
Tips on Hosting a Conference

There are many things to consider when hosting a conference. This document is designed as a guideline, only to help you understand what others have done to have a successful conference.

You will need only ONE person to chair and no more than 6 committee people to help

Don't panic, this document is not the end all to be all. These are just ideas not a check list.

Timelines for what, when, where etc:

- 1 - Thursday - Arrive at hotel, prep work, stuff bags etc.
- 2 - Friday – staff registration table
- 3 - Saturday – staff registration table, staff credential table for meeting
- 4 - Monday take a deep breath, clean up and go home

When to host a conference:

The Tri-State Fall Conference is to be held during Columbus Day Weekend in October. Keep in mind the weather conditions during this time of the year. Especially when planning rides.

Host Hotels:

The most difficult decision to make as a chapter is WHERE to host the conference.

Chamber of Commerce Visitors / Travelers Bureau:

Discuss with them the number of hotels in the area that have the capacity to host the conference. Tour the top 4 places recommended, make a decision as to where to host the conference. Remember the hotels are **competing for your business.**

Consideration should be given to the size, location, accessibility, parking availability, shopping availability nearby the hotel. Hotels within walking distance of shopping and restaurants will provide the members and their spouses with something to do outside of your plans.

Ask the hotels / chamber of commerce to see if there are any other events in your city at the same time as you want to host your convention. Are there any sporting competitions, other conventions, etc. that are going on that would eat up the rooms in the local hotels?

Banquet Hall / Hospitality Room / Conference Meeting Room;

Negotiate a contract with a host hotel - where the break even point is set at 100 people. The costs of the rooms are important, the higher the cost, the fewer members will attend. If you can come in less than \$100.00 / night including taxes, you are on the right track. Rooms that start at \$130.00 ++ are not going to attract the older pensioned members.

You need a good hotel that will work with you to keep the prices down for the rooms and the food. Watch for hidden add-ons in the hotel contract - remember they need your business - do not let them take control. An example would be an additional \$10.00 for parking over the cost of the rooms.

You will need a hospitality room(s) to be made available for the entire weekend. You need some place for the members to gather upon arrival, Friday night and Saturday during the day. Is this room large enough to accommodate a good size group? Can the over flow go just outside the door to this room? Are they offering you a tiny room where 12 people can sit and the rest are in the hallway? Turn that one down...

You will need a conference room for the Saturday meeting. Seating should be prepared for about 100 people.

If you have sufficient attendance, many hotels will waive the costs of booking these rooms. Some conferences use the banquet hall for the entire Saturday night. Ensure again there are plenty of (free) beer, water and cold soda for our members.

You will need staff to man the hospitality room both Friday/Saturday nights if needed. Their job is to ensure there are sufficient beer, water, soda, and junk food on the tables.

You will need staff to a table at the conference meeting room on Saturday to check the member's credentials upon entering the meeting. Your staff must ask to SEE the membership cards for all those entering the room. No membership card, no entry – period!

Generally there are two lists on the table – one for voting members and one for non voting members. The members complete the appropriate form themselves indicating who they are; *the conference secretary will provide the paperwork for this part of the meeting.*

Provide clear separation of seating for voting and non voting members. Members who are not chapter Presidents, need a letter from their chapter President indicating they can vote at this meeting... or an all encompassing letter.

Have sufficient copies of the previous conference minutes and the current agenda available for the members to retrieve upon entry to the meeting room. Remember the conference executive will help you with this part of the meeting.

Negotiate the meals for the conference:

Will there be breakfast served at the hotel on Saturday and Sunday mornings? Many chapters are no longer providing breakfasts, to keep the costs down. Is there a restaurant nearby for those that *need* to eat in the mornings? Does the hotel offer a breakfast; can you get a discount on the breakfast? Do you need to hand out breakfast tickets with the registration package?

What will be on the menu for the Saturday night banquet? Include both red and white meats as well as pasta and salads for those vegetarians.

Do you have enough beer? How much is a good guess. Past conferences have hosted from 100 to 300 people. *When negotiating for the beer, ensure that you can return any unopened containers to help minimize the chapter's costs.*

Consider if the hotel must provide the beer, or can you work on getting several beer distributors to compete for your business. Can the hotel purchase the beer from your choice of providers and return the un-used containers?

Do you have sufficient soda and water for those non drinkers? Do you have several large coolers to take care of the various types of water and soda? Is there plenty of ice? Normally the host hotel takes care of providing you with ice.

Is there a ban on members brining their own cooler with personal beverages such as wine or soda? This needs to be addressed before the conference to avoid being embarrassed by hotel staff who could come along and tell you to have those coolers removed.

