



American MENSA®

Area Coordinator Handbook

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Introduction to the Area Coordinator Program

The purpose of the Area Coordinator Program is to encourage Mensans who live outside major metropolitan areas to become more involved in Mensa. The majority of members in some groups live in outlying areas. While they are usually willing to drive a distance to attend special events, most members are seldom willing to drive more than an hour for smaller events, and some who will never go that far would be happy to attend something more local. By encouraging the development of subgroup areas, more Mensans can become active participants of the Local Group.

Mensans live in all types of geographic areas. In many cases, those members who do not reside in a major metropolitan area place an even greater importance on their Mensa membership. They may not have as many opportunities in more rural areas to meet others who are like themselves. The creation of a subgroup with an active Area Coordinator gives these individuals the chance to get the most from their membership and in many cases provides them with the opportunity for face-to-face interaction with other Mensans.

One of the most important areas to look at to potentially support the growth of Mensa is some of the secondary cities around the country, which do not have a dedicated Mensa Local Group. By having Area Coordinators in some of these areas, we have the ability to tap into new markets and new sources of members.

One of the primary joys of being an Area Coordinator is encouraging potential members to join Mensa and turning these prospects into active, happy Mensans as well as new friends. The ideal Area Coordinator is someone who finds pleasure in his membership and wants to share that with others.

Getting Started

When a Local Group is spread over a geographically large area, Area Coordinators help plan and implement activities in the subgroup area(s). Even if the Local Group is not spread over a significantly large geographic area, there may still be impediments to participation at the local level. Several of our larger metropolitan areas have Area Coordinators as, even if the distance is not great, travel time may be significant. Outlying population areas or areas that are cut off from the center of the Local Group's major activities because of geography are prime areas in which to form subgroups to ensure a diversity of programs and to reduce travel distances.

When deciding what geographic territory to include in a local subgroup area, consider the distances, local economic routes, transportation, demographics, traditional groupings in the area, and governmental jurisdictions. As it is difficult to invigorate a group from afar, it is important to recruit an Area Coordinator as soon as possible as well as a Proctor, if possible. The Local Group Executive Committee (ExComm) should consult with members who live in the area to determine who would be a good fit for the position.

If more than one Area Coordinator is appointed to cover several distant areas, your Local Group may want to appoint an Area Coordinator Chair or have the Area Coordinator report to another member of the ExComm. Area Coordinators may be elected positions on the ExComm or may be appointed voting members of the ExComm – it depends on the Local Group bylaws. Many Local Group bylaws permit them to attend meetings electronically if it is hard for them to come in person. Please note that, even if Area Coordinators are not discussed in the Local Group bylaws, typically the ExComm has the authority to appoint nonvoting officers and/or committees to handle specific issues.

To get started, one person must take the initiative and arrange a regular event and encourage other local members to participate. Eventually, other members will sponsor additional events. On occasion the Program Chair or another member of the ExComm may agree to host a one-time event in the subgroup area and at the time of the event interest another member or two to continue hosting the event on a semi-regular basis.

Job Description

Basically, an Area Coordinator is a volunteer who welcomes new members, receives calls and questions from members, and schedules events in a limited geographic area within the Local Group; the Area Coordinator must live within this area. The Area Coordinator also assists the LocSec in the administration of the subgroup. Area Coordinators are included in the Mensa Directory published semi-annually in the *Bulletin*. To be included, the name of the coordinator and of the area (or subgroup) covered must be provided to the National Office by the LocSec.

An Area Coordinator is a coordinator for that geographic area. They are appointed or elected officers of the Local Group and should be listed in the Local Group newsletter to make contact easier. The Area Coordinator may act as a local membership officer and greet new members as they move into the area. Area Coordinators are also approached with questions relating to gifted children, SIGHT and testing so Area Coordinators are typically well-rounded Mensa members; however, other officers should be available to provide information to Area Coordinators on a timely basis. An AC is often asked for local resources even by the overall group SIGHT coordinator etc., such as “How can I take the Mensa test here?” or “Who can test Johnny locally?”, “Which are the local schools with good gifted programs?” or “Who can put up a SIGHT guest in your city?”

