

THE GRAND RAPIDS EVENT GUIDEBOOK

Your Guide to Planning a Successful Conference

GRAND RAPIDS

Experience



GUIDELINE FOR YOUR EVENT TIMELINE

These are planning schedules based on past events in Grand Rapids. Remember that you can change things based on your specific conference needs!

18 MONTHS OUT

- Establish Goals for Conference
- Recruit Planning Committee
- Hold Planning Committee Meeting
- Establish A "Ballpark Budget"
- Establish Deadlines
- Develop Communications Plan
- Map out Promotions Plan
- Begin website development

15 MONTHS OUT

- Hold First Planning Committee Meeting
- Launch Website
- Establish Theme for Event

12 MONTHS OUT

- Begin Attendance Building (at annual convention)
- Brainstorm Breakout Session Topics
- Have a site visit with key committee members to get to know your spaces
- Visit any off-site locations and/or excursions you are planning (see it in the same time of year you will be hosting it)

10 MONTHS OUT

- Establish themes and outline for any special events
- Brainstorm Speakers
- Develop a list of all Food and Beverage needs for the conference
- Contract Key Note Speaker(s)
- Contract Entertainers
- Contract Speakers
- Establish layout needs for Exhibit Space
- Plan layout of Registration Process

8 MONTHS OUT

- Communicate with Catering Managers
- Promote Registration Date (teaser)
- Open Booth Registration
- Decide on final locations for special trips/excursions
- Send RFP for Transportation Needs for special trips or airport shuttles

6 MONTHS OUT

- Begin Registration
- Coordinate any transportation needs
- Put together General Session(s) outline
- Collect all Speaker Information Forms
- Have a preliminary site visit to review plans and spaces
- Confirm the plan for expo space and possible needs for decorations with decorating company

4 MONTHS OUT

- Collect any Breakout Session amenities
- Plan décor for Special Events
- Meet with Caterer Company to establish menus

2 MONTHS OUT

- Design Conference Program
- Design any Special Events programs
- Finalize A/V Plans
- Confirm Food and Beverage Needs
- Confirm Exhibit Space needs
- Order any food and beverage needs for special trips/excursions
- Order any plaques or special awards
- Establish Room Set-Up for General Session, Breakout Sessions, Special Events
- Finalize plans for offsite tours

1 MONTH OUT

- Confirm Speakers and collect any final program information
- Plan Day-Of Registration Process
- Plan script for General Session(s)
- Organize and schedule volunteers
- Finalize "other" catering needs (linens, china etc.)
- Confirm Transportation arrangements
- Finalize A/V needs
- Close Booth Registration
- Order needs for booth from decorator

2 WEEKS OUT

- Contact speakers, provide copy of schedule and program for their reference

1 WEEK OUT

- Confirm counts for meals (usually 72 hours before event; check your contract)

PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR TEAM

You may have a group of members interested in getting involved in the planning process. Divide committees based on what you would like to get accomplished, and ask your team to choose who would like to lead each committee. Remember: you cannot be in every location at every time, so the more reliable help you have the better. Don't be afraid to delegate! Examples of committees are:

COMMITTEE LEADER	RESPONSIBLE FOR:
Registration	Designing registration piece, distributing registration, collecting and organizing incoming registrations, day of set up
Awards Dinner	Planning aspects relating to the dinner, including speakers, script, awards purchase and order, entertainment, décor, food and beverage plans, room set up, etc.
Expo Hall	Working with services representative and decorator to plan the expo hall layout, develop the registration information needed for exhibitors to order a booth, and coordinate on-site logistics of move-in and move-out.
Speakers	Find, recruit, and negotiate fees with speakers. Assure all contractual obligations are met, assemble and provide documents needed for presentation, order AV and room set ups from Facility Set Up leader
Facility Set Up	Works closely with meeting facility to order all AV and room set up needs. Also decide which presentations will go where. This covers everything except the expo hall
Tours and Outings	Plans the outing(s) for attendees, spouses, or kids. This includes securing the location, transportation, food and beverage, and admission fees
Promotions	The head marketing person works on promoting attendance and special events within the conference. Also manages the Social Media
Web Site (Webmaster)	Updates, changes, and manages the conference website.
Fundraising	Responsible for any fundraising, sponsorship, or donations needed
Financials	Manages the budget and reporting system
Food and Beverage	Decides and orders the food and beverage for all events except the Awards Dinner. Has to negotiate pricing and menu options with catering company.
Volunteer Leader	Recruits, assigns, and manages volunteers. Responsible for communication to all volunteers as well as leaders that have requested a volunteers help. Training, information, and attire also included.
Program Designer	Gathers all information needed and designs and prints the program for the event.

