



ORGANISING ACADEMIC CONFERENCES

Amy Zelmer
Lynn Zelmer



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Amy E Zelmer

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HERDSA

HERDSA GREEN GUIDES

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FOREWORD

In his report for the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, Academic Development Units, Professor Richard Johnson said, in reference to knowledge about educational matters:

There exists a substantial body of knowledge on many of these matters and there are techniques for finding answers to the questions. However, just because the body of knowledge is substantial, just because the processes of higher education are complex, it cannot be expected that the academic pursuing research and teaching in another discipline or the administrator coping with the day-to-day and year-to-year urgencies of an institution can master and keep up with the range of contemporary thinking and research results.

While that is technically correct, it is also true that most staff in tertiary education are interested in carrying out their various tasks and responsibilities well.

To this end, many of them would appreciate some guidance on one or another of these tasks and responsibilities. But staff do not have time for a detailed study of the literature on these issues. The other reason for the frustration of staff who go in search of guidance is that many of the publications available are written by people who are conscious of the academic tradition of writing and hence prepare treatises which attempt to be comprehensive, argued in detail and fully documented. This is not what staff need — they need some ideas and pointers that they can relate to their particular circumstances and some brief guidance to further reading if they so desire.

The publication of this HERDSA Green Guide Series is explicitly designed to meet these needs. They are relatively short, inexpensive, easy to read, and concentrate on supplying ideas rather than a fully comprehensive cover of an area. Their bibliographies are deliberately not comprehensive but are designed to be helpful — these are not academic studies of an area but, as the series title indicates, guides.

Each Guide is designed to cover one aspect of a staff member's tasks and responsibilities. Each Guide has been commissioned by the HERDSA Publications Committee and refereed, but the content is the responsibility of the particular author(s) and does not represent the views of the Committee or the Society.

We hope that staff will find the Guides useful, and welcome comments on individual Guides and on other areas that could be covered by similar volumes.

HERDSA Publications Committee

PREFACE

Perhaps it's your institution's turn to host the annual conference of a professional or academic organisation.

There might be a special anniversary or other event coming up and the powers-that-be have decided that a conference would be an appropriate way to mark the event.

Or perhaps you are hosting a special staff development programme, research group or international event.

Whatever the reason, you now find yourself with major responsibilities for organizing an academic "conference". Unless your situation is very unusual this task will be in addition to your regular work — and will involve you in some unfamiliar activities.

Whether you anticipate a day-long event for half a dozen people or a week-long series of events for 6,000, this Guide is intended to provide a framework for your planning. The key to a successful event with a minimum of stress for all concerned is to pre-plan and avoid "surprises", and we have set out to help you to achieve this.

We would particularly like to extend thanks to the academic and support staff of the "Health for All Conference" at UCCQ in 1990. This was the first time most of them had helped to run an academic conference and it was their work which inspired the writing of this Guide. We all survived the experience and believe that you can too.

Gary W. Wilson, formerly Assistant to Master, Capricornia College, UCCQ, deserves individual thanks. Gary managed the catering and housing support for the "Health for All Conference", catered for many special functions for the School of Health Science during 1989 and 1990, and read relevant portions of this manuscript.

Finally, we want to thank those colleagues who have helped us, and whom we have ourselves assisted over the years, as well as the organisers of the conferences we have attended. Running a successful conference is the result of experience, experience gained both in organising and attending conferences.

USING THIS GUIDE

We do not know whether you are planning a major scientific conference with highly complex material being presented by one specialist to other experts, a working group seeking to involve representatives of disparate groups in the development of policy, or a group which meets periodically to renew acquaintances and recharge batteries. Likely your conference will have to serve a variety of these and other needs.

For most conference attendees there are three aspects to a conference:

- First, most attendees come to learn about new developments in their particular discipline or field of activity, and are thus very interested in the quality of the conference presentations — small group as well as keynote or plenary sessions.
- Second, many of the 'oldtimers' are there to see and be seen, and are very interested in the presentation skills of potential staff members, impressing colleagues, collecting new techniques, etc.
- Finally, everyone is interested in the quality of the food services and housing.

Twenty years ago presenters at academic conferences might have used an overhead projector, a slide or film projector, a tape recorder, or a videotape playback unit. Standards for acceptable presentations with this basic equipment were well known and the number of possible technical standards was reasonably limited.

Today a presenter at an Australian conference, especially if from overseas or working on a collaborative project with an overseas institution, might need any one of five completely different videotape standards and either of two or more possible sizes of tape cassette; films are used so infrequently that projectors might not be available; and it might cost \$100,000 to install equipment in a conference theatre for a simple computer-controlled multimedia presentation.

This Guide has many more questions than answers. There is no one right way to organise an event, but finding your own answers for these questions will give you the basic information you need to plan your own conference.

Some questions may not be relevant to your situation. For example, some of the questions and issues which apply to larger events will be irrelevant for smaller gatherings — skip over those that you are sure don't apply to you — but all deserve at least some consideration if you hope to achieve the kind of programme which will make the whole effort worthwhile for planners, presenters and participants.

1 GETTING STARTED

Some events are scheduled literally years in advance and the format is well known, but if your event is a first or one-of-a-kind, you'll need to consider the questions below.

Assemble a small planning group to brainstorm ideas — don't try to be too logical or 'realistic' at the first meeting. Get as many ideas as possible, then refine those that make most sense in your situation.

- Why hold this event?
 - a regular professional education opportunity
 - a celebration or commemoration
 - part holiday
 - a focus event for a particular topic or concern
 - an opportunity for colleagues to meet others with similar interests
 - to take advantage of a visiting expert's presence
 - an activity for academic or professional credit
 - a demonstration of particular facilities or equipment.
- When to hold the event?
 - are the dates already fixed on an annual or other basis?
 - do the dates coincide with particular events (openings, graduations, visitors, etc.)?
 - consider dates during non-teaching time when participants are available or during the 'low season' to take advantage of bargains in travel or accommodation
 - eliminate dates that conflict with national, local or religious holidays
 - eliminate dates that conflict with competing events.

Do potential dates coincide with availability of space, speakers, major participants, programme events, housing, etc.?

- How long should the conference be?
 - is length fixed by tradition?
 - how long should it be to make the travel worthwhile for

participants?

- how much programme material, etc., is there to sustain interest?

Once the focus of the Conference has been agreed upon, it is necessary to establish a Conference Planning Committee. Initially the Committee may be an informal group; however a formal group will soon be needed and eventually the Planning Committee will become the Conference Committee. The Conference Convenor will be the Chair of the Conference Committee.

A number of Subcommittees will need to be formed in order to ensure that all aspects of the conference are attended to. You will need to tailor this to your own situation and perhaps consider doubling up some of the Subcommittees for smaller events. The term 'Subcommittee' may sound a bit grandiose if you have a small group, but try to have at least two people responsible for each major activity so that there is some backup in case of emergencies.

Sample List of Subcommittee Responsibilities

- Academic Programme Subcommittee
 - establish an overall plan and budget for approval by main committee
 - issue call for papers, arrange for review and selection of papers, notify those whose papers are selected, invite keynote speakers, arrange programme sessions
 - consult with Social Subcommittee re timing of breaks, etc.
 - organise AV facilities, presenter's rooms, brief session chairpeople and presenters
 - thank presenters after conclusion of the conference
- Social Subcommittee
 - explore options for housing, food service, other support services and entertainment
 - check that conference will be accessible to people with physical disabilities
 - establish an overall plan and budget for approval by main committee
 - confirm arrangements after approval by main Committee
 - reconfirm arrangements as number of registrants becomes known
 - have one key contact person for each outside supplier, caterer, etc.
 - arrange purchase and presentation of gifts to presenters if required
 - delegate or co-opt transportation and translation arrangements
 - meet VIPs at airport or conference site as required and escort to appropriate sites
- Finance Subcommittee

These responsibilities might be handled by the Treasurer of the sponsoring organisation, the Finance Office of the host institution, or by an individual on the Planning Committee who acts as liaison with the

Treasurer and Finance Office.

- establish financial controls, signing authorities and procedures for the receipt and disbursement of funds
 - using information provided by the other Subcommittees, prepare a budget for approval by the main committee
 - prepare monthly financial reports for the Planning Committee (monthly reports may seem too frequent; however non-routine and one-of-a-kind activities require current financial information for guiding almost all decisions)
 - arrange for official receipts to registrants and exhibitors
 - arrange for refunds, deposits and payment of bills
 - arrange for printing and issue of special event tickets
 - have books audited after the close of conference activities
 - arrange for the transfer of any remaining balance to appropriate bodies
 - close special conference accounts, signing authorities and procedures
 - prepare a final financial report as required by sponsor(s)
- Display/Exhibition Subcommittee
 - check venue and confirm costs, location and facilities for displays
 - establish an overall plan and budget for approval by main committee
 - send information to prospective displayers
 - confirm reservation of space and facilities
 - confirm security and janitorial arrangements with host institution and arrange alternatives as appropriate
 - prepare information for inclusion on printed programme
 - arrange draws or competitions to encourage participants to view the exhibits
 - identify contact person to act as 'host' for exhibitors
 - be on-hand when exhibitors arrive to trouble-shoot last minute problems
 - check as displays are disassembled for problems and the return of all materials
 - thank exhibitors after conclusion of the conference
- Publicity and Public Relations Subcommittee
 - establish an overall plan and budget for approval by main committee
 - prepare ads, posters and brochures and arrange for their distribution
 - alert local/regional media to the conference and establish when/how they will have access to the presenters, exhibits, etc.
 - issue timely press releases
 - arrange for an on-site media room and someone to host it
 - keep a record of all publicity and mail copies to featured speakers, etc.

