

**HANDBOOK: THE IN'S AND
OUT'S OF STARTING A
NEUROSURGERY INTEREST
GROUP**

Developed by:

**Young Neurosurgeons Representative Section of the
Council of State Neurosurgical Societies**

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How to Start a Neurosurgery Interest Group

Step One: Get Organized

- Find a core group of colleagues interested in neurosurgery
- Designate a leadership team (Chair, Vice Chair, Director of Events, Director of Outreach)
- Establish your chapter's bylaws (for ideas, please see resource entitled "Sample Bylaws")
- Reach out to neurosurgical residents in the academic programs affiliated with your school and ask for their help and support
- Find a motivated and helpful faculty neurosurgeon at your school or an affiliated hospital to become your advisor
- Establish contact with a medical school near to you to determine whether they already have a Neurosurgical Interest Group or Surgical Society. If they do, you may find ways to collaborate with them on educational events and mentoring programs.
- Begin the process of seeking funds (Please see "Tips for Fund-Raising") for more information.

Step Two: Spread the Word

- Plan an interest meeting at your school.
- Post flyers around your school
- Advertise in your school's list serves
- Make an announcement in your classes
- Tell students about the purpose of your Neurosurgical Interest Group (to provide a forum for students to learn more about a career in neurosurgery, get connected to mentors, etc)

Step Three: Have a meeting

- Do what you can to get people to attend. Offer food (pizza is usually a big draw), snacks or a door prize (you can raffle an anatomy book or surgical suture kit).
- Invite neurosurgical residents and senior (third and fourth) year medical students who are applying to neurosurgery residency
- Ask them to speak about their experiences in neurosurgery and/or on sub-internships

Step Four: Have Your Chapter Recognized

- Each medical school has different rules to become a recognized as an official chapter on campus.

Step Five: Get active

- Make sure that your chapter members are aware of neurosurgical research opportunities available at your medical school, affiliate hospitals and national societies.
 - Promote the meeting schedule of the neurosurgical societies (AANS, CNS)
- Consider hosting a residency fair in collaboration with surrounding neurosurgical interest group chapters, or with your school's surgical interest group chapter (please see "Organizing a Residency Fair: A Practical How-To")

Sample Neurosurgery Interest Group Bylaws

Sample Bylaws

BYLAWS

Article I – Name

The name of this organization shall be the _____.

Article II – Purpose

The purpose of our organization shall be to foster professional growth and career development of members of the _____ School of Medicine who are interested in the field of neurosurgery.

Article III – Compliance Clause

We agree to abide all regulations, all University policies, in addition to all federal, state, and local laws.

Article IV – Non-Discrimination

This organization shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

Article V – Membership

Membership shall be open to any currently enrolled student in the _____ School of Medicine.

Article VI – Election of Officers

A. The following officers shall be elected on a yearly basis –

_____.

B. An election shall be scheduled in __ (month)___ of each year to elect new officers by majority vote. Incumbent officers shall have the option to run for re-election.

C. Officers must be in good academic standing _____

D. Two-thirds of the active members must be present at the time of voting.

E. Newly elected officers should assume office immediately following the meeting in which they are elected.

Article VII – Executive Board

A. All elected officers shall serve on the Executive Board.

B. The duties of each officer shall be:

President- To preside over meetings and to serve as the official liaison between the Department of Neurosurgery and the students. In addition, the president will plan meetings that focus on

direct interaction with faculty, fellows, residents, etc. from Neurosurgery and its various subspecialties.

Secretary – To keep meeting minutes and post meeting minutes.

Treasurer- To keep track of all financial transactions and attend relevant training sessions/meetings.

Article VIII – Removal of Officers

A. Any member may make a motion for the removal of any officer providing that evidence is presented to support the removal. Grounds for removal include the inadequate fulfillment of duties or the violation of regulations described in University policies, or any federal, state, or local laws.

B. A two-thirds vote by the membership is needed to remove an officer. Two-thirds of the active members must be present at the time of voting.

C. An election for a new officer should be conducted at the next scheduled business meeting.

Article IX – Advisor

A. The Executive Board shall nominate one faculty or staff member (at least 75% full-time equivalent) to serve as advisor.

B. The active membership shall vote on accepting the advisor with a simple majority needed for acceptance.

C. Two-thirds of the active members must be present at the time of voting.

Article X – Amendments to the Constitution

A. Any member of the organization may present amendments to the Constitution at any regularly scheduled business meeting. After reading the current Constitution along with the proposed change, the change will be voted on. A four-fifths majority is necessary to pass the amendment. Two-thirds of the active membership must be present at the time of voting.

