

# Conference

Engagement range	Inform/Consult
Difficulty level	Medium to hard (reasonable level of skill in communication, media public event organising)
Cost	Medium (\$1,000 - \$10,000) to High (over \$10,000)
When might you use it	To showcase a product, plan, policy To discover community issues To communicate an issue
Number of people required to help to organise	A team of people may be required (3 - 12)
Size of audience	Large (over 30)
Time to organise	Medium (six weeks to six months) to long (6-12 months)
Issues/resources to think about	Venue; Catering; Presenters fees (in volunteer organisations, presenters may not ask for fees); Staffing (can be a trained volunteer); Moderator/facilitator; Overhead projectors; Data projector/Video/ screen; Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.)
Innovation level	Low

## Description

A conference is usually organised by a like-minded group or association to share information, present the latest innovations, and/or to make decisions about or on behalf of the organisation.

Conferences can vary from 'shoestring' budget gatherings to large-scale, week-long events that may justify hiring a professional conference organiser. Often, conferences provide an opportunity for organisation members who are geographically scattered to gather, learn, and socialise.

The venue and presenters need to suit the types of people who will be attending. That is, a camping conference may suit backpackers, but an organisation whose members have young children, or are aged, will need a venue that suits these special needs.

## Objective

- To bring a large group of people together to share information, hear the latest updates on a topic or issue, and make decisions.

## Desired Outcome

- Recommendations or an action plan for future directions.

## Uses/Strengths

- Can allow organisation-wide sharing and decision-making by bringing all members to one place for a day or a number of days.
- Provides networking opportunities for members of an organisation that are spread over a wide area.
- Provides a large enough audience to draw presenters of renown who may not be willing to come for a smaller gathering.
- Allows new information to be shared with a large number of people simultaneously.
- Usually provides time for serious consideration of issues over two or three days.
- Can provide an opportunity for public statements that bear the authority of coming from the collective group.

## Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- May take a long time from conception to welcoming delegates.
- Needs a dedicated committee for advance planning to ensure every detail is planned for.
- When deciding on timing and venue, consider other events or activities that may affect costs and availability (e.g. school holidays).
- Need good quality presenters and a suitable venue to encourage large numbers to attend.
- Need to tailor the venue and costs for inclusiveness (e.g. disabled access, childcare, cost, ambience, levels of comfort, distance from public transport) to encourage people to attend.
- Starting and registration times need to suit people travelling long distances.

## Step by Step Guide

1. Select a small working group to organise the event.
2. Determine what will be a suitable venue and time, taking into consideration the types of participants, their levels of ability/ agility, the kinds of activities planned, cost and transport accessibility.
3. Book the venue and catering early, and check at regular intervals in relation to staff turnovers, changes to availability of facilities, changes to numbers, events, etc.
4. Give plenty of advance notice of the date and venue through mailouts, newsletters, together with contact details for one person for inquiries.

5. Select presenters who have credibility, knowledge, and good presentation skills. Confirm all times, dates and locations in writing, and clarify what audiovisual equipment they may need, and any issues of payment.
6. Visit the venue when booking, and closer to the event, to check that all is as expected. Select knowledgeable and credible presenters, aiming for a variety of delivery styles and information.
7. Engage independent moderators to encourage equitable participation and to assist processes of decision making and deliberation preferably, have some agreed conference outcomes or actions or recommendations.
8. Consider gaining sponsorship to lighten the cost to participants.
9. Arrange all legal, financial and other responsibilities for holding a public gathering.
10. Organise a booking procedure, keep scrupulous records, and consider offering discounts for early registration.
11. Check audiovisual requirements, book and check equipment.
12. Plan carefully for the arrival of participants. If possible, trial your registration processes, catering and other facilities prior to the event.
13. Publish any reports, statements or recommendations.
14. Consider how participants will find their way to their destinations (signs, arrows, 'help desks' can all help the conference run more smoothly).
15. Use the media to publicise your event and the conference's decisions or opinions on issues. Send out media releases before the event to publicise the venue, times and speakers, and any notable events or people attending. If appropriate, organise a media conference for the end of the conference to announce the outcomes.