

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS TO AREAS

The Conference Review Committee has been working to create several new documents that can be utilized by areas that are interested in bidding on an International Conference. The outline below contains a list of the subjects that have been addressed by the committee.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It offers suggestions and reminders to any area wishing to bid for an International Conference as well as help for those which have been granted a bid. It follows this introduction and covers several subjects.

2. REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

This document can be used to obtain bids from different hotels in a specific area. It is posted under a different heading.

3. GENERIC REGISTRATION FORM

This document can be used by areas to create their registration form. It is posted under a different heading.

4. PAST CONFERENCES DATABASE

We have obtained and compiled financial information from several past International Conferences, going back over 5 years. This database will be updated regularly when financial results from International Conferences are known.

It is posted under a different heading as a PDF document. We have also created an excel spreadsheet which resumes all of the information on one single page.

1. INTRODUCTION

To all Area Intergroups

Before embarking on your journey of hosting an International Conference, you need to make sure that you have a minimum of five to ten dedicated GA/Gam-Anon volunteers that understand that they will be doing much of the workload. Of course, many more members will eventually be needed to do service. There will be a need of volunteers to staff the registration, hospitality room, workshops etc. but a minimum of five to ten is recommended to steer the conference committees. Once you have those dedicated members in place, we wish you all the best on your journey and hope the guidelines we have put in place will assist you on this journey.

2. CONTRACTUAL PROCEDURES

a) Finding a hotel

Location and affordability are two important points in finding a hotel, but there are certainly other factors to consider. Check with local city council, Chamber of Commerce, Bureau of Tourism, AAA, other internet sources or our past conferences database. You may also consider using other local members as a resource.

Airport hotels are ideal locations. They normally offer free shuttle service, which is a great relief for the conference committee. While it is beneficial to have free shuttle service provided, it shouldn't be considered a deal breaker. However, there may not be anything else around an airport facility and this may cause other activities to be more expensive i.e.; like golfing, eating, shopping etc.

The conference committee should have access to the hotel reservation system to view all the attendees that have already registered. This will allow the committee to be sure they are credited for all conference attendees, regardless of how the attendee registered for the hotel accommodations. Several hotels offer this option via internet access.

It is suggested to visit at least three facilities spelling out the needs for the conference. Let the hotels make a contract proposal without negotiating yet. This allows the conference committee to have contracts and amenities to compare and contrast. Even if you have an ideal location in mind where you want to have your conference, it is always a good idea to have bids from other hotels and use them to negotiate.

Contacting the local CONVENTION AND VISITOR'S BUREAU (CVB) is an extremely important early action to take. If done properly with the correct information, it can reduce the amount of time spent searching for a hotel and stimulate competitive price quotes among eligible hotels.

Most CVBs and Chamber Tourism Boards can implement a BULLETIN or REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) service. This service will notify all major member hotels with specific details of potential conference business. It will also direct interested hotels to submit their preliminary proposals and room rate quotes directly to the local site selection chairman/committee by a certain date.

To be most effective, this BULLETIN must contain the following information (*note 1*) and might look something like this: (the numbers & dates used are only for example)

Note 1: See a draft of proposed document after this section of the document.

b) Negotiating a contract

As you begin to negotiate the contract, everything needs to be spelled out; meeting rooms, breakout rooms, hospitality room, registration space, cost of meals etc., but most importantly, price per room before and after the conference. Furthermore, in negotiating meals and room rates, you have to remember that the bid given by the hotel WILL NOT include service charges, gratuities and taxes. If it is applicable to include tax and gratuities with the price of the room and meals, have the hotel include this in the proposed bid. This will help keep the numbers even and there will be no uncertainty on the conference flyers.

All proposed contracts should include an attrition clause on the number of room nights and food commitments. Most contracts will already have this clause in place. A Force Majeure clause in the event of an Act of God or natural disaster (hurricane, earthquake, terrorism, etc) is also important to include in the contract. It has even been a past experience that a hotel was sold after the bid was awarded and during the planning phase of the conference. It is important to bring this possible situation up with your hotel to make sure that all guarantees will still be honoured if the hotel changes ownership.

