchase may include commemorative souvenirs such as t-shirts, cups, and other merchandise sold for the benefit of the host group. As a courtesy by the Event Committee, there may also be books for sale to benefit an author who is speaking at the gathering. If there are relatively few items for sale, attendees will usually pay the Registrar for their purchases during the event. Having items for sale is another area where it is important to know the facility's policy, and permission to conduct such sales should be expressly stated in the contract with the hotel.

Informational materials may also be set out on a display table by a speaker at a gathering, to promote their business or profession. Common examples are business cards, magazines, and copies of published articles. Other common sorts of informational materials set out on display tables at a gathering include flyers, brochures, and

coupons that attendees might use for sightseeing in the host city and the surrounding area, copies of newsletters from the Local Group that is hosting the event, and advertisements and registration forms from other Local Groups who wish to let attendees know about upcoming events.

Fund Raisers

Gatherings are ideal opportunities for a host group to raise money. Since a gathering is seldom intended to lose money, essentially the event itself can be considered a fund raiser, and indeed some Local Groups use their gatherings to help balance their budget for the year. However, it is also the case that money may be raised for special purposes at a gathering, usually for the host group's scholarship fund.

The simple donation jar is an often overlooked, but effective way to raise money at events. Since cash is involved, a donation jar should be under the direct supervision of the Registrar at an event. There are many other methods of fund raising at events, including selling souvenirs, charging entry fees for contests of various sorts, and holding auctions. Auctions hold perhaps the greatest potential for profit at Mensa events and they are held regularly at AGs and RGs. There are two basic types of auctions at Mensa gatherings: silent auctions and live auctions.

Silent auctions require merchandise to be laid out on tables, each with its own ticket or sheet of paper to allow bidders to record their bids. Normally, each item will have a starting bid written on the ticket or sheet, to set a minimum price for that item. Bidders will circulate among the tables and write their bids down for the items of their choice. Books are very commonly sold at silent auctions, but fancy gift baskets, bottles of wine, or almost any sort of donated item can be sold in this way. If an item will not fit on the table, or if it is a service that someone will perform for the winning bidder such as an afternoon on a boat or a free haircut, it can be represented by a photo or a certificate.

At a silent auction, there must be signs telling bidders when the auction will end. To avoid any questions over who was the last bidder before the time expired or to prevent a bidder from taking the bid ticket or sheet to protect their bid as the time runs out, some auctions will have only an approximate ending time posted with an alarm clock set to go off at a secret moment to establish the final winning bid. If there are many tables with items available for bid, it is helpful to close the

bidding table by table, underscoring or highlighting the winning bid on each bid ticket or sheet.

Live auctions are very lively activities, requiring an auctioneer, an assistant to help manage the items to be auctioned off by handing them to the auctioneer, and several spotters who watch for bidders and who may also record who won each item and the final amount bid. As it takes several minutes for each item to be auctioned off, a live auction may last for an hour or more for just 20 items. It is better to use the time well by trying to use the live auction for items which will attract spirited, profitable bidding. These can be valuable items, or they can be joke items that may provoke "attack bids." Attack bids are humorous ploys whereby the bidder pays to have a joke item foisted upon a dear friend, usually with conditions, e.g. "I bid \$20 to have the LocSec take home this incredibly ugly painting, to be mounted on his wall until the next RG," and so forth. Often other bidders will join in and add to the original bid, until it will cost the victim a considerable amount to change the conditions and make sure the unwanted item ends up with someone else.

Live auctions may also involve people: date auctions are a popular example. However, the most famous live auction in Mensa has taken place many times at AGs, where Joe Zanca has raised many thousands of dollars for the Mensa Foundation, each time by auctioning off a \$5 bill. Joe is a master at arousing a spirit of competition in the bidding, resulting in rival camps of bidders pooling their money to try to win the \$5 bill.

For either type of auction, it is expected that winning bidders will pay for their items immediately by cash or check and carry away their merchandise. If they do not do so, the Auction Coordinator will have to make an extra effort to collect the money and deliver the items to the winning bidder. Bags and boxes under the tables will help bidders who have won large numbers of items. Any cash or checks collected from an auction should be turned over to the Registrar or Treasurer as soon as possible, along with an accounting of how much was collected from whom, and the names and the amounts owed from any winning bidders who have not yet paid for their merchandise.

Message Center

Communication is extremely important at gatherings. To facilitate messages between attendees or to post announcements of various kinds, most gatherings will have strategically placed bulletin boards or white boards and dry-

erase markers. The volunteers working in registration may also double as the message center or information desk volunteers, but larger gatherings will have separate the registration and information functions. At very large gatherings like the AG, computers may be sponsored by corporations outside Mensa and made available in a central area so that attendees may check email, check in for flights, and satisfy whatever informational needs they may have while they are at the event.

The message center, information desk or Registrar's table may also have informational signs identifying speakers and topics or special activities scheduled, making it easy to post room changes and cancellations. Daily fliers with updated information about program changes are very handy for attendees, and they are customarily available at the AG.

