



# **EVENT PLANNING GUIDE**

**Updated 2013**

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## **HOW TO BEGIN**

### ***Introduction***



The Washington Fire Chiefs (WFC) hold a minimum of 10 events a year (generally many more than that), many of them are planned and managed by a partnership between a WFC Section Board and the WFC Staff.

This can be a daunting task, even for the most experienced event planner! This guide is meant to assist you, and also help the WFC Staff provide more concrete resources for each step along the way.

The WFC Staff want to not only help you plan your event, but assist you in growing it. Our goal is to support the WFC's mission, to "Serve, Education & Lead" and we believe your events are a path to supporting our common mission.

There are many ways to begin to plan an event. Some WFC Sections have a standing "Event Planning Committee" or a "Conference Committee". In other cases, there is one individual tasked with planning the event, or sometimes the entire WFC Section Board. Regardless of what structure you choose, it is wise to designate someone to work directly with the WFC Office, thus eliminating the possibility of conflicting instructions or confusion by any party involved.

There are many ways the WFC Staff can assist you; however there are a few steps along the way the WFC Staff *must* assist you with according to WFC Policies & Procedures.

The steps to pay special attention to are:

- Executing A Venue Agreement
- Executing Speaker Contracts and MOU's
- Creating a Registration
- Creating a Marketing Flyer
- Ordering Merchandise & Giveaways
- Wrapping up the Event

We want to thank your creativity, skill and ingenuity with us. It is a true honor to work with such dedicated individuals!

*WFC Staff*

## HOW TO BEGIN

### *Reccomended Event Timeline*



**12 Months or more before the event:**

Choose Location & Venue

**11 Months or more before the event:**

Finalize contract with WFC Office & Venue

**10 Months or more before the event:**

Plan Event Theme (if applicable) and Speakers

**10 Months or more before the event:**

Create draft agenda

**9 Months or more before the event:**

Draft Speaker Contracts with Speaker & WFC and send to be signed.

**8 Months or more before the event:**

Finalize Agenda

**6 Months or more before the event:**

Fill out WFC Event Request Form and return

**6 Months or more before the event:**

Send Save the Date Email to WFC Membership

**5 Months or more before the event:**

Launch Registration

**5 Months or more before the event:**

Fill out Marketing Plan Form and Develop Email Campaign with WFC Office

**5 Months or more before the event:**

Finalize Flyer with WFC Office (If needed)

**4 Months before event:**

Launch Flyer (If needed)

**3 Months before event:**

Start requesting hotel block numbers to ensure a full room block

**2 Months before event:**

Start weekly monitoring of registrations with WFC office

**2 Months before event:**

Coordinate with hotel to finalize meeting room spaces.

**1 Month before event:**

Coordinate with hotel to arrange meal counts, menus and A/V

**1 Month before event:**

Contact WFC office to arrange for any printing and document creation for event.

**1 Month before event:**

Let WFC office know of any special A/V requests, equipment or supplies needed

## **THE WHY**

### ***Why is this event needed?***



Every event needs a “Why”. Not only will determining this early on be important to the planning process, but a paragraph describing why this event is needed can be quite useful for the marketing plan as well.

This is especially important if it is a new event that has never been held before. Consider the following:

- How is this event different than other events held in Washington?
- Does this event fill a niche that is currently lacking in the fire service?
- How will this event help fulfill the Washington Fire Chiefs’ mission to “Serve, Educate & Lead”?

Once you have determined these items, it might be helpful to put together a paragraph to help keep focus on the event you are planning, and to use later for marketing purposes.

For Example:

*This event is a comprehensive educational forum. The classroom lecture sessions as well as the hands-on sessions provide a wide-range of training for all levels of technical competencies in the field of hazardous materials response and special operations tactics.*

## THE WHY

### *Determine the Type Of Event*



If this is an existing event, this step may be a given; however, if you are planning a new event this could be very important in determining some vital information down the line.

There are several sorts of events the WFC holds throughout the year:

- Conferences, Academies, Symposiums and Institutes
  - These events generally have a multiple day agenda, with several speakers. Attendance goals range from approximately 75 attendees and up. *Many of these sort of events the WFC holds are established yearly events. It is recommended when starting a new event this size to start with a 2 day event and work up to a larger event over the course of several years, so that your event has time to develop a following.*
- Workshops, Forums, Seminar
  - These events generally have a shorter agenda (two days or less) with one speaker, or several shorter presentations. Sometimes attendance of these shorter events can be surprisingly high; however attendance goals generally range from 30-60 attendees.
- Webinar, Online Training,
  - These are less traditional events. The general recommendation for a webinar is 2 hours or less, and attendance may vary greatly depending on topic and timing, but goals range from 15-30 attendees. It is important on these online sorts of events to make sure your agenda is well focused and to limit speakers to 1 or 2.