Conference committees need to carefully set the starting numbers of room nights. It is important for the committee to know how often they can edit the numbers and when the last time is that they will be able to edit the number. The Past Conferences database can be very helpful in this area.

Any item can be negotiated with the hotel. Our leverage comes when we explain to a hotel that we have a captured audience. The more nights our guests stay, the more revenue the facility will earn with restaurant sales, bar tabs, etc. A good example of captured audience is buffet style meals for trustees/delegates for Thursday lunch & dinner and for Friday lunch; with the cost passed onto those attending. This is direct revenue for the hotel and you could possibly use this in negotiating better room or meal prices.

Make it very clear with the hotels that are bidding, that we need pricing for rooms, meals meeting rooms, etc to be a win/win situation. You can always access the Past Conferences database to view what items may have been negotiated. Do not allow the local area to be oversold by the hotel representative and NEVER sign a contract until the Board of Trustees has awarded the area the conference. Make sure that the area has the ability to make amendments or renegotiate the original contract if there should be anything missing from it. Do not sign the document or agree to anything unless you are completely sure you understand the agreement. Use the Past Conferences database or the Conference Standing Committee to help clarify any concerns.

All contracts **must be** in the name of the local intergroup or in the name of the conference. The contracts are NOT to be in the name of Gamblers Anonymous, as it's not Gamblers Anonymous hosting the conference, rather the local intergroup. Individuals that are signing the contract with the hotel or using the Chamber of Commerce should be aware that their name will be associated with the event and maybe used for marketing purposes. You may want to negotiate with the hotels, Chamber of Commerce or Convention Bureau that individual names shall not be used for marketing purposes. It is suggested to use the conference mailing address or the address of the intergroup for all correspondence.

The Committee believes that each international conference should look at the possibility of acquiring liability insurance but it should remain on a case by case basis. The local conference committees should seriously consider acquiring such insurance if they bring food from outside the hotel or hold activities outside of the hotel.

c) Rooms

The area should review the Past Conferences database and find a past conference held in a similar city. There, the area will be able to see the number of room nights booked vs. actual room nights accountable. This should help planning the number of rooms needed for the duration of the conference. Spring Conferences normally get a

larger number of attendants due to the Gam-Anon Delegates meeting, thus a higher number of rooms than for a Fall Conference could be needed.

Higher rates directly affect local and week-end attendance. This needs to be kept in mind while negotiating rates. Hotels may try to up the meal charges to hold down the room charges. Another thing to remember is that taxes must be added to any amount bid by a hotel. This could easily add 15% to 20% to the original bid.

Try to book low and add on rooms as the event approaches. It is always much more difficult to cut back on rooms, rather than to add rooms. As mentioned before, an attrition clause should be included in all contracts with a hotel. It is possible to negotiate with the hotel that the attrition clause be used to reduce the number of room/nights booked, but also to increase the number. A flat rate for single, double or even triple occupancy should also be negotiated. Check with the hotel for the necessary room/nights needed to qualify for other amenities, such as free hospitality room, free meeting rooms etc.

The hotel will normally give free rooms at the ratio of one (1) free room per 25/50 guest nights. Some past conferences were allowed to credit the value of free rooms to the master account; others were denied this opportunity. Check with the hotel if it is possible to credit the free rooms to the conference master account.

Some members have booked their accommodation using other means such as; internet sites, travel agencies, etc. Negotiate with the hotel to credit those rooms to the conference master account and to give credit towards the total room/nights commitment.

d) Meals

A major concern for most conferences is the food guarantee. Do NOT try to guess the numbers. Our experience is that guessing at the number of meals has left conferences in real concern for making the numbers. Use the Past Conferences database to guide setting the numbers. Use real numbers, you can always add meals.

