WHAT'S MY MOTIVATION HERE?
ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES FOR CAMPUS PROGRAMS

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"What's my motivation here?" This famous line has been uttered in many movies from 'Office Space' to 'Friday the 13th' to 'Hitchcock' flicks. Alfred Hitchcock even alluded to describing his work with some of his actors in his films: "When an actor comes to me and wants to discuss his character, say, 'It's in the script.' If he says, 'But why my motivation?' I say, 'Your salary.'"

What do you think about attendance incentives for campus programs? Do they work to encourage students to attend lectures and classes? Or do they create a culture of complacency? Let us know your thoughts in the comments below.
What motivates people is an age-old question with many, many answers. Program boards often are asking themselves the question, "What motivates a student to attend an event?" Students are motivated to attend events for any or all of the following reasons:

- Interactors may offer extra credit to attend an event.
- The student has friends who are planning to go.
- The topic is something the student is personally interested in learning more about.
- There is a reward involved like free food or a prize.
- Boredom.
- It's held at a place and/or time that is convenient.
- Luck — the student just happens to be at the right place at the right time.

I am sure you can think of many other motivations students have for attending events besides these. But let's explore these reasons and really focus on the "reward" component. People are motivated by two sets of rewards, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic rewards are those that might make a person say, "It just makes me feel better about myself, or I do it because I want to help/support others." Extrinsic rewards are things like free pizza or a prize.

Discerning "What's in It for Me?"

Let's spend a moment thinking about the intrinsic rewards students receive when attending a program. For a social program, the reward is simply having the opportunity to meet new people or interact with friends. Many program boards do education programs as well, where the rewards for attending may be learning about something new or engaging in something the student is passionate about already. It may be difficult for the board to "sell" these intrinsic rewards in a flyer or other promotional materials, yet it is far easier to sell some of the extrinsic rewards.

Have you ever heard of the WIFM theory? It stands for "What's in it for me?" We all want to know what "I" am going to "get" out of being involved in this event/program.

In an effort to answer this question, many program boards have developed attendance incentive programs. One such program was developed at the University of North Carolina—Charlotte approximately five years ago in an effort to increase the attendance at program board events. UNC-Charlotte calls their program CAB Fare and here are the basics of how it works.

1. Students register for the CAB Fare program by completing a small informational card that includes the student’s name, address, phone number and e-mail.
2. Then the student receives a CAB Fare card, which is a wallet sized hard plastic card. Each time the student attends an event, the card is punched.
3. Once the card has been punched 10 times, the student turns in the card for a grand prize drawing held at the end of the school year.
4. The prizes for the grand prize drawing are donations from the program's corporate partners, who either give cash from which prizes are purchased or company products.

Creating an Attendance Incentive Program

Attendance incentive programs have been increasing in popularity and many institutions are now using them to help reward students for coming out to support programs. Your program board can develop its own attendance incentive program. Follow these easy steps and you'll be on the road to an attendance incentive program that will help you pack the house!

1. Define your goals: What do you want to accomplish through this program? How many sponsors/corporate partners would you ideally like to have?
2. Brainstorm a list of your ideal sponsors: Think of sponsors students would be most interested in, such as the pizza joint across from campus or a cell phone company. Poll the students on your program board and find out where they shop. The places students go are the places most likely to help support your program.
3. Talk to your institution’s development or fund-raising office: This step cannot be skipped! Make sure you get the OK from this office before you go out to solicit. You don't want to ask a company for a $500 donation when the university is asking them for $5 million!
4. Develop your promotional packet: It should include a letter explaining how many events you have a year, as well as your annual attendance figures. Also include flyers from recent events along with information on how sponsors can be involved. You'll want to spend some time in this step to determine what sponsor categories you want. The UNC Charlotte program has three: green—$500 in cash or products; yellow—$1,000; or gold—$2,500. You also will need to determine what the sponsor gets in return for participating in your program. Some examples might include their company logo on your flyers.

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5. Get to work: Attendance incentive programs take a lot of legwork. You have to call the sponsor, set up a time to meet with the manager or person who will be making the decision, and you have much follow-up work to do. This is a good project to take on during the summer when the board is not involved with many events. This could also be a good project for a marketing or public relations intern.

Realizing the Benefits

Attendance incentive programs do work! During the years of the CAB Fare program, attendance at events increased more than 100%. Students became excited each year to get a new CAB Fare card and even more excited at the end of the school year when the date of the grand prize drawing came near. Some lessons learned from the program follow:

- Use a plastic card that fits easily into a wallet. It can simply be a laminated business card but a paper card can be easily lost or ripped.
- Punch cards at the end of the event, not at the beginning, so students don’t just drop by the door and then leave.
- Know what motivates the students on your campus. Maybe a free laptop isn’t going to motivate students because everyone gets a laptop when school starts, but free pizza for a year may get students really excited. We learned students weren’t motivated by a free cell phone because many already had phones. Instead, we solicited a cash donation from a cell phone company that we used to buy prizes.
- Continually update your sponsors on how things are going by sending monthly correspondence. Sponsors want to know their name is getting out, so send a copy of a flyer or ad that featured their logo. Also, at the end of the school year, invite all the sponsors to your end-of-year banquet or give them a plaque to thank them for participating in your program.
- Don’t select more than one sponsor that offers the same product. For example, don’t have both Joe’s Pizza Shack and Sue’s Pizza Hut as sponsors. Pick one pizza place, one hotel, one music store, etc. You don’t want your sponsors competing against each other!

Finally, do your homework, have fun and motivate students to be in those seats at your events!

References


About the Author

Regina Young Hyatt is director of Student Life at the University of South Florida-St. Petersburg. She previously served as associate director of Student Activities at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. In NACA, she has held a number of volunteer positions, including 2005 CO-OP Festival host, 2004 NACA National Convention Program Chair and as a staff member of NACA Summer Workshops from 2000 through 2003. She currently serves as Association Treasurer after previously serving as Vice Chair for Regions on the NACA Board of Directors. She holds a bachelor’s degree in political science and a master’s degree in college student personnel, both from Western Illinois University. She has written for Campus Activities Programming in the past on topics such as money-saving tips for programmers and student and advisor partnerships.

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