B. Amendments to the Constitution must be submitted to and approved by the Coordinator for Student Organizations before they become effective.

Organizing A Surgical Residency Fair: A Practical How-To

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Proposed Agenda for a Surgical Residency Fair

Timeline/To-Do's in Preparation for a Residency Fair

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Resource Two: Thank You Letter to Residency Directors

Resource Three: Student Sign-In Sheet

Resource Four: Residency Fair Survey

Resource Five: Email Advertisement of the Residency Fair to Students

Resource Six: Flyer

Resource Seven: Signs for the Day of the Residency Fair

Resource Eight: Reminder Email to Students

Sample Agenda for a Surgical Residency Fair

10:00-10:10 AM

Registration of Students and Residency Directors; Breakfast Available

10:10-11:00 AM

Residency Directors speak for 5-7 minutes each about their program what sets the program apart, and special opportunities available to residents.

11:00-1:00 PM

Small-group break-out sessions one-on-one with Residency Directors (one Director in a room); students are divided up into groups and rotate to each of the rooms with a residency director; depending upon the number of residency directors, students will have time to ask questions and learn more about the programs (10-25 minutes depending on the number of residency programs represented)

**LIST OF THINGS TO DO IN PREPARATION FOR A
SURGICAL RESIDENCY FAIR**

1. Residency Directors

- a. Email Residency Directors to invite them/let them know date/time/location of event. Keep track of their RSVPs [See Resource One; end of Aug]
- b. Make sure all Residency Directors who are coming to the event: [by mid-Sept]
 - i. Have directions and know where to park
 - ii. Have parking vouchers [check on this by early Sept]
 - iii. Have a contact phone number from one of us so they can let us know if they are lost/late, etc.
- c. After the event is over, send thank you notes to each Director who attended, and invite them again for next year [See Resource Two; within a week of the Residency Fair]

2. Event

- a. Entrance/Event Sign-in
 - i. Have sign in sheet for attending students [See Resource Three; get email addresses if possible]
 - ii. Student Survey
 1. Hand out survey regarding the event when students sign in so that they can fill out and hand it back before they leave [See Resource Four]
 - iii. If there are any students who are non AWS members, have membership cards available for them to fill out if they are interested in joining. [By early Sept]
 - iv. Have sheet of list of AWS benefits for students available to hand out to non-members students [See Resource Five]
- b. Site/Rooms [By early Sept]
 - i. Big Room/Gymnasium/Atrium w/ table set up panel style so we can introduce each director and they can give their power point shows about their programs (if they want)
 - ii. AV equipment for big room
 - iii. Small Rooms for small group breakout
 1. 2 residency directors per room and about 6-10 students per room
 2. Table chair set up for small rooms

3. Food

- a. Order food [Breakfast Items and Bag Lunch/Sandwiches for Residency Directors and Residents; at least two weeks before event]
- b. Make sure it arrives and is set up before the event begins
- c. Make sure any trash taken care of before/during/after the event
- d. Deal with any left over food

4. Advertising for the event [By second week of Sept]

- a. Blast email to surgical interest society student members in the state advertising the event [See Resource Five; by beginning of Sept]
- b. Individual schools can send out email to each class – ask Deans of each school to send it out
- c. Make fliers to post around school [See Resource Six; by beginning/mid Sept]
- d. Make signs for how to get to the rooms, etc. on the day of the event at the institution [See Resource Seven]

5. **Students** [by second week of Sept]
 - a. Keep track of student RSVPs from each school (we will need this for a head count for ordering food)
 - b. Send out a reminder email a day or so before the actual event reminding students that they RSVP'd and they should attend [See Resource Eight]
 - c. If any students need rides there, coordinate rides
 - d. Make sure students know how to get to the location [Offer directions on public transportation routes, driving directions, parking vouchers, etc]
 - e. Make sure that breakfast is advertised!
 - f. Tell students about the dress code [Business Casual]

RESOURCE ONE:

Dear Dr. RESIDENCY DIRECTOR,

My name is [Neurosurgery Fan]. I am one of the student leaders from the Neurosurgical Interest Group. I am emailing you on behalf of the surgical society leaders within STATE. We are planning to put together a Surgical Residency Fair for students who attend medical school in our state. We hope to hold this event on a Saturday sometime this September or October at the LOCATION. The event will be held in the morning from TIME (with a light breakfast provided).