- Accommodation/Hosting Subcommittee
 - secure information re campus and community accommodation (hotel, caravan, camping as appropriate)
 - establish an overall plan and budget for approval by main committee
 - confirm any special rates for your group
 - solicit families willing to billet participants (most useful for student and overseas participants), confirm numbers, dates, etc.
 - set up an information booth/sign at airport and/or ensure that information is available at regular information desks
 - arrange the preparation and placement of campus directional signs
 - arrange for special handling for late arrivals
 - be available near the registration desk to handle individual requests/problems
 - provide information on local tourist facilities
 - thank billeting families and other providers of special services after the conference
- Proceedings and Records Subcommittee
 - obtain information about and costs of design and printing of programme and proceedings, and of audio-taping of sessions
 - establish an overall plan and budget for approval by main committee
 - arrange for distribution/sale of audiotapes at the conference and afterwards
 - have Proceedings printed and distributed (either at the conference or by mail)
- Registration Subcommittee
 - establish procedures for handling inquiries, registrations and refunds with the appropriate Subcommittees
 - recruit and brief volunteers (student?) and/or paid help for conference registration
 - work with the Finance Subcommittee to establish a cash float and procedures for handling finances for on-site registration, special event ticket sales, etc.
 - ensure that the registration desk is staffed at all times and that 'helpers' are readily identifiable (hats, sashes, large ID badges, t-shirts, or whatever is appropriate for your group and event)
 - thank volunteers after the conference
- Conference Convenor
 - recruit chairs of Subcommittees
 - enforce/cajole the Subcommittees to meet deadlines
 - ensure that all decisions are made responsibly and acted upon expeditiously
 - **DELEGATE EVERYTHING**, and be absolutely free of administrative tasks during the conference to deal with emergencies, host the VIPs, and be seen to be calm and happy

- keep morale of all workers high, give lots of positive reinforcement
- thank chairs of Subcommittees, etc., after the conference.

The effectiveness of the Planning Committee, the Conference Committee and the various Subcommittees will depend greatly upon forward planning. Having a realistic set of time-lines, and keeping to them, will avoid last minute panic or chaos.

Sample Timelines

18 months (and counting)

- Recruit Conference Planning Committee and begin regular monthly meetings (the meetings may not always be necessary but they keep everyone aware of progress)

16 months

- decisions about sites, dates, type of programme and theme

14 months

- tentative confirmation of keynote speaker(s)
- approval of budget and registration fees
- place ads and send notices to journals (and selected individuals) with call for papers
- send initial information to prospective exhibitors

12 months

- prepare and print brochures/registration forms
- confirm general outline of programmes (formal and informal)

11 months

- first mailing of brochures
- establish submission and review process for papers

10 months

- deadline for submission of abstracts (remember that many will be late)

8 months

- confirmation of papers accepted
- preparation of detailed programme
- review of registrations for participants and exhibitors
- decision on additional publicity

6 months

- begin recruiting local host families, tour guides, translators, and other volunteers
- suggested deadline for very early registration discounts and review of registration
- review budget and approve changes required

4 months

- confirmation of food, housing and child care arrangements
- solicit advertising for programme, etc., from local suppliers
- reconfirmation of keynote speakers
- first press kit to media about forthcoming conference

2 months

- begin (bi-)weekly meetings of Conference Committee
- suggested deadline for early registration discount and review of registration
- adjust plans as required by registrations
- recruit volunteers for registration, on-site helpers, etc.

2 weeks

- print final programme and additional materials
- reconfirm all arrangements re speakers, catering, facilities, etc.
- second press kit to media
- deadline for submission of papers to be included in Proceedings to be distributed after the conference

1 week

- assemble registration kits
- assemble all backup materials for registration, drivers, etc.

1 day

- registration 'rehearsal'
- walk-through of all arrangements

CONFERENCE

1 week after

- meeting of Conference Committee to 'debrief' conference
- send thank you letters
- prepare reports to sponsor(s)
- close financial accounts and prepare for auditing
- distribute proceedings

The number of people required will vary with the size of the event and the availability of paid staff. For most small to medium academic conferences there is little or no paid staff; conference committee members are volunteers, with other full-time jobs, and the support staff of the host department add the conference activities to their regular workloads, with minimal temporary help. Our examples above assume a 2-3 day national or regional conference for 100-200 participants. Yours may be more or less complex, but your processes will be similar. Adapt as appropriate.

The Planning/Conference Committee is composed of the chairs of each Subcommittee plus representative(s) of the sponsoring organisation(s) if they are not otherwise represented. One of its first tasks is to establish the timeline of

events, followed by the budget required to hold the event.

Academics are notoriously adverse to being told what to do — or to meeting deadlines. Organising a conference is probably more like a military campaign than most academic activities and will work more smoothly if all involved have a clear **written** understanding of responsibilities and deadlines — and if the limits of consensus decision-making are agreed early in the process. A timeline in a 'count-down' format or a 'critical path' flowchart keeps everyone aware of how their particular responsibilities affect the timing of tasks for others.

Publicity, Advertising and Public Relations

This is probably the area which suffers most from the rotation of academic meetings to different sites each year and the consequent 'first time' experience of conference organisers.

The primary reason for advertising or 'marketing' the conference is to ensure a more than adequate registration. Other considerations include:

- obtaining new members for the organisation
- raising monies to run the organisation (from the registration fees)
- enhancing academic and professional reputations
- raising the profile of the host institution.

Potential advertising vehicles include:

- related professional and trade journals and newsletters
- local press, radio and TV (appropriate for some conference *activities* but usually not appropriate for conference *registration*)
- posters sent to universities and other agencies in advance of programme details as "date claimers" or to generate interest
- a brochure which includes a call for papers, registration form, etc.

Brochure Preparation Checklist

- date, place
- sponsoring organisation(s)
- title/theme
- special local features and details of how to request further information (send to organisers or direct to local tourist bureau?)
- registration fees and details
- accommodation information
- Check with Australia Post for special rates and conditions for large mailings.

Most academic and other publications and media services allow both announcements of forthcoming events and paid announcements. Paid ads have an obvious impact on the budget; the costs will be related to the size of the ad,

its placement, any special arrangements such as reply cards, and the circulation of the publication.

Local media will usually carry announcements of 'open days', etc., but it may be worthwhile paying for additional advertisements so that details such as locations and timings are correct and adequately displayed.

You will need to develop, borrow or rent a mailing list for brochure distribution. Some journals will distribute brochures with their regular mailings for a fee. Consider having all staff members include a brochure with their regular correspondence for a period of time.

Timing of advertising is important — but probably more advertising is sent too late rather than too early.

- The first announcement, particularly if it also includes a “call for papers”, should go out early enough to allow for reasonable preparation time before the deadline for submissions.
- Academic journals require lead times of 90 days or more for announcements and advertisements.
- Allow adequate time for design and printing, preparing mailing lists, stuffing envelopes, etc.
- Overseas mail, and mail during holiday periods, requires a longer lead time than normal. Remember that the time required for mail to leave your organisation's postal system and to be distributed within the recipient organisation will be at least an extra five working days.

You should allow for a second round of publicity if registrations are lagging. Set a deadline for the decision about the need for a second advertising campaign.

Some major conferences are now sending regular conference 'updates' to early registrants in the hope that this will stimulate interest — and additional registrations — from colleagues who see the updates on Common Room Notice Boards or through the 'circulation' system.

2 PROGRAMME PLANNING

Why do people go to conferences? The major reasons include exploring what's going on in a field, to catch up on the latest developments and resources, to build and/or renew acquaintances with professional colleagues and, perhaps, to show and tell what you've been doing.

The job of the conference planner is to provide opportunities for all of these activities — and to balance them in such a way that those attending the conference have maximum opportunities to interact with others but minimum information overload and logistical problems.

All academics know that students have a limited span of attention and that trying to teach people in physical surroundings which are inconvenient or at the end of a long day is next to hopeless. Conference attendees also have their limitations. While the programme organiser can't make sure that each individual will have an optimal programme, it is possible to help by the way in which the programme is designed.

The Formal Programme

This is the part of the programme which is decided upon in advance and appears in print. Some people prepare presentations and other people will decide whether or not to attend — and their agency will decide whether to provide leave and travel funds — on the basis of the formal programme.

- Are there traditional items to be included in the programme? (e.g., a particular distinguished lecture or oration, a business meeting or handover to new office bearers?). Traditions can be changed but only at your peril.

Most organisations which hold regular conferences have settled on a pattern which will provide some guidelines (unless it has been decided that it's time for a change). You will need to consider

- how many days the conference is expected to last
- whether there is to be any fixed, special presentations (a special lecture by an eminent person, for example).

- Do you wish/need to have a particular theme for the conference? A topical or eye-catching theme may help with publicity but may also limit development of some aspects of the programme.

Organisers often choose a theme in hopes that those submitting papers and those invited to speak will prepare presentations which relate to one particular issue. This may be more attractive to those with interests in this issue (a good marketing device) and make the task of those selecting papers and preparing proceedings easier...But unless there is an obvious reason for a particular theme, you may find that you still have to organise some very disparate topics into a coherent programme.

Try to select a theme that is timely and will appeal to a wide range of the potential attendees unless there is a major reason for doing otherwise.

Some potential themes can be found in:

- the history of the sponsoring organisation
 - current world, national or local events (e.g. conferences on AIDS or a just-released "green paper")
 - a particular individual (e.g. a retiring president of an organisation may have a specific field of interest and it may be appropriate to use that as a way of honouring the individual)
- Will a "keynote" speaker set the theme?

Particular speakers may, by the nature of their expertise, set the theme for the conference — or at least for that day. Larger conferences may have a keynote speaker for each day.

- Will you issue a 'call for papers', invite particular speakers or use other means for finding presenters?

