

**ORIENTATION MANUAL**  
**for the**  
**ORGANIZERS AND CHAIRPERSONS OF SECTIONAL**  
**NAGT CONFERENCES**

after a manual for NAGT-Far West Section  
by

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## **INTRODUCTION**

While every organizer and chairperson should feel free to add a touch of his or her personality and effort to their conference and while the circumstances in which they have to operate may differ considerably, they all share similar responsibilities. Hopefully this guide and checklists will prevent repetition of our past mistakes and omissions and, at the same time, assist in a modest way the future organizers and chairpersons in their monumental task of producing successful NAGT Section Conferences.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Good and early planning, adherence to deadlines, and being well organized on the conference day are obviously the chief ingredients of success. Also, intense communication and cooperation with the Section Officers are essential to solving organizational and financial aspects. There are also a great number of details to attend to. A permanent and updated copy of this manual should be in the files of the Section Archivist. This manual should be provided to the conference organizers and chairperson at the time of their appointments.

## **FINANCIAL ASPECTS**

In order to prevent a financial drain on the section conferences should pay their way. The host institution is required to set the registration fee to cover expenses, with an additional \$1.00 or \$2.00 contingency factor. Guidebooks, transportation and meals have caused some difficulty in the past. The following are suggested to assure financial solvency:

1. Avoid expenses for speakers. Use local guest speakers whenever possible. There is enough talent among the Section membership to assure a good program.
2. Student help may be renumerated by waving registration fees, by special credits, etc.

3. Try to get allowances from the hosting institution for printing, mailing, hospitality coffee and doughnuts, vehicle use, bus for field trip, etc.
4. Selling display spaces to instrument and supply companies can be a nice source of income.
5. The banquet is a tradition but not an essential event. It can be expensive and risky if you have to guarantee a high number of guests.

If reservation packages are mailed out on time with a firm reservation deadline and mandatory advanced payment, there should be little problem. The same applies to renting buses, food services, etc. Several past chairpersons called the banquet their major problem and suggested avoiding it. Alternatives could be:

- a night session without banquet (publish a list of convenient eating places),
- a bar-b-que picnic in a local park, weather permitting, followed by a session on campus,
- presentation of awards at regular sessions, no banquet.

6. High attendance is the key to a good and safe income level. To secure high attendance:
  - advertise early and extensively
  - prepare an attractive program with rather wide appeal
  - reach to local schools' science teachers and geology societies
  - provide inviting functions for old as well as new members and guests
7. The best way of recruiting new members is to get them to attend a good conference where they can find their identity and something to participate in.
8. To better estimate attendance and be assured of it, give a discount for preregistration.
9. Provide special incentives to attend the meeting by arranging university credit with a 4-year institution. Make sure to advertise it early.
10. Announce early that there will be opportunities to:
  - see, buy, or get free maps, books and other publications, swap minerals or other items,
  - get free road logs to local field trips or articles on local geology (this attracts high school and junior college teachers),
  - organize some service (maybe job placement service),
  - organize some activities for spouses, etc.
11. Mailings are a high cost but necessary advertising item. There should be at least two mailings for each meeting:

- Preliminary announcement should be in the Section Newsletter submitted to the editor by May 15 for the Fall conference and by December for the Spring.
- Final program and registration materials should be mailed to arrive one month before the conference.

It is possible to reduce mailing costs by combining ballot and other correspondence from the Newsletter Editor or Secretary-Treasurer with announcements concerning the Conference. The details have to be worked out carefully with the Treasurer regarding the deadlines for mailings.

## **THE PROGRAM**

1. Start working on it as early as possible. Most speakers, supply companies and hosting institutions want to be contacted a year in advance to put their commitments on their calendars.
2. The program should be appealing to all segments of the membership including H.S. teachers and local groups you intend to invite. However, do not over-crowd the schedule. Insist speakers adhere to their allotted time!
3. A unifying theme for the conference may be a fine idea if it has wide appeal.
4. Attractively executed announcements, the program materials and formal correspondence may be well worth the expense.
5. Mailing out of announcements, invitations and eventually the reservation package on time is very important. Obtain commitments from speakers early and stay in touch with them. Adhere to all deadlines.
6. The Program and Reservation Package should be mailed at least five weeks before the date of the Conference and should include:
  - Maps of the institution and how to get there
  - An appealing program with abstracts of the presentations
  - Information sheet regarding transportation, accommodations (suggest a few hotels and approximate prices--one low, medium and high priced--with convenient locations, as well as campgrounds), field trip data, extra activities, university credit if any offered, displays, availability of publications to buy or free etc. Be specific and accurate.
  - Reservation form and firm date when it should be returned to be honored. Leave a space on the registration form to be checked by those wanting a roommate for lodging. Send matched names to registrants.
  - Send a contact sheet so registrants can arrange car pools.

