

ORGANIZING A REGIONAL MEETING

The steering committee of each region selects and approves future meetings based upon requests from local sections to host a meeting. These requests are usually submitted as a presentation to a regional meeting steering committee at one of the regional meetings. The sites are typically agreed upon three to five years prior to the meeting. When presenting a proposal to the Steering Committee, a local section should indicate features of the area, facilities being considered, relative costs, and the program being considered.

EARLY STAGES OF ORGANIZATION

Selecting and Contracting for the Meeting Site

After the steering committee has approved the request, the local section should appoint a Site Selection Committee to review facilities and suggest meeting dates. The next step is to prepare a request for proposal (RFP) to submit to possible meeting venues. A sample of the RFP and meeting setup appear at the end of this chapter. These might include conference centers, college/university campuses, hotels, and convention centers. The amount of meeting space is an important consideration—most regional meetings require between 8 and 12 concurrent meeting rooms, as well as exhibit space and areas for registration, workshops, banquets, poster sessions, and other special events. Your ACS meeting planner can help you put together an RFP and distribute it to facilities in your area for competitive bidding,

Once they have received responses from potential meeting facilities, the Site Selection Committee should tour those they are most interested in before proceeding with contract negotiations. Keep in mind the traditional time of year for the meeting, holidays, and school breaks, and then determine when the most desirable facilities are available—at the best price. In addition, confirm your selected dates with your meeting planner in order to avoid potential conflicts with other meetings.

The Ideal Physical Setup for a Regional Meeting

When planning a regional meeting, one of the first decisions to make is where to hold it—the physical setting. While many attendees are local and drive to the meetings, a number are far enough away to require housing during the meeting. The comfort of attendees is paramount in attracting them, and keeping the arrangements as simple as possible is a major consideration.

The content of your meetings meets the highest professional standards; accommodations should be comparable. Regional meetings must compete for attendees with other professional conferences, workshops, and educational seminars. Attendees appreciate “one-stop shopping”. The primary attraction is the program, and it always should be. But, to keep and build attendance, attention must be given to the packaging of that program. Attendees don’t want to find their own housing; they appreciate the meeting negotiating hotel rates to their benefit. They don’t want to worry about where to park, where to find

meals—or just a cup of coffee—and they want sessions in proximity to one another. They also appreciate having an area where they can sit and read the program or chat with colleagues. Networking is a major benefit of attending regional meetings, and the venue should be conducive to that.

You are competing with other professional organizations that do address those considerations. Take a closer look at those brochures that arrive in your mailbox offering you a training program or seminar. Look carefully at how they have packaged the meeting. Basically, if you want to attend, you check off a couple of boxes, fill out a registration form, and then show up.

Considerations in Site Selection

When selecting the location for your meeting, consider the following:

1. The location should include sleeping rooms or easy access to nearby hotels and restaurants, preferably within walking distance and/or near to good public transportation to make it easy for attendees to get to and from the site. (Many will be carrying coats, briefcases, portable computers, umbrellas, and the usual paraphernalia everyone needs at a meeting.)
2. A place to receive deliveries of shipments by vendors, support staff, or events presenters is crucial. So is access to storage for such materials.
3. A hotel is the ideal setting, followed closely by a conference center, either on or off a university campus because
 - The meeting is in one central location, making it easy for attendees to move from session to session.
 - Attendees have easy access to meals. If the location is in a city, even better, as it allows attendees access to dining and evening social activities at a variety of price ranges. It also means that there are hotels in the area offering a range of room rates to better accommodate attendee budgets.
 - The staff at these facilities is trained to handle meetings and events and can respond to meeting needs rapidly at any hour of the day. They assign a staff member to coordinate with the meeting planners as a “personal assistant”.
 - These facilities are designed to meet the electrical, telephone, computer access lines, and AV equipment needs during a meeting—and have the staff to set it up and keep it running.
 - Hotel and conference center meeting areas are designed to provide good traffic flow during a meeting, and also offer a variety of rooms of varying sizes to comfortably accommodate sessions and events. They also can recommend a variety of resources in the community that might be needed

to support a meeting, e.g., exhibition companies, special events planners, and AV support companies.

- A hotel will offer special discount room rates and often will provide free meeting rooms depending on the number of sleeping rooms guaranteed in the contract.
- A hotel or conference center provides relief from the wear and tear on committee members in monitoring the meeting activities. Any potential problem can be resolved almost instantly by simply picking up a phone and contacting your facility liaison. Often attendees will not even know there was a problem as the staff works quickly and quietly behind the scenes to resolve difficulties.
- Attendees are more likely to attend special events associated with the meeting if they are in the same location as the sessions.
- Attendees are more likely to visit the exhibition if it is convenient to the sessions.