A call for papers will generally bring a wide range of possibilities and encourage presenters to attend, but will require a selection mechanism and risk some ill-will from those not selected.

- What principles of adult education will help in organising your programme?
 - attention spans fade after 20 minutes in a lecture
 - group discussion may be an important way of sharing information
 - most people learn more by looking than listening; have you made provision for and encouraged appropriate use of audio-visual approaches?

Having presenters read formal papers seems to be rather a waste of time for intelligent people who have some knowledge of the subject. One alternative approach where people register in advance is to

provide copies of the paper to those attending and to use the time of the session for discussion of the topic.

- Are there particular opportunities or problems posed by the physical facilities you will be using?
- 'Poster sessions' are a relatively new format in conference presentations and are one way to include a wider range of presentations:
 - set up the poster area where posters can readily be seen — in the area used for tea breaks is often a good idea
 - provide appropriate flat space and tape, pins or adhesive to fasten up the posters
 - think about providing one major session early in the programme where the posters can be 'reviewed' as a group to raise points of interest and encourage viewers.
- Would it be useful to provide specific 'student' or 'practitioner' sessions at which individuals who have short presentations or works in progress can have an opportunity to gain experience with a smaller group?
- How will you handle the opening and closing sessions?

The opening session generally sets the tone for the conference. Some organisations have a very formal opening with government and other officials bringing greetings. If this type of activity is expected, consider having it in the evening and combining it with a welcoming reception (see 'informal' programme).

Many conferences will begin with a full 'plenary' session with a keynote speaker. Choose carefully. Ideally this individual should give a thought-provoking presentation which will get participants thinking and talking; s/he should also be a polished presenter so that things start smoothly.

Some conferences begin with special audio-visual or dramatic productions. This approach is generally more costly, and can be either a big plus in terms of stirring up interest or can create controversy.

The closing session is often even more of a challenge. Many people will have travel scheduled and will be leaving early. There is a tendency for conferences to run out of steam and for final sessions to be poorly attended. Some conferences have attempted to counteract this by providing for a final plenary session which summarises the conference and perhaps sets a direction for the future. Try to avoid having the business session (AGM) of the organisation as the last session if you want to have any more than the dedicated few attending the meeting.

Speakers vs presentations

Most programme organisers feel that they need some major presentation to draw individual registrants to the conference. In academic circles this is often an individual well-known for particular expertise. In trade shows the major presentation often takes the form of some type of 'show' or spectacle which will dazzle and enthuse the audience. This latter approach seems to be becoming more common with large conferences which have attracted a wide variety of attendees, but for most academic conferences a major speaker will still be the preferred approach.

There are some hazards in pinning a great many hopes on the 'drawing power' of a particular speaker. The more high profile the individual, the more likely it is that some last minute change of priorities will prevent their attending the conference — and any speaker can become ill or be marooned by transportation problems.

Questions to Ask About Speakers

- Does the proposed speaker have presentation talent? (Not all leaders in academic fields are good speakers)
- Is the proposed speaker sufficiently well-known and respected to attract an audience — and registrants? (In some cases merely being from overseas is sufficient glamour to attract, but local experts should not be overlooked)
- Is there someone from outside your field who can bring fresh insights? (Such a person may be a 'big name' or simply someone who has made a contribution elsewhere. David Suzuki, a geneticist, has been invited to speak at a wide variety of academic and professional gatherings on the basis of his very popular and provocative television series on the environment.)
- Can we afford this individual? (In addition to transportation, accommodation costs and waiver of registration fees, some speakers are now expecting substantial honoraria. This is particularly true of those who may be from outside the organisation planning the conference.)
- Is this individual available at the time of our conference? (The better known the speaker the more apt they are to have other commitments. Starting early to nail down the key people is an important element in good conference planning.)

While conference participants are generally sympathetic to the genuine last-minute emergency, the more difficult situation for the conference organiser occurs when a speaker cancels a few months before the conference — long enough for the organisers to feel obliged to find a substitute, but after all the publicity has been prepared and distributed.

This is never a good situation, but it can be dealt with by:

- having a "Plan B", a short list of emergency replacements (you don't need to have talked to the alternatives ahead of time, but you should know who might be suitable)
- asking the presenter him/herself for suggestions
- requesting the presenter to prepare a videotape presentation, possibly with a telephone conference call to handle questions so that the presentation itself doesn't need to be cancelled
- changing the format for that portion of the programme and substituting a panel discussion, film presentation or other activity where several people can share the burden of the presentation.

Other Types of 'Keynote' Presentations (films, dramas, etc.)

Business organisations in particular are using alternate presentation formats to spark their conferences and training sessions. Recent reports in the Australian media described high-energy physical activities such as white water rafting, historical presentations such as a *son et lumiere* within a former prison, mystery tours and exotic locales as means of generating enthusiasm among the participants. Normally such events are stage-managed by professional conference organisers.

- Is someone on the programme planning committee actually knowledgeable about this approach? If not, where can you get unbiased advice?
- Is the organisation willing to commit the funds and psychic energy necessary? (For example, one conference with which we were involved decided that a film covering changes in the particular profession over 75 years would be an appropriate opening for its anniversary conference. Not only did they have to find a suitable filmmaker, but the efforts of a great many people had to be mobilised to provide the material for the film.) The presentation was successful, but the effort required was much greater than that required to engage and brief a keynote speaker.
- Can the presentation also be used elsewhere to help defray the cost and effort? (The film referred to above had an independent use after the conference.)
- Does the venue of the conference lend itself to this alternative approach?

The 'Middle' of the Programme

These sessions usually provide opportunities for minor or more specialised presentations. Unless the conference is very small it is usual to split

the registrants into smaller groups by providing a number of simultaneous or 'concurrent' sessions. This has the advantage of catering for a larger number of special interests, but can pose problems for both presenters and conference attendees.

- Concurrent sessions? Be careful not to have too many sessions concurrently or the number of attendees at any one may be very small or even zero. It is, of course, a matter of judgement whether it is better to have been 'on the programme' and presenting to two or three others than not on at all, and different groups will have different expectations. A large number of concurrent sessions may indicate a lack of discrimination or quality control in selecting papers.
- How will conference attendees know what to choose? Including abstracts with the conference material is an improvement over simply providing titles.
- How will conference attendees know where to go? Provision of maps and clear directions is essential if there are many concurrent sessions. Be especially careful to put up extra signs if there are room changes or cancellations for any sessions after the programme is printed.
- How will time limits be managed? Many attendees find that they want to attend part of one session and part of another. Unless the timing of all sessions is handled with considerable precision, people will find themselves anxious to leave before one presentation is over and coming in late for the next. This can be disturbing for all concerned.
- Who will chair the concurrent sessions? Make sure that these individuals are designated well in advance and know who will be presenting papers in their sessions. In a very large conference you (the organiser) may have to provide for a meeting place to ensure that both chair and presenters have an opportunity to meet each other before the actual session. Provide a checklist of responsibilities for chairpersons to help them (and you) function smoothly.
- In some venues (whether hotels or universities) there is a lack of sound separation in some of the smaller rooms. Will this cause a problem for concurrent sessions?

The Informal Programme

The informal programme includes all of the other activities of the conference. Most people attending meetings also have a personal agenda which may include:

- exchanging information with colleagues
- meeting new potential colleagues
- recruiting staff/students or being recruited

- talking with old friends
- catching up on the news
- exploring employment opportunities
- obtaining information about new equipment, books or services.

Checklist for Chairing a Session

Before the session

- Arrange to meet with the presenter(s) before the session
- Do you have biographical information for each presenter?
- Do presenters know the time schedule for the session?
- Do presenters know the format for the session?
- Explain any time keeping arrangements
- Have appropriate AV or other facilities been arranged?
- Are there alternate arrangements in case of equipment failure?
- Do you have alternate arrangements in case of delays or a 'no-show'?
- Have YOU checked out the room and its facilities?

During the session

- Introduce yourself, the topic and explain 'No Smoking' and similar rules
- Introduce the presenters and explain the format to the audience
- Explain any time keeping arrangements, rules regarding making recordings, etc.
- Smooth the transition between presenters as appropriate
- Facilitate audience questions
- Close the session by thanking the presenter(s) and audience

After the session

- Ensure that all presentation materials have been retrieved and/or returned
- Thank presenter(s) and AV assistant(s), etc.
- Report to Conference Convenor, plenary, etc., as appropriate

Regular conferences will likely have developed several routines for meeting these needs. Some which you may wish to consider are:

- Provision of name tags. This is routine at most conferences, but since it is one of the first ways in which your planning expertise will be demonstrated, give some thought to:

- type of a size which is legible from a normal social distance
 - other identifying information which should be included — agency, geographic location, role in programme, nature of registration (daily, student, etc.).
- Coffee/tea breaks. These provide opportunities for people to mingle and to visit exhibits; provision of sufficient space so that it is relatively easy for people to get tea and coffee, move about and perhaps sit informally will help.
 - Contact mechanism. The larger the conference the more difficult it is to find someone. For a small conference a simple notice board and natural mingling may suffice. For larger meetings, informal sessions around topics can be set up over lunch or after formal sessions.
 - One conference which we attended lately used an elaborate electronic messaging system which seemed to be effective in bringing people into contact, but required major effort and sponsorship.
 - Provision of an up-to-date list of registrants to everyone at the point of registration will help identify who is there. Provision of a corrected list of registrants, with addresses, following the conference (perhaps as part of the proceedings) will facilitate follow-up.
 - Social events. Most conferences have an informal reception or similar event at the beginning of the conference. This event can also provide a focus for early arrivals.
 - Planning events in sites which encourage people to mingle and provide 'excuses' for strangers to talk to each other will facilitate the contact process. River cruises, box lunches in railroad museums, barbecues, and dinners in historical villages have all been used to good effect. Most such venues will also require some type of group transportation (buses) which can facilitate people meeting.
 - Local tourism organisations can also provide information on other, non-conference, activities that may be of interest.