I am contacting you to see if you might be able to participate in this event on one of the following Saturday mornings listed below:

SEPTEMBER SATURDAY

SEPTEMBER SATURDAY

OCTOBER SATURDAY

OCTOBER SATURDAY

If you are interested in joining us, please rank the dates that work best for you (1 = best, 4 = worst). I hope you can join us. If you could respond to my email by AUGUST DEADLINE, it would greatly help us secure rooms in a timely fashion.

Sincerely,

[Neurosurgery Fan]

Neurosurgical Interest Group Student Leader

School Name

Email

Phone

RESOURCE TWO:

Dear Dr. RESIDENCY DIRECTOR,

On behalf of the [INSERT] Chapter of the Neurosurgical Interest Group and the medical students in attendance, we would like to thank you for helping make this year's Surgical Residency Fair such a success! It was certainly a pleasure for us to meet you personally and get to know more about your program.

Student feedback so far has been very positive, and shows that the event was very productive for students in all stages of the application process. To this end, we also appreciate the valuable feedback you provided at the end of the fair, which we will try to implement for next year's fair to make it even more useful for the students. We hope that it was also an enjoyable event for you, and that you will consider participating in future Residency Fairs held by our chapter.

Sincerely,

[Neurosurgery Fan]

Neurosurgical Interest Group Student Leader

School Name

Email

Phone

RESOURCE FOUR:

SUBJECT: MEET SURGICAL RESIDENCY DIRECTORS!

Want to apply for Residency? Interested in Surgery? Want to meet Residency Directors from the top programs in (STATE)? Then come to the ACP (STATE) Surgical Residency Fair (YEAR)!

DATE TIME LOCATION

Reasons you can't afford to miss this Residency Fair:

- Hear Program Directors highlight unique aspects of their Surgical Programs
- Talk one-on-one with Program Directors; ask questions and learn more about the application process
- Learn more about the decision-making that goes into the selection of residents

Questions? Please contact [EMAIL](#)

RESOURCE FIVE

Neurosurgical Interest Group (SCHOOL)'s

Surgical Residency Fair

Who: ALL medical students

When: **TIME DATE**

Where: **LOCATION** [insert directions here]

Why: GET FACE-TO-FACE TIME with Surgical Residency
Directors from the top programs in **SCHOOL** (**LIST
PROGRAMS** AND MORE) BREAKFAST WILL BE PROVIDED

Please RSVP to [insert email here] by **DEADLINE**

RESOURCE SIX:

Neurosurgical Interest Group Surgical Residency Fair

DATE

Survey

Please rate the following items on a scale of 1-5:

	1 (not at all)	2	3	4	5 (very much)
I enjoyed attending this event					
I learned about residency programs in my area					
I found the location accessible					
I enjoyed the breakfast					
This event was well-advertised					
I would recommend this event to friends next year					

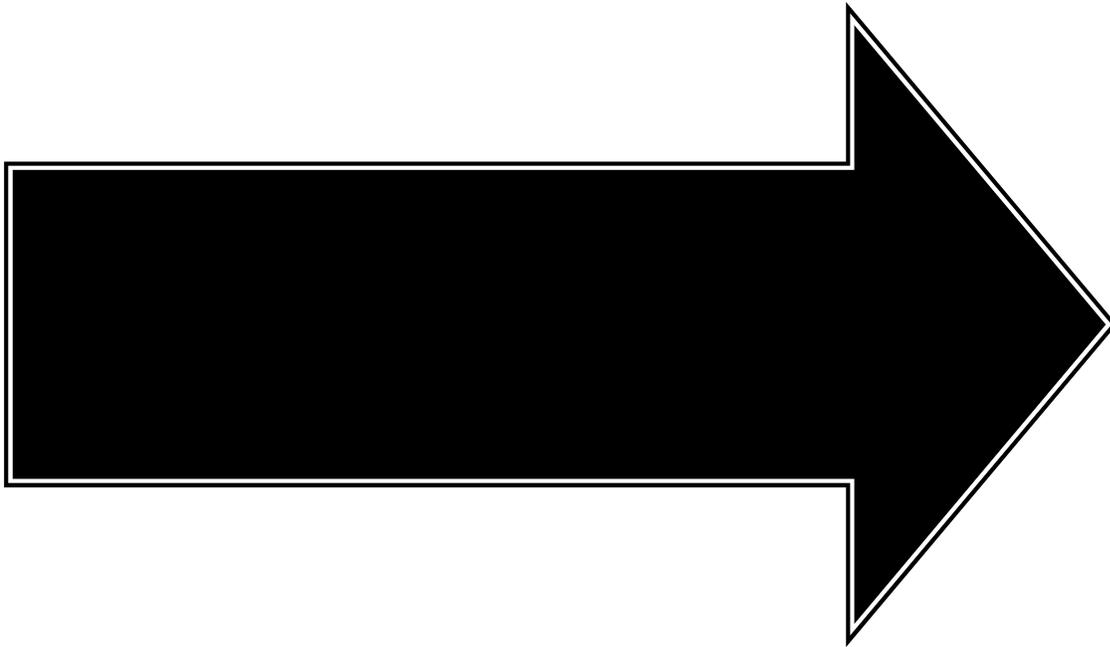
What did you find most helpful about this event?

