FMI Program Methodology

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Many thanks to the FMI Edmonton Chapter, notably their Marketing & Programming Director Frank Potter, for sharing their program methodology and tips with all fmi·igf e-Journal readers.

The Fun and Challenges of an FMI Chapter

Running a Chapter of the Financial Management Institute (fmi·igf), like running most volunteer organizations, is a combination of lots of fun and lots of terror. The fun is in seeing a great idea mature into an event and be pulled off without a hitch. The terror is in coming up with a great idea, finding the speakers, the volunteers and the venue, and dealing with things that go wrong.

While this article cannot find volunteers for you, book your venue or locate your lost digital projector, it gives you a way to find and share event ideas and a methodology to make organizing your learning event easier. This article also starts a conversation within FMI through an idea locker and a resource locker. These tools are web spaces that hold nuggets of information on how to deliver a quality product to your members or how to reduce the burden of volunteering by sharing ideas, material, and methods.

To start the sharing, the FMI Edmonton Chapter has put forward its ideas and methodology in this article. In turn, other Chapters can help FMI Edmonton create even better programming by contributing their good work, ideas and procedures to the FMI pool of resources. Before the sharing starts though, let's establish the factors that make for a good event.

What Makes for a Good Event?

An engaging speaker, a flawless production, good food (perhaps) and a topic of relevance—surely it is not that difficult! Unfortunately, it is tough because there are so many things that can go amiss and too few volunteers to do the work necessary. Here are seven factors for a great FMI learning event:

- **1. Topic 2. Topic 3. Topic:** (with apologies to real estate agents and their maxim of *'location, location, location'*). FMI topics fall into three categories: government/public service, financial management/professional interest, and local/personal interest. See the Idea Locker for more than seventeen ideas your Chapter might use. Also check if other local organizations (IPAC, CPA, etc.) are already covering your chosen topic; if so, consider collaborating with them!
- **4. Speaker-Presenter:** No matter how good the topic is, a droning speaker will quickly kill it. Fortunately, many people are worthy/adequate speakers and are keen to share their messages or experiences freely. The key is to ask people to speak—and ask and ask and ask. If one person says yes after nine people have said no, you are doing pretty well.
- **5. Venue:** A great venue 1) is centrally located, 2) has good parking/public transit, and 3) has good food for a reasonable price.
- **6. Organization:** Seeing volunteers running around at the last moment while the start-time slips away is a killer for repeat attendance. Good organization will not sell out the next event, but poor organization will turn people away from future events. See the Resource Locker for methodologies that can make the event go smoothly!
- **7. Promotion:** The best topic-speaker-venue combination is for naught without an audience. Each market is a bit different and your members are constantly being bombarded with demands on their time and attention. A list of promotional ideas is available in the Resource Locker.

You Are Not Alone

FMI Chapters are not alone in their struggle to find volunteers and put on good professional development programming at a reasonable price. The Edmonton Chapter has had some success

in collaborating with other professional and industry organizations. The lesson learned is: to make one organization the senior partner: to clearly define the roles and responsibilities: and, to develop a cost sharing agreement with the partner organizations early in the planning process.

What is an Idea Locker?

An idea locker is a bit of a junk drawer. Each of the entries is a germ of an idea upon which you can build ideas for your specific FMI Chapter circumstance. The Idea Locker includes untested ideas and ideas used in the past by other FMI Chapters. Where possible, former Chapter slide presentations, etc. have been included to help you convert an idea into a FMI professional development learning event.

Idea Locker

www.fmi.ca/
the-idea-locker/

This is not an exhaustive list; please use the **contact us form** on www.fmi.ca (select "Idea Locker" on the drop-down menu) to contribute your own ideas. Be sure to include a descriptive title, a short paragraph summarizing the event, whether the idea is new or was used before, your contact information (in case of questions,) and which of the following broad themes the idea falls into:

Government/Public Service Theme:
Focuses on the public sector and the professionals who work in it. Partners for these types of programs include government entities, the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC), universities, public sector pension organizations and unions.

