

## Conference – Organisational pointers

### 1.) Venues

- a. Conference centres. Conference centres are expensive to rent venue spaces and you are a captive audience for their catering which is also not cheap. There are a lot of hidden costs such as AV, technicians, speaker room supervision, security, Goods delivery and cleaning so make sure you get a detailed costing of everything.

If it's a big conference or an international conference a number of the states support their conference centres so it's very important that this avenue be secured before choosing the venue. Generous states are QLD, VIC and SA. Currently NSW does nothing.

- b. Hotels. They try and catch you with cheap venue costs but these are linked to minimum spends on catering for which prices are expensive [2 to 3 times convention centres]. They also try to get you to commit to taking a set number of hotel rooms for delegates.
- c. Universities. These are the cheapest option but have the disadvantage of not being designed for conferences and having little open space for exhibitions and catering. They normally don't have in house catering but there are good external companies that can do this. The other disadvantage is the limited availability. You can't run an event during term time.

### 2.) Commercial involvement

Commercial partners are getting increasingly hard to get. Many of the Chemistry based conferences are highly specialised and have little attraction power for sponsors or exhibitors. To make matters worse the marketing budgets of possible partners are getting cut and many are moving off shore so you are not dealing with Australian based players.

It's important to treat the commercial income as the "cream" and not depend on them to pay for the routine conference costs. Budgets should aim at breaking even at the expected number of delegates before any commercial partner income.

### 3.) Delegate planning

Delegates are the majority income source for any conference.

- a. The starting point is how many are you expecting. If it's a regular local event then you will have a good idea of numbers but still be conservative. Money is tight people are becoming time poor and there are likely to be competing events some where. If it's an international conference then the watch words of being conservative is even more relevant. Australia is a long way from the rest of the world and expensive to get to and expensive to stay so overseas visitors can not be counted on. Unless there is a very large local interest in the subject matter you should only plan on 60% of normal event attendance numbers.
- b. The next issue is student %. Student pricing normally contributes very little to the fixed cost proportions of conference expenses basically covering the variable costs.

The trend over the last 4-5 years is for students to make up a large proportion of the conference delegate demographic, > 40% and this has to be catered into the budget planning. The suggestion is 45%. It's better to err on the side of caution.

- c. Earlybird. % Again recent history indicates that the majority of delegates register at earlybird rates and by majority we are talking 85 – 90%. Again a sign of the tight financial times. Large % of full conference rates makes the budget bottom line look good but are not achievable.
- d. The price. A balancing act. Has to be enough to make some surplus but not too much to price yourself out of the market. The dinner is some thing else to factor into this as many look at the package price. The rego price will, at the end of the day, depend on the expenses. So the advice is to think carefully about the expense items. Particularly the catering.
- e. Participation. Delegates are more likely to register if they are participating actively. The number of talks should be maximised [quality obviously paramount]. Don't go for long tea breaks and lunches, start early – finish late if you have enough good quality abstracts. Use 5 minute presentations as better than posters, gives exposure particularly for the ECR.

#### 4.) Program

The program quality is obviously important but the themes have to be relevant to what is going on in the subject area at that time to have any pulling power

The program attracts delegates [and sponsors] so a fairly detailed program has to be available at least 3 months out. It doesn't have to be perfect but must cover all the important bases. Label it "subject to change" and every time it is modified use this as subject matter for a newsletter. This is also important for overseas visitors who have to get visas to visit Australia. Some of these take a long time so the sooner the program's out the sooner they can make their decision.

Plenary / Keynote Speaker selection is obviously important and should be the core of the program structure BUT be careful with the financial assistance offers. Make them a definite fixed amount of money not a loose travel and hotel expenses offer because you have absolutely no control over the latter and could land yourself in financial trouble or have an unhappy star speaker.

#### 5.) Professional Conference Organiser.

A large cost item. Firstly for large conferences >350 they really have to be used as the organising is time consuming and quite complex however below this thought should be given to using NO or a combination of NO and organising committee.

PCO costs vary but are normally around \$100 per delegate and \$20 per abstract. Only the tip of the iceberg as there are lots of other costs below. Websites, conference apps, advertising, disbursements [a personal favourite = slush fund].

We have a preferred supplier and they should be used unless good reason exists to use others. It's always a good idea to get a "scope of work" from them. What are they going to do – what are they responsible for? Don't accept minimum number limits. They should be responsible in a good part for delegate raising. Don't accept fixed management fees straight off - cost per head could be better.