Finally social events must be planned to take into account such variables as the age, sex, mobility and interests of the conference participants and their friends or guests. A formal dinner and dance, for example, would not normally be appropriate for an academic conference attended without spouses or other companions. On the other hand, a less formal dinner, barbecue, 'bush dance' or similar event is appropriate for most groups.

3 CONFERENCE LOGISTICS

The logistics, the administrative side, of your conference will have an important influence not only on how positive an impression the participants have, but also on how much 'work' you and your committee have to put into the organisation and how much 'fun' you have.

Registration

Once the venue, programme and dates have been decided you will be in a position to begin thinking about registration. A key decision is the basic registration fee. For most conferences this basic fee multiplied by the number of expected registrants will be expected to cover all the costs of the conference. If yours is an annual event you will probably have some guidelines to follow in determining both the fee and the number of registrants expected. If yours is a first-time event or differs markedly from previous conferences you should probably build in a couple of points where you can reassess the budget, depending on how many participants you are able to anticipate.

In Australia there seems to be a pattern that most participants do not send in their registrations until the last possible moment. This can be very unnerving for conference organisers!

One strategy frequently used to encourage early registration is the provision of a discount for "early bird" or advance registrations. The deadline you select for the cut-off point for the discount and the amount of the discount are matters of judgement, but usually a minimum of two months prior to the opening of the conference and a minimum of 10% off the registration fee will be necessary to have any impact at all.

For most conferences which last more than one day it is also necessary to provide registration opportunities for those who are unable or do not wish to attend the entire conference. Some conferences provide for a daily registration rate (usually more than a simple division of the full fee by number of days of the conference — and not including any meals, conference satchel or proceedings). Others do not provide a daily rate, but make provision for an "institutional" rate which permits one registration to be used by several participants from the same institution. Usually such registrations provide for only one name tag which must be left at the registration desk and picked up by each attendee in turn.

There is often an additional charge for such registrations.

For some conferences it will be advantageous to provide a student registration rate. Usually student registrations are set as low as possible to encourage the attendance of future members — often they do not include attendance at banquets or other meals.

Where "accompanying persons" may be expected to attend, particularly for social events or to view exhibits, a special rate may also be established for them. Occasionally it may also be appropriate to establish a rate for children if there are occasions on which they might also be present.

Organising the Speakers

Ensuring that conference presenters bring quality materials and have good presentation facilities takes planning.

- Start early.
- Send presentation guidelines for potential speakers at the same time that you send them guidelines for preparing their papers (see the Sample Guidelines for Authors later in this section). See the box (next page) for a sample guideline for preparing overhead transparencies, still the most abused presentation technique.
- Request that speakers bring their own presentation equipment or provide detailed specifications well in advance when it differs from the equipment that you normally use. This will become even more important as "multimedia" presentations using computers become more common.
- Make available (and advertise in presenter's materials) a "presenters' room" where strange equipment can be tested, slides previewed, and technicians briefed prior to presentations.
- Arrange for technical staff to be available for the whole conference. This will usually require 'duty' technicians to be available early in the mornings, during breaks and meals, and after hours as well as during presentations.
- Ensure that more than one person has keys to important facilities, and that several people know how to operate all facilities.
- Obtain any borrowed or rented equipment early enough that it can be tested in the actual location of use prior to the conference.
- Request that presenters send samples of any unusual materials so that their use can be tested prior to the conference.

Using Overhead Transparencies

Good transparencies are really a question of design and layout rather than special production facilities. If possible, prepare any text using a word processor or presentation software and print using a laser printer. The paper print can then be copied onto special transparency film with most photocopiers.

Lettering Size, Font and Style

The minimum acceptable size for use on an overhead transparency is 18 point type (typewriters and basic computer printers are typically 10 point). Larger sizes are permissible and often preferred. 24-30 point size should be the absolute minimum used for theatre projection; 36-72 point can sometimes be used for emphasis.

- Use a simple plain font and bold colours or black.
- **Bold** type is permissible; however you should avoid cursive scripts, underlining, shadowed type, etc., as these "features" make the text harder to read.
- Courier bold, Geneva bold, Helvetica (& bold), New Century Schoolbook (& bold), New York (& bold) and Times (& bold) are acceptable fonts, although some are more useful than others.

Content Considerations

Overhead transparencies should be aids to understanding your presentation, not a copy of your notes to be read aloud. Use an outline form with brief phrases for emphasis, to help the audience keep on the same point that you are on, or to understand a complex issue.

- Use single words or phrases rather than sentences.
- Use short quotes rather than long extracts from documents.
- Use summary lists (especially when dealing with figures).
- A list with more than 10 points should probably use more than one transparency.
- Use simplified diagrams with bold lines, icons or readily recognised symbols.
- Use bullets and other symbols for emphasis.
- Keep the transparency material brief.
- Check for spelling and other errors before use.
- Number the transparencies if they are used in a series.

Using Transparencies

- Talk to your audience, not the screen.
- Use the transparency to aid your presentation, not as a substitute for a verbal presentation.
- Stand so that everyone in the audience can see the screen.
- Use a bold coloured transparency pen for emphasis.

Sound Systems

Conference audio systems need to facilitate hearing the speaker without distorting or getting in the way of the speaker.

- Try to ensure that all speakers will be "miked" with individually controlled microphones. This should mean wireless microphones attached to a lapel or shirt (bring an extra belt or otherwise make provision for attaching the transmitter box to individuals without jacket pockets or belts) and a receiving system, with operator, located near the sound system amplifier, but the ugly reality of costs may require less adequate solutions.
- Discuss microphone use with speakers before their presentation. Ensure that speakers know how to turn the microphone on and that they will be comfortable with the arrangements; suggest that they refrain from blowing into the microphone.
- Ensure that the height of microphones is easily adjusted; brief speakers on how to adjust the height if required.
- Locate microphones at points of use to avoid moving them during the event. This is particularly important if the speaker must move to several locations to operate presentation equipment (OHP, computer controlling visuals, etc.).
- Microphones hung from the ceiling are an often overlooked way to avoid mike stands and cables on the floor.
- Panel discussions might use a table with individual fixed microphones, each of which has its own easily operated on/off switch. Avoid handing microphones from speaker to speaker, especially when cable lengths are limited.
- Ensure that the person controlling the microphones understands the system being used and the responsibilities involved. A perfectly miked person whose sound isn't turned up (or down) at the appropriate time is worse off than a person without a microphone.
- Test voices prior to the event and 'balance' the microphone levels where several people will be making presentations during the same session.
- Some speakers are reluctant to use a microphone. Be firm and persuasive, particularly when the proceedings are being recorded.

'Feedback' results when a microphone is aimed at a speaker (the box on the wall, not the person speaking), causing the electronic sounds from the speaker to be reamplified to painful howls. The fact that some modern

microphones have a very broad pickup pattern leads to situations where, even when the microphone is behind the speaker, feedback still occurs.

- Accept the advice of technical staff and avoid situations where they indicate feedback will occur.
- Warn users that they may cause feedback when they move outside a predetermined area, as for example, when they walk around on the stage or move out into the audience.
- If feedback does occur, quickly place your hand over the microphone to stop the squeal. Then move the microphone to avoid a recurrence.

Feedback isn't the only unwanted addition to conference audio systems.

- Wireless microphone systems will sometimes pick up other sounds — alien communications messages or static bursts. Sometimes the intruder will be a taxi dispatcher or a speaker in a nearby room using the same channel, or a fancy piece of equipment in the nearby trade exhibit. Eliminating the source of the transmissions is the only real solution other than avoiding wireless microphones.
- Never locate microphone cables near fluorescent lights or electric motors as they may be a source of static.
- Turning off institutional sound systems is a real challenge. We have probably all tried to listen to an after dinner speaker in a hotel where other users of the sound system keep interrupting. I don't know which is worse, to have orders to the kitchen's staff interrupting a speech or to have piped music playing in the background. Consult with the manager before the event.
- The moveable doors dividing two or more parts of a larger conference or banquet room are never soundproof and the sound system in such a room(s) is often common to all parts of the room. Avoid using such rooms for any situation where it is necessary to hear a speaker or ensure that the sound from your session drowns out any competing noises.

Questions From the Floor

Questions from participants are an essential part of a conference yet they will be almost impossible to hear without adequate preparation.

- Decide where and how microphones will be used well before the event, and especially before the seating arrangements are fixed.
- Ensure that it is easy to get to the microphones from any part of the

room, even if it has an overflow crowd.

- Set the microphones up so that they face away from the speaker system. Since many conference rooms, especially in hotels, use ceiling mounted speakers, this may be a challenge.
- "Shotgun" microphones, operated by a competent individual, with questioners standing at their seats, may be an acceptable alternative to fixed microphones. Test the system in realistic conditions before use.
- Never depend on handheld microphones passed from individual to individual.
- Test the system thoroughly before use, especially to avoid feedback problems.
- Ensure that the technicians operating the system understand when and how the question period will be conducted and any rules imposed on the questioners.
- Encourage the session chairperson to require questioners to use the microphones.

Sound Systems in Small Rooms

Small rooms are particularly problematic. For most speakers there should not be a need for a sound system; however a full room and a quiet speaker will need an electronic boost.

- Use a system designed for the type of room being used and ensure that the seating enhances the sound system.
- Self-contained podium and sound systems are ideal for use in small rooms. Place any extension speaker boxes in line with the podium (never behind), well to the side of the room and elevated high enough to project over the heads of the seated audience.
- Put the podium at the end of the room farthest from the door. This allows people to enter and leave the room with minimum disruption and minimises feedback in the sound system.
- Avoid situations where the podium is on the long side of the room. Speakers cannot maintain eye contact with the audience and setting up an adequate sound system is more difficult.