ORM has physical requirements that must be met in order to operate effectively on your behalf. We ask you to consider them as you examine potential meeting sites. These include:

- an office or storage room that locks to store the equipment we bring to run registration, i.e., signs, printers, computers, and general supplies.
- easy access to electricity and phone lines for computers.
- a highly visible, central location near where attendees enter to attend sessions to make it easy for them to pick up their badges and programs, to register quickly onsite so they may get to the sessions, and to answer questions they may have about the meeting. (It is also essential in order to monitor attendees to make sure they do register.)

Your ACS meeting planner can help you find a location by working with you to prepare an RFP to send out into the community where you wish to find a hotel or conference center. S/He can negotiate favorable terms for sleeping room rates, meeting rooms, banquet events, and AV support, as well as work with you to determine if there are competing events taking place at the same time, when the peak season is, and other factors that would affect your costs.

Negotiating A Contract

Once you have received the proposal(s), you need to review them to determine which one best meets your needs. Then you request a contract from the facility. Once you receive the initial contract, we urge you to send it to your meeting planner to review before signing it. The ORM staff has worked on numerous contracts for regional meetings, and can make suggestions that will protect your meeting and your best interests. *We strongly*

urge you to work closely with your ACS meeting planner to select the location and dates, and to review your contract.

Remember that the regional meeting is a function of the host local section. Therefore, the contract should be written between the facility and the host local section. A local section officer, preferably the treasurer, should sign it. After the contract is signed, stay in touch with the staff at the property. Changes in facility personnel and/or remodeling could affect your meeting plans.

Once you have locked in your meeting dates and location, notify the steering committee of the region and the ACS Office of Regional Meetings of your definite plans in order to minimize potential conflicts in scheduling. Remember, your ORM planner is available at any step along the way.

THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

The regional meeting organizing committee should include the following:

A **General Chair**, appointed approximately three years prior to the meeting, will have strong organizational skills and will select and direct the other members of the Committee. S/He must have the ability to maintain organizational control, and must be confident enough to delegate responsibilities. S/He will be invited to attend the ACS Regional Meeting Planning Conference (RMPC) two to three years prior to the meeting.

A **Program Chair**, appointed by the General Chair, generally has contacts throughout the region in many areas of chemistry. The Program Chair needs to be familiar with all aspects of the meeting plans and represents the committee in communications with speakers and session chairs. A General Chair may want to appoint additional chairs who would specialize in a given topical area, e.g., educational/teacher program, industry, and academia.

The **Treasurer/Finance Chair/Fundraising Chair** assists in developing the proposed budget, maintain and track income and expenditures, and solicit funds for the meeting. These responsibilities can be assigned to one person or several. It is recommended that the Fundraising Chair be a separate position, to alleviate the burden of responsibility.

An **Exhibits Chair** important to the financial success of the meeting, should already be acquainted with many of the instrument, book, and service companies in the area, and could be, an experienced exhibitor. The Exposition often generates up to half the meeting's revenue.

A **Printing & Publicity Chair** submits information to ORM for the Call for Papers and advertisements in *C&EN*. The chair also prepares the final announcement, press releases, meeting notices in local section and division publications, and arranges for the publication and printing of the abstract book. Because past experience has shown that publicity through a variety of sources will result in higher attendance, the Publicity Chair must have time to devote to this project. Some local sections have PR chairs who have

received training from the ACS Office of Communications. Check with Sharon Worthy in the Office of Communications to find out if your section has a PR chair.

An *Arrangements Chair* coordinates lodging, set-up of meeting rooms and registration area, audio-visual equipment, projectionists, signage, and arrangements for banquets, meals, mixers or other special events.

Other positions you may wish to assign include *Special Events Chair, Awards Chair, and General and Program Co-chairs* to more equitably share responsibility.

MEETINGS OF THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

As soon as the committee has been formed, the General Chair should forward the names, titles, and contact information for the committee members to the ORM meeting planner.

A recommended agenda for the initial meetings to include the following:

- Introduction of committee members
- Descriptions/clarification of responsibilities of committee chairs
- Suggestions for recruiting volunteers to work with committee chairs
- Recommendations of local section members whose skills are needed
- Determination of the theme and goals of the meeting
- Identification of meeting site requirements
- Review of history of previous meetings
- Identification of technical program topics
- Identification of potential workshops and special events
- Suggestions on which Divisions would enhance programming
- Review of suggested timeline provided by ACS
- Development of an "Action Item List" for the next meeting
- Setting the date of the next meeting
- Other Business

Each member of the organizing committee should be given a resource workbook containing the following information.