10 – Volunteers

Introduction

Every elected and appointed officer in Mensa is a volunteer, and our society could not function without their help. However, some activities require many hands in order to be successful, and recruiting additional volunteers for gatherings can make all the difference even at monthly events and home parties. Using volunteers helps your guests see only the fun, not the frantic. Here are some of the benefits of recruiting, soliciting, and using additional volunteers at gatherings:

- The gathering will have enough human power to staff Registration, the Information Desk, and Hospitality, do speaker introductions, handle AV equipment, and act as general "gofers."
- The Event Committee and their assistants will not be burned out by the time the gathering is over and will live to volunteer again. This is a good thing!
- Volunteers at gatherings might, over time, prove themselves capable of handling a major role on the Event Committee at some point in the future or running for local office. Today's volunteer may be tomorrow's LocSec — or Chairman. Treat them well!
- Volunteers feel a vested interest in the success of the event. Volunteering makes attendance at the gathering, and Mensa membership in general, vivid and memorable. When enthusiastically thanked for volunteering, this feeling is intensified.
- Volunteers tend to have a good time, feel useful and important, and may be inclined to invite their friends next time. Sometimes those friends join Mensa.
- Volunteers who feel good about their contributions take those feelings into account when volunteers are next sought, and when membership renewal time rolls around. They just can't imagine **not** being a part of the fun next time!

Treat volunteers well by having enough of them, and by recognizing and rewarding them with a well-timed thank you, a public and private thank you, and a verbal and written thank you. Don't worry about overdoing it. Such words make people glow.

How To Recruit Volunteers

Decide what has to be done.

No matter the size of your gathering, many decisions must be made in advance. These decisions, described in more detail elsewhere in this handbook, might include:

- Guestimate the attendance,
- Find a hotel,
- Negotiate a hotel contract,
- Choose the dates,
- Get RVC approval,
- Rough out the main events,
- Establish a budget,
- Choose a theme,
- Consider advertising,
- Select critical staff,
- Plan transportation, and
- Take inventory of supplies.

The LocSec/Business Manager, the ExComm or Board of Directors, or the Event Committee may handle these tasks. Volunteers can be sought to handle some of them.

The key areas of your gathering can be established and usually include: Publicity, Registration (advance and on-site), Hospitality, Programs and Treasurer. Some of these areas, especially Programs and Hospitality, have potential for extensive volunteer involvement. Draft up a general job description of each. Each of them should also have an assistant whenever possible, as this provides training for continuity and backup if a person in a major role is unable to perform their job for any reason.

Create Job Descriptions

For each area, create a list of general duties. Remember that the "what" and "when" may be critically important, but the "how" may have much more flexibility. Build in as much specificity for the outcome without stifling creativity. Here's an example of the list of duties for one area:

Sample job description for the Hospitality Chair might include the following:

- Budget for snacks and beverages for all expected guests for the entire weekend by anticipating expected consumption
- Plan shopping and transportation of all food and beverage
- Select key assistants for each day, feeding frenzy, or shift

- Inventory all serving bowls, platters, and utensils for food functions
- Ascertain whether cooking is allowed in the hotel and what appliances are available for our use. What might be brought in?
- Check outlets and power sources for all appliances (refrigerators, popcorn poppers, microwaves, freezers, crock pots, hotplates, etc.) Ensure that using two at once will not blow fuses or cause a safety hazard.
- Obtain floor plan of Hospitality suite and determine placement of all items so that guests may easily enter and leave the suite
- Arrange for housekeeping services and regular trash removal. Consider recycling glass/cans/plastic (maybe contact a local non-profit group or a scout troop to handle it). Consider bringing in a "Dustbuster" or broom if one is not available from the hotel.

The Hospitality Chair should break down the job responsibilities so that work is fairly spread around. Many hands make light work for everyone and the Event Committee might actually have time to enjoy themselves at the gathering!

Critical Point: Don't assume that you or one super-efficient person can handle several key areas. They can't do each well.

Ways in which the tasks might be broken down include: appoint a Day Chair for each day of the gathering. That Day Chair can appoint various Shift Supervisors and Feeding Frenzy Chairs to handle specific meal functions. Decide whether the Feeding Frenzy Chairs will be responsible for purchasing, transporting, cooking, serving and cleaning up after their own meal functions or whether assistance will be provided.

Alternately, an overall Volunteer Recruiter could be assigned or each Chair could be made responsible for recruiting his own help. Make this decision in advance and communicate it widely so that there are no surprises. Begin recruiting volunteers well in advance. It is better to have too many hands rather than too few. Also consider giving each Chair a special title. Chief Running Beer and Talent Scout might be more fun and amusing than Beverage Supervisor and Volunteer Recruiter. Use your imagination and keep it fun!

Don't overbook volunteers if possible as it may make them feel that their contribution wasn't necessary and they may not volunteer a second time.

Now you're ready to match the individual to the task. Nearly everyone has a strong suit, a talent at something. Some are obvious: gregarious types can be placed happily into Registration and Hospitality assignments; detail and analytical types may prefer Treasurer or inventory assignments. But beyond that, there's matching responsibility area to motivation type. People volunteer for all sorts of reasons, and by matching motive to task, everyone benefits. Be open to the guest's preferences, however. Maybe the actuary wants to work a shift in Hospitality and the comedian wants to be a gofer. Consider carefully before turning down an offer from a volunteer! If you believe the individual is ill-suited to the task they'd prefer, suggest another one.