The Presenters' Room

Presenters expect a place where they can have some privacy before and

after their presentation. This room should be close to the presentation area and must be away from any facilities for the media.

- Last minute changes to presentations requires a quiet work area with standard preparation facilities including possibly word processors, photocopiers, and overhead transparency production facilities.
- Review of presentation materials requires access to preview and presentation equipment. This might include a light table and projectors for previewing slide presentations, overhead projectors, VCRs, and computer controlled presentation facilities.
- Conferring with technicians or others operating facilities in the presentation room requires, first and foremost, access to those individuals at reasonable times. This may require more than one shift of technical staff, or payment for overtime when they are working longer hours than normal.
- Nervous presenters waiting for their time 'on stage' and tired ones who have finished will all appreciate simple refreshments. These should be available whenever the room is open, not just at scheduled 'break' times.
- Local equipment suppliers and other vendors can often be convinced to sponsor the Presenters' Room provided appropriate credit is given.

Taping Sessions

Audiotaping or videotaping, where required, is much more controllable when done by the conference organisers rather than members of the audience.

- Announce in advance that tapes of conference sessions will be provided.
- Price tapes low enough that it isn't worth the audience doing their own taping. If you are using a professional conference service to tape sessions, ensure that their costs are reasonable.
- Tap the tape recorder into the conference sound system, avoiding extra microphones and cables. Similarly, video equipment should use the conference projection system for a video source when possible.
- Keep the taping equipment, and crew, out of the way. They are an adjunct to the conference session, not the stars. This is especially important with novice TV crews (and local media professionals) who often seem to have an exaggerated idea of their own worth.
- Ensure that technicians discuss arrangements with the speakers prior

to the session so that technicians are not surprised by lights being turned off, use of projectors, etc. General details can be provided to speakers in the form of a handout.

- Put an identifying "header" message on the start of each tape, duplicate tapes quickly, label them and distribute prior to the end of the conference. Clearly indicate on the label and in later promotional materials when the quality is poor because of taping problems, external noises, use of a roving speaker, etc.
- Provide an alternate mailing system for individuals without room in their baggage for the tapes, as well as for non-attendees.
- Photography at sessions is in the same category as taping. The photographer shouldn't be a distraction. A professional photographer will avoid flashbulbs and refrain from blocking the view of conference attendees.

Technical Support Staff

Quality presentations start with well prepared presentations from competent presenters; however even the best presenter with the best preparation can be destroyed by a lack of professionalism among the technical support staff.

- Technical staff need to know what they are doing. Students can do much of the technical work for a presentation, but they will almost always need to be trained for the job. Their training should include both the technical aspects of the equipment they will be operating AND the social skills for communicating with the presenters.
- A responsible, competent, and cheerful technician must have overall responsibility for the technical support services. Cheerful technicians are almost unknown at conferences because they usually have to maintain their normal duties as well as providing conference support. The cost of getting them released full time to the conference will be repaid many times in better service and compliments from the presenters.
- Repair facilities and adequate spare parts must be ordered well in advance of the conference. Murphy's Law says that the most expensive projector bulb will blow out first, and that a new one will have a delivery time of three weeks. Be prepared.

Little Things that Make a Big Difference

- Ensure that cables are taped securely to the floor with "carpet layer's" or "gaffer's" tape.

- Know where the switches (and circuit breakers) are located for lights, power points, etc., so that operators can work quietly and efficiently and/or react to a fault.
- Test the emergency lighting system, fire alarms, etc., prior to the event and get faults repaired.
- Have a supply of batteries (and fuses), cable connectors, extension cords and similar items, in all the sizes and types that could be required during the conference. This is especially important for microphones which are battery powered.
- Have a small tool kit capable of fixing all the common problems handy for the technicians (or others). This kit should probably include band-aids and similar first aid supplies.
- Speakers who have a known history of refusing to use a microphone are somewhat like the ones who use handmade overhead transparencies made with an almost dry felt pen. Avoid them like the plague.

Annual General Meetings

The preparation of the agenda, the distribution of documentation, and the conduct of an organisation's business or annual general meeting is normally the responsibility of the organisation rather than the conference committee. As the meeting is usually held during the conference, and is listed on the programme, the organisers need to settle a number of issues.

- Will there be other concurrent activities?
- Will the meeting interfere with or need to be cut short for other activities such as hotel preparations for a banquet?
- Where and how will the meeting materials be distributed? Alternatives include within registration materials, at the registration desk, by special mailing, or at the meeting itself.
- What special facilities does the meeting require?
- Who can attend the meeting? If admission is restricted, how will this be communicated? If the meeting is open but voting is restricted, how will this be handled?

Proceedings

The preparation of printed proceedings, primarily containing copies of the

papers presented, seems to have become expected for national-level academic conferences in Australia. This is not necessarily the same in other countries, and proceedings there may contain only abstracts or a summary report on the conference.

Editors of full paper proceedings can have some control over paper preparation and to keep their work to a minimum by giving authors clear guidelines.

Sample Guidelines for Authors

Paper Preparation

Papers for inclusion in the proceedings should be 5000 words (or less) and must be submitted in camera ready form on A4 sheets (297mm by 210mm) with top margin 20mm, bottom margin 20mm, left margin 20mm, and right margin 20mm. These pages will be reduced to A5 size and reproduced as is in the Conference proceedings.

Text should be either Palatino or Times Roman (font), 12 point/pitch. The top 120mm of the first page should be left blank. The title of the paper, author(s) and abstract will be produced by the secretariat and inserted in this space.

Do not use headers or footers on the page. Number all pages, including diagrams and tables, in pencil, on the back top of each page.

Copies for Delegates

Handouts and other related materials should be duplicated by the presenter, transported to the conference and distributed by the presenter. Duplicating at the conference site will be expensive and time consuming. Please bring approximately 25-30 copies of any handouts you may need.

Queries

If you have any further queries with regard to paper preparation or presentation, please do not hesitate to call the Conference Secretariat.

Phone:

FAX: (nnn) nnnnnn

Email: (nnn) nnnnnn

Address, etc.

Considerable work will also be saved if the proceedings can be distributed at the conference. The following suggestions will help to make this possible.

- Establish a standard format for the submission of abstracts and papers.
- Request that all written work be submitted 'camera ready' on paper (or in a specific word processor format on disk if you are prepared to cope with some authors who fail to follow directions).
- Work with your printer to establish deadlines and quantities of materials.
- The cover, the text for the programme itself, and similar material can all be printed in advance.
- Work with the Registration Subcommittee to organise a distribution system and sales procedure.
- If the proceedings will be bulky, consider making arrangements with Australia Post to have a temporary facility at the conference for weighing parcels and selling postage and Postpak boxes.

4 SUPPORT SERVICES

The housing and feeding of conference delegates is often at least as important as the academic content of the programme. How often have you heard people some years later referring to a particularly good or bad experience with the hospitality side of the conference — and how seldom do they refer to the splendid programme sessions which they attended?

Your first task as a conference planner is to decide how much of the 'food and lodging' will be included in the conference programme and how much you will expect participants to arrange on their own.

- If you are holding your conference at a resort which offers a 'package', then all meals and refreshments at breaks are likely to be included.
- If you are holding your conference on campus with some people staying in residence, arrangements may vary from 'bed and breakfast' to provision of all meals.

Tea Breaks

Most conferences will include morning and afternoon 'breaks' as a part of the conference package without additional charge to the delegates. (Although we have seen attempts to charge for coffee, etc. in hotels, this seems to generate more hard feeling than revenue.) The Australian tradition seems to be to provide more substantial food for breaks than is the custom elsewhere. If you are responsible for setting up arrangements, do give some thought to traffic flow; the provision of food definitely slows things down, particularly if individuals have to spread cream and jam on pikelets! Not everyone drinks tea or coffee and it is a nice touch to make some provision for those who would prefer juice. The provision of iced tea in hot weather is a nice touch (although apparently almost unknown in some parts of Australia) as is the provision of decaffeinated coffee at any time.

If participants will be coming from some distance to the opening session, the provision of coffee in the registration area adds a good welcoming note.

Lunches

There are many different possible arrangements for lunch. If your conference is in a hotel or downtown venue with a lot of nearby places for individuals to have lunch, then you need not include it in the conference programme and cost. On the other hand, you then need to allow more time for the lunch break since people will need to get to restaurants, order, eat, and walk back. There may also be the temptation not to return.

- If you want to keep people around and serve large numbers as quickly as possible, a catered buffet style service is probably the most reasonable choice. A buffet also provides the opportunity for people to choose foods according to their preference for both variety and amount.
- Some organisations have begun to include breakfast meetings in their programmes. While this is one way to ensure that the meeting does not conflict with other activities, it is one about which most people have mixed feelings. We have seen this tactic used quite successfully, however, to make sure that there was a quorum for the Annual General Meeting. Provision of a full breakfast at no extra cost does seem to bring out the membership.
- If you are planning a tour as part of the conference, you may need to make arrangements for some type of box lunch. Check with the caterer for appropriate arrangements — you don't want to find yourself responsible for a food-poisoning epidemic because of improper refrigeration!

If you are going to conduct any formal programme in conjunction with any meal you do need to make sure that you have scheduled events so that they will fit within the time allotted and so that speakers do not have to compete with the clatter of crockery being cleared. Have a contingency plan if you have a guest speaker — planes can be late and it is often impossible to delay the meal.

Receptions and Dinners

Evening meals are generally not included in conferences except for a "conference dinner". The formality of the dinner can vary considerably from black tie with a full programme of speakers followed by a dance, to something more along the lines of an Aussie barbecue. (Think about adding chicken, prawns and a vegetarian alternative.) If you have some special local attraction which can be combined with the dinner (river cruise, local historical site, cultural presentation) it often provides a more convivial atmosphere for

conference participants attending with or without partners.