## Conference Jobs to do

Project planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Finalise conference dates</li><li>Set abstract opening date</li><li>Set registration opening dates</li><li>Set abstract closing date</li><li>Set early bird closing dates</li><li>Set program completion date</li><li>Set dates for completion of website</li><li>Set dates for news letter schedule</li><li>Set dates for various prospectus and program completion</li><li>Produce planning time line</li><li>Estimate delegate numbers</li><li>Estimate exhibitor numbers</li><li>Estimate room requirements</li><li>Set standards for catering - what / when</li></ul>
Venue interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Determine location(s) to be investigated</li><li>Investigate likely state and city support available</li><li>Identify likely venues</li><li>Review venue facilities for delegate numbers and room requirements</li><li>Obtain quotes from venues for space</li><li>Get quotes from venues on catering required</li><li>Select venues</li><li>Get detailed quote from venues based on skeleton program including all likely rental expense items and AV costs</li><li>Get catering quote</li><li>Select venues</li><li>Review for flexibility and sign contract</li><li>Determine likely venues for dinner</li><li>Obtain quotes for dinner</li><li>Select venues</li><li>Adjust room and catering dependant on registrations</li><li>Work with venue AV to ensure streamline speaker prep process.</li><li>Selecting exhibition build contractor</li><li>Determine layout for exhibition</li><li>Design of registration desk</li><li>Approval from venue for exhibition design</li></ul>
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Logo design</li><li>Obtain Conference URL</li><li>Set up website</li><li>Maintain website as event develops</li><li>Design initial marketing material - fliers &amp; newsletters</li><li>Design newsletter format</li><li>design commercial partner prospectus</li><li>Set up prospective delegate data base</li><li>Identify prospective commercial partners</li><li>Design marketing program for delegates</li></ul>

design marketing program for commercial partners  
Executing marketing program  
Produce program for conference  
Designing signage for the venue  
Having signage made and erected  
Ensure partners get appropriate exposure  
Do post event surveys to identify problem areas.

#### Registration

Setting up fee structure  
Putting into system  
Receiving payments  
Acknowledging payments  
Ensuring all info is provided  
Dealing with queries  
Refunding drop outs  
Producing delegate tags  
Running the registration at the venue  
Providing certificate of attendance  
For international conferences

#### Abstract

Setting up abstract theme structure in system  
Receiving abstracts  
Acknowledge receipts  
Give access to reviewers to rank  
Appraise authors of review result  
Confirm they will present  
Reconcile presenters with registrations  
Follow up non registered presenters  
Notify technical committee of drop outs/non registrations  
Inform presenters of speaker preparation and requirements  
Accumulate all abstracts for dissemination to delegates

#### Technical Program

Determine conference theme  
Determine program structure - days/streams topics  
Determine session times / various types of speaker time slots  
Create program skeleton  
Identify plenary and keynote speakers and stand ins  
determine honorarium values for speakers  
Invite speakers - fill plenary then keynote  
Determine abstract topic requirements [how many for each theme]  
Review abstracts and identify orals for program  
Identify back up abstracts  
Inform oral presenters of selection  
Ask "down grades" if poster OK  
Follow up with presenters who have not registered  
Decide on poster session format  
Fill in speaker program  
Inform presenters of presentation times  
Inform technical committee of any speaker time issues  
Finalise speaker schedule

- Let poster presenters know of position and date
- Identify session chairs and back ups
- Invite session chairs
- Finalise session chair schedule

#### Social program

- Opening ceremony format
- Dinner format
- Poster session catering
- Any site visits
- Any partner program

#### Financing

- Setting original budget dependant on original parameters
- Maintaining budget current as items change
- Receiving moneys
- Paying deposits as come due
- paying expenses as they become due
- Chasing non payers
- Managing cashflow
- maintain unique accounts for the event
- identifying financial problems early
- Working with committee to minimise impact of problems
- Review all contracts for suitability
- Keep copies of all contracts
- Ensure contracts are followed by all signatories
- Ensure GST is controlled and paid correctly

#### Exhibition

- Will there be a registration - how big
- Identify area for exhibition - should be enough room for feeding delegates and close to poster area
- find and appoint a exhibition build contractor
- Decide on booth size
- Design floor plan for exhibition area.
- Get venue's OK of the plan
- Decide on duration of exhibition bump in and out times