

20 Things Every First Timer Should Know Before Attending the Annual Meeting

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Is it your first time attending the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA) Annual Meeting (AM)? There is a first time for everything and attending this meeting is no exception. Here are a few tips to make sure you are in the know and ready to take on your first AM with ease.

1. Go into the experience with a goal in mind. It will help you feel in control of the plethora of awesome program offerings, rather than feeling overwhelmed by them.
2. Take advantage of the job search preparation...it is FREE. There is no better feeling than having an experienced professional compliment how well you interview and how spectacular your qualifications are for a position. To get to that place, one must go through many drafts, be exposed to different interview questions, and occasionally revisit the drawing board. Participating in that process is invaluable no matter where you are in your career.
3. Fill in gaps in your experience. Never created or balanced a budget? Haven't advised a multicultural group? Now is the perfect time to learn about opportunities and experiences different from those provided in your current role.
4. Learn outside the lecture. Programs are very important for the learning at the Annual Meeting. So is coffee. So why not put the two together and grab a refreshment with a presenter with whom you had a great connection or interest?
5. Looking for a job in a certain area? Make time to attend the regional meeting for that area. It is a great place to network with professionals within the region and jumpstart your job search. Most regions also announce upcoming job postings at these meetings as well. It is a great opportunity to talk with a potential employer about position requirements.
6. Meet other first time Annual Meeting attendees. Attend the Connection Kickoff session to network with other professionals.
7. Depending on where you are in your career, attend the Graduate Student Training Track, New Professionals Seminar, or Seasoned Professionals Seminar. They are all great opportunities to meet other members and learn more about the Association and profession.
8. Request to attend Fireside Chats. These are a great time to connect with inter/national organization staff and/or campus professionals about the

organizations or campuses with whom you work. Remember to share the positive experiences you are having!

9. Volunteer! Volunteering is a great way to meet other fraternity/sorority professionals and give back to the Association.
10. Ask questions. The Annual Meeting is a great opportunity to gain fresh perspective on the program, policy, or chapter you might have difficulty getting your mind around. Seek out peer institutions and experts to receive sage advice.
11. Network with diverse groups of attendees. Inter/national organization staff, vendors, graduate members, and campus professionals all work together to facilitate the fraternity and sorority experience. Building relationships now will help to collaboratively solve problems and celebrate successes later.
12. Visit the vendors. Not only do they have fun giveaways, but these folks provide many different services that fraternity/sorority professionals use often. Shop around for keynotes, software, literature, clothing, and more.
13. Consider applying for the Annual Meeting Graduate Staff or serving as an Annual Meeting Ambassador! These volunteer positions are a great opportunity to get involved right there at the Annual Meeting and network with fellow members in the Association.
14. As simple as it may seem, do not forget to bring your business cards!
15. Stay up on your work. It may feel like a mini-vacation in early December, but this is often one of the busiest times for fraternity/sorority professionals. Remember to keep abreast of things while you are away in order to minimize your catch-up upon returning to the office.
16. Attend Ignite Fraternity. Professionals from all walks apply to present short speeches on innovative ideas or reframed approaches to issues with which the fraternal movement has long struggled.
17. Attend the business meeting. This is the AFA equivalent of attending your own organization's business meeting. Financial figures, upcoming initiatives, and important updates are provided here, which are all essential to the health and stability of AFA.
18. Participate in the case study competition. Whether it is as a participant or a judge, this is a great way to put your theory caps on and apply what you know to a real life scenario.

19. Continue the conversation after the Annual Meeting. Be sure to engage your new colleagues through the AFA online community discussion boards to keep the idea exchange flowing.
20. Allow yourself time to decompress. We encourage you to discuss, prepare, engage, and immerse yourself in the Annual Meeting experience, but we also want to suggest you take some time for yourself after it is over. The AM can be exhausting for anyone, and it can be hard to work when you are running on a half tank of gas (or somewhere closer to empty).