7. Recording and publishing of presentations in the *Journal of Geoscience Education* is desirable but it requires signed permission of the speakers involved. Ask them early enough and have the forms ready for their signature on the Conference Day.
8. Make sure to check with the speakers regarding their equipment needs and make sure you have back-up equipment. Have spare projector bulbs within reach in case of emergency.
9. Regarding field trips:
  - For many they are the main attraction so plan them well and offer choices considering the expertise and interests of participants.
  - Remember that some participants may have to leave early. The Sunday schedule should always end by noon.
  - Think of transportation for those who fly in.
  - Strongly advise the field trip leader to prepare guidebooks. Attractive guidebooks are an asset to any conference. Print extra copies and save the master for later reprint. These guidebooks are the principle source of income for many sections. All guidebooks not given out at the conference are the property of the local section and should be turned over with the master to the sales coordinator.
  - Plan a realistic time schedule and stick to it!
10. Have an "ice breaker" social the first night. The social may be a bar-b-que, refreshments, or just a common meeting place. Make sure everyone knows they are invited to the social. (This would be an excellent place to put the business meeting- say at 7 pm)

## **CHECK LIST A (1 Year Ahead)**

1. Publicity is crucial. Put announcements in *Geotimes*, *Journal of Geoscience Education*, *The Earth Scientist*, any available State Science Teachers Publications, etc. Try to avoid clash with other conventions.
2. Work on the content of the program:
  - Scout for and obtain commitments from speakers and field trip leaders.
  - Contact instrument and supply companies regarding their displays.
  - Think also about displays of publications by USGS, NAGT, and NAGT members.
3. Clear the calendar for the Conference with the host institution and request your institution for possible contributions to defray meeting costs (think of the President's Hospitality Fund for coffee, doughnuts, and labels, use of school cars or buses, printing, and perhaps even mailing expenses, etc.).
4. Scout for the place for the Banquet; consider also lunch, coffee break service, field trip lunch. Make sure to understand the conditions and have witnesses to all agreements. Once you find a bargain, keep in touch with the principals involved to prevent a change in charges at the last moment.
5. Secure the addresses of Science Departments of High Schools and of Earth Science or Science Organizations in your area.
6. Communicate with the Section officers on all of the above to obtain advice and assistance.
7. Encourage field trip leaders to work on attractive guidebooks.
8. Check about the possibility of securing university credit for conference participants.

## **CHECK LIST B (6 to 3 months ahead)**

1. Stir up local publicity for the conference:
  - Mail attractive announcements and letters to Science Deans, or heads of Science Departments at local high schools and local organizations requesting addresses of individuals who wish to receive the final Program/Reservation package.
2. Start preparing a mailing list of these individuals in addition to the membership list available from the Section Treasurer.
3. Ask speakers and field trip leaders for abstracts and guidebooks respectively to be turned in before the deadline for all printing.
4. Check the availability of all facilities and rooms (keys), AV equipment, recording and other instruments. Contact responsible people to run the equipment.
5. If practical, send out a reminder note (pre-program) to the membership, perhaps included with other mail from the Section or use the Section Newsletter.
6. Contact local newspapers. As we often meet in small towns, hosting a conference is big news. Remember also the college publicity officer and the college news media.

### **CHECK LIST C (3 to 2 months ahead)**

1. Banquet, lunch, coffee breaks and other food services should be settled by now.
2. Firm up all activities for the conference and collect information needed for the printing of the Program/Reservation Package. Print it.
3. Reserve buses for the field trip if needed.
4. Print tickets and receipt forms for Conference participants.
5. Mail out the Program/Reservations package five weeks before the date of the conference to allow early pre-registration. (Instruct the participants to make checks payable to the Section).
6. Get signs made: names of speakers, directions on the campus.
7. Print guidebooks, free hand outs, etc., if not ready already.
8. As reservations come in, start preparing the packages for preregistered participants (envelopes with name tags, tickets, hand outs, receipts, etc.).
9. Make sure you have friendly, competent and reliable personnel ready to staff all stations for the duration of the meetings. Students are often happy to help in exchange for free registration.
10. Make a layout of the registration area, display stations, field guide sales, etc.

## **CHECK LIST D (Last few days before the Conference)**

1. Check list of facilities and equipment:
  - Conference rooms - light, air conditioning, working electrical plugs
    - Extension cords long enough
  - Bathrooms - running water, toilet paper supply
  - Projectors, screens, microphones, loud speakers in working condition, with back up reserves in case of failure, for conference rooms, banquet room, field trip.
    - Recording equipment and permission forms for speakers to sign
    - Tables and enough chairs in the ante-room for:
      - Registration uses
      - Displays and publications from USGS, etc.
      - Coffee service
      - University credit table
      - Free hand outs
  - Bulletin board for announcements, etc.
2. Make sure the direction signs are out first thing in the morning and that all facilities are opened on time, especially those facilities for which you usually have no keys. Also make sure that your staff does not over-sleep. Have a cash box with enough change, receipt forms, and tickets ready.
3. Prepare a list of participants for distribution at the conference. Include address and phone numbers to facilitate communication between meetings.
4. Print name tags. Use the pin-on type so they can be reused throughout the conference.

## **CHECK LIST E Conference Wind-up Activities**

1. Balance finances with the Secretary-Treasurer.
2. Mail thank-you letters to the speakers, field trip guides and other "Working" persons or their supervisors or both.
3. Write a final report and turn it in to the Newsletter editor for publication.
4. Offer aid to the President in preparation of a short report on the conference for publication in the *Journal of Geoscience Education*.