

# Planning an Award Letter Presentation

It takes a lot of planning to have a successful award letter presentation. There are many details to consider, from picking out a time and place to organizing all of the equipment, not to mention the presentation itself! The following tips can help you prepare for an organized and informative presentation.

- Choose a Date.** This is the first step in planning your award letter presentation. Keep the following things in mind as you choose a date:
  - Spring is a good time to schedule the award letter presentation as most schools try to send out their first batch of award letters by April 1. Pick a date late enough in spring so that some students have already received award letters, but not too late so that they miss their response deadlines.
  - Be sure the date doesn't conflict with holidays or school events, like sporting events or plays.
  - Consider offering parents and students a choice of nights, to accommodate as many people as you can.
  - Consider offering a presentation on a weekend.
  
- Choose a Time.** After you pick a date, you need to pick a time. Remember these points:
  - Schedule the presentation late enough to give parents time to get home from work and eat something before coming—6:30 or 7 PM is generally a good time to start.
  - Be careful not to schedule the presentation too late, as you don't want the audience getting tired!
  - Give parents and students an end time as well so that they can plan accordingly. Allotting an hour for the night should be sufficient.
  
- Choose a Location.** When picking a location, make sure that it's in a convenient place for the majority of the attendees, and secure the room well in advance. Also remember the following tips:
  - Submit all the required paperwork for the room reservation as well as the equipment, which could include:
    - Microphones
    - Audiovisual Needs
    - Overhead Projector
    - Computer and Projector
    - Screens
    - Internet Access
  - Find out if you'll be charged for any of the equipment you may need.
  - Be sure the room you choose is big enough to easily fit the number of people you expect to attend. Comfortable people make better listeners!
  - Determine if the room is handicap accessible, if necessary.
  - Make sure the room is conducive to giving a presentation. A cafeteria gives you enough space, but it could be hard to hear one person speaking.
  - Check out the lighting to make sure people will be able to see your presentation. Personally sit in different spots in the room to test it out.
  - Be sure that people will have enough room around them to take notes if they need to, and provide pens and paper.
  - Arrange for bilingual assistance if you'll need it.

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- **Prepare Materials.** Thinking about what you'll cover in the presentation and what kind of materials you'll hand out to the audience is a key step in getting ready for your award letter presentation. Remember that giving supporting materials to the audience can help to drive home important points, but that giving them too much could overwhelm them.
  - **Presentation.** Great Lakes provides a Microsoft® PowerPoint® presentation with accompanying speaker notes that you can use at your award letter presentation to give students and parents all the information they need. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the slides before your presentation night.
  - **Handouts.** Great Lakes offers three handouts that reinforce the main points of our presentation. The Sample Award Letters handout includes a financial aid award letter key, as well as sample letters students can compare and refer to throughout the presentation. The Award Package Comparison is provided as a blank form and with the information from two of the three sample letters pre-populated. The Financial Aid Reference Sheet provides a general overview of federal student loans, such as the loan types, the loan details, the financial aid process, and a glossary of terms.
  - **Financial Aid 101 Award Letter Evaluation Form.** Great Lakes provides an evaluation form you can hand out to students and their families. The form asks for their opinions on the presentation, letting you find out what they thought was most helpful, and any additional information they'd like to learn about.
  - **Additional Resources.** Great Lakes also provides print and online resources to help your students educate themselves about college and financial aid.
  
- **Advertise!**
  - Great Lakes provides a flyer for you to let people know about the award letter presentation well in advance. Some ways to spread the word include posting the flyers around school, sending it home with students, placing ads in the school newspaper, and reminding students about the presentation in school announcements. Get the word out to the community by including churches, community centers, libraries, recreation centers, and social service agencies.
  - What should you put in your advertisement? Be sure to include what you'll be covering in the presentation, the date, the location (including the address and basic directions), start time, length of the program, and a phone number and contact person to call for more information. If you want to be notified if anyone will need special accommodations or bilingual services, include this in the advertisement.
  - You can't oversell this presentation! Be sure that students and parents know how important it is that they come.
  - Offering incentives is a good way to convince students and parents to attend. Consider providing food and drinks. Something as simple and inexpensive as cookies could do the trick. Offering door prizes is another way to persuade people to come. Raffle off T-shirts, pens, pencils, or notepads can create a fun and friendly atmosphere.
  
- **Follow Up**
  - After you've concluded your presentation, collect the Financial Aid Award Letter 101 Evaluation Forms you handed out earlier. Use the feedback you receive to make changes to your presentation as needed.
  - Visit the Financial Aid Award Letter Presentation Tools Section of **CounselorsToolkit.org** and fill out a Presenter Evaluation Form. You can let us know what you think of our materials, and what we can do to make them more helpful.

To download Financial Aid Award Letters 101 and any of the presentation materials, visit **CounselorsToolkit.org**.