



NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

NMU Alumni Event Planning Guide

Want to plan an event to meet and mingle with NMU alumni? Here's some information to get you started!

GETTING STARTED

Contact NMU Alumni Association staff. We can brainstorm together and check dates.

Need some initial ideas? Consider the following:

- Happy hour or mixer
- Brewery/winery/distillery tour and tasting
- Picnic
- Sporting events
- Rec sports league
- Trivia Night
- Volunteer at food bank, soup kitchen, park or beach clean-up, marathon aid station, etc.
- Book clubs
- Museum tours
- Alumni speaker or panel discussions
- Senior send offs (gatherings to send off new NMU freshman from your area)

Plan Early: Work with NMU Alumni staff to determine the best date for your event and appropriate deadlines. Allow yourself plenty of time to negotiate details with venues, speakers or any other partners, as well as sufficient time for effective marketing. All events should be finalized no less than 4-6 weeks in advance. Be sure to consider any external deadlines such as distributing tickets or providing final counts to caterers.

Planning Timelines:

- Happy Hours: begin planning 8-12 weeks in advance. Connecting with restaurant managers can sometimes be a challenge!
- Ticketed Events: Begin planning sporting events, tours, cultural events, etc. as soon as the schedule is announced or the best pricing and availability. Allow more time for larger groups.
- Service Projects: Begin 8-10 weeks in advance. Non-profit organizations that can accommodate large groups often fill up quickly, so early outreach is essential.

When selecting dates, consider:

- Other NMU events
- National or religious holidays
- Local festivals, school breaks, etc.
- Planning deadlines

VENUE: Always try to find a free venue. Survey fellow alumni to determine if professional offices or private homes are available for events. Alumni may also have connections to museums, clubs, or restaurants that will waive or reduce their fees.

For happy hours or socials, a private room is not necessary and often is not financially feasible. Instead, reserve a section of the restaurant or bar for alumni. Confirm the reserved space is conducive to mingling, with room to stand and move around. Ask the venue in advance to provide a registration table.

Consider neighborhood, parking, and public transportation when selecting venue. The best venues are centrally located, have ample free or inexpensive parking nearby, and are easily accessible by public transportation if possible.

Be sure to check for ADA access, especially in older venues.

AUDIO/VISUAL SERVICES: If needed, determine the venue's available services (podium, microphone, projector, screen, TV screen, wireless Internet, etc.) and inquire about fees for their use.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE: For events at museums, clubs, offices, etc. determine if food and beverage service must be provided in-house, or if an outside caterer may be used.

Many restaurants and bars offer appetizer platters for groups. Sometimes this is the most cost-effective option, but often ordering from the regular menu allows for greater flexibility at a lower price. Ask to see both the regular menu and the group/catering menu. Confirm whether a minimum spend or minimum guaranteed guest county will apply. Ensure the venue will allow for separate checks, allowing alumni to purchase food and drink on their own.

TICKETS: For ticketed events, inquire about minimums required to take advantage of group discounts. Determine whether tickets can be reserved in advance, and then purchased or released closer to the event date based on actual registration, or if all tickets must be paid in full up front. Factor any deadlines into your planning.

If tickets are limited, consider whether it is appropriate to limit the number of tickets each registrant may purchase.

Determine the best method of distribution for tickets, and what the venue is willing to support. Possible scenarios include: will call list provided to venue; tickets provided to event coordinator (you!) who places them in separate will call envelopes for each registrant, tickets provided to you to distribute at a pre-event social, or tickets mailed or e-mailed to registrants by NMU Alumni staff.

SPEAKERS: When planning a panel or other speaker event, begin by identifying the overarching theme for the event and the background or expertise required by the speakers. Research potential speakers using LinkedIn, the NMU Alumni directory, and referrals by NMU alumni staff. Work with alumni staff to coordinate outreach to potential speakers, as colleagues across the university may have preexisting relationships with the alumni you've selected and may be able to provide background information or facilitate an introduction.

SUPPLIES: NMU Alumni staff will ship you an event package several days prior to your event with any necessary materials. Standard materials may include:

- List of registrants
- Sign-In sheets
- Nametags
- Sharpies
- Pens
- Giveaways or prizes

NMU alumni staff will work to fulfill any additional special requests.

FINALIZE DETAILS: Once you have gathered all of the necessary information and are ready to move forward, contact NMU alumni staff. Alumni staff will begin the internal processes to build a registration page if necessary and schedule marketing and promotions efforts. To do this, we'll need to know:

- Event name
- Event date and time
- Event location
- Event description (we have standard language for many events, but encourage you to be creative)
- Registration fee
- Maximum number of attendees, if appropriate
- Event coordinators (you and anyone else who may be coordinating)
- Any additional information that might be helpful to registrants (parking, public transportation, information about cash bar, etc.)
- Contact information for venue
- Preferred shipping address for event package (including any special instructions for mailrooms, P.O. boxes, etc.)

We'll ask you to review the registration page before we begin promoting the event. Please take the time to look over the page for accuracy and typos.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION: A minimum 3-4 weeks is recommended for effective marketing of your event.

Alumni staff will work to market your event in the following ways, when appropriate:

- Identify area alumni and pull invitation lists to ensure targeted marketing.
- Promote the event in the following ways:
 - Social media (free posts, paid ad campaign or creation of Facebook event)
 - Inclusion on NMU Alumni Association website
 - E-blasts to area alumni
 - Phone and voicemail blasts
 - Press release or community announcement in local paper
 - Create flyers
 - Include in Northern alumni magazine, if timing aligns

We encourage you to post to your own social networks and contact your fellow alumni as well as to raise awareness of your event and drive attendance.

DAY OF: Please arrive at least 30 minutes early to your event. Check in with your venue to reconfirm arrangements, and be sure the host/hostess knows that you are with an NMU event and can direct guests to the appropriate location. Wear an NMU t-shirt or hat so that attendees can easily find you.

Registration: At the event, greet all attendees, encourage them to sign in (using the sign-in sheet provided to you by the NMU alumni office) and help them with nametags. Feel free to recruit additional alumni volunteers to assist in this effort.

Welcome: Use your best judgement as to whether a formal welcome is necessary. When appropriate, welcome speeches should be brief and provide information about NMU, future events and opportunities to get involved. Thank those who may have helped with the event and recognize any special guests. If an NMU employee is present, plan for them to speak briefly. If you decide against a formal welcome, be sure to introduce yourself to all attendees.

Photos: Take photos using your smart phone or camera, or ask a fellow alumni or volunteer to do so. If you post to social media, tag NMU alumni on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and use the #NMUalumni hashtag.

WRAP-UP: After the event, touch base with NMU alumni staff with any feedback. In some cases, a phone call may be helpful to debrief.

Documentation: Send the sign-in sheets to NMU alumni staff as soon as possible, either by mail, scanning and e-mailing, or even texting photos of each sheet. Sign-in sheets are used to code attendance and contact information updates; the data they provide are critical.

Photos: Please send any photos to NMU alumni staff.