Consider Motivation

There's no need to psychoanalyze your volunteers and critical staff. People often will let you know right up front why they volunteer in Mensa. Perhaps they've just divorced and want to meet new people; some may feel a need to give back to the group, set an example, or just have fun. The experts say that people tend to fall into one of three types.

The following material is used with permission by Sue Vineyard, Author and Trainer with international expertise in recruiting, utilizing, and rewarding volunteers.

1. Achievement Motives

- motivated by working toward goals and can work well alone
- need checkpoints during work to know they are on track
- need specific instructions that are measurable
- love challenges and to beat previous records
- are organized and like to problem-solve

Achievement people love assignments such as:

- fund raisers at the gathering (like an auction), and on-site Registration
- organizing and coordinating Programs
- research and analysis, doing reports, nitty-gritty work of the Treasurer or Registrar
- chair or leadership positions (Day Chair or Shift Supervisor)
- executive directorships like Co-Chair of Gathering or Hotel Liaison

2. Affiliation Motives

- motivated by relationship opportunities, prefer to work with other people
- want everyone to be happy, love team or committee assignments
- attend to feelings of others, care about what people think of them
- work well under friendly people who like personal relationships with them
- respond to direct work with guests

Affiliation people love assignments such as:

- task force members and banquet committees
- Hospitality committees, recognition events
- greeters, ushers, introducers, and help-desk workers

3. Power Motives

- positively work to empower others, want to impact and influence others
- like to inspire others and read people well
- can work alone or in tandem with others
- can think long term, like to be used as a resource; feel information is critical to success

Power people love assignments such as:

- public speaking, writing newspaper articles for advertising
- fund-raising one-on-one or to a group — perhaps soliciting contributions of food, services or other goods to the gathering several months in advance
- being in charge, especially chairing events that bring public attention to a cause
- managing many people; solving complex problems
- those which offer great creativity and flexibility; jobs that “can't be done” or are very challenging

Perhaps you thought about your own motives for participating in Mensa functions and found that you don't neatly fit into anyone category. That's pretty common. But we all have some primary motivators, and the better the fit between the motive and the task, the happier everyone will be.

Recruit Volunteers Enthusiastically

Most people want to be part of something exciting. The positive, excited tone in the voice of the person recruiting volunteers makes all the difference in their willingness to help.

Starting as much as a year or more before your gathering, solicit volunteers for:

- Event Committee and their assistants,
- participants in planning meetings and brain storming sessions,
- designers of the tee shirts, cups, bags, and print material for the gathering,
- key individuals from other Local Groups that might handle a "Taste of their RG," a feeding frenzy, a special event or other function at your gathering.

Then, starting perhaps three to four months before the gathering, telephone the pre-registered guests in the evening after supper in their time zone, or on the weekend. One way to increase the success rate when recruiting volunteers by phone is to write out a script and practice saying it with a smile in the mirror. One such script might be:

"Hi, name, I'm name, the Volunteer Coordinator for the Apple Fest Gathering this fall. I see from your registration form that you're interested in volunteering to help make our gathering a big success. We have lots of wonderful programs and events planned for you and would really appreciate your help in making it all work. Have you been to a gathering before? What sorts of work might you enjoy? (Describe if need be.) Would you prefer a 2-hour shift at Registration or in Hospitality? We have lots of time slots open now, though they're filling up quickly. I'll be happy to schedule you at a time that doesn't interfere with your favorite program. When do you arrive/arise/start to fade?"

As you can see, having a preliminary program schedule nearby while making these calls can be very helpful in avoiding a conflict of schedule and potential no-shows. Many Event Chairs choose to place a slip of paper in the registration packet for each volunteering guest to remind them of the date, time, task and name of the supervisor to whom they are to report for their volunteer assignment. Some even post the job duties for Registration, Help Desk and Hospitality on the wall or table where the volunteer will work. For speaker introductions, AV procurement, and other tasks, you might also consider slipping the job description into the registration packet.

Here are some of the important tasks for which volunteers might be used:

- Site selection committee to evaluate cost/space/parking, etc., of area hotels.