Area Coordinator Job Duties

Each Local Group may assign different duties to the Area Coordinator, but typically the duties will include some of the following:

- Plan and coordinate regular and special events within a specified subgroup area;
- Contact all existing and new members in the area and invite them to events in the subgroup area;
- Obtain publicity for the subgroup events;
- Write a regular column in the Local Group's newsletter to keep members informed on the activities of the subgroup (regular writeups will encourage more members to participate in the subgroup activities); and
- Use other means of communications to involve other members who live in the subgroup area, such as a Web page, chat group, e-mail list or other electronic means.

The Area Coordinator should have a budget to cover expenses relating to his/her duties, and the Area Coordinator should keep expenses reasonable. Without the support of the Local Group, a subgroup cannot succeed. A successful subgroup reflects well on the ExComm and the Local Group as a whole.

Planning Events

Types of Events

A. Regular Events

Mensa is a social organization and so those members who live in less populous areas are most likely interested in the same type of events as the main group hosts on a regular basis. Consider hosting similar events such as regular dinner events, special events and holiday theme parties. If your Local Group has a regular book club or discussion group, you may want to host a meeting in the subgroup area to discuss the same book or topic as is discussed at the main meeting. The idea is to have something that binds the group as much as possible. Encourage members to bring family and friends to scheduled events.

B. Special Events

Some examples of special functions are costume parties, games nights, panel discussions, new member parties, old-timers night, etc. which can be held either in members' homes or in public places. One asset of having subgroups within the Local Group is that members of the subgroup typically know their areas well and some of the subgroup areas have unique off-the-beaten track places of interest. If the subgroup area is the home of an unusual museum, restaurant or other educational or entertainment venue, the Area Coordinator can host an event there which may arouse the interest of other more distant Mensans who may wish to travel to the event. Open up events to members outside of the geographic area encompassed by the subgroup; invite members from the entire local group and neighboring local groups. You may be surprised at who shows. For an interesting event, Mensans may be willing to drive further distances. Of course, you may want to advertise some activities to members of the subgroup.

Frequency of Events

The Area Coordinator plans and coordinates events for the area. The first goal should be to get something going regularly at least once a month. What the event is would be at the Coordinator's discretion. It can just be an informational meeting to discuss prospects for future events. Plan to hold the first meeting in as centrally located venue as possible. Once local members start meeting each other, more ideas for future meetings will surface. After the first monthly event takes hold, try to encourage another member to host a different type of gathering on an occasional basis. And then watch the subgroup area grow.

Publicity

Within Mensa

Events should be scheduled well in advance and announced in the Local Group newsletter and listed on the Web site. Include enough detail and contact information so members will be able to easily find the event.

When there is not enough time to utilize the newsletter or a few days before the scheduled event, the Coordinator can use a personal touch and send a post card or an email or make a phone call. The combination of the newsletter/Web site and the personal touch work best especially when you are starting a new event. Following the event, consider a write-up of the event for the Local Group newsletter. Let everyone know how much fun you are having.

Outside Mensa

Based on the geography and population size of the subgroup area, many prospective members may not have previously considered Mensa membership. By publicizing subgroup activities, you may be able to increase the membership in your subgroup and the Local Group. Contact local news media, such as community newsletters, local radio and TV stations or local newspapers. Post notices of upcoming events at local libraries, post offices or any other location where people gather.

National Resources

Area Coordinators Email List

This list is open to all Area Coordinators and the discussion frequently revolves around ideas of what works and what hasn't. Many of the participating Area Coordinators started their subgroups and are happy to share their thoughts. To subscribe, send e-mail to AreaCoordinators-request@lists.us.mensa.org with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

AML Reports

Quarterly, AML provides Area Coordinators a copy of the ZIP code list of the Local Group as well as other helpful and pertinent information. Talk to your LocSec or Membership Officer about getting copies of listings of new Mensans, or even prospects or potential proctors, in your area. Having a proctor in the subgroup area would be a great advantage to the Local Group and would work on increasing membership within the subgroup and more members create more activities.

Publications

The Area Coordinator is a unique position; it involves responsibilities that frequently belong to the LocSec, Membership Officer, Proctor Coordinator and the Program Chair. The LocSec and Local Group Membership Officer Handbooks may provide invaluable information to the Area Coordinator. In addition, InterLoc frequently prints articles which may be of interest to the Area Coordinator.

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