One other question which you will need to settle for receptions and dinners is whether beer, wine or alcohol will be included in the event, or whether there will be a cash bar. The venue you have chosen may have its own preferences and the group for which you are organizing the conference may also have its own. If you are organizing the conference in an unfamiliar venue (particularly overseas or interstate), do check to see what the local licensing regulations are. There is probably more variation in regulations and policies with regard to the serving of alcohol than any other item and you do need to be sure that you have the proper permits or licenses if you are using a 'different' venue.

At a formal banquet someone will need to be delegated in advance to make arrangements for protocol and seating, programme of speakers and notifying all involved about the arrangements.

- Who will be seated at the head table or other designated area?
- How will they be seated? Are spouses to be included? If not, where will they sit?
- If there is to be a formal entry of the head table guests, where will they gather first? (Normal practice seems to include some type of pre-meal refreshments.)
- Will there be a piper to 'pipe in' the head table guests? Who will serve as compere or master of ceremonies?
- If awards are to be presented, where will the recipients be seated? Will the award be a surprise? (Recommend that the recipient at least be forewarned that the award is being made and seated close enough to avoid delays in presentation.)
- Will there be speeches? If yes, do everything in your power to ensure that they are brief and relevant. A few minutes outlining the programme, timing and expectations to speakers will avoid embarrassment later.
- Will there be entertainment during or after the meal? If yes, co-ordinate timing with the caterer.

Meal Costs

There are some advantages in including the cost of all meals in the one registration fee; this will mean that you have much closer control over the numbers and that everyone tends to join in. It will, however, drive up the cost of the registration fee — and you may have to make a compromise. If you are

including the cost of meals in the registration fee, you may also need to make additional tickets available for "accompanying persons". The cost of these should be set at a break-even level or better. See the Budget section for additional details.

Whatever the meal, most hotels or caterers will need to know somewhat in advance of the day how many to expect so that appropriate quantities can be prepared as well as seating and serving arrangements. If you are controlling attendance by issuing tickets, make sure that you are clear who will collect the tickets and how attendance will be counted. Specify with the caterer in advance:

- menu (and basis for individual preference if any)
- minimum number for which you will be charged
- date by which number to be served must be confirmed
- arrangements for service of beer, wine, alcohol
- the time that the service will commence and cease
- cost (generally on a per person basis)
- who will make arrangements for head table decorations, microphones, place cards, etc.

Accommodation and Local Transport

The cost of accommodation will be one of the more substantial items for participants attending your conference from out of town. Tastes and pocket-books vary considerably — and you would be well advised to provide information for participants with regard to a range of possibilities and price ranges. Information about the distance of hotels from the site of the conference is also appreciated.

If participants will be staying at several sites and public transportation is not adequate, you may want to consider setting up a shuttle-bus service from the major residential sites to the conference. While this is a nice touch, our suggestion would be to try to avoid the necessity for this if at all possible — it just adds one more complication.

It is, however, probably worthwhile setting up bus transport for those who will be attending evening functions at 'special' sites, particularly if alcohol will be being served. In this case providing a local host on the bus who can point out interesting things along the way and help to get the social interaction started would be a good move.

Child Care Arrangements

More and more conferences are making arrangements for child care for families of participants attending conferences. This is generally best done by making arrangements with existing child-care centres, although ad hoc arrangements may be needed for some sites or shorter events.

You will need to have registrations in advance for this service, along with an indication of the ages of the children and fees to be paid. Early consultation with someone familiar with the pitfalls in this domain is recommended; if you have a child care facility on campus, it should probably be involved in the planning and service.

Accompanying Persons

A few years ago it used to be standard to have a 'social programme for wives' as a part of many conferences. This now seems to have almost died out. The provision of information on tourist sites, shopping facilities and other local attractions would seem to be enough to meet most needs, with perhaps the opportunity to sign up for an optional local tour.

Facilities for the Handicapped

If your conference will be held in a major hotel, the facilities for wheelchair access probably already exist (but check out older hotels). If your conference is at a resort or on campus, there may be considerable problems for those with mobility handicaps. Check out the site so that appropriate information for housing, dining facilities and conference facilities can be included in conference information.

Facilities for the hearing handicapped seem to be even scarcer than wheelchair access facilities. If you are able to provide additional facilities, be sure to mention them in the promotional material.

No Smoking Policy

Many campuses have now adopted 'no smoking' policies for their buildings. If this is the case with the venue you will be using, it should be made clear to those who will be attending the conference. Similarly, if the organisation itself has adopted a no smoking policy, that should also be made clear at the beginning of the sessions as a reminder to all concerned and information to guests.

Meeting and Greeting

Large conferences often provide identifiable meeting services at airports to assist those arriving with transport to hotels, information on conference programme, etc. If you do not intend to provide this service, it is absolutely essential that the information going to participants include information on how to get from the airport to both the conference site and residential areas (if these are different).

At a minimum, advise key staff and information desks at airports and rail stations about the conference and how to reach the venue.

Using Campus Residences

More and more universities are marketing their halls of residence as places for conference participants to stay during the between-semester breaks. If you will be using campus residences for accommodation:

- mark the residence entrance clearly and place directional signs at the entrance to the campus
- have someone available 'after hours' to admit people who may be arriving late by car or off delayed planes or trains
- clearly mark the location and hours of breakfast service for those who arrive late
- clearly mark the location of telephones and other amenities (especially when males and females are sharing normally single-sex facilities).

Message Service

Probably most of us have had the frustrating experience of trying to locate a colleague at a conference. This difficulty is compounded if the venue is on campus and people are staying in residence rather than in hotels. Provision of a message board in a prominent location is the minimum required to help to overcome this problem.

Portable telephones can be installed for the duration of the conference. You may wish to discuss this with Telecom or simply have a hand-held phone available at the registration desk.

If your site and facilities run to computers and electronic mail, you might also make this facility available to those attending the conference.

Other Services

Conference participants need headache remedies, postage stamps, newspapers, banking facilities, photocopies, etc. Provision of information about these facilities (particularly if you are using a campus site) will help a great deal to make sure that all goes smoothly.

5 BUDGET

If you are planning a conference which is a regular annual event, you may be able to build your budget on the basis of past experience, although you may have different cost factors depending on your locale.

If you are planning a first conference or special event, you will need to consider all of the cost categories outlined below. For some of these categories you may be able to negotiate 'in kind' donations or to make use of existing services. We would suggest that you examine each of the categories listed and decide on either a realistic cost which must be covered, or a *gratis* source of service.

This task must be carried out early in your planning since you will need to set your registration fee prior to release of advertising — and your fee is probably a major reflection of conference costs. Or, conversely, the budget available for conference planning will reflect the amount you expect to raise from conference fees.

The remainder of this section has been set out as a checklist with questions and suggestions to help you and your planning committee in planning the budget.

Anticipated Expenses

Programme Costs:

- Travel and accommodation costs for main speakers
 - Can you arrange for appropriate speakers whose expenses will be paid by their employer or other source?
 - Will speakers require special arrangements at additional costs (e.g. business class airfares or up-graded accommodation)?
 - Do you need to provide transportation such as taxis from hotel, etc.
 - Do be clear in your own planning and in any communication with prospective speakers whether or not any travel subsidy will be provided on the basis of distance, organisational membership, country of origin, etc. Do not assume that everyone will have the

- same understanding or that if you say nothing the speakers will not have any expectation of expenses being covered.
 - Make sure that you use standard fares for calculation since special fares may not be available when needed.
 - If a banquet or other functions are charged separately to registrants, don't forget to include major speakers on the gratis guest list — and to budget for their inclusion when calculating costs of the event.
- Fees for speakers/entertainers
 - Fees for speaking are not usually provided at academic conferences, but may be a factor if you are seeking a "name" speaker as a drawcard.
 - Many conferences provide gifts for major speakers. If you intend to do this, include the gift and wrappings etc. in your budget.
- Rental of Facilities
 - Space
 - Reductions for charges on hotel function rooms may be available if a certain number of participants stay in the designated hotel or group meals are served. Do be clear on the arrangements in advance. (See section on "Care and Feeding" for further details.)
 - With universities being encouraged to become entrepreneurial, don't assume that meeting space will be available on campus without charge.
 - Are there any associated costs for janitorial or security staff?
 - Equipment.

Depending on the size of the conference and the facilities available, you may need to consider the costs of:

 - a sound system (for speakers and for questions from the floor)
 - overhead projectors
 - slide projectors
 - film and videotape projection
 - technicians, if required either by the nature of the equipment or because of facility or union agreements.
 - directional signs to point to venues, parking, etc.
 - banners or background signs for meetings
 - flowers or other decorations for tables.
- Translation services

These may range from ad hoc arrangements provided by other delegates, staff or students to simultaneous translation provided by commercial services. If the latter, costs will probably be related to the number of "receiver" sets required by conference participants, the number of hours of translation required, the number of languages required and the complexity of the material.

 - While translation services are not usually provided for Australian conferences it is something to consider, at least for the plenary

sessions, of international conferences.

- In some countries subsidy may be available for the cost of translations.
- **Meals and refreshments**
(Only services to be included in the registration fee need be considered; see also previous section on "Support Services")
 - Will you be subsidising these services or covering them totally?
 - Will you be providing tea and coffee breaks, lunches, a banquet or other "feature" meals, food and/or drink on any field visits, etc.?
- **Other costs of producing the programme**
 - Will any audio-visual materials be required? While most speakers will bring their own slides or overheads, you may need to provide some materials.
 - If you are planning to have one or more speakers 'appear' on videotape, the production of these materials needs to be budgeted.
 - If speakers are bringing videotapes or other electronic media prepared in North America or Europe, the materials will need to be converted to Australian standard before they can be shown on equipment here. The costs of conversion or rental of special equipment need to be included.
- **Costs related to exhibitions and displays**
If you are planning to offer display or exhibition space in connection with the event, you should consider the costs of:
 - preparing a special brochure or other notification to possible displayers
 - setting up the display area, possibly including tables, background cloth separation between booths, electrical connections etc.
 - extra security which may be required
 - any other services provided to paying exhibitors (complimentary banquet ticket?)

