

PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITIONS

*Honoring the Past,
Envisioning the Future*

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After many months of dedicated work, the presidential search committee has completed its assignment, and your institution is about to have a new leader. This is a time of excitement and anticipation on campus.

It's also the time to begin planning the presidential inauguration. You'll begin this work just as you and the college community are getting to know the new president, and their personality, preferences, and vision.

Some inaugurations take place shortly after the president has been hired; others are scheduled for later in the first year (often at the beginning of the next fall semester). Either way, this is a key moment in your communications strategy, and developing an initial messaging platform for the new president is an important early step.

Ideally, your platform will be both buttoned up and flexible enough to allow for adjustments without making major changes. That way, the inauguration experience can be integrated seamlessly into your overall communications effort, and the focus can be on bringing the college community together.



Coming Together

The appointment of a new leader can be regarded as what we think of as a transitional opportunity—one of the most important ones in higher ed. Much more than a formal ceremony, an inauguration offers you the chance to:

- Reach out to and connect with your key audiences, including strengthening bonds with donors
- Share the institution’s story from several compelling perspectives
- Broadcast a vision for the future
- Showcase your assets, from people to the campus
- Reaffirm shared values
- Strengthen connections with the community

The Benefits of a Theme

Choosing a theme for the inauguration has several benefits. A compelling theme:

- Helps to unite the school, and your guests, around the new leader
- Knits together distinct events into a coherent and meaningful whole
- Guides the overall look and feel
- Provides direction for content

It’s important that messaging be aligned and consistent across disciplines and platforms—from public relations to the different types of events that could be planned for this special time. You can also use the occasion to broaden the reach of your messaging via traditional and social media.

Is the local community an important audience? Plan a weekend event especially for the local population, offering community members the chance to mix with students, faculty, staff, and of course, the new president. Consider extending inauguration branding to the community itself, through signage and exhibits.



From Past to Future

Most inaugurations turn into a series of events, including:

- The formal induction ceremony is likely to be a moment when traditions are honored or rekindled. It's a great opportunity to position your institution among "the company you keep." Delegates from colleges, universities, and learned societies are your peers, and the audience should feel impressed and proud. We've seen keynotes from the presidents of other universities, and readings by U.S. Poet Laureates
- Panel discussions, featuring faculty, outstanding students, and distinguished guests

- A showcase of arts groups and affiliations
- Smaller or private dinners for select groups, from faculty and alumni to major donors
- A community event held in the daytime
- An informal party for students

Typically, the inauguration itself isn't the first event of the various gatherings you're organizing. It's also rarely the last. A good model to follow is to hold a ceremony steeped in tradition, while the pre- and post-events express the intersection of past, present, and future. The ceremonial aspects of the inauguration allow you to honor the past while the content steers guests toward a vision of the future.

MAKE IT BOLD



Extending Your Reach

Using different types of technology, you can open the events—especially the inauguration itself—to those unable to attend:

- Engage guests who can't attend either through your website, livestreaming, and/or Virtual Reality
- Build in a mechanism for following up with guests—those who attend in person and those unable to
- You may also decide to organize a presidential "listening" tour, or series of regional events designed to introduce the new president to important area audiences

You may decide on three or four days of events tailored to multiple audiences, or a classic inauguration ceremony followed by a small dinner at the president's home. Whatever the plan is, theme and execution present you with an important opportunity to convey the college's vision for the future, and an excellent platform for ongoing outreach.

WHAT CAN FEATS

do for you?

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