- Hotel Liaison so that just one person will interact with key hotel staff and the other members of the Event Committee.
- Someone to create a Help Desk services directory: local grocery and drug stores, malls, restaurants (by cuisine, price range and attire required), gas stations, points of interest (zoos, museums, architecture, etc.), airport shuttle departures, areas to avoid, etc.
- Games Person: someone to purchase, gather, transport, set up, and supervise a Game Room, as well as to ensure all the games get into storage or to their owners again afterward.
- Someone to write an exciting gathering description and ask that it be advertised in other Local Groups' newsletters. Also, someone to carry gathering notices to other gatherings they may attend.
- Program Chair to book speakers, programs, dances, and other events.
- A Registrar for the gathering with computer savvy necessary to keep a running tally of, print confirmations for, and produce an attendance list of all guests. This data may be merged with a badge-making program, and labels for the registration packet.
- On-site Registration staff: a Supervisor to safeguard handling of cash, design forms for use on-site for an accurate count of attendees, etc.
- A team to make badges, type/print/reproduce gathering materials, stuff registration packets, design and print tee shirts/bags/cups, and select/purchase prizes for any competitions, etc.
- A team to select, purchase, make, transport, display, and take down decorations that will set the tone for the gathering.
- A solicitor of product or service donations from area companies, and someone to arrange for the rental/delivery/retrieval of refrigerators, beer kegs, popcorn poppers, roasters, recyclable materials, etc.
- A photographer or videographer to capture all the fun of your gathering for your newsletter and archives.
- A host for the Workers' Party for all the volunteers. Don't forget to recruit a clean-up crew for the Workers' Party!

Repeating the Critical Point: Even if you have several super-efficient Event Committee members, don't allow them to take on too much responsibility. It's important to have many hands

do the work so that everyone appreciates the enormity of the effort to mount a gathering and so that as many guests as possible feel ownership in the success!

Thank your volunteers

Even if she dropped the platter of hot dogs all over the floor and he garbled the introductions of your speakers, thank your volunteers for their efforts. By giving all your guests and volunteers a good experience, you'll ensure they come again next time. One would hope that in time she'll develop better balance and he a clearer speaking voice, but perhaps next time you'll remember the limitations and suggest that she work in the prep room and that he schlep the AV equipment.

A thank you may take the form of an invitation to a Workers' Party after the gathering. It could be a thank you note in the registration packet from the Event Chair, or handed to the Volunteer by the Supervisor after their shift. Even better would be a mention from the microphone by the Event Chair at the awards banquet or farewell luncheon. Thank them warmly, often, publicly and privately.

Something often overlooked

Your Event Committee and assistants, additional program and Hospitality volunteers and everyone else working at the gathering are functioning as Gathering Hosts. It is important that each volunteer know s/he is responsible for treating all guests with a cheery, "satisfy the customer" attitude — even if the guest asks for special favors. Diplomacy, congeniality, and a smile go a long way. This positive, respectful treatment begins during the preliminary planning stages of the gathering, and continues all the way through to the Workers' Party! The Event Chair(s) and other members of the Event Committee have the responsibility to communicate this message, and embody the essence of Host, by treating all members of the team respectfully. Tension at the top filters all the way down. Remember: it's a party. It's for fun!

11 – Gatherings with Children

Whenever children will be present at a gathering, event planners and their committees at every level of American Mensa should take into account their special needs and the necessity for a safe, supportive, and stimulating environment. While not all events have to be for all members, some children are Mensa members and many members have children, so whole family events will encourage them to attend. Gathering Coordinators should consult the *Gifted Children's Program Handbook*⁶⁷, which is a comprehensive guide and reference for Gifted Children's Coordinators, Local Groups and others regarding Mensa activities and interactions involving minors – whether members or guests.

As noted in section 04 in this handbook, children are especially welcome at the AG, and to help them get the most out of the experience, there is a track of programming entirely devoted to the needs and interests of children ages 4-12 which has come to be called "Kids Trek." The teens also have their space at the AG in alcohol-free rooms set aside for them, and they plan their own events such as talent shows, volleyball games, game console tournaments, dance classes, movie nights, card games and scavenger hunts.

AML publishes *Hosting Events for Children: Safety Essentials*⁶⁸ that summarizes key points that event planners should bear in mind when hosting events for children. Taken together, the guide and the *GCP Handbook* provide a foundation for assuring that Young Mensans will be able to take part in and enjoy American Mensa gatherings to the fullest extent possible. For further information, contact your local Gifted Children's Coordinator or email the National Gifted Children's Program Coordinator at GCPC@us.mensa.org.

⁶⁷www.us.mensa.org/handbooks (ref. L8)

⁶⁸*Hosting Events for Children: Safety Essentials* (ref. R45)

12 – Mensans and Guests with Disabilities

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide a general overview on the relationship between American Mensa, Ltd., the hotels, motels, restaurants and similar facilities at which Mensa-sponsored gatherings may be held, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. There is also a brief discussion on the number of disabled Americans, and the relationship to age to the percentage of people with disabilities. In closing, there is a discussion on service animals.

For more information, consult the National Council on Disability⁶⁹, an independent federal agency. American Mensa has recognized the need to provide access to Mensans and guests with disabilities at gatherings, and has made a policy statement on the subject which can be found in Section 10 of the Actions Still in Effect⁷⁰.

The Relationship between Age and the Number of Americans with Disabilities

The U.S. Census Bureau periodically surveys a population sample in order to have a count of the number and percentage of Americans with disabilities. The percentage relative to age has been fairly constant for years. Almost nine percent of Americans under the age of 21 have one or more disability. The age group between 21 and 64 shows a percentage of about 13 percent. The over 64 age group has a level of over 40 percent with disabilities.

As more Americans are living longer, the number of those with disabilities has increased. The count commonly used today ranges from 47 million to 53 million. It is reasonable to assume that the number of Mensans with disabilities is increasing as they age. Thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Mensans and their guests with disabilities can still expect to attend and participate in Mensa gatherings.