Costs Related to Participants

- **Subsidies**
 - Will any participants require a subsidy to attend? If so the conditions should be made clear from the beginning.
- **Ancillary services for participants**
 - Will bus transportation to venues be necessary?
 - Any programmes for "accompanying persons"?
 - Child care arrangements?
- **Materials for distribution to participants**
 - Printed programme
 - Conference satchel

- Contents of satchel
- Name tag
- Receipts
- Abstracts
- Proceedings

A satchel and contents seem to be expected these days. This can be a useful way to distribute information about the local community, facilities, other programmes, etc. Items may be donated or advertising sold to reduce costs. Costs of print materials will vary with such factors as style, number of pages, colour, number of copies needed, whether material is sent in "camera ready" or must be retyped.

- Transport — local and regional
 - Is your venue at some distance from housing for participants? If public transportation is not easily available you may need to consider making arrangements for local buses.
 - Are field visits included in the programme?
 - Is the conference dinner or other event held at a venue which people will have difficulty finding?
- Lodging costs for participants

Most conferences do not include lodging costs in the conference fee, but if you are planning a "closed" conference or one at a special facility, it may be wise to consider putting together an "all-inclusive" package. In that case the cost of lodging for all participants and staff will need to be considered.
- Benefits

If this conference could be considered as a staff benefit, check to see whether you will need to pay fringe benefit tax.

Support/Planning Costs

- Office costs
 - Extra support staff and/or overtime for regular staff – don't forget 'super', payroll tax or other required costs in addition to the appropriate hourly rate
 - Stationery — small conferences will likely make use of the regular sponsor's stationery, but special events may require printing of special purpose stationery
 - Rental of office equipment
 - Telephone — line for conference use — STD and ISD calls?
 - Facsimile service or electronic mail
 - Photocopying
 - Postage/express

- **Service bureau costs**
One way around the difficulties of organising a conference "on the side" is to turn matters over to a service bureau whose main business is organising such events. You need a clear understanding of what is included in the contract and how the costs will be calculated. Similar questions need to be answered if you are involving a university "conference centre" or continuing education office.
- **Advertising**
 - Paid ads in journals
 - Production, printing and mailing of brochure or other announcements
 - Additional mailings to registrants prior to conference (directions for papers and other presentations, etc.)
- **Planning costs**
 - Does your planning group include members from some distance? Will they need to have travel expenses for planning meetings?
 - Office costs (see above) of planning

After-Event Costs

- A post-event function is a nice way of acknowledging the help of local workers and volunteers
- Do you need to have the accounts for the conference audited?

Contingencies

- **Inflation**
Depending on how far in advance you are preparing the conference, you may need to make some provision for increases in the Cost-Price Index. This will affect every category of expense and should generally be provided for on a percentage basis if your expenses will be over more than a few months.
- **Insurance**
Theft, loss and public liability are all matters to be considered.
- **Cancellation**
With the recent history of airlines in Australia being disrupted by "industrial action", several conference organisers have had the unhappy experience of cancelling well-planned conferences at the last moment because people simply could not get there. Other cancellations due to natural disasters, etc., are rare, but do need to be considered.

- **Refunds**
Some of your registrants will probably have a change of plans and request refunds (especially if you have encouraged early registration). Your policy on refunds needs to be established well in advance and publicised along with the registration form. Remember to calculate a certain number of refunds in figuring anticipated income.
- **Other!!**
There are always contingencies which arise. Most planners will put a figure of at least 10% (more if the conference will be held more than a year away or in an unfamiliar or overseas locale) to cover all the unexpected contingencies ranging from fluctuations in currency exchange rates to the last-minute need to substitute speakers, etc.

Anticipated Income

Some of the sources of income listed below may not apply to your event; some may provide services or 'freebies' rather than cash.

- **Grants, subsidies**
 - From sponsoring organisation
 - From hosting institution
 - From tourist promotion groups
 - From related government departments
- **Loans**
The sponsoring organisation may provide conference organisers with funds to cover the initial costs of conference preparation. Don't forget that these monies will usually have to be repaid.
- **Travel**
A "designated carrier" may provide tickets or travel subsidy in return for designation and advertising in the conference materials.
- **Sponsorship by related industry or charitable organisations**
 - Sponsorship of particular speakers or sessions in return for acknowledgement on the programme
 - Support for printing costs of programme or proceedings in return for acknowledgement
- **Sale of advertising**
 - In the conference programme
 - In the conference proceedings
 - Display booths at the event
 - Enclosures in the conference satchel

6 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

If you are planning on having an international conference, that is one to which you hope to invite individuals from overseas or to which overseas participants will come, there are a number of special issues to keep in mind.

You will need more lead time to publicise the Conference.

Information will need to be sent to overseas publications and counterpart organisations in time to meet their deadlines for publication. Simply allowing time for mail to get back and forth with inquiries, registration forms and confirmations will take more time. Although FAX technology does help speed up communication, not everyone has access to FAX facilities and timelines must take mail deadlines into account.

A greater proportion of your effort will need to go into personal contact with prospective participants, some of whom may require formal invitations.

The ability of overseas participants, including invited speakers, to obtain permission and funding to attend may be dependent on the kind of formal invitation which they receive.

Simply seeing an advertisement in a journal may not be enough to attract the kind of participants you want. Personal contact by every member of the planning committee with former students, colleagues at other institutions, and friends will be important in spreading the word.

Overseas participants may need clearance from their own governments to attend, and will certainly need time to obtain visas.

While visas are not required in every case, you should become familiar with the particular requirements for those attending from different countries so that the appropriate information can be included with conference information.

Currency Exchange

Most international airports have facilities for currency exchange which

operate whenever the airport is open. Information to overseas delegates about where the currency exchange facility is located in your nearest international airport will probably be appreciated. (It is very frustrating to get out into the general airport and then discover that the currency exchange facility is back in the customs hall.)

Information about the location of the nearest bank and its hours of operation will also be appreciated by delegates who may have to cash traveller's cheques or to change currency during the event.

Where participants will be attending from countries where the currency is not freely exchangeable (as is the case in many developing countries) you may need to make special arrangements for *en route* transferring between international and domestic airports, transport from the airport to the conference facility, and for coverage of their expenses. Even if arrangements have been made to cover or reimburse their expenses, individuals from countries with very tight currency control may not be able to bring or change money for their initial taxi fare, etc.

Translation Services

A major international conference may require quite elaborate translation facilities for the sessions — this has been covered elsewhere in this Guide.

- Where you anticipate participants whose English may be limited, try to provide a 'host' who can help with translation, either during conference sessions or to provide assistance with travel and accommodation arrangements.
- This is one area where a university locale is often a distinct advantage since it is likely that you will be able to locate staff or students who speak a variety of languages. They need not be expert translators to assist in making participants feel comfortable!
- If you are able to provide translation services, do include information about this in your conference brochure — it may help convince more people to attend.

Confirmation of Travel Arrangements

Those who have overseas flight connections will need to confirm these arrangements prior to their return departure.

If you are not in a major city with international airline offices easily accessible, you might want to make an arrangement with a local travel agent to assist with these confirmations. Including information about these arrangements in the conference folder will help to make everyone feel more at ease.

Hosting and Other Contacts With Local Counterparts

Participants from overseas may be particularly interested in making contacts with local colleagues and/or visiting local facilities. Offering local 'host' arrangements can facilitate this. Try to have these arrangements set up ahead of time and well publicised so that those who are interested can take advantage of them.

Depending on the financial situation and interests of your participants it may be a nice gesture to be able to offer 'home stay' facilities to avoid expensive hotel bills. This will require a good deal of prior arrangement and is probably the type of task which is best delegated to a specific individual with a small subcommittee.

Jet Lag

A long flight (north to south) can be tiring on its own. One which goes east to west also brings the problem of crossing time zones and the potential of jet lag. Individuals vary widely in their ability to adjust, but if you are inviting speakers or key participants who will face either a long flight or time zone differences, it is probably to everyone's advantage to have them arrive a day ahead of the actual event so that there is some time to recover.

(There may also be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy about this phenomenon, and we would suggest that you refrain from dwelling on the issue. It is more than a little annoying to be asked for the tenth time about jet lag if you're the traveller.)

Medical Care

While everyone hopes that all participants will stay healthy, there are some particular hazards for overseas travellers. The journey itself may be stressful — but an equally crucial difficulty may arise if the individual needs to seek medical or hospital care.

- Arrangements between countries vary widely and are prone to change from time to time.
- If you will be having visitors from overseas (particularly if you are inviting specific individuals) you should be clear what the arrangements are for coverage of any medical expenses. (In some unfortunate situations guest speakers have been known to have heart attacks or be involved in car accidents!)

Food Preferences

Australians can have distinctive food preferences and it is always a nice touch to be able to accommodate these, but the issue becomes particularly important for overseas visitors where dietary preferences may be related to religious beliefs.

- Try to have the possibility of a reasonable choice for vegetarians at conference banquets or other set meals, even if this has to be indicated in advance.
- Try to have a choice of fruit juice as well as tea/coffee for morning and afternoon breaks — and have non-alcoholic beverages easily available at receptions.
- Where meat is served for major meals, be aware that even non-vegetarians may have dietary restrictions covering beef, pork, shellfish, and/or meat which is not prepared in acceptable ways.

