



## USSVI Base Meeting Improvement Ideas

The genesis and initial work on this project came from Ron Martini of Lockwood Internet Base. This is a work in progress and input is requested on what works or what doesn't work for your base. Email to: [rontini@bresnan.net](mailto:rontini@bresnan.net) and [householderp@comcast.net](mailto:householderp@comcast.net)

Barb Base says it well in regards to members who seldom or never attend meetings:

***“Shipmates and Silent Partners;  
It is better to be a part of the organization  
than to be apart from it.”***

The purpose of this paper is to help Base Officers develop and maintain more interesting meetings that your members will want to attend. Effective and interesting meetings will improve retention and recruiting for your base as well.

Virtually all members belong to USSVI because they found their USN Submarine experience a life-changing event for themselves and they wish to maintain the ties to the fraternity shared by all “Brothers of the Dolphin.”

Always remember that each member has competing demands on their time, Home and Family obligations, Business, Hobbies and Avocations and medical issues.

To maintain your Base charter, the Base must meet at least once a year. Most bases choose to meet monthly, although some meet bimonthly, quarterly and semi-annually.

Regardless of meeting frequency, your challenge as a Base Officer is to insure USSVI meetings and other activities are of such a nature and value that the member will want to participate and attend more than they value some of these other competing interests *at the time* of the USSVI meetings or events.

## IMPROVING MEETING ATTENDANCE IMPROVES RETENTION/INTEREST PLUS OTHER TIPS ON MEETING SUCCESS



What does this mean? For many base officers, getting people to attend meetings is challenging, if not daunting. Often, despite a base's concerted efforts, people simply do not come, and the level of effort seems unjustified by the results. Low attendance is especially common for a meeting whose format does not vary or have interesting topics of discussion. How can bases summon

their resources to get more members involved in the participation of regular meetings?

A first step is to understand why people do not participate. They offer numerous reasons for not attending base meetings:

- They are not aware a meeting is taking place
- They receive inadequate notice
- They have other commitments
- They have a negative perception of one or more of the officers or of their immediate group and in some cases, even their national organization or leadership.
- Individual comments and suggestions are not taken seriously
- Important Base Decisions have already been made behind closed doors
- Meetings are too time consuming or boring, especially the business portion
- Meeting sites are too far away, inconvenient, or inaccessible.

Members will participate if a base offers them meaningful opportunities to honor our Sub Vet creed, provides a lively and upbeat environment for socialization, and does praiseworthy deeds, such as local Navy support, Sub Vet Charitable Foundation support and has a history of using the Base membership input to make better plans and projects. Simply put, they will come if Base participation makes them feel good about themselves.

Good meeting attendance, then, is closely linked to a base's responsiveness and receptivity, commitment to the process of member involvement, careful advance planning, and effective communication strategies. High turnout with productive results is possible.

Why is improved meeting attendance desirable? High meeting attendance helps ensure both the member and the organization achieve their mutual goals of remembering our fallen heroes, socialization with our fellow Sub Vets and supporting good works carried out through our Sub Vet Charitable Foundation.

Members feeling good about participation in meetings and events will be more interested in suggesting new ways for the Base to prosper and thrive, or put another way, will have more of a stake in seeing the base thrive.

A word about meeting attendance: Generally speaking, participation in meetings as a percentage of local members will decline as a percentage as the size of the base increases BUT absolute attendance numbers will increase.

How do you measure a meeting's success? By member satisfaction, of course, and one rough measure of that is attendance measured over time.

In general, a small Base (defined here as 25 or fewer local members) should be able to achieve 45-50% meeting participation on average over a year's period.

A medium Base (defined here as 25-75 members), should be able to achieve 35-45% meeting participation on average over a year's period.

A large Base (defined here as 75-150 members), should be able to achieve 25-35% meeting participation on average over a year's period.

A very large or mega base is outside the scope of this discussion.

Widespread participation enhances member's awareness about a plan or project. When people get involved in a meaningful exchange of ideas on base issues, they are likely to spread the word to other members and/or shipmates.

It is also crucial when an elected body such as a base E-Board must ratify a plan. Broad participation from the beginning of a process aids consensus building at its end.

When people are instrumental in shaping the vision for a project or plan and have been involved in working through issues and alternatives, they are more likely to be supportive of the final results.

All base members benefit from increased meeting attendance because they get to know their fellow Sub Vets better, stay current on submarine related matters and support the creed we all share and believe in.



