Inviting Professors to Speak at your Event: Best practices

When possible, include in the following in the invitation:

* Date, time, location (with address), duration of entire event
* Title and abstract of event (or link to website / facebook event page)
* Expectations: is it a formal talk? an informal roundtable? an open discussion? How long should the profs remarks be? 5-10 minutes? 20 minutes?
* How strict is the format/content of the prof’s talk? In other words, are they free to speak about whatever they want or are you looking for a particular topic?
* Will s/he present alone or will other participants be present?
* Can/should s/he use a PPT, video, audio, etc.?
* What other expectations are there? (In most events, a speaker just speaks and participates in a Q&A, and there is an organizer that facilitates the rest of the event). If you want the speaker to prepare something else (discussion questions, conversation facilitation, etc.), explicitly state that.
* Is there a meal? Reception?
* Availability to meet or respond via email to answer questions, etc.

In the ideal scenario, you give your speaker(s) enough forewarning that you have not yet determined the precise date/time/location. In those instances, you are able to work around your speaker’s schedule.

Timing

* Give ample forewarning. For a 10-minute talk, at least one month in advance. For a 20-to-30-minute talk, at least two months, but ideally longer.
* When events take place in non-business hours (after 5PM), things get tricky because professors have children, live off campus, etc. I conducted an informal survey of my colleagues at UBC and abroad, and they said for an after-hours event, they require a minimum of two months’ notice, because of arranging childcare and scheduling around other commitments and life.
* If the event happens off campus, give more notice (2 months minimum).
* The bottom line is, profs need plenty of warning, because we are very busy. We teach classes, mentor graduate and undergraduate students, write books and articles, serve on myriad committees, and have private lives. So, aim for two months of notice to allow the prof to prepare a quality presentation.

Below is an invitation that I received on February 15 for a March 24 event. As you’ll note in the first paragraph, the organizer had already informed me about the event (date, topic, length of talk) verbally in January.

Dear Tamara,

I know I mentioned this to you some time ago, but I have been remiss in following up. Here is more information about the event to mark the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Monseñor Romero, an incident that (as I am sure you know) was one of the tipping points as the country moved towards full-blown civil war.  
  
First, it will take place on March 24, 3-5pm, in the Choi Centre at UBC.

The basic idea is to look back on the past forty years and identify some of the key elements of that history, of which of course Romero’s death was merely one. There will be contributions also from Max Cameron, myself, and we hope (via Skype) Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, formerly of *Radio Venceremos* and now of the Museo de la Palabra e Imagen, as well (perhaps!) from Susan Soux, who was involved in the process that led to the peace accords of 1992.  
  
I suggest that each of speak for 5-10 minutes (no more than 10), and then open up a general discussion with the audience.  
  
The event will also be accompanied by an exhibition from the Museo de la Palabra e Imagen.

Do let me know if you have any questions.