What could have been done better?

Other comments/suggestions:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

Surgical Residency Fair



RESOURCE EIGHT:

SUBJECT: REMINDER: Surgical Residency Fair THIS Weekend!

Dear NAME,

This is a reminder that you have RSVP'ed to attend the Surgical Residency Fair, to be held this DATE at LOCATION (DIRECTIONS VIA PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND DRIVING DIRECTIONS). This event will run TIME. Please contact me if you have any questions (EMAIL).

Since Residency Program Directors will be present, suggested dress is Business Casual.

Thank you, and see you on Saturday!

Neurosurgery Fan

Neurosurgical Interest Group Student Leader

School Name

A Month-by-Month Sample Activity Schedule

Guiding Principles and Sample Activity Schedule

Neurosurgery interest groups around the country have, collectively, hosted a variety of useful events and activities for their student members. Several best practices emerge from this experience that can assist your student group in planning successful events.

Overall guiding principles for planning activities:

- 1) **Match the timeline of residency application process** for 4th year students
 - Busiest periods include months of November-January, when residency interviews occur for 4th year students.
 - May-September is the ideal time to hold events geared toward the application and interview process for 4th year students.
- 2) **Synchronize with exam schedule for first and second year students**, who are the primary audience for the events
 - One neurosurgery interest group (Harvard Medical School) reported having approximately 50 active student members on its e-mail list, with >50% of those being first-year students still exploring their specialty interest.
- 3) **Organize events of broad appeal and/or multiple events covering a range of focused interests** (neurosurgical subspecialties, health care policy and neurosurgery, international neurosurgery)
- 4) **Benefits that should be provided by activities**
 - *Students*: information and contact opportunities for research, shadowing, and networking. Free food is a mundane, but often important, benefit for students who may be uncertain about their interest in neurosurgery.
 - *Faculty or resident volunteers*: opportunity for mentorship, and to attract student collaborators to research projects.
 - *Medical School*: foster environment of academic interest in a surgical subspecialty among students who otherwise may not have considered it.

Sample Event List for a Student Group

In preparing this report, we spoke to student leaders of neurosurgery interest groups to assemble an ideal sample schedule of activities.¹ The following list is based on that information, and represents one neurosurgery interest group's real and planned activities (with comments listed below) during a single academic year.

Events successfully held:

Transition of leadership board meeting

- New club leadership only, private meeting
- Often middle of the year (January?), influence of USMLE Step I is problematic in throwing off schedule.
- Ensure smooth switchover with planned elections and logical transition plan put in place well in advance.
- Encourage written documentation of by-laws, record-keeping for future generations of student club leaders

Intro to Careers in Neurosurgery

- Speakers on evening panel on various subspecialties within neurosurgery, training requirements for each.
- Most feasible at larger academic departments.
- Open to questions afterwards.

Neurosurgery Meet and Greet

- Informal mixer with food and beverages, networking between students and faculty.
- Limit number of student attendees (RSVP only) in order to ensure a favorable student:faculty ratio.

Softball game – recreational activity

- Students vs. faculty. For students, a valuable opportunity to interact with faculty in a fun and non-intimidating setting. For faculty, serves as practice before the inter-program regional softball championship.
- Informal lunch afterward.

¹ Particular thanks to Ben Schanker from Harvard Medical School and Griffin Baum from Emory School of Medicine, who each served as presidents of their school neurosurgical interest groups and contributed valuable first-hand experience to this report.

Applying and Matching in Neurosurgery

- Residents, faculty, and 4th year medical students on panel.
- Emphasize on producing a strong application to residency programs
- Ideally, local Program Director as speaker on what programs seek in candidates.
- Discussion of interviewing scenarios that students may encounter, and useful techniques to make an interview successful.
- Sub-internship experiences from 4th year students.

