



# ASSOCIATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL & ENGINEERING GEOLOGISTS

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## CONFERENCE PLANNING TIPS

from the MAC

Most Chapters agree that conferences and short courses are not only money makers but worthwhile investments in the local AEG brand, by providing education credit opportunities, professional development and networking opportunities. The Meetings Advisory Committee (MAC) has put together a list of general scheduling tips and important considerations when planning a meeting. All meetings are different; however the general format remains the same. These tips are provided below and are available for immediate download and use in the AEG Members section, under Committees, MAC. If you want help with meeting planning please contact someone on the MAC and they will be happy to help or connect you with a committee member who can.

1. Start with an Idea – You want the primary topic for the conference to be a topic that is something relevant for multiple disciplines, current issues are excellent, new rules and regulations, or updates to existing regulations with wide-ranging impact. Also you could present talks for both sides of controversial issues.
2. Assemble the Team – Volunteers are crucial.
  - a) For a smaller conference (up to 100 people) you can possibly get by with 5 people but once the conference gets larger you may need as many as 8 people working. This way one person is not monopolized with conference planning work.
  - b) Get people from different sides of the issue or different professions, to expand networks for contacts, message boards etc. (for example river keepers and realtors, regulators and consultants, lawyers, bankers or insurance companies)
  - c) Utilize people with different skill sets, and utilize those with expansive networks.
  - d) Students are great resources, they are good with the social media and electronic communications, they are excited to help and always looking for opportunities to network and earn the big J.O.B. They are necessary for check in, working the projector and slides, running errands and all the other small time consuming tasks.
  - e) Provide ad space for the companies of those that volunteer to help.
3. Pick the Date – Give yourself time, things always seem to start slow and end in a mad dash, just be prepared it is coming and enjoy the ride.
  - a) Make sure to compare other local and regional calendars for similar topics, so you are not redundant and look for other major events that will compete for attendees. Also check the AEG calendar.
  - b) Consider how people work in your area, (e.g. don't schedule a long day on Friday, will traffic patterns effect an 8AM start time?)
  - c) Avoid major holiday and family vacation times
  - d) Try not to immediately follow a section meeting, field trip or other major conference.
  - e) Once your date is set, notify headquarters so they can get it on the calendar, and be aware contacts etc. will need review.
4. Simultaneously Secure: Speakers, Sponsors, Spectators and the Spot
  - a) Speakers: Research and reach out to the top minds actively speaking about your Topic, look at multiple sides of this issue. This could be more than scientist, engineers and regulators, but lawyers, bankers, realtors and other various levels of city officials and citizen groups. Similarly you could request abstracts – just allow enough time to notify accepted speakers.
  - b) Sponsors: Start advertising for sponsors ASAP!
    - i) Everything is for sale, breakfasts, lunches, breaks, ad space on the booklets. An example ad sheet is provided as an attachment.
    - ii) Set prices relative to your area and clientele.



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- iii) Clear pricing and perks for sponsorship and exhibitors (We recommend to provide all sponsors with the attendee list.)
  - c) Spectators: As soon as you have a general date in mind, start advertising to the local membership.
    - i) Reach out to chapters in neighboring areas, post on all the relevant local boards.
    - ii) Get social media active and keep fresh posts at a minimum of 3X per week to start and daily once you are within a month of the event.
    - iii) Send preliminary flyers and information to headquarters so they can post it on the national calendar, website and social media.
    - iv) Acquire distribution lists wherever you can get them for any position that is even semi-relevant to the topic of discussion
    - v) Email blast frequently
    - vi) Announce at every local meeting and event, as well as in the local newsletter
    - vii) Place ads in local papers and online (Free is always best)
  - d) The Spot: Get your venue
    - i) Try to be as convenient as possible, hotels work great but are a bit pricey. You can sometimes get a deal with the food, audio equipment and room rates (both for the meeting and for overnight stays).
    - ii) Check the other conferences potentially occurring simultaneously.
    - iii) Get the contract approved by headquarters.
- 5. Advertising and other Paper – It will be important to have a basic logo for the conference that will be on all materials related to the conference, sponsor/exhibitor price lists, sign-up sheets, information booklet. The AEG logo should also be on everything
  - a) It is a good idea to “partner” with the local government, for example in North Carolina we always try to partner with the department of environmental quality. Regulators know a lot of people and it adds weight to your conference announcement.
  - b) See if you can get one or several of the conference planning committees companies to sponsor the agendas and books with abstracts. You can spend your entire profit paying for overly fancy books at Kinko’s or you can have nice books printed by interns at someone’s office that will get the same attention. This is a huge cost savings and will significantly reduce the stress factor.
  - c) Make nametags for people, this is pretty quick and easy and is a nice touch. The added bonus is everyone’s name and company is legible.
  - d) When scheduling group similar talks together in “blocks”.
  - e) Example agendas and abstract books are provided as an Attachment.
- 6. Plan a Networking Social – Even if it is only a one day event, end the day with a social (don’t pick a Friday). Provide everyone with one drink ticket to be used at the social to encourage attendance. If you can end the day with an energetic speaker it will encourage attendance, if people are not engaged they will want to leave sooner. Provide hors d’oeuvres.
- 7. Registration – This is critical. You need to know who has registered and paid for the conference before sign-in begins. With the new mobile technology it is an asset to allow people to pay with a credit card prior to the event using pay pal, or at sign-in. But you need to be able to confirm or deny with absolute certainty who has and has not paid for their registration.
- 8. The Day(s) of – Expect a long check in line, get there early. Expect some attendees to show up 30 minutes before the start of check in. Similarly, expect to have to shuffle the program for speakers who show up late.
  - a) Make sure the speakers have a laptop or monitor form which they can see their slides. Larger rooms may have two screens with the podium in the middle.
  - b) Don’t put too many talks together.
  - c) If you plan a break make it a full break. 15 minutes is generally appropriate.
  - d) A dinner bell works well to announce the two minute warning between the break and the beginning of the next session.(4- 30 minute talks is generally a good segment)
  - e) Get your presentations loaded before the program starts to prevent delays between speakers.
  - f) Keep the speakers on time (make sure they can see their timer/warning lights) and don’t provide long, drawn out introductions, just hit the highlights.
  - g) Coffee, tea and water. Make sure hot coffee and water (for tea) are available at all times and ice water is also on the tables or readily available to attendees.



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9. Money
  - a) Remember hotels are expensive, and their “price” does not include the hotel charges, taxes and fees that generally add another 25% to the cost of the bill. This number will vary between states, but always over budget this cost and you will, hopefully, have a buffer for un-expected expenses or bonus surplus.
  - b) Get everything free or sponsored that you can. Everything is for sale
  - c) The following are potential costs to consider when planning your event:
    - a. Food: Breakfast, coffee & teas, pop, lunch, snacks, drink tickets for the social,
    - b. AV equipment
    - c. Reserved hotel rooms that are un-used
    - d. Printing costs
    - e. Taxes and fees on everything
    - f. Transportation costs and speaker fees (if any)
    - g. Giveaways
    - h. Speaker travel expenses (if arranged to be covered by the conference)
10. Education Credits – Contact local and regional state licensing boards and get the credits for geology and engineering pre-approved, so all attendees will have to do is use the code provided to them by the volunteers at the check in table.
11. Random Tips
  - a) Plan to end at lunch on Friday, so people can catch their flights and have an early day. It also saves money on food cost.
  - b) People like hands on, group panel discussion and field trips
  - c) Put the food in the vendor area to encourage foot traffic and flow.
  - d) Higher lumen projectors make a difference in slide clarity. If you are using two projectors in the same room make sure they have the same lumens.



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