1. List of committee members, their addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses
2. Address and phone numbers of ACS staff involved in your meeting
3. Past statistics
4. Timeline
5. Samples of the previous year's promotional materials
6. Organizational policies
7. Site information, floor plans, and contact persons
8. Meeting dates
9. Meeting budget
10. Local section chairs contact information for the region
11. Community Resources, e.g., the local Convention and Visitors Bureau

Office of Regional Meetings Support for Regional Meetings

The ACS Office of Regional Meetings offers the following services to regional meeting committees at no charge.

- ❑ Assistance in site selection
- ❑ Contract review and negotiation
- ❑ Assistance with budget preparation
- ❑ Contact lists and leads for fund raising, exhibitors, and local section chairs/members
- ❑ Assistance in obtaining programming grants
- ❑ Publicity and Marketing services
 - Free promotion of your event on the ACS web
 - Free promotion of your event at ACS national meetings
 - Free promotion of your event in *Chemical & Engineering News*
 - Deep discounts on advertising in *C&EN* and other ACS publications
- ❑ Graphics and printing support
- ❑ Online abstract services
- ❑ Assistance with expositions
 - Vendor contacts
 - Sample contracts
 - List of ACS national exhibitors in your region
- ❑ Onsite meetings with your organizing committee
- ❑ Liaison to other ACS offices and Divisions
- ❑ Assistance with food and beverage orders
- ❑ Assistance with meeting room setups
- ❑ Audiovisual recommendations
- ❑ Preparation of registration form
- ❑ Online Registration
- ❑ Responsibility for all advance/onsite registration
- ❑ Sending of confirmation notices to advance registrants
- ❑ Preparation of badges, badge cases, and tickets to events
- ❑ Preparation of all receipts for attendees
- ❑ Assistance to organizing committee with onsite meeting logistics
- ❑ Preparation of all internal signage for meeting
- ❑ Training of volunteers onsite to assist with registration and meeting functions
- ❑ Capture of important meeting data for present and future reference
- ❑ Identification of registrants with special needs
- ❑ Preparation of detailed financial reports on attendance and finances

tips for working with **VOLUNTEERS**

ACS

Never ask a volunteer to do something you would not volunteer to do.

Every conversation with a member is a golden opportunity to build enthusiastic support for the Society and to invite their involvement.

Share the vision. Clarify the purpose of project and group. Define success measurements.

Don't be a know it all.

Really listen to what the volunteers are asking and not just rush them off the phone.

Ask! Many members don't volunteer because no one has ever asked them what their interest/talents were nor were they asked to do a specific task or play a specific role.

Be sure that your volunteers feel recognized and appreciated for their contributions.

Volunteers want to help. That's why they volunteer. Let them and give them the training and resources they need to succeed.

Remember the importance of motivating and rewarding volunteers.

Chemists love to share their enthusiasm for chemistry—let them know that the “job” you have to offer will let them do this.

We need to always be mindful that our volunteers are professionals. They hold and perform jobs with major corporations and academia. Further, our communications with them via phone and email are usually at their job. Thus, we must be mindful of our approach, as well as the timeliness of such.

Don't take a hostile volunteer to heart.

Just understand that it's a big job and this person is willing to help!

Know what the volunteer is experiencing and work to improve their environment.

The attitude of the staff person in relation to the volunteer is integral to the environment that is set for that person. People respond to the degree of respect and kindness with which they are treated.

Volunteers always respond positively to a positive attitude. I think everyone knows this but sometimes we forget to practice it. Become a volunteer yourself, thereby gaining insights/experiences to work with ACS volunteers.

Clarify the duties and responsibilities of your volunteers, as well as your role as staff. Establish a working relationship with volunteers, if possible. Communication with volunteers is vital to ensure their requested task is understood.

Strive to make the volunteer leader look good. Never surprise or embarrass the leader. Help plan events in advance—clarify roles, reiterate expectations, identify strategies, list desired outcomes (volunteer leader and staff member).

Affirm volunteers not only for what they do for ACS but by showing an interest in volunteers as people.

Communicate on a regular basis—often just to touch base—to build a relationship. That way you're not always calling with work, deadlines, etc.

Don't assume your volunteers completely understand the goals of the group they've joined.

Make sure when you offer advice to a volunteer that you always are willing to listen.

Develop a friendly working relationship so they will enjoy working with you and they'll feel confident coming to you when they have questions.

**as shared by ACS staff participating
in a workshop on February 20, 2002**