

# Planning a Conference

The task of planning and co-ordinating a conference is a high profile but demanding role that can be rewarding at the completion of the event. The following offers a few useful tips to use that will make the task easier.

Planning the event is all the groundwork for a successful conference or function.

There are two important questions to ask before considering organising a conference

1. What is the conference to achieve - Purpose
2. What method will be best used for the conference to achieve- How

## Conference Purpose

The purpose of a conference may be for a variety of reasons. Some of the more common purposes are to:

- Co-ordinate Activities
- Build Morale
- Secure Agreement
- Brief Staff/Clients
- Solve a Problem
- Exchange Information
- Initiate Policy
- Product Launch

Keeping the purpose in mind will assist in planning the method on how will the conference be able to achieve its purpose. This will also determine how much time allocation is required to achieve the objectives.

## How to conduct the Conference

### Date and Time

Select a date, time and duration for the Conference. These may all be approximates initially, but after reviewing the following steps shall then enable a much more accurate duration. When selecting a date, be sure to leave yourself, attendees and presenters enough time to plan ahead for the conference. Also allow time to be able to find and book a suitable venue. Many conference and function venues get booked ahead well in advance, so you may not have many choices if leaving it too late.

### Attendees

Identify who will be the intended audience of the conference, how many will be attending and from how far are they required/able to travel to the conference. Are there any special requirements attendees will require to access the conference eg wheelchair access.

### Conference Content

Determine the most appropriate topics that will address the conference purpose. Select activities and presenters that can help achieve the conference purpose. The final agenda, order and content of conference activities will go through many changes until the actual conference is run.

## Venue/Facilities

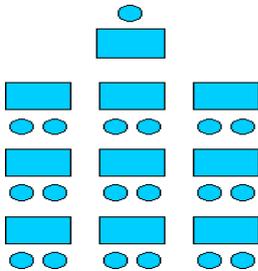
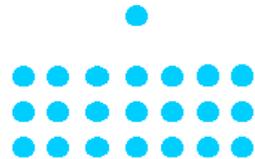
Selecting the correct Venue may require the most time, as you should always inspect a venue prior to booking it. Preparing a check list of the conference facilities and requirements that will narrow the selection to appropriate venues for the conference. The following points should be decided prior to searching for a conference venue.

1. Location – To help decide the location, ask the following questions

- How far are attendees travelling,
- If attendees are being flown in, how far from the nearest airport
- How are attendees arriving to the venue eg car then how long a drive is not too long
- Does it need to be close to the workplace or far away from the busy workplace

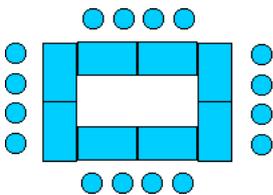
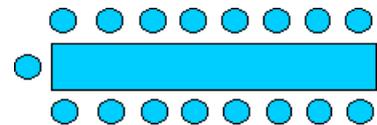
2. Capacity – Ensure that the venue can provide for the number intended attendees in the conference room layout appropriate for the conference purpose. The following are a selection of room layouts to be used

- Theatre– useful for briefing a large group, initiate a policy or build morale and writing by attendees is not required to take place



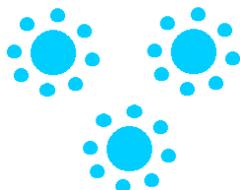
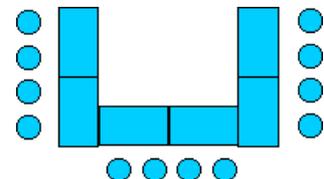
- Class Room – Used for briefing a groups who are also required to take notes and perhaps work in small groups of a maximum of 4 for Exchanging information, or solving a problem conference

- Board Room – This arrangement all participants can see each other in the conference and is useful for securing agreement, solving a problem amongst the group, or purpose that consists of a group no larger than 20. This arrangement encourages participation of all attendees



- Hollow Square – The participants face each other but unlike the board room arrangement, has more space across from participants.

- U-Shaped – enables group interaction but the conference is focused around a facilitator at the front of the group.



- Banquet Style – A large conference can be arranged in smaller groups seated around round or rectangular tables where group and workshop activities can be performed through the conference. The banquet style also encourages attendees to network with their immediate group at the conference.

3. Facilities – There are a variety of facilities to be considered for a conference
  - The presenter facilities e.g. speakers, mics, audio, visual aids, screens, boards, flipcharts etc.
  - The attendee facilities e.g. catering, seating, lighting, break up rooms for workshops, writing materials etc.
4. Accommodation – If the conference is residential the venue should address the following items
  - Whether the accommodation will be required close to the conference facilities
  - How are the attendees to be roomed eg in pairs, triples, quads or dormitory styles
  - Capacity – can the venue accommodate to room the number of attendees of the conference.
5. Budget – work within the cost allocated for each attendee and how much has been budgeted for the conference. This amount will narrow the selection of venues suitable for the event.
6. Conference support – It is always helpful to have a conference co-ordinator at the venue that can assist with the finer points of the conference. Venue Conference Co-ordinators know their venue and it's capability that can provide useful suggestions for your conference.
7. Extra curricular activities – When the conference is in recess, will the attendees be required to participate in any “team building” activities. The venue may have contacts that can oblige or find your own, ensure the venue can accommodate these activities if required.

The hardest decision of the conference organising has been completed soon as a suitable venue has been selected.

## Promote the Conference

Invitations may be required to be sent out to presenters/facilitators and the intended the audience of the conference.

Posters on noticeboards around the workplace are also a useful easy promotion activity of a work conference

## Preparation

All the finer details of the conference should now be attended to. Items such as fine tuning the order of the conference, confirmations, name badges, co-ordinating and printing of presenter notes, table arrangements, catering options, Conference evaluations etc.

## After the Event

Taking time out after the conference and just covering some of the following will nicely complete the hard work of planning and conducting a conference.

- Pay all outstanding accounts of the conference
- Organise presenter notes/conference outcomes
- Distribute conference outcomes
- Collect and analyse conference evaluations if used
- Reflect whether the conference reached it's objective/purpose
- Strengths of the conference
- Weaknesses of the conference.
- Have a team meeting and brief the team (if used) about the conference outcomes.

Take a rest until the next conference is required.

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