Travel Assistance

If you intend to encourage participants from developing countries, you may want to explore the possibility of financial subsidies for their travel and/or expenses. There are several ways in which this may be done.

- International agency subsidies
 - Australian agencies such as AIDAB
 - UN and other agencies (Unesco, WHO, British Council, etc.).

These subsidies will require considerable advance notice to arrange and require that specific individuals be nominated. You will, therefore, need to have the names and c.v.s of those you intend to nominate some months in advance of the conference date.

- Subsidisation by the conference itself

This will require setting conference registration fees and making provision in the budget to cover this possibility. The basis on which a subsidy will be provided needs to be specified well in advance and a mechanism for deciding between applicants needs to be established.
- Reduction of cost to participants by the provision of home-stay has been referred to above.

Overseas Venues

Why choose an overseas venue? (You will probably ask yourself this several times during the process if you have become involved with an overseas conference!)

- Perhaps this is a major international organisation and meetings routinely change from one region or country to another; you may become involved as part of the international planning group.
- Perhaps you want to hold a meeting of your group overseas to provide an exotic venue which will draw individuals or provide participants with opportunities to see or experience situations which they could not do elsewhere. (A conference on tropical agriculture, for example, might more logically be held in a tropical venue.)
- Perhaps you want to choose a site which will be convenient for a majority of delegates. This may be particularly important if some have limited travel budgets.

Whatever the reason, you are likely to multiply the problems of conference arrangements and logistical concerns if you select an overseas venue.

- Be prepared to allow for more time and effort.
- You will need to develop a strong liaison with a local (on-site) co-ordinator who can help establish the logistics. Unless you have seen the site before or have great trust in the local committee a visit may be worthwhile.
- Remember that almost all of your participants will be "overseas". All of the points raised above with regard to visas, currency exchange, confirmation of reservations, medical care, etc. should be checked well in advance of the conference.

7 TRADE DISPLAYS

Well organised trade displays can provide an opportunity for conference participants to obtain information about the latest publications and equipment. From the point of view of the displayer, they can provide opportunities for contacting those who will be making purchase decisions or recommendations and who are not ordinarily accessible to sales representatives. For the conference organisers, trade displays are often a way of obtaining useful financial support for the conference.

- If all of these needs are to be met, it is crucial that the trade displays be well organised and that potential displayers know about the possibility well in advance.
- If you are organizing an annual conference there will be likely to be a list of usual displayers. As a matter of courtesy they should be informed of the dates, locale and arrangements well in advance. It is possible that one or more displayers may have a regular circuit, so use caution if you change the dates of your conference in relation to other related conferences.
- You should probably also try to add some new faces to the usual trade displays. Are there publishers, equipment suppliers, related industries, recruiters, consultants or others who may be interested in contacting your participants? Are there local agencies or institutions who should be offered an opportunity to display on a complimentary basis?

Inclusion of information on displays in the conference programme or participants' satchels will help to ensure that those attending the conference visit the displays. A variety of tactics can be used to encourage visits.

- Site the tea and coffee-breaks so that people must go through the displays to the tea or coffee. This also has implications for the design of traffic flow.
- Arrange one or more lotteries to which participants become eligible by depositing cards, names, etc. in the display area, or by obtaining tickets, etc. from displayers. Obviously this requires co-ordination

and the co-operation of displayers.

- Make frequent mention of the displays. This can become annoying if included in every "housekeeping" announcement made, but can be done more subtly by inclusion of "coffee break and visit displays" at appropriate points in the printed programme.

Organising the Trade Display

The way in which the displays are organised will depend in part on the space available at the site, the requirements of the displayer and other factors to be described in more detail below.

- If you are using a hotel or other venue which routinely hosts conferences there may be a standard plan available. If you are in another site you will need to think about how traffic will flow around the different displays. Try to avoid cul-de-sacs, aisles which are too narrow and mazes.
- Security will be another major consideration. Having the displays in an area which can be closed off at night will be an important factor in keeping security costs and concerns to a minimum. Having access limited to one or two doors will help make the job of controlling access (for large conferences) easier.
- Be aware of fire regulations with regard to materials used, access, doors, width of aisles, etc.
- You will need to inquire of potential displayers whether they have special requirements which may limit where their display can go. If, for example, there is limited access to electrical outlets, you may want to give preference to those sites for those who have plug-in equipment. Businesses may have some preferences about where they are located in relation to competitors. Displays which have noise (even if it is music) as a part of the display should be located carefully in location to each other.
- Prepare a brochure or information sheet for potential displayers with all of the available information about site, hours, potential audience, perks and costs. This will greatly simplify the provision of information to displayers (and also force you and your committee to clarify your thinking well in advance of the event).

Other Issues

You will need to decide what services beyond actual display space will be offered to those mounting a trade display — particularly those who are paying

for the privilege.

- Will you or the venue provide curtains between booths, tables, chairs, electrical supply?
- What are the costs of additional security?
- What are the hours for set-up and take-down activities?
- What are the hours the display should be staffed? For many conferences there is little point in the display being staffed at other than tea breaks and lunch, but for other larger conferences, where participants may be expected to miss some sessions to visit the displays, those with displays may want to be there all day. If there are special events planned (e.g. a field trip away to another site), displayers should be forewarned.
- Will displayers be given a complimentary ticket to reception, lunch, dinner, etc.?
- Will displayers be listed in the programme?

For some conferences it may be necessary to decide on specific ethical issues before some displayers will be accepted. For example, it is unlikely that a health conference today would accept a display mounted by a tobacco company. With the growing interest in health, environment and ethical issues, similar questions may need to be addressed for a wider variety of situations.

8 EVALUATION AND WIND-UP

Evaluation

While informal evaluation of the conference will undoubtedly occur as you and others discuss the triumphs and near-disasters after the event, a more formal evaluation of the conference should also be considered.

- A formal evaluation of the event may be required by the sponsoring organisation or funders. It will certainly be important information for you or your successors when planning future conferences.

The ideal evaluation would obtain three types of information:

- The conference participants' reactions, level of satisfaction and suggestions for the future
 - The speakers', presenters' and displayers' similar reactions, level of satisfaction and suggestions for the future
 - Your own (and your planning committee's) detailed notes about the process and outcomes.
- Many academic conference planners now attempt to gather information from the conference participants through structured questionnaires which are distributed in conference kits or at particular sessions. Aside from the problems of questionnaire construction, the result is usually hampered by a relatively low response rate and by comments which have been made in haste. Generally only major trends will be apparent from this type of evaluation — and these would probably have been obvious to the planning group in any case.
 - Questionnaires should not be written off altogether, but you may get more meaningful results from other approaches.

One such is to use a sampling approach and to write or phone a smaller number of the participants about one week after the event — before memories fade altogether, but after enough time for the conference as a whole to have been 'digested'.

Another approach is to designate some individuals as "conference evaluators" and to charge them with the responsibility of gathering comments and documenting reactions. Supplement them with a comments box or a more open comments board on which individuals can respond to each others' feedback. While this type of feedback is not so easily quantified, it probably taps into a segment of conference goers who never fill out evaluation forms.

- Information from the presenters is often overlooked but can provide useful direction for future planners.
- Information from the planning group and conference workers is also often overlooked — sometimes because everyone just wants to recover from the experience and sometimes because everyone is hurrying to catch up with other responsibilities neglected during the conference. However, one more meeting of the planning group is a good investment of time and effort. Use this final meeting to note the strengths and weaknesses in the planning and to write down suggestions for the future.

This is also an opportunity to gather information on costs, suppliers, publicity avenues, etc., which should be written down.

Even if your group were to plan another conference in the near future, memories fade. More likely the next conference for your organisation will be planned by another group of inexperienced volunteers or conscripts — and your experience can be a great help to them. Using this Guide as a start, make a note of the particular circumstances which apply to your organisation so that the next planning group does not have to rediscover what you have had to learn from experience.

Wind-up

There are some post-conference events and activities which should be planned for and carried through to maintain the glow of a well-organised conference.

- Financial affairs should be wound up as speedily as possible with all bills paid, a financial report prepared, an audit carried out if required and the surplus or deficit returned to the sponsors as planned or negotiated.
- Thank you letters to presenters, sponsors and displayers will create a favourable climate for the next time.
- If your conference was held at a campus, a recognition of the extra work put in by support staff will generally also be appreciated. A lunch or a 'happy hour' is both a gesture of appreciation and an opportunity to gain information about the conference organisation from their point of view.

Future Planning

With on-going academic organisations which have annual conferences it is likely that the planning group for next year's conference will have at least been named before your group has finished their wind-up activities. You can be of most help to them by passing on your information as speedily and completely as possible.

9 REFERENCES

These references focus on materials that are particularly appropriate for academic conferences. In addition, there are many books and guides on general conference planning and it seems that almost every popular magazine has recently featured articles on the conference industry.

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Meyer, Susan. (1985) Maximizing the Conference Experience for First-Time Participants. *New Directions for Continuing Education*. 28:12, 57-68.

The author investigates the problems that newcomers face at conferences and offers clear guidelines for conference planners and newcomers alike. (abstract from ERIC)

Mueller, Gus. (1982) *Successful Conference Programming Methods: Your Guide to Effective Planning and Administration*. Bloomington IN: Fern Publications .

Section One establishes reasons for having a conference, suggests alternative programme models, and describes the coordinator's roles.

Section Two describes the process of conference planning. In Section Three, onsite realities of the programme and evaluation are discussed; the final section concerns the aftermath of the programme — financial "clean up," final evaluation, and planning for next time. An appendix to the guide which makes up about half of the booklet contains checklists, idea sheets, a bibliography and sheets for planning. (abstract from ERIC)