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The ADA, signed into law in 1990, is designed to break down barriers that have stood in the way of people with disabilities in the areas of employment, public services, public

accommodations and telecommunications. The states also have ADA laws that have to equal to or exceed the federal ADA.

The ADA and related regulations are not static; they are changed over time to fit with circumstances. AML is not a business that is covered by the ADA. The facilities that are the locations for Mensa sponsored gatherings are generally covered by Title III of the ADA, which relates to public access and accommodations.

Public Access Compliance with Title III of the ADA

Public accommodations must comply with basic nondiscrimination requirements that prohibit exclusion, segregation and unequal treatment. They must also comply with specific requirements related to architectural standards for new and altered buildings; reasonable modifications to policies, practices and procedures; effective communication with people with hearing, vision or speech disabilities; and other access requirements. Additionally, public accommodations must remove barriers in existing buildings where it is easy to do so without much difficulty or expense, given the public accommodation's resources.

Note that some older facilities, although in compliance, cannot yet allow full access because of architectural design. As these facilities are renovated, they are brought into compliance with the modern requirements of the ADA.

In recognition of the need to provide access to Mensans and guests with disabilities at gatherings, American Mensa has made a policy statement on the subject which is published in Section 10 of the ASIEs. ASIE 1998-039 states, "That in selecting sites for all official Mensa sponsored activities, the relevant selection officer or committee shall consider compliance of the facilities to the Americans with Disabilities Act. Groups are encouraged to indicate accessibility or lack thereof when announcing events, and Mensa publications are encouraged to publish that information." In particular, each gathering advertised in the *Mensa Bulletin* has a code indicating whether there are accessible facilities for Mensans and guest with disabilities. It is suggested that Mensans be encouraged to contact the venue directly if they have personal concerns or requirements.

⁶⁹www.ncd.gov (ref. L10)

⁷⁰www.us.mensa.org/ASIEs (ref. L5)

Service Animals

Service animals are animals that are individually trained to perform tasks for people with disabilities – such as guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling wheelchairs, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, or performing other special tasks. Service animals are working animals, not pets. They may be dogs, pot-bellied pigs, miniature horses, or monkeys. There are reports of cats and parrots being trained and used as service animals. The number and types of animals being trained and used as service animals is increasing.

Under the ADA, businesses and organizations that serve the public must allow people with disabilities to bring their service animals into all areas of the facility where customers are normally allowed to go. This includes areas marked as “no animals allowed.” Businesses may ask if an animal is a service animal or ask what tasks the animal has been trained to perform, but cannot require special ID cards for the animal or ask about the person’s disability.

People with disabilities who use service animals cannot be charged extra fees, isolated from other patrons, or treated less favorably than other patrons. A person with a disability cannot be asked to remove the service animal from the premises unless: (1) the animal is out of control and the animal’s owner does not take effective action to control it (for example, a dog that barks repeatedly); or (2) the animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others. Note that allergies and fear of animals are generally not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people with service animals.

13 – Ridesharing and Roommate Matching

In the past, ridesharing and roommate matching were services to members. Someone, often the event Registrar, would keep a list of people wanting roommates or ride shares and would make matches.

We have been advised by both our paid Risk Management consultants and by members who are in the business of Risk Management that this practice must change in order to protect the interests of American Mensa. Mensa is a fairly substantial organization with a high profile, assets and insurance, which makes it a target. In a catastrophic event, deep pockets are sought. It is impossible to predict the probability of a lawsuit. If it only happens once in a generation, it would be significant. One solution is to avoid liability completely. Quite often, that is not a viable alternative. If a risk cannot be avoided, a way to manage it should be found.

One way to manage risk is to distance Mensa from liability to the farthest extent possible. In the cases of ridesharing and roommate matching, this means that such practices ought not to be officially provided or sponsored by American Mensa or its Local Groups. Even if waivers or disclaimers are used, they are subject to local law, and they might protect Mensa in one jurisdiction but not in another. Disclosures ("we take no responsibility, etc.") are another way to minimize risk, and though they may not have legal standing, they are a deterrent.

The most preferable solution to ridesharing and roommate matching in the current climate of risk management would be a general message board, elist, online group or newsletter ads for communications among members. If it is not specified what would be accomplished there, Mensa would be distanced from the risk, and members who wanted rides or roommates would be able to find one another. In addition, it would be a good idea to notify users of elists maintained for a gathering that Mensa does not ascertain the background or characteristics of any individual who might want to participate in activities such as carpooling, ridesharing or roommate matching, and therefore users of the elist who make such arrangements will be doing so at their own risk

14 – Publicity

The Publicity Chair is a key position for any gathering, whether at the local, regional or national levels. The primary job of the Publicity Chair is marketing the gathering, both internally within Mensa, and externally if it is appropriate for the event to be publicized in media outside of Mensa. Publicity for an event should begin as soon as the contracts are signed and the dates and locations fixed. A well-coordinated campaign will include regular updates each time a new feature is added, so that people who haven't yet committed to registering will have a reason to decide to come.