Do you have enough munchies? Chips / pretzels / other junk food that can be put out on the tables for the hospitality room or in the banquet room after dinner.

Attendance Registration & Tracking:

Put one person in charge... someone who knows how to run a computer and related software. You need to keep track of the people who have registered for the conference. Use an excel spreadsheet with the names, address and other pertinent details of the registration package.

Why Excel? You can sort the various information columns and print out those different lists for the registration table.

Look at previous registration forms for an idea of what to place on it.

Contact your bank to ensure they will accept Canadian Checks that are made out to your chapter in "U.S. Funds".

Registration Table:

You need volunteers to staff a registration table at the front entrance or close to it from Friday early afternoon until later that night. Some members will arrive early; others will not arrive till later in the night.

The table needs to be staffed again on Saturday morning till noon. By that time most of your guests have arrived. Ensure that someone is available for those late comers though. You will probably have between 10-20% of walk in members depending on your location. Be prepared to inform the food manager as to the increase in numbers on the day of the event.

Print your list of members attending, and check off their names as they arrive. The member can move down the line to the next person, to pick up their goody bag and information about the conference.

T-Shirts / Pins:

Consider the costs of a T-Shirt and/or Pins for memorializing the event. Place this information on the registration form so members can pre-order them. Generally the member will pay the entire cost of a t-shirt. The pin on the other hand is considered to be free gift you recover the cost in registration fees and the 50/50 draws etc..

Caution here = *take only pre-orders on T-Shirts* though. You don't want to end up with several boxes of shirts that are dated and not easily sold. Consider not dating them and simply offering a chapter crested t-shirt/golf shirt of some sort. That way you can continue to sell the shirts to members later on.

Staff t-Shirts:

Some host chapters have been seen wearing special coloured t-shirts so the guests can identify them immediately if they have a problem. This is just a nice touch, not a necessity though.

Wrist Bands:

Consider obtaining wrist bands for those who have registered for the entire event. This saves your members time and effort to ensure that everyone entering the banquet hall has in fact paid their registration dues. This also allows those members to come and go as they please instead of showing you a ticket or a stamp. See if your local beer suppliers can provide these bands – even if their logo is stamped on it, who cares?

Breakfast Tickets:

If a hotel has a restaurant attached, they might have a breakfast menu at specific costs. In negotiating the breakfasts with the hotel, ask if they will require a breakfast ticket to ensure only our members get a discount. Include the appropriate number of tickets in the member's registration bag.

Registration Bags:

Obtain a bag of some sort for all the advertising pamphlets, pins, pencils, local city maps, member's breakfast tickets, arm bands and any other bead or bobble you can find to put in there. A lot of times local stores or your chamber of commerce will be glad to advertise and provide you with some sturdy bags.

If the member has pre-ordered shirts, you can place them in these bags.

Use a computer to print out a label of each attending person and place that label on the bag. When the member attends the registration table, one of your staff members can search through the bags for the person's name. Place them in alphabetical order.

Attend your local chamber of commerce and obtain pamphlets on your local tourist attraction hot spots. Some of the best conferences I have attended were the ones where we had some place to go and see places / things / that we would not normally do.

Include a local map of the area and any discounts pamphlets or tickets that local business / restaurants will offer our members.

PLACE A COPY OF THE CONFERENCE TIMELINES in the registration bag. Guests need to know when/where breakfast is going to be held, where is the banquet, hospitality room, what/when are you planning on doing? The meeting will be held from 09:00 am till Noon on Saturday. Include any planned rides in the timelines paper.

Rides:

Generally there is a guided ride or two or three lined up for AFTER the Conference meeting which is usually afternoon. Give the members who attended the meeting time to change, or at least take care of business and get dressed for riding.

You will need staff riders who have a CB radio up front and back if possible. Split your groups into manageable sizes so you don't lose half the riders at a stop light. The Blue Knights CB channel is 15.

Have the members sign up for the various rides at your registration table when they arrive. INCLUDE these ride schedules and information in the Registration Bag. Once the members sit down and read what is offered, you will see them run back to either change or add their names to a tourist ride.

Is there someplace 'special' that you wish to take the members? Is this a restaurant? Have you made prior arrangements for seating for xx number of people or do you expect them to stand at the door and wait in line like the rest of the population.

Is there a ride through some scenic roads, even if they are paved back roads? Keep in mind that members need to return to the hotel by 5:00 PM in order to prepare for the banquet. Do you have a chase car with first aid, cell phone and a can of gas for those who didn't fuel up before joining your ride?

Is there something for the members to do while some folks are out for a ride? Do you have a bus or shuttle to take some of the spouses to a local mall where they can shop till they drop? Can they walk to the mall from the hotel?