Further ideas on planned events:

Neuroanatomy teaching (crossover with academic preclinical neuroscience course)

- Neurosurgery faculty called in to teach preclinical medical students about neuroanatomy or neurosurgical dissections / cadaveric procedure demonstrations

Research Roundup

- Invitation of neurosurgery residents and faculty to provide brief summary talks about their academic research to interested medical students. Inspired by the “TED talks” concept at www.ted.com
- “Speed dating” matchup provided immediately after event for students who are interested in contributing to a project as clinical or lab research assistants.

A List of Potential Funding Sources

Funding the Group

Some events may not require funding, or may be feasible using in-kind donations from medical schools (meeting space) or neurosurgical departments (equipment, expertise). However, it is ideal for a student interest to have access to funding for planning a broad spectrum of events, including those involving food, travel, equipment, or other expenses.

In speaking to student leaders of successful neurosurgery interest groups, it became clear that funding was generally obtained from 2 sources:

- **Medical School Student Council or Student Affairs Office**
 - o Requires being a recognized student organization.
 - o One student group we spoke to reported funding of \$300-400 per semester.
- **Neurosurgical Department**
 - o One student group we spoke to has consistently been able to split the costs of events with the medical school's Neurosurgery Department.
 - o Neurosurgery Departments benefit by attracting students to Grand Rounds, to research projects within the department, to rotating on the service as elective students, to applying as residency candidates, and to the field of neurosurgery in general.
 - o Critical to get faculty on board as key supporters or advisors to group. Support of Chairman or Program Director is essential.
 - o Faculty have taken initiative on new or creative events where connections with group have been historically strong.

Note: In some other fields (such as neurology), student interest groups have benefited from national-level centralized initiatives to fund and connect these student groups on behalf of the professional society. The American Academy of Neurology sponsors medical student groups in Neurology (providing roughly ~\$300 per semester in funding) and enabling official groups to network and connect with one another. No known such program currently exists within neurosurgery. However, it may be beneficial to partner with other interest groups, such as Neurology, from a funding standpoint if they have excess funding for neuroscience-oriented events. In addition, such funding opportunities may emerge in the future for neurosurgery interest groups.

Residency Program Contacts

Medical School	Contact Person	Contact Email
Mayo Clinic Oakland	Fred Meyer	meyer.frederic@mayo.edu
University/Beaumont	Chaim B. Colen	chaim.colen@gmail.com
Pitt	Douglas Kondziolka	kondziolkads@upmc.edu
U Mich	Jason Heth	jheth@med.umich.edu
UCLA	Langston Holly	LHolly@mednet.ucla.edu
UCSF	Jillian Maliszewski	maliszewskij@neurosurg.ucsf.edu
UNC	Eldad Hadar	hadar@med.unc.edu
Univeristy of Minnesota	Cornelius Lam	Lamxx023@umn.edu
University at Buffalo	Jody Leonardo	jleonardo@ubns.com
University of Arizona	G.Michael Lemole, Jr,	mlemole@surgery.arizona.edu
University of Illinois at Peoria	Julian Lin	jlin@uic.edu
University of Kansas	Jules M. Nazzaro	jnazzaro@kumc.edu
University of Kentucky	Karin Swartz	karin.swartz@uky.edu
University of Louisville	Haring Nauta	hjnaut01@louisville.edu
University of Maryland	E. Francois Aldrich	faldrich@smail.umaryland.edu
University of Missouri	N. Scott Litofsky	litofskyn@health.missouri.edu
University of Oklahoma	Timothy Mapstone	timothy-mapstone@ouhsc.edu
University of Tennessee	Frederick Boop	fboop@semmes-murphey.com
University of Utah	Randy Jensen	randy.jensen@hsc.utah.edu
University of Vermont	Michael Horgan	michael.horgan@vtmednet.org
Unversity of Nebraska	William Thorell	wthorell@unmc.edu
USC	Steven Giannotta	giannott@usc.edu
USF	Fernando Vale	fvale@health.usf.edu
UT Houston	Bryan Oh	Bryan.C.Oh@uth.tmc.edu
UT Southwestern	Kim Rickert	kim.rickert@utsouthwestern.edu
UVA	John Jane, Jr.	jaj2K@virginia.edu
Wake Forest University	Thomas L. Ellis	tlellis@wakehealth.edu
Washington University	David Limbrick	limbrickd@wudosis.wustl.edu
Wayne State University	Jay Jagannathan	jjaganna@med.wayne.edu
West Virginia University	Charles L. Rosen	crosen@hsc.wvu.edu
Yale	Charles C. Duncan	charles.duncan@yale.edu