The most common forms of internal publicity are flyers, press releases for newsletters, Web sites, elists, and requests to have gatherings included in official AML lists. The rules and procedures for listing gatherings are available in the Events section of the American Mensa Web site⁷¹. An effective way to inform Mensans around the world about a gathering is to place a notice in the Mensa International's publication, the *International Journal*⁷², which is also available on the American Mensa Web site. Email submissions to the *IJ* must be sent to the editor at IJEditor@mensa.org.

Flyers should be printed and distributed at local and nearby events and brought along to RGs and the AG, if possible. For the regions of American Mensa that border Canada, publicizing to Mensa Canada is also a good idea. Advertisements in both text and graphic form should be distributed to Local Group newsletter editors to be used as inserts in Local Group newsletters. Examples of this type of advertisement include:

*Oregon Mensa Publicity Piece*⁷³
*Article for SFRM RG*⁷⁴
*Central Indiana Outdoor Gathering*⁷⁵

Direct emails are effective when sent to the list of attendees at prior events. In addition, many Local Groups have announcement elists, and some SIGs

(such as GenX SIG) are willing to pass along notices about gatherings to their email lists.

For additional ideas and help with publicity for gatherings and Mensa events of every sort, the National Office has resources and materials available, including a very helpful *Internal Publicity Guide*. The *Internal Publicity Guide* offers information on working with the media both before and during an event. For a copy of the guide, contact the National Office or complete a materials request online⁷⁶.

Finally, the PR Coordinators elist can be very helpful for local PR Coordinators seeking assistance with publicity for their gatherings. It also serves as a resource area where good public relations ideas may be shared or where PR Coordinators can ask for help or assistance with a particular situation. This is a closed list available to local PR Coordinators, which means your subscription will be held for approval. You will be notified of the list moderator's decision by email.

The following examples of questions and answers from the PR Coordinators elist were answered by the AMC's Development Officer:

Reproduced from the *Mensa Marketing Memo*, April 2007, published by the AML National Office

What are the differences between public relations, marketing, advertising and publicity?

Public relations relates to all the communications of the total organization. It is an umbrella discipline, as well as a stand alone practice area. The public relations practitioner is a jack-of-all-trades, writing press releases, organizing news conferences, liaising marketing efforts, and arranging for publicity.

Marketing focuses on products and/or services, price, promotion, and place; collectively referred to as the four "P's." The most effective marketing strategy encompasses a comprehensive plan that includes a communications mix of marketing tools including advertising and public relations.

⁷¹ www.us.mensa.org/gatherings (ref. L9)

⁷² www.us.mensa.org/ij (ref. L11)

⁷³ *Oregon Mensa Publicity Piece* (ref. R46)

⁷⁴ *Article for SFRM RG* (ref. R47)

⁷⁵ *Central Indiana Outdoor Gathering* (ref. R48)

⁷⁶ www.us.mensa.org/materials (ref. L12)

Advertising provides a visual or audible "image" that lets the public know that you have something of interest and value to them. It presents the features of the service or product and, because it is paid for, allows for nearly complete control over timing, content, and placement.

Publicity, at its core, is free. But, unlike advertising, there is little or no control over timing, content, or placement. For small or non-existent budgets, it is the perfect form of advertising; and with proper planning and good relations with individual reporters, it can be nearly as effective as advertising.

How do I prepare for an interview?

Be honest

Be open

Be positive

Know your audience and tailor your message

General media rules

Reporters know that they have to grab the reader in the first three or four sentences, or the article will be passed over. Be sure to have two or three message points clearly in mind and speak in headlines. If the reader gets nothing else from the article, they should get these points. Think about and practice getting one or more of these points into the answer of every likely question.

Be considerate of reporters. At the beginning of any interview, ask the reporter if they are under deadline. If they are not, they will appreciate your professional approach; if they are, they will appreciate it all the more. When you set up the interview, try to learn the entire range of the subject area – ask if the interviewer has any areas of specific interest. If you have background information that may help them formulate questions, offer to send it to them in advance of the interview. Since you are in control of what you send, you have an opportunity to get in your message points or information that will increase the likelihood that you will be asked about them.

Do your homework. Anticipate questions – both positive and negative. Have a quick reference sheet of statistics (readily available from the National Office) at your fingertips. If you don't know an answer, say so, and offer to get back to the interviewer. Then be sure that you do, and do it as soon as is humanly possible.

Correct an inaccurate lead-in statement and then go on to answer the question. Use language that will act as a bridge between the answer and one

or more of your message points. End your answer on a positive note that will help to diffuse any negative feelings the reader/listener/viewer picked up from the inaccurate lead-in.

Never lie — NEVER, NEVER EVER!

How do I create a media list?

It's easy – just spend time reading, watching, and listening to your area's major news media outlets until you've figured out which reporters are most likely to cover your story. You can also call the media outlet's main number and ask if they can tell you who covers social groups. They may even give you a specific reporter's phone number and email address.

Try to get as much contact information as possible about each reporter you hope to contact.