## What are the main keys to successful Base Meetings?

A positive and responsive officer's and/or EBoard attitude is essential. This is reflected in the level of care, attention, clarity, sincerity, and honesty the Base Officers display in contacts with members.



Follow-up efforts before, during, and after meetings are opportunities to assert a positive attitude and improve rapport with the membership.

It is important to stress that base operations involves all members because their ideas and concerns are valued and useful.

Members quickly detect when the Base officers are asking for member ideas simply because it is required to do so but not really considering them, and they will be turned off and stay away. Remember always that even bad ideas may morph into good ideas or new ideas if discussed and considered. Members will not attend meetings if they think their views will not be heard.

### BASE EXECUTIVE BOARD ADVANCE MEETING PLANNING

Careful advance planning is crucial. Good organization assures members that their time is not wasted and that the base has a strong handle on what needs to be accomplished.

**Be clear on the purpose and theme of your meeting:** If there isn't a meeting focus or theme, the meeting will probably be ineffective and unsatisfying.

**Have a plan:** The agenda is the project plan for a meeting. It lays out the steps or topics you'll go through to accomplish the purpose of the meeting. An over-stuffed agenda is a common problem, however, so be ruthless in keeping the agenda to one or two major discussion points.

**Invite the Right People:** This obviously includes your base members, but also have a plan in place to invite non-member sub vets to attend your meeting, and when they come, be sure to make them feel welcome and at home. Make sure at least one member is tasked as a 'greeter' for this purpose.



## Potential Themes for Meetings:

- January 17 First Barbel class commissioned 1959 (3) Last U.S. combat diesel subs built
- January 27 Adm. Hyman G. Rickover Birthday
- February 04 First Balao class commissioned 1943 (119)
- March 3 First Sturgeon class boat commissioned 1967 (37)
- March 8 First submarine arrives Holy Loch
- April 10 Loss of USS Thresher 1963
- April 15 First Skipjack class commissioned 1958 (6)
- April 18 Submarine Birthday 1900
- May 6 Adm Charles A. Lockwood Birthday
- May 22 Loss of USS Scorpion 1968
- May 24 USSVI Birthday 1964
- June 6 WWII D-Day
- July 19 First Seawolf Class commissioned 1997 (3)
- July 20 First Submerged missile shoot
- August 3 First Thresher (Permit) Class commissioned 1961 (14)
- August 28 First Trident missile launched
- September 30 USS Nautilus Commissioned 1954
- October 6 First Tench class commissioned 1944 (25)
- October 13 U.S. Navy Birthday
- October 25 First Tang class commissioned 1951 (6)
- November 11 Veteran's Day (also known as Armistice Day)  
First Trident Class (USS Ohio) commissioned 1981 (18)
- November 13 First Los Angeles class commissioned 1976 (62)
- December 7 Pearl Harbor Day
- December 23 First Skate Class commissioned 1957 (4)
- December 30 First SSBN (George Washington) commissioned 1959 (41)
- December 31 First Gato class commissioned 1941 (77)

How often should the Base Officers meet to discuss future meetings and events? It will obviously vary with the needs of the base, but a good guideline is to meet face-to-face at least quarterly as a Base Executive Board, and monthly by email or telephone to fine-tune the process.

Base Officers must also identify any shipmates with any special needs. For example, are there shipmates who need transportation to the meeting? Consider putting a officer in charge of developing a car pooling arrangement.

Successful meetings have clear agendas, including the purpose, discussion topics, types of activities, names of speakers, overall schedule and time for Q&A and brainstorming other ideas/projects.

Meeting times and locations optimize people's ability to participate for instance, after work hours, in convenient neighborhood locations and comfortable settings conducive to happy meetings. Members should be periodically consulted about meeting

places(s), times and dates to make sure the present arrangements are still satisfactory.

Distance traveled by members is also important and rotation of meeting locations that encompass a large geographical area may be helpful. Consider alternate meeting locations to maximize overall attendance. The downside risk to alternative meeting locations is potential member confusion so clear communications is vital if you do choose to rotate meeting sites.

Sufficient notice well in advance of a meeting helps members set time aside in their schedule for attendance.

- ***Mailed or emailed invitations*** can take the form of a "save-this-date" card or flier.
- ***Phone calling*** lists the day prior are helpful in reminding the members of meeting times/locations.
- ***Faxing and Newsletter meeting notices*** are other possible approaches.

Discussing National policy and issues in planning a meeting enhances its chances for success. Bases can ask District, Regional or National officers about what issues to discuss and if they would be available to attend the meeting. Obviously this must be done well in advance.

