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)