Shuttles:

Do you have a casino or shopping mall near the host hotel? Consider if the hotel offers shuttle service or if your members have a passenger van they can drive people within a couple mile radius of the hotel.

Advertising:

Make up the advertising flyer that should be distributed to the conference web master, the conference Secretary and all your surrounding chapters.

VERY IMPORTANT - One of the key tasks to complete early in the setting up of your conference is to get the word out fast. Many members are still working and have to book their holidays and time off for the next year. Even retired members want to plan next years rides based upon what is advertised in early fall of this previous year. They have to budget for your event.

Include a **PAPER** registration form to complete and mail you their money. Again, computer online generated registration forms are nice, high tech, how many people refuse to do on line banking? Same thing, they'll not register on a computer in some instances but they will PRINT out a registration form.

Entertainment:

Can you afford to have a comedian, live entertainment or a disk jockey to attend the banquet? Are they truly funny? Can they really sing? Quite a number of people I know (we are getting older you know) will LEAVE the banquet hall when the dinner is done and the entertainment is about to start. Why? Because the music is so loud, it actually hurts their ears.

A number of members who have hosted a conference indicated that no entertainment was held on Saturday night because of the lack of availability of good entertainers. People migrated back to the hospitality room / area and continued to socialise there instead. We want to talk to people we may not have seen for a while.

Non Smoking vs Smoking:

Although some people do not smoke many do. Is there someplace for the smokers to go – even if outside – are there chairs for them to sit on and get out of the rain/sun.

Fun & Games:

Consider offering to pay for a member's room for the weekend or will the hotel offer up a free room or two to give away on their behalf as an advertising or good will draw. Give each registered member a numbered ticket. Place the other half in a draw for the free room. This can be done as you prepare the registration bag.

Offer a 50/50 draw Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights and have the staff to perform this job. This will help your chapter with overall cost to host the function – make the draw early enough so people can get to bed at a reasonable hour.

Offer give away door prizes, a Chinese raffle He places a ticket in a collection box beside the article he wants.

Can your chapter members scrounge enough door prizes to give away after the banquet? This is a two step process in order to be fair.

Registration Costs:

It has been suggested as \$70.00 or **less** is a good starter point.

Calculate the cost for the full registration package for each person. You are not doing this to make a profit, nor loose money. You will be passing some of your expenses to the members in the registration package. The more you get for free from the hotel, the less expensive the registration.

What expenses are incurred?

Banquet meal

Beer, Water, Soda, munchies

Several rolls of Beer / Admittance type tickets – either single or double row.

Optional Items:

Breakfast meals

Entertainment
Conference Pins
Wrist bands

Calculate the cost for ONLY the banquet meal for commuting members. Advertise it both prices of full registration and banquet only costs.

Let the members BOOK their own rooms. Sometimes members have special discount packages or points to lower their costs for the rooms even further that you may not be aware of. For you to provide an all inclusive package could come back to bite you if the member doesn't show up for whatever reason.

Vendors:

Can you get a local auto / bike painter to attend your conference? Are they prepared to work a lot? Do they have sufficient staff to do this task? Are they good painters?

Are there local motorcycle shops that can attend to sell leathers, bike chrome or other gleaming articles relating to motorcycles? Consider putting the name and address of the local MC businesses on the Information sheet included in the registration package.

Some folks will want to attend their brand of bike shop to either purchase something, or at least get something fixed that broke along the way.

This is a hit and miss type of consideration. Sometimes business sell a lot of 'stuff' other times not so much. Do not make any promises, or commitments to them, other than to work with the hotel manager or grounds manager to provide space for them.

Women (Non-members):

DON'T FORGET TO PLAN ACTIVITIES FOR THE WOMEN DURING THE MEMBERSHIP MEETING AND THROUGHOUT THE CONFERENCE.

Bike Washing Station:

Sometimes the hotel has a place where they can provide a hose, bucket and some old towels for members to wash their bikes. Nice touch if you want to get rid of the bugs before heading home again.

Conference Funding:

Normally there is no funding allocated towards helping a chapter with a conference.

Awards:

Suggested awards to be given by the Hosting Chapter: King and Queen, Uniform Competition, Motorcycle Agility, Longest Distance Rider, Youngest and Oldest Rider.

Conclusion:

This whole venture is not difficult – you simply have to get yourself organised into a committee, make a list of who is going to do what, who is going to look after this task or that task, and ensure **that you all get along together**. One person has to be responsible as chairperson for the group and keep things moving along. If your volunteers indicate they want to help – then be prepared to help not just play lip service to be on a committee.