Eventually, your media list should include the reporters' and editors' name, title, publication or broadcast outlet, address, phone, fax number, email address, and sometimes notes on the type of stories ("beats") they cover.

Example:

Keith Testa
Calendar Reporter
The Villager News
111 West Main Street
Anytown, NH 03244
Ph. 603-603-6033
Fax. 603-603-6036
Email: keith@villager.com

The National Office staff can provide you with a general media list for your area, but your familiarity with the media in your area will make that list more effective. Contact the National Office for more information.

How do I write a professional press release?

A press release is pseudo-news story, written in third person, that seeks to demonstrate to an editor or reporter the newsworthiness of a particular person, event, service, or product. Press releases are often sent alone, by email, fax or snail mail. They can also be part of a full press kit or may be accompanied by a pitch letter.

When writing your press release, use the inverted pyramid format, placing less important information further down in the release. You need to sell your story in the first paragraph.

Structure your press release in block format and do not indent your paragraphs. (See American Mensa's online News Room⁷⁷ for examples.)

Review your press release and make sure it does not sound like an essay; it should be informative but appealing.

Keep your press release within 500 words; this should be enough to cover your news event and prompt people to take action.

Proofread your press release more than once. Step away after you are done writing and come back with a fresh set of eyes.

Several sample press releases are available in the *Internal Publicity Guide*. Contact the National Office for help writing or formatting your press releases.

⁷⁷www.us.mensa.org/newsroom (ref. L13)

15 – Web Site

The Gathering Webmaster is responsible for producing one or more Web pages to promote the gathering. General information pages are the minimum. Extra value can be delivered in the form of:

- Online registration and payment pages
- Maps and directions
- Event site map
- Hotlink to event hotel page
- Hotlinks to local attractions
- Airline / Amtrak / bus transportation information
- Mommy letters online
- Photos of the venue
- Photos from prior year's events

The Web site for the gathering should be linked to the host group Web site, and they should be regularly maintained and updated. The following are examples of effective RG Web pages:

www.chicago.us.mensa.org/weem⁷⁸
www.localsemm.com/SEMMantics/index.htm⁷⁹
www.nh.us.mensa.org/rqnews.shtm⁸⁰
www.oregon.us.mensa.org/rq/index.php⁸¹

The Web sites for American Mensa's national events include:

www.ag.us.mensa.org⁸²
www.mindgames.us.mensa.org⁸³
www.colloquium.us.mensa.org⁸⁴

American Mensa has many resources for assistance with Web site issues. The Web Services section of Inside AML provides a comprehensive set of tools that Webmasters for Local Groups and Gathering Webmasters may make use of. Contact the National Office for more information on these services.

The Webmasters elist is another resource within American Mensa which could be very helpful for Webmasters seeking assistance with Web pages for their gatherings. This is an elist for Local Group Web Contacts, member Webmasters, and other members interested in Web development. To subscribe, send an email to webmasters-request@lists.us.mensa.org with the word "subscribe" in the subject line. Upon membership verification, your subscription to the elist will be approved.

⁷⁸www.chicago.us.mensa.org/weem (ref. L14)

⁷⁹www.localsemm.com/SEMMantics/index.htm (ref. L15)

⁸⁰www.nh.us.mensa.org/rqnews.shtm (ref. L16)

⁸¹www.oregon.us.mensa.org/rq/index.php (ref. L17)

⁸²www.ag.us.mensa.org (ref. L4)

⁸³www.mindgames.us.mensa.org (ref. L6)

⁸⁴www.colloquium.us.mensa.org (ref. L18)

16 — Links and References

This Handbook contains many references and many online links. The online links provide examples or additional information and are cited by footnotes on each page with corresponding reference codes. URLs referenced may change over time and could be out of service for any number of reasons. Broken or unusable links should be reported to AML's National Office so that appropriate changes may be made in future editions in this handbook.

Each of the report references cited is provided with the *Gatherings Handbook* online. Any or all of the references cited below are available upon request from the National Office.

Please note the parenthetical reference code in the footnotes in this handbook when referencing documents online.

Link References

- L1: www.us.mensa.org/handbooks – link to all officer handbooks on InsideAML
- L2: www.us.mensa.org – American Mensa's primary Web site
- L3: www.us.mensa.org/officerresources – American Mensa's officer resource Web site
- L4: www.ag.us.mensa.org – the current Annual Gathering Web site
- L5: www.us.mensa.org/ASIEs – direct link to the current Actions Still in Effect
- L6: www.mindgames.us.mensa.org – the current Mind Games Web site
- L7: www.mensafoundation.org/colloquium – information about Colloquiums on the Mensa Foundation Web site
- L8: www.us.mensa.org/handbooks – link to all officer handbooks on InsideAML
- L9: www.us.mensa.org/gatherings – link to information on gatherings information and listings requests online
- L10: www.ncd.gov – National Council on Disability Web site
- L11: www.us.mensa.org/ij – Mensa International's *International Journal* archive on the American Mensa Web site
- L12: www.us.mensa.org/materials – material requests form on InsideAML
- L13: www.us.mensa.org/newsroom – American Mensa's online News Room
- L14: www.chicago.us.mensa.org/weem – Chicago Area Mensa's Halloween RG Web site
- L15: www.localsemm.com/SEMMantics/index.htm – South East Michigan Mensa's SEMMantics RG Web site
- L16: www.nh.us.mensa.org/rgnews.shtm – New Hampshire's Granite Gathering RG Web site
- L17: www.oregon.us.mensa.org/rg/index.php – Oregon Mensa's Beaver RG Web site
- L18: www.colloquium.us.mensa.org – the current Colloquium Web site

