

Making the Most of Consultant Visits and Headquarters Conversations: A Campus Perspective

Santiago Gayton, Grand Valley State University

As campus-based professionals in fraternity and sorority life, we have many local resources available as we work with our chapters. Sometimes we have so many local resources on campus that we often overlook the headquarters office when an issue arises. With leadership offices, community service learning centers, academic support services, faculty advisors, chapter advisors, student leadership and others on campus, these can easily distract us from reaching out to the headquarters staff throughout the year.

Yet, the campus-headquarters relationship is a very important piece to having a healthy community. As partners in the fraternal movement we both want to see our chapters succeed. As campus-based professionals we have the opportunity and ability to see our members on a daily and weekly basis while inter/national organization staff and volunteers are able to set an agenda for their organization that deeply impacts how their chapters program and live their values.

We primarily receive one or two visits in person with a(n) inter/national organization's consultant per year. We may only have one meeting at a national conference for organizations without traveling staff. So how do you make the most of a one hour meeting? Do you get right into the "nitty gritty?" Or do you first develop the relationship with the organization staff member? How do you deal with an organization that does not have a traveling consultant? Do you rely on phone calls and conference meetings to create touch points for collaboration? Or do we try some or all of the above?

The following are personal lessons learned and those passed down from mentors in the field about collaborating with headquarters staff to strengthen the fraternal movement.

1. **Focus on the needs.** For all consultant or headquarter visits I like to give a snapshot of the campus and their chapter. These include grades, service and philanthropy statistics, roster numbers, demographics, involvement information and any other campus information that will help them understand the culture. This is useful because it opens the meeting up to the important topics to cover, while still supplying the data and information for the reports organization staff members complete.
2. **Be forthright and honest.** There is no way our chapters will improve if we are not sharing everything. I have spent time with consultants sharing my concerns of patterns that have not resulted in any violations yet, but if addressed now will save both campus-based professionals and organization staff time in the future. It is also important to use this time to celebrate a chapter that is doing well, especially if they have overcome some previous challenges.
3. **Make yourself available.** It is easy to get caught up in our own schedules and sometimes consultants must change their visits or arrival dates, but meeting in person must be a priority. In addition to the one hour meeting, it is a great idea to meet again before they leave to cover any

areas that must be focused on for improvement. This is a great opportunity to create a plan to support headquarters and what they want to accomplish.

4. **Do not be afraid to collaborate.** The visit does not have to be the only time to communicate and solve chapter issues. Many consultants make themselves available through email and phone calls year round. As issues and concerns sprout, save some time and address them as a team.
5. **Do not be afraid to ask for help.** This is simple enough. When we need support, we need to ask for it.

The following is advice for regional and inter/national conference visits with organizations that do not have traveling staff or volunteers. You can use this advice whenever a campus visit is not possible.

1. **Have an agenda.** It is so important to capitalize on the time you have face-to-face. Know the issues and areas that you want to address and where you are looking for feedback and support.
2. **Have information prepared.** Unfortunately, these meetings do not take place in the office with easy access to your resources. In order to be able to discuss the chapter, bring the information that you need with you.
3. **Be frank.** Be honest and open in your conversation. You are on the ground year-round and can provide the valuable feedback that the organization needs.
4. **Seek resources.** Find out with whom you need to speak. Is there an area alumnus with whom to connect? Are there local resources that you can utilize? Is there an organization staff member that will be your new point of contact? Be sure to walk away with new information and connections.
5. **Do not be afraid to ask for help.** This is simple enough. When we need support, we need to ask for it.

Regardless of if you are meeting with an organization staff member in your office or at a conference, it is important to implement the new information that you have gained. Read the full report from the organization staff member (if one is provided), and use the information from your meeting.

1. **Leverage the relationships you have built with students.** Some students respond better to information when you reveal that you spoke to the inter/national president or chapter alumni. Revealing the relationships can act as a catalyst to chapter members. This is not in a threatening or malicious manner, but rather it is to simply be more transparent in the relationship you have and the knowledge you have learned.
2. **Mirror what the organization staff member is focusing on.** When both organization staff members and campus-based professionals are working on the same area, the results can be greatly amplified. The organization staff member can lay the foundation and roadmap for the chapter to follow. As campus-based professionals we can provide the tools for the chapter to achieve their goals.
3. **Be authentic.** This can make all the difference. Student can tell when we are genuine and really want to better their experience and who they are as people. Do not conceal hidden agendas; be truthful about outcomes; and, work with all partners.

The above lists are not intended to be all-encompassing, and there are additional tools and processes for making the most of our short visits. However, these simple steps can help begin to improve and contribute to our collaboration between campus-based professionals and organization staff members.