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)