File References

- R1: www.us.mensa.org/primer – *A Gatherings Primer*
- R2: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – *Notes for Event Organizers*
- R3: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – *Weekend Gatherings PowerPoint*
- R4: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – *Weekend Gatherings Handout*
- R5: www.us.mensa.org/MGResources – *WG2006 Final Report*
- R6: www.us.mensa.org/MGResources – *AG2004 Final Report*
- R7: www.us.mensa.org/MGResources – *AG2005 Final Report*
- R8: www.us.mensa.org/MGResources – *AG Bid Packet*
- R9: *British Mensa AG Handbook*
- R10: www.us.mensa.org/MGResources – *2004 Mind Games Final Report*
- R11: www.us.mensa.org/MGResources – *2005 Mind Games Final Report*
- R12: www.us.mensa.org/MGResources – *2006 Mind Games Final Report*
- R13: *Colloquium 2002 Bid Report**
- R14: *Diane Hartt Colloquium 2002 Report**
- R15: *Colloquium 2005 Committee Report**
- R16: *Colloquium 2006 Final Report**
- R17: *Guidelines for Mensa Colloquium Host Groups**

- R18: www.us.mensa.org/InterLoc – InterLoc LDW Article-January 2005
- R19: www.us.mensa.org/leadershipworkshops – LDW Needs Analysis Process
- R20: www.us.mensa.org/leadershipworkshops – LDW Attendance Form
- R21: www.us.mensa.org/leadershipworkshops – LDW General Information
- R22: www.us.mensa.org/leadershipworkshops – LDW General Information for Set Up
- R23: www.us.mensa.org/leadershipworkshops – LDW Guidelines
- R24: www.us.mensa.org/leadershipworkshops – LDW Participant Evaluation
- R25: www.us.mensa.org/leadershipworkshops – LDW Proposal
- R26: www.us.mensa.org/leadershipworkshops – LDW RVC's Report
- R27: www.us.mensa.org/leadershipworkshops – LDW Suggested Workshop Topics
- R28: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – SFRM RG Hotel Sample Contract 2006
- R29: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – 2007 RG Sample Budget
- R30: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – How To Be a Speaker Seeker
- R31: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – Sample RG Schedule-Oregon Mensa 1999 RG
- R32: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – Sample RG Program Schedule
- R34: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – Hospitality-Sched-When-2-Set-Out-Food
- R35: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – HalloweeM Hospitality Timeline
- R36: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – HalloweeM Hospitality Checklist
- R37: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – HalloweeM Hospitality Requirements 2006
- R38: www.us.mensa.org/certifications – Cooking for Groups
- R39: www.us.mensa.org/certifications – Cooking for Groups Certification Test
- R40: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – HalloweeM Hospitality 2006
- R41: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – RG Budget Supplies 2001
- R42: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – Thoughts of an Exhausted Hospitality Queen
- R43: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – HalloweeM Lessons Learned
- R44: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – 2007 RG Evaluation Form
- R45: www.us.mensa.org/certifications – Hosting Events for Children: Safety Essentials
- R46: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – Oregon Mensa Publicity Piece
- R47: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – Article for SFRM RG
- R48: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – Central Indiana Outdoor Gathering
- R49: www.us.mensa.org/RGResources – Oregon Mensa RG Registrar and Treasurer Tasks

* Please note that Colloquiums are now handled completely through the Mensa Foundation. For more information on hosting a Colloquium, including timelines and responsibilities, please contact the Mensa Foundation at Director@mensafoundation.org or at 888/294-8035 ext. 5577.

17 — Credits

This *Gatherings Handbook*, May 2008 edition, recognizes the contributions of many Mensa members over the years who have contributed directly or indirectly to its content and organization. Here is a partial listing of the dedicated volunteers who have contributed to this Handbook:

Cookie Bakke
Sallie Banko
Dr. Jean Becker
Paul Beetham
Stan Bercovitch
Pat Coontz
Bob Cox
Robin Crawford
Janice Johnson
Joan Johnson
Joyce Patterson-Rogers
Scott Rainey
John Recht
Lynn Rockler
Mike Seigler
Dr. John Sheehan
Cat Sterrett

In addition, there are scores of references cited throughout the Handbook which are collectively the work of many more Mensans who have helped over the years to realize one of Mensa's fundamental purposes, "to provide a stimulating intellectual and social environment for its members." Our deepest thanks goes out to all of the volunteers who have done so much to make our gatherings such an integral and enjoyable part of American Mensa, as well as to the National Office staff, who have, under the leadership of Pam Donahoo, has worked wonders time and time again to make American Mensa's gatherings a success. Bravo to one and all for all of your good work!