Financial Management Theme:
Focuses on the financial aspects of an organization, and accounting and finance professionals. Partners for these types of programs include accounting associations (CPA, ACCA, etc.), accounting firms and banks.
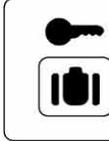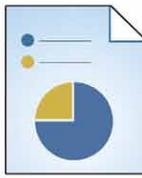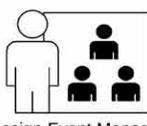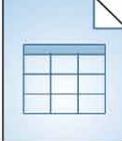
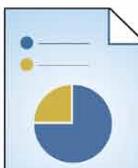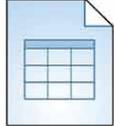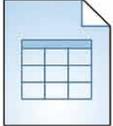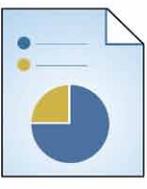**Local or Personal Interest Theme:**
Includes everything else. Local interest events are specific to each Chapter. Nevertheless, while your Chapter may not deal with oil and gas exploration, maritime law or managing governments in two official languages, the ideas in the locker may lead to other more relevant ideas for your Chapter. The Edmonton Chapter tries to hold a least one fun or personal development-focused learning event per program year.

Execution and Some Handy Tools in the Resource Locker
The Resource Locker
Ideas are great, but only hard work delivers results. Fortunately, some simple tools and methods make the hard work easier. The tools are organized according to the stages when they are used:

• **Idea Generation:** establishing the program for the year.

— *FMI Edmonton's Program Methodology*

- **Event Idea Refinement:** taking a possibility and turning it into a plan of action.
- **Pre-Event Organization:** executing the plan of action.
- **Event:** running the all-day, lunch hour, breakfast session, etc.
- **Post-Event:** continuing the learning after the audience has departed.

The Edmonton Chapter uses the following model for its typical event format, which is a half-day program including breakfast. A brief summary of steps and tools used in each stage of the planning process is provided on page 2. More details can be found in the Resource Locker.

Resource Locker

www.fmi.ca/
the-resource-locker/

Idea Generation

- **FMI – Idea Locker:**
  The Edmonton Chapter never let an imperfect idea go to waste. They are kept around, re-tweaked and reconsidered for the "Upcoming Events" web page at http://fmi.ca/Chapters/Edmonton/upcoming-events.
- **Idea Selection Night:**
  A Board meeting in a social setting results in a plan for the following program year. Of course, if an unexpected opportunity falls into the Chapter's lap, rush efforts will be made to incorporate it.

Event-Idea Refinement

- **Event Idea Document:**
  This is a one- or two-page document detailing the idea, its value to members, potential speakers and other details. The document helps board members, speakers, and potential partners understand or contribute to the event idea.
- **Assignment of Event Manager:**
  The most important planning step is assigning a project/event manager for each event. Ideally, no one manages more than one event per year because of the time and effort commitment required.

Pre-Event Organization

- **Excel Planning Tool:**
  Event managers may find it helpful to use the Microsoft Excel-based event planning tool. The template has nine tabs, the most important one being the detail agenda tab. It creates a minute-by-minute program to provide a level of comfort to your speakers and volunteers.
- **Event Registration and Communication Tool:**
  Don't go cheap on the registration or communication tool. FMI is developing a registration/database tool for Chapter use that is scheduled for release in September 2015, but in the interim, Edmonton utilizes Constant Contact, which it considers to be the best-in-class tool. Its best feature is that it enables the Chapter to monitor details like registration from different government levels and to tailor future promotion accordingly.
- **Conference Calls for Event Planning Meetings:**
  Edmonton's preference is to hold bi-weekly conference calls of 20 – 30 minutes. The advantage of conference calls is that they are very focused and time-limited. Event Planning Meetings allow the event manager to do walk-throughs.
- **Presenter Conference Call:**
  This is one of the most important meetings when organizing a learning event, particularly when there are two or more presenters. The meeting provides a chance to set the tone of the event, and it allows the speakers to synchronize their presentation content. This meeting also helps the speakers to understand what to expect and how to prepare. In addition, it is an opportunity for speakers to share their slide presentation decks to minimize content overlap.
- **Pre-Event Notes:**
  This is a 2 – 6 page PDF document providing a summary of the program, speaker biographies, other relevant content, upcoming
  FMI events and any other Chapter news or activities. This document is available 2 – 3 weeks in advance on the event registration page.
- **Promotion:**
  There are three promotional emails: an early-bird promotion, regular promotion, and a last minute reminder. An event poster (to download) allows members to get the news out to their colleagues and associates, both in and beyond their work area. Depending upon the topic, cross promotion with local organizations, such as IPAC, should be on your promotion check list.