Offering a variety of formats increases the chances of attracting participants and demonstrates a base's intent to make it easy for the members to take part. Bases should use a blend of topics and formats to attract broad involvement. Some examples include:

- Topical Speakers, preferably Submarine, Navy or National Defense Related.
- Submarine Related Videos.
- Dinner Meetings
- "Mid Rats" following the speaker or video may have appeal.
- "Show and Tell" exhibits by members of their submarine related mementos.

What else helps?

To be effective and successful, the Base Officers ***must*** do pre-planning legwork. There is no getting around it.

Analysis and action to increase meeting attendance is time consuming. Members who are savvy about engaging the membership in common involvement may be scarce. A trial and error period is sometimes needed to determine what works. Base inaction, errors, and poor planning compound the difficulties of establishing credibility.

Ask your District Commander which other bases in your District or Region that seem to have a better than average meeting attendance and contact the base(s) to see what they are doing that might help your base.

Use many methods to communicate Base meeting information with your base members. Publish meeting information in your Base Newsletter and Website, send it

via email announcements (at least three times in the run up to the meeting) to all online members, by postcard to offline members and set up and use a phone tree for meeting announcements. (One phone tree member for 10-15 base members is a good ratio.) In all cases, remember to 'sell' the meeting using the agenda highlights because while the meeting topic may be self evident to you, it may not be obvious to the base member being called.

Meeting notices in local newspaper may be free in your area. Some area radio stations offer free "public announcements."

Use other Veteran groups' publications to announce meetings. Sharing resources might help your base with its attendance. Other local Veteran groups BBS's or bulletin boards and/or American Legion, VFW Fleet Reserve or Navy League newsletters can also list your meeting. Be sure to offer to publish their information in your newsletter in return.

Be aware of other events when planning a meeting. Do not schedule meetings on Monday nights during football season or on Saturday afternoons when your college is playing a game or on Sundays if the Pro team has a home game. What events are occurring in your community that might impact your member's decision to attend your meetings? It might involve even moving the meeting to another day if a major event is occurring.

**BOTTOM LINE:** FOLLOW THE NEWSPAPER EDITOR'S ADMONITION AND (1) TELL THEM WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO TELL THEM; (2) TELL THEM, (3) TELL THEM WHAT YOU TOLD THEM. **If you don't tell them (and repeatedly), they won't come.**

Focus each meeting on a special theme. Base members belong to USSVI because they are interested in submarines. If base members clearly see how the specific theme addresses their particular interests, they will more readily attend meetings. Keep in mind the mix of submarines represented by your membership. Always try to have one major idea to discuss each meeting and have a backup if the first fails.

Establish and maintain your information sharing networks. Word of mouth and email are powerful tools. Phone calling lists are effective. Keep each other informed of member's illnesses, business ventures, hobbies, etc.

Offer low cost meeting perks, ranging from food and transportation to something for the ladies. Alternatively, have a meeting occasionally with the ladies in mind. Set up car pools. Snacks and beverages can be rotated through the membership.

Offer alternative modes of participating for individuals constrained by time or distance. Do you have a handicapped or ill member? Get their input via the phone or videotape a meeting with them and present it at the meeting. That will make that member really feel they are participating. Alternatively, call them from the meeting and ask their opinion or vote on whatever you are voting on. If you have email, then have members email in to give opinions or vote.

Spark interest by featuring well-known experts or perhaps political candidates with considerable veteran leanings. If well publicized, the presence of prominent people

enhances attendance. One base has SVWWII give their recollections and some even from surface Navy types WWII. Another has city officials to meetings. Although preferable, there is nothing that says your meetings must always just be about submarines.

Offer your members the chance to speak at your meetings. Offer your willing members the chance to speak at other community affairs. There are many schools/civic groups who would love to have you discuss submarines with them. This interest might filter into the community and reach those who do not know there is even a submarine veteran group in existence.

Evaluate outreach efforts after a meeting and track attendance number per meeting. Determining what worked and what did not helps assure that future meetings will be more effective. When participants see that the base has improved its process, their enthusiasm is renewed. Reviewing attendance lists can help track individual interests.

Maintain interest through follow-up. When people know their presence has been appreciated, they feel more inclined to continue with the process. Follow-up includes thank you letters, reports, phone calls, surveys, and distribution of new information. For invited participants, courtesy dictates a thank you note. Written responses are also appropriate to follow up unanswered questions or unresolved issues.