Most hotels will ask that we commit to a minimum dollar amount and use this number to negotiate other amenities. There should be an attrition clause on the food commitment similar to the attrition clause on the number of room/nights booked. It's important to consider the number of meals that your conference is offering when making the food commitment. Many conferences have offered four meals and some have only been able to negotiate three meals. This should be taken into consideration

when committing to a food and beverage minimum. To help offset the meal commitment, negotiate with the hotel to include the bar tab from the cocktail hours on Friday and Saturday evenings. They can have a significant impact on the total food commitment amount.

Just as you need to add service charges and taxes to the cost of the rooms, you need to be sure to include gratuities/service charge and taxes to the price of a bid for a meal plan. Gratuities/service charge normally ranges from 15% to 22% and be aware that taxes ARE charged on gratuities. This is important to know upfront in order to price your plans accordingly. Try to negotiate a price that is all inclusive; this will save a lot of time and frustrations on calculations.

e) Rooms for workshops, meetings etc.

Many conferences have received free meeting rooms based on total room/nights or food commitment. These free rooms have included trustees/delegates meeting, workshops and therapy rooms, arranged in a specific set-up style. There have been instances that a BOT committee will need a meeting room sometime during the conference; negotiate with the hotel to always have an additional room available for them.

To avoid any conflicts with meeting room space, it is advised not to use the same room for meetings and workshops that will be used to hold the trustee/delegates meeting or the banquets. There is no guarantee that the trustees/delegates will complete the work they have come to do in the necessary time. The trustees may sometimes need to continue working on business past the predicted schedule of events. Their meeting room should be secured for Friday evening and Saturday.

The hotels will suggest using a specific in-house firm for audio-visual needs. The area needs to be aware that these in-house firms charge extraordinary high cost for audio visual equipment. In some instances they have been four times more expensive than other local vendors. Make sure the area gets outside bids from local vendors to bring in the audio visual equipment. These bids will also serve to negotiate with the hotels in-house vendor.

f) Hospitality room

It is a common practice that the hotels will offer in the bid a free hospitality room based on total room/nights and/or food commitment. Please refer to the Past Conferences database.

Some hotels will allow the conference committee to bring their own food; others will only allow snacks, coffee and soft drinks. All facilities are different on this item, most

likely due to corporate structures. It seems to be an issue with liability of bringing outside food and/or serving prohibited beverages. Our experience leads us to believe that is a “grey area.” You may try negotiating with the hotel to bring your own food and offer to sign a disclaimer to eliminate their liability. One way or the other, all items negotiated should be specified in detail in the contract.

3. FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

a) Projecting number of attendees

The number of attendees will depend largely on the number of members and rooms in the hosting area. You can start with the number of trustees who will attend your conference. Approximately 65% of the active trustees should be a good starting count. Spring conferences normally bring more attendees with the Board of Delegates meetings, unlike in during the fall conference, where there is no such meeting. Some conference committees have used the attendance of previous conferences and averaged the numbers. If your area chooses to use this method, the Past Conferences database will be a useful tool.

Local attendance is probably the key to a successful conference. Use an “all out” approach in your area in promoting your conference.

b) Pricing the plans

The “Hosting an International Conference” pamphlet describes in a detailed fashion all steps to follow in pricing the various plans. Please refer to it, but remember that all items should be spelled out so there are no questions or hidden costs.

c) Budgeting for Committees

Each committee must have a standing budget for each function of the conference committee (opening-closing ceremonies, entertainment, conference booklet, goodie bags, hospitality room, workshops, outside entertainment/tours/golf). One way to do this is to look at our Past Conferences database and try to pick a conference similar to your conference as a reference. Once individual budgets for committees are set, follow-up regularly to make sure they are within budget. You could create a form for each committee to fill with latest figures (revenues and expenses), which will help the Chairman and Treasurer follow-up conference finances.

It is suggested to give the committees a smaller budget than requested and explain that budgets can increase as registrations increases. The “Hosting an International

Conference” current pamphlet is a good guideline to assist in creating these budgets.

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