

Regional meetings and conferences

These guidelines supplement the SPA Guidelines for Organising Conferences. They give additional advice for those organising international or regional conferences.

This document is divided into 3 sections:

- Before the meeting
- During the meeting
- After the meeting

Before the meeting

Planning

- ❑ Agree the purpose of the meeting and set a planning timeline
- ❑ Allocate responsibility for different tasks, dividing this between local organisers and the international committee members
- ❑ Plan well ahead to ensure wide participation

Program

- ❑ Should be related to identified regional needs and the purpose of the meeting
- ❑ If possible, should also cover topics given priority by funding agencies
- ❑ Should ensure participation of regional delegates as speakers and panel members
- ❑ 'Round table' format may be preferable to a series of lectures
- ❑ Consider whether sessions will be in one or more languages and whether translation facilities are required
- ❑ Ensure local protocols are observed and that customs and ceremonies are included appropriately, and encourage local content in the program (but not to the detriment of the meeting's purpose)
- ❑ If an ICA meeting, include time for official meetings
- ❑ If possible, accompany the formal ICA meeting with a professional or training program where locals may be able to participate
- ❑ Decide whether papers will be published for circulation at the meeting, or as conference proceedings, and set timeframes for their preparation and collation
- ❑ A website can be a useful way to provide information about the conference but be conscious of the infrastructure available to likely participants

Participants

- ❑ Decide whether participation will be 'by invitation only' or open
- ❑ Decide which members, regional representatives, local professionals, sponsors or potential sponsors, government representatives, etc will be invited
- ❑ Balance of regional representation and gender may be important for the meeting's purpose or for some sponsor's requirements

Hosting

- ❑ Determine who will host the meeting and what responsibility they have. This may differ depending on whether the host is an institution, an association or an ICA body.
- ❑ You may need to advise participants about local climate conditions and cultural behaviour

Funding

- ❑ Decide whether a registration fee will be charged and whether the conference is intended to break even or return a profit
- ❑ If there is a lack of resources for particular delegates to attend regional meetings you will need to raise funds.
- ❑ Decide what costs you aim to cover through fundraising - travel of delegates, stopovers, per diem allowance, accommodation, registration, conference costs (catering, venue, transport, etc)
- ❑ Always start fundraising locally, and use past experience for examples of potential sponsors
- ❑ Encourage potential delegates to seek their own sources of funding.
- ❑ Develop a standard 'business case' to send to potential sponsors including information on program, potential delegates and their needs, etc
- ❑ Research funding agencies and their criteria. Develop contacts. Examples of some sponsoring agencies are UNESCO, aid agencies
- ❑ Commercial sponsorship can keep costs down and enable wider participation

Budget

- ❑ closely allied to your funding strategy
- ❑ determine the financial commitment of the host country (in cash and/or in kind) and the regional branch/ICA
- ❑ costs and likely revenue will determine many things - the size of the conference, the amount of support provided to delegates, the number of delegates who can be funded.
- ❑ Be conscious of exchange rates and financial regulations in your planning - in the Pacific for example it will be more expensive to organise a conference in a US\$ or Euro economy than in an Australian, New Zealand or Fiji dollar economy.
- ❑ Common elements of the budget are:
 - ❑ Venue
 - ❑ Catering
 - ❑ Travel
 - ❑ Communications
 - ❑ Local transport
 - ❑ Speakers fees, materials
 - ❑ Printing
 - ❑ Materials for delegates (satchels, etc)
 - ❑ Translation (if required)

Local arrangements

- ❑ It is essential to have someone locally who is able to handle local arrangements e.g. venue, transport, communications, etc
- ❑ Developing countries may not have facilities for conferences. Hotels are possible but may be more expensive. Local educational venues or community meeting places may be suitable.
- ❑ Accommodation may need to be split if there is not much available. Ensure delegates are able to get to the venue easily.
- ❑ Communications e.g. computer use, telephone, fax facility may be needed
- ❑ Language. If multiple languages are spoken in the region decide how this will be handled - an agreed working language or translation

- ❑ Promotion to local community - radio, banners, etc. have a media release prepared in advance
- ❑ International delegates will want to experience the flavour of the country: ensure local culture is integrated into the program and events

Travel

- ❑ Check what visas are required. Be sure to include stopover or transit locations as some countries will require a visa even for a few hours (e.g. Fiji nationals require a visa for Guam even though in transit)
- ❑ Shop around for fares - some may be cheaper or easier to organise from different countries. Alternatively it may be simplest and give a bulk discount to work through one agent

During the meeting

Administration

- ❑ Enlist local helpers (you can never have too many!) for preparing satchels and papers, room set up and tear down, photocopying, etc
- ❑ Make sure you have access to office facilities - phone, PC, printer, paper supplies, and copier. If necessary budget for this item
- ❑ Distribute an evaluation form and ask delegates to complete it at or before the final session of the conference

Payments

- ❑ If you are paying a per diem allowance or reimbursing travel costs, develop a standard form which delegates can sign to show receipt of payment
- ❑ Always have two signatories for accounts and a second person available to check cash reimbursements

Media coverage

- ❑ Issue a media release and have a local person available to give interviews
- ❑ Make sure someone takes photographs of official parts of the conference and the delegates. These can be used in reporting, promotion and can be sold to delegates

After the meeting

- ❑ Send letters of thanks to sponsors, supporters, speakers, dignitaries
- ❑ Prepare a report on the conference that can be summarised for newsletters and other publications, sent to sponsors, etc
- ❑ Make financial reports to sponsors
- ❑ Compile results of the evaluation forms so that future conferences can take account of people's views. The evaluation is also useful to send to sponsors.
- ❑ Prepare and distribute minutes of any official meetings
- ❑ Report as required to sponsors according to their timetables
- ❑ Edit and publish conference proceedings (if appropriate)