CONFERENCE AND EVENT PLANNING

Many state networks host an annual conference, which typically takes place in person. Most state network conferences are held on a college or university campus, and the host campus may offer some support or cost savings for the state network. Annual conferences may range in length of days, but generally they are one- or two-day events.

Here are a few key areas to consider as you plan your state network's conference. Please note that some, but not all, of these steps apply to virtual event planning.

☐ **Determine the event goals and objectives.** Think about what you want the event to accomplish for your state network, how many attendees you hope will participate, and what you want the participants to gain from the event.

☐ **Choose an event date.** Try to choose dates that do not conflict with holidays, religious observances, or other events taking place in your state or area.

☐ **Pick the event location.** To ensure accessibility for participants from across your state, consider whether a central location is possible. If finding a central location each year may pose a challenge, think about how you can move your conference around the state (e.g., the southern part of the state in the first year and the northern part of the state in the second year) so that people in different regions may attend at least semi-regularly.

☐ **Develop an event plan.** This plan should identify critical details and designate a strategy to address each of those details. Ideally, your event plan will also include the individuals and/or committees responsible for each task area.

☐ **Create a budget.** You may base your budget on available resources and then retrofit the costs associated with the event. You may also build the budget based on cost estimates gathered and then determine where you can reduce expenses. Either way, having a budget is critical to the success of your event plan. Key expenses to consider within your budget include:
  - Cost of the venue or room rental fees
  - Food and beverages
  - Speaker fees
  - Travel expenses for speakers and staff
  - Insurance
  - Equipment (A/V, multimedia equipment, etc.)
  - Program materials and supplies
  - Gifts and/or giveaways

☐ **Develop the branding and marketing strategy.**
  - Consider whether the event needs a theme, logo, and/or tagline.
  - Develop a website or web page(s) to describe the event.
  - Develop a marketing and outreach strategy to publicize your event.

- ☐ **Develop the program for the event.**
  - • Establish the outcomes and objectives, program format and design, and agenda for the event.
  - • Identify speakers and other key individuals who may need to be part of the program (e.g., campus president to give a welcome, WNEC liaison to share about the ACE Women's Network).

- ☐ **Invite and confirm speakers.** Your invitation to speakers should include the title of the session, the date and time of the session, how long they will speak, whether there will be a Q&A session, a respond-by date, and information on who to contact if they need additional insights.

- ☐ **Launch registration.** Once you have enough information to share publicly about the event, you can launch registration. Think about whether your event will have a registration fee or will be free, what information to gather as part of registration, and what platform your network will use for registration. There are a number of online options for event registration. Some state networks use Eventbrite or Constant Contact as a registration platform, while others may use a Google Form to collect registration information and PayPal to collect payments. Determine the approach that will work best for your state network's event.

- ☐ **Coordinate with the event venue and vendors.** Think about all of the logistics needs for your event. Determine and arrange the catering, A/V, parking, security, accessibility, and communication needs to ensure that everything is well coordinated and the event flows smoothly.

- ☐ **Manage event day set up and execution.** Your event plan should map out all of the details so that the day of the event flows smoothly. Make sure to give plenty of time for set up and that everyone knows who is responsible for which tasks (greeting speakers, managing participant check-in tables, set up of program materials, A/V management, etc.).

Conduct a thorough evaluation of your event. Your evaluation should not only allow you to gain insights from the participant experience, but also assist your state network in planning for future events. As part of your evaluation strategy, you may consider a debrief meeting with the planning committee to understand what worked well and what changes may be useful in the future. During the debrief meeting, your committee may want to revisit the event plan, budget, outreach strategy, and program design/format. Keep track of anything that will aid your network in planning future events.

FOR MORE TIPS ON CONFERENCE AND EVENT PLANNING, SEE THE WEBSITES BELOW.

The Event Planning Checklist Used by Top Event Planners
This checklist provides a breakdown of an event plan by months leading up to and even following the event.
https://www.wildapricot.com/articles/event-planning-checklist

Your Conference Speaker Outreach Checklist
This site presents key information as you consider speaker outreach for a conference.
https://www.eventbrite.com/blog/conference-speaker-checklist-ds00/