Event

- **Event Manager:**
  Ideally the event manager is now having a relaxing breakfast (or lunch) as all of the pieces fall into place. However, if digital projector is missing, the speaker is delayed in traffic or the fire alarm goes off – the event manager is the Go-To person to get the session back on track!
- **Single Presentation Deck:**
  The advantage of combining the various speakers' decks into a single deck is that you can insert biographies, transition and break slides. Post the presentation deck to the event registration page the night before so that audience members can follow along on their laptops, tablets, or other smart devices.
- **Time Cards:**
  A Toastmasters technique, time cards keep the program on track. These are preferred over the red "STOP" card, which everyone dreads.
- **Record the Event:**
  If you are planning to produce post-event notes, or you are hosting a webinar, consider recording the event. The Edmonton Chapter uses a digital voice recorder to tape the proceedings. If you are technically savvy, plug it into the sound board. For those less technically inclined, simply leave it taping near a sound speaker.
- **Enable Text-a-Question:**
  Audience members who are a somewhat shy can text in their questions. Questions are edited as required.

Post-Event

- **Post-Event Notes:**
  After the event, you may wish to produce post-event notes. These notes are a summary of the speaking points of each presentation and any discussions or questions. Due to the editing and layout involved, many authors consider post-event notes to be a writing credit.
- **Event-Debrief:**
  Finally, no event goes un-debriefed.

You are encouraged to share your resources with all FMI Chapters by using the comment box of the Resource Locker; and placing them in the categories of idea generation, planning tools, and communication and promotion.

Planning à la Carte

The above resources should be seen as a menu of tools, not a prescription of activities to follow. Many of the tools can be ignored or simplified for a simpler single-speaker event. A larger or more complex learning event may require an online project plan and possibly a collaboration site to share documents and communications.

Can Ideas and Resources be Shared Outside of FMI?

Absolutely! The resources and methods listed above can be re-purposed to run a hockey team awards night, a CPA luncheon or a company picnic to name a few. Please use and re-purpose the ideas and resources, as this demonstrates the value, networking and leadership of FMI in our communities. When using the ideas and resources please include a note of acknowledgement, such as the following:

This idea originated with the Financial Management Institute of Canada (fmi✧igf) and is used with permission under Creative Commons (Non-commercial). We thank the FMI for sharing their ideas and will let them know how their idea worked out for us.
    <u>and/or</u>
Organization of this event was partially-(fully-) based on an event organization methodology developed by the volunteers of the Financial Management Institute of Canada (fmi✧igf) and is used with permission under Creative Commons (Non-commercial). We thank the FMI for sharing their methods and will let them know how it worked out for us.

Locker or a Tomb?

The problem with online resources is that they can become stale, get spammed or get buried in the graveyard of good intentions. Hopefully, the Idea and Resource Lockers will not succumb to this and will instead be seen as valuable resources for all FMI Chapters. Events that are listed in the fmi✧igf e-Journal's "Chapter News" will be copied to the Idea Locker on the Chapter's behalf. Future issues of the fmi✧igf e-Journal will include a small feature called "The Locker," in which new, highly-rated or popular resources are listed. In conclusion, if you have a great event, idea or tool, please save it in the Locker!

About the Author
Frank Potter is a professional accountant (CMA) and holds a MBA from the University of Athabasca. He is currently with the Ministry of Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education and is the Director of Strategic Planning for Information Management and Technology. Previously he held roles, typically at the Director level, within governmental and consulting organizations. To contact Frank, visit www.myorgbio.org or email frank@myorgbio.org