Your role as the leader is to manage the communication between these leaders, as one always relies on another. This will be a full role in itself! You are the go-to person for questions and decisions. Make sure you have a manageable group – you are the leader, so be sure you can handle the number of committees!

BUDGETING

Budgeting is an ongoing task in your event planning process. Prices change, programs get added, and items overlooked in the beginning are remembered as you get more involved. It is important to start with a “ballpark” budget – you may not know how much every specific item is going to cost, but if you know how much you have, you can delegate funds accordingly.

Planning Tip!

GETTING STARTED

1. Establish what the financial goal is of the meeting. Know what you want to earn, and what you can spend to make the event a success.
2. Divide your conference up into sections – the best way is to stay with the same outline as your committees (Registration, General Session, Breakout Sessions, Promotions, etc.).
3. Work with your committee leaders to think of what expense categories you might incur for each section of your budget.
4. Identify what expenses fall outside of a committee - you may not have a committee for rental or office supplies, but you will want to track that as well.
5. Research your estimated expenses in each category to make sure you are on track
6. Ask someone to review the budget and find errors and missing items
7. Share the budget with the committee and the national office

Your budget is your greatest outline for your event! Add the details as you get them. If you have something donated, include it in your budget, and just put \$0 after it. This helps keep track of what has been done.

In reference to #3 above, if your conference included an awards dinner, your budget might include:

- Food and Beverage
- Awards
- AV
- Décor
- Parting Gifts
- Entertainment
- Program

Establish a basic budget for each of your categories, then, as you plan more you will be able to put in more exact numbers. Use a program like Excel to establish a spreadsheet that will contain all of the information you need. A basic format for a budget is:

EVENT	ITEM	COST PER ITEM	AMOUNT NEEDED	AMOUNT IN BUDGET	PAYMENT METHOD	TOTAL COST
Awards Dinner						
<i>Décor</i>	Centerpieces	\$50.00	40	\$2,100.00	Check	\$2,000.00
	Linen	\$2.00	40	\$100.00	Credit	\$80.00
<i>AV</i>	Microphone	\$45.00	2	\$90.00	Check	\$90.00
	Video Screen	\$400.00	1	\$400.00	Check	\$400.00
Gifts	Chocolates	\$1.50	400	\$600.00	Credit	\$600.00

Make sure you develop your budget based on your needs and what you want to keep track of. You may have a column for sponsorships or donations, or even a column for when the payment was made. This is your tool for keeping track of your event – make it just the way you want it!

SPEAKERS

There are two ways to approach the search for the perfect speakers for your breakout sessions: finding a specific speaker and guiding them to a topic or deciding on a topic you want presented and finding a speaker that would best fit. Start with a list – this is a great brainstorming session for your committee!

Speakers We Want To Invite	Topics We Want Covered

If you are having trouble getting started, try dividing your association into categories. For Example, if your organization was related to the Hospitality Industry, you would start by dividing topics by Lodging, Food and Beverage, Tourism, and Events. From there, you can focus on specific topics you think would make a great breakout session.

On the other hand, it also helps to look into speakers that are knowledgeable in your field or in a general topic (leadership, teamwork, motivation). They may have a presentation already put together that they can bring to your event.