## THE WHY

### *Creating an Event Budget*



One of the first things you need to look at is what money you have available to plan this event. Each year WFC Sections budget for the events they wish to hold. The WFC Office is always happy to provide you with that budget so you can see what funds you have available for planning this event.

Here are the major areas that are budgeted for:

- Income
  - Attendee Income
  - Sponsorships
  - Vendor Income (for those events that include a Vendor Show)
- Expense
  - AV (Such as projector screens & AV Carts)
  - Catering
  - Location Fees
  - Lodging
  - Travel
  - Instructor Fees (this includes any lodging and expenses your Instructor may require.)
  - Event Supplies
  - Giveaways
  - Merchandise

The budget that takes affect October 1<sup>st</sup> of each year should encompass the budget for all events planned for the next year.

For this individual event, write out the estimated expenses and income goals. It is a good idea to estimate low on income and high on expenses. *This budget information is now also asked for on the Event Request Form, and a worksheet is provided at the top of the form for your convenience.*

Is this an event that was not anticipated during the budgeting process? That's okay! Contact the WFC Office and we can assist with the budget amendment process to amend your income and expense to include this new event.

*It is very important to keep your expenses within your budgeted amounts, or to take the time to amend it if you believe you may not be able to stay within those numbers currently budgeted.*

## **THE WHO**

### *Considering your WFC Section Demographics*



Who is in your Section Demographics is important, considering your marketing will generally most easily reach these individuals.

There are some documents that may assist you in determining your Section Target Audience:

- WFC Section Protocols for your Section
- WFC Section Purpose Statement (if your Section has developed one)

You may also look through your membership roster to see if particular job titles often show to be associated with your membership (your WFC Section name, may in and of itself contain the job titles that would be associated with membership in your Section)



## **THE WHO**

### ***Determining an Audience***



Now that you know who the easiest audience is to reach, with your Section Membership Demographics, you can consider what other groups might have similar interests and goals.

Things to think about:

- Are there other Sections or WFC Membership that this event might appeal to?
- Are there other Fire Service Stakeholder groups this event might appeal to?
- Are there related industries that this event might be applicable to?

*When we get to marketing, this is an area where the WFC Staff may be able to help. We develop connections and relationships within our own organizations as well as with fire service stakeholders and other related industry groups and non profits.*

## **THE WHEN**

### ***Determine a Date Range***



The next step is determine what the best time will be to hold your event. This needs to happen early in your planning process. Your exact dates may be determined by your venue, but to adequately plan for an event a date range should be decided early on.

Some factors to keep in mind when you are determining a date range are:

- Other Conferences or events geared toward your audience that could conflict with your dates.
- Other events that could impact attendance (such as, is it Wildfire season? Will there be weather complications?)
- Are there other WFC events that it would be advantageous to partner with to leverage location, venue or audience?

Once the factors have been considered, choose the dates you would like to target. These dates will need to be flexible as you consider venue and speakers, however it should be a good start to begin planning your timeline.

*You will also want to keep in mind the WFC Recommended Event Timeline (page 3) as you choose your dates. It is important to plan enough time to successfully launch and market your event to make it as successful as possible.*

## **THE WHEN**

### ***Create an Event Timeline***



Next it is good to map out an event timeline. This will help keep you on track as you move through the steps of planning your event, and also gives you a document to share with the WFC Office and your Section Board so everyone is working towards common goals.

The WFC Recommended Event Timeline (Page 3) is geared towards larger conference events, and you may find you need to abbreviate it for small workshops. For workshops the WFC recommends starting *at least* 6 months prior to the event to allow for ample time. The longer the time you have to plan the better!

Here are the items for consideration when you are planning your timeline. It's a good idea to make a list and fill in dates.

- Find a location and venue.
- Finalize contract with WFC Office & Venue
- Plan Event Theme and Speaker(s)
- Create draft agenda
- Draft Speaker Contracts or Memorandums of Understanding with Speaker & WFC and send to be signed.
- Finalize Agenda
- Fill out WFC Event Request Form and Return
- Send Save the Date Email to WFC Membership
- Launch Registration
- Fill out Marketing Plan Form and Develop Email Campaign with WFC Office
- Finalize Flyer with WFC Office
- Launch Flyer
- Start requesting hotel block numbers to ensure a full room block
- Start weekly monitoring of registrations with WFC office
- Coordinate with hotel to finalize meeting room spaces.
- Coordinate with hotel to arrange meal counts, menus and A/V
- Contact WFC office to arrange for any printing and document creation for event.
- Let WFC office know of any special A/V requests, equipment or supplies needed

*Please note that on Venue and Speaker contracts, as well as the Event Request Form the WFC Office requires them to be submitted 30 days prior to your event launch to allow for time for review, negotiation as needed (in the case of contracts or MOU's), and creation.*

## THE WHERE

### Choosing a Venue Type



There are amazing venues located all over the state of Washington. Depending on the audience and type of event that you have determined, you have many options available to choose from.

