

HOW TO PLAN A CONFERENCE

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Step One - Planning

Decide who is going to be involved in organising the conference. Set up a conference planning committee. Arrange a meeting to establish what work needs to be undertaken, by whom and set timescales. Obtain handover notes if this event has been previously organised by other committees.

At this initial planning meeting it is essential that you set your event objectives.

For example these can be along the lines of:

- What is the conference aiming to achieve?
- What as an organisation are you trying to achieve by hosting this event?
- Who are you trying to impact?
- Define your target audience in terms of delegates and sponsors?
- How do you define success?

Decide on dates for regular planning meetings and produce notes from meeting together with action points.

Step Two Work in Progress

From the planning meeting draw up an activity schedule together with list of actions, status of actions and deadline dates. This will become your working schedule.

At each planning meeting produce an agenda based on the headings of the activity schedule. Produce meeting notes together with actions. These together with the activity schedule will be what you use to plan your event.

Step Three Producing the Conference

To put the conference product in place you will need to action the following:

Conference Budget: This needs to be drawn up and must contain a revenue and expenditure section together with an actuals column. Always include a contingency figure, say 10% of the estimated total.

Programme: Clearly identify your objectives so that both you and your speakers know what the conference is aiming to achieve and delegate expectations are met

Marketing and PR plan: You need to identify how you are going to reach your target audience. Websites will need to be designed or updated.

Event Schedule: This is used to plot all the various activities that are taking place throughout the conference.

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Step Three Products and suppliers

Once you have produced your conference budget you can confirm your suppliers and product requirements:

- PCO:* Professional conference organisers can help you plan the conference as well as manage delegate registration.
- Venue:* Ensure it is big enough to hold all the various conference activities. Confirm with the venue all costs to be incurred
- Accommodation:* This may need to be placed on provisional hold if the conference venue cannot provide or has insufficient space
- Audio Visual equipment and production:* This is something either the venue can provide or you can source in-house. Alternatively obtain up to three quotes from conference / AV companies
- Catering, entertainment, transport, delegate bags etc:* Make sure you have thought of everything at this stage so that there are no surprises in the budget later on

Step Four Implementation

Make sure you have procedures in place for managing all the various conference activities. These procedures and booking forms should cover processing registrations and finance, speaker, session, workshop requirements, sponsorship and exhibitor guidelines, venue and accommodation requirements.

Remember to update your activity and events schedule and to attend regular planning meetings in order to report back on progress.

Step Five Post Event Evaluation + Reports

Produce and hand out evaluation forms for delegates, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors. Arrange a meeting straight after the event in order to obtain feedback from the organisers / committee members. Set a final meeting in order to review the budget, evaluation feedback, outstanding delegate payments etc.