Consider the costs of speakers as well. If you are hiring someone from across the country, you may be responsible for their airfare and hotel as well as their speakers fees. If you want to save some money, look into speakers from the area – you will find a wealth of experts!

Your CVB representative will have some ideas for you regarding local speakers. Another option is to contact a local speaker’s bureau, entertainment company, or speakers association. If you are looking for experts in a specific field, try some of the many local colleges and universities in Grand Rapids.

SPEAKER COMMUNICATION:

You always want to be very clear with your speakers about the details of the conference. Your basic communication plan with a speaker would include:

1. Invitation to Speak (Could include follow up and contracts)
2. Speakers Information Form for Program (See example on the following page)
3. Details of the conference. This can go out to the speaker a couple weeks before the event.
 - a. Driving Instructions or travel arrangement details
 - b. Hotel Information (if applicable)
 - c. Parking Instructions (and reassure them that you will take care of their parking fees)
 - d. Arrival Time and location to meet conference representative
 - e. Speaking Time and location
 - f. Details about the group for background knowledge
4. Thank You and Payment and/or Gift

Planning Tip!

If you can, have a Green Room for speakers to prepare in, leave their coats and other belongings, and grab a bottle of water and/or refreshments you provide.

This can be their check-in location when they arrive.

EXCURSIONS, TOURS, AND OTHER OUTINGS

One of the best parts of traveling to Grand Rapids is knowing that there is plenty to do in the area during the down times of your conference.

The activities you choose depend greatly on your audience. Think about who is attending these activities as a starting point. Common excursions are for spouses, families, all attendees, kids-only, and special committees.

WHAT DO I NEED TO CONSIDER?

When planning what you want to provide, there are a few things to keep in mind.

- HISTORY:** This is the most important! Find out what people have attended at past conferences, including attendance, cost, and where they went.
- TIME:** Don't try to cram too much into a short amount of time
- TRANSPORTATION:** How will my guests get there? How much does it cost?
- ADMISSION COST:** What is the admission cost? Who will pay? How will the money be collected?
- COMMUNICATION:** Does the destination know that they will have a large group coming to their attraction?
- LOGISTICS:** How will your attendees know when and where they depart from? Where do they meet to return to the hotel?
- DINING:** Will this require a meal?
- WILL YOU NEED TOUR GUIDES?** Many museums offer tour guides.
- MOBILITY:** Are the attendees active or restricted in their mobility?

IDEAS FOR TRIPS

Think about what you love about Grand Rapids. Is it the Frederik Meijer Gardens? The Zoo? One of our many museums? Decide what it is you want to share with your group to make their experience in Grand Rapids unforgettable. Common excursions include:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children's Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Craig's Cruisers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fredrik Meijer Gardens | <input type="checkbox"/> Canoeing/Kayaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grand Rapids Art Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Golfing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ice Skating in Rosa Parks Circle | <input type="checkbox"/> Heritage Hill Tours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> John Ball Zoo | <input type="checkbox"/> Mall Shopping Tours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lakeshore Visit | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Robinette's Apple Haus | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Saugatuck Tours | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Van Andel Public Museum of Grand Rapids | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theater/Dining Options | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shopping in Uptown | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local Festivals (Tulip Time, Celebration of the Arts, ArtPrize) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spa Experiences | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Sessions—cooking classes, wine tasting, etc. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dune Rides | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wine Tasting | |

Services Tip!

Alert your hotel representative and the destination you are going to that you are going on a tour – they may have tips and/or restrictions for where shuttle busses can depart from!

Services Tip!

Many area attractions offer a special discount to conferences and large groups. Contact the facility or your CVB Services Representative for more information! Also, if you need to coordinate transportation for a large group, speak with your CVB Services Representative about your options. They can send an RFP out to all of their transportation partners to get the best rates for you and save the hassle of calling each company!