Court press coverage and establish good media relations. A Base community relations committee is a good idea. They should know what radio stations and newspapers they could count on for support of base activities. Museum publications are also another good source of information. Feeding them choice bits of news and keeping them, up-to-date helps assure they will cover the story well and in a timely fashion. Consider radio coverage as a cost effective alternative to reach broad segments of the public for special events. Paid ads, public service announcements (PSAs), and spot interviews can make more people aware of Navy and Submarine veteran issues and call attention to upcoming meetings and the unveiling of your projects.

Who leads the effort to improve attendance? The Base officers led by the Base Commander usually initiate these measures, developing strategies and techniques for improving attendance and tailoring the approach to meet base needs as well as project's particular demands. This could be one person or a committee of 2 or 3 for larger bases.

Even one committed Sub Vet can make a difference! The picture at right is of a \$7,000 check being presented to the North Little Rock Mayor for help with returning the USS Razorback. The money was raised by one motivated individual holding an on-line auction!



The sections that follow are reference material that may be helpful to you in the organization and structure of your meetings.

**TYPICAL MEETING STRUCTURE FOR PRESIDING OFFICER:**  
 (When you are ready to start and the Secretary is ready to record the minutes)

**CALL MEETING TO ORDER**  
 (REMI ND- EVERYONE TO SIGN IN - NOTE DATE AND TIME: \_\_\_\_\_ )

**"All Rise."**

**"Let us at this time, with a moment of silent prayer, remember our Shipmates who made the supreme sacrifice, that we may gather here in Peace." "We dedicate this meeting to our Shipmates on Eternal Patrol, to perpetuate their memories in our lives and to honor our Shipmates on active duty in the service of the first line of defense of our Nation."**

**Report the submarines and crew lost in this month**  
 (Source: Policy & Procedures Manual – Appendix)

**INVOCATION & CONDUCT "PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE"**

**" Be Seated"**

**MEMBER INTRODUCTION**

**"Would each member please rise, state your name and recite the boats you served/serve on for those new members and guests who don't know us."**

**CALL FOR READING OF MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

**Secretary read minutes**

**ANY DISCUSSION, CORRECTIONS, ADDITIONS?**

**CALL FOR MOTION TO ACCEPT**

**CALL FOR TREASURER'S REPORT**

**TREASURER'S reads REPORT**

**ANY DISCUSSION, CORRECTIONS, ADDITIONS?**

**CALL FOR MOTION TO ACCEPT**

**CALL FOR COMMITTEE REPORTS (EXAMPLES)**

**CHAPLAIN REPORT – BINNACLE LIST**

**MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE**

**STOREKEEPER REPORT**

**MEMORIALS AND CEREMONIES**

**SOCIAL EVENTS**

**(Short break)**

**FEATURED PROGRAM**

**(Short break)**

**OLD BUSINESS: "ANY OLD BUSINESS?"**

**NEW BUSINESS: "ANY NEW BUSINESS?"**

**FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER**  
**(LOCAL/NATIONAL SUBVET NEWS OF INTEREST)**

**BENEDICTION**

**ENTERTAIN MOTION TO ADJOURN**

**ADJORN MEETING - (NOTE TIME \_\_\_\_\_ )**

# Base Attendance Improvement Survey

Our Base is committed to improving the attendance and participation of its members. Please take a few minutes of your time to complete this brief questionnaire to help us improve attendance as well as provide your Base officers with topics of interest for the monthly meetings.

## MEETING ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

What city/area do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Which day of the week is best for you to attend the Base meetings?
2. Is the current meeting location convenient? YES NO
3. If not, please provide suggestions for an alternative location.
4. Is the cost of the meeting, including dinner or "Mid-Rats", a determining factor as to whether or not you attend the meetings?  
YES NO Comment: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Approximately how many meetings did you attend the past 12 months?
6. What did you like BEST about the meetings?
7. What do you like LEAST about the meetings?
8. What suggestions would you like to offer for improving meeting attendance and group participation?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What topic(s) would you like to see presented at the meetings? Please list at least one topic. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Are meetings that offer submarine video's valuable to you? YES NO
11. Would you like guest speakers to attend the meeting? YES NO
12. Your comments are welcome and valuable to us in determining how to serve our membership better. We would like to have your suggestions.
13. Who is our Base Commander? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Who is our District Commander? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Who is our Region Director? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Who is our National Commander? \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like personal follow-up, you may include your name and email below. Only responses will be published, all names will be withheld to maintain confidentiality.