- Convention Centers
  - These are generally reserved for larger events such as Conferences, Academies, Symposiims and Institutes where multiple rooms will need to be used at once, and the size of the event will exceed the meeting space that a Hotel will have available.
- Hotels
  - This is an ideal option for a mid-range event that will need a lodging room block as well as event space.
- Resorts, Casinos
  - These can be great options depending on the size of the events. The factors that are important to consider when planning at these sorts of venues are the time of year, and the impact that may make. *(Such as an event at a resort with skiing, held during the winter may face peak rates, and crowding due to general resort clientle)* It is also important to note that many Casinos in Washington are on tribal land, and are not smoking free. This can also cause an impact to your event and attendance and may be important to visit and determine the proximity of the meeting space, to any of these influences before selecting one of these sorts of venues.
- Non traditional Meeting Space
  - Event planning has become big business, and a draw for many major cities across Washington. Event Centers, Non Traditional Meeting Space and Resteraunt Meeting Space can now be found in most mid sized cities in Washington. *These spaces are a little more challenging to find. If this is what you have in mind, the WFC Office may know of a location, or be able to put you in touch with a Convention Bureau representative in your target area that can assist.*
- Free or Low Cost Venues
  - These are generally only available for a maximum of a full day event (although there are exceptions). This space is many times found in Fire Stations, Fire Training Centers, Libraries, Religious Institutions, and Government Buildings. *There can be complications to this sort of space depending on the rules they have established. Be sure to ask about catering or rules that may impact food and coffee if you are planning to offer any.*

## THE WHERE

### *Choosing a Location Area*



Before preparing a Request for Proposal (RFP) you'll need to determine where you want to look for a venue. Here are a few items that may help you determine a general location where you will need to look:

- Where is the majority of your audience based?
- Will you need to rely on a room block to offset the meeting room cost? (*If this is the case you will want to be far enough from your audience that they will need to stay.*)
- Are there weather complications during your date range that may affect where your audience can travel? (*For example, crossing the passes in January can be a challenge*)
- Are there unique requirements for this event (such as special equipment that will be needed, or terrain features that will be utilized?)

You may want to start with general areas:

- Eastern Washington (Spokane, Yakima, TriCities, etc.)
- Central Washington (Cle Elum, Ellensburg, Wenatchee, Leavenworth, Chelan, etc.)
- Western Washington (Seattle, Bellevue, Issaquah, Tacoma, Olympia, etc.)
- Northwestern Washington (Bellingham, Everett, Anacortes,, etc.)
- Southwestern Washington (Vancouver, Stevenson, Centralia, Grand Mound, etc.)

## THE WHERE

### *Creating an Request For Proposal (RFP)*



So by now you should have an idea of the type of event (and general size associated with it), the general area you are looking to hold the event in, and the types of venues you would like to consider.

*This may be a good time to check in with the WFC Office, to see if there are any venues in the area that the WFC might have a close working relationship with. Sometimes due to the volume of events, or a venue wanting to get their foot in the door for a larger event, the WFC Office may be able to find you a very competitive quote on venue.*

There are some free tools that may help in finding a venue:

- <http://www.cvent.com/rfp>
  - CVENT offers a free RFP service that allows you to query most major event centers and hotel venues.
- Convention Bureaus
  - Many local Convention & Tourism Bureaus in cities will assist you in obtaining RFP's from any venue that would be a good fit for your event. Working with them can save you considerable time compared to speaking with each venue sales representative yourself.

The information you will need to provide when requesting an RFP are:

- Dates
  - What dates are you looking for availability?
  - Are you flexible on those dates, and if so how flexible?
- Attendance
  - What is your target attendance.
- Square Footage
  - How many meeting rooms will you need a day and for how many people?
  - What will the seating arrangements be in your meeting rooms (such as Theater Style, Classroom Style, Hollow Square, ect.)
  - Will you need separate rooms for meals or breakouts?
  - Do you have any special needs when considering space, such as a social event, or space for a training prop?
- Lodging
  - Will your attendees need lodging?
  - Will the lodging need to be government rates?
  - What is the minimum lodging you expect to need?
- Food
  - Do you plan on offering any meals?
  - If so, which meals will you offer?
  - Will you need the venue to provide Per Diem menus?

Why do an RFP? An RFP can assist you later in negotiating a venue contract, as well as help you determine quickly which venues are within your budget and will fit your needs.

## THE WHERE

### *Negotiating a Venue Agreement*



Now that you have completed the RFP process or worked with the WFC Office to find a promising venue, it's time to request a contract and start working on the venue agreement.

Here are the first things you will want to check in the contract the Venue provides you with:

- Dates
  - Are the dates correct?
- Meeting Space
  - Does the contract contain the correct meeting space, room setup and approximate setup numbers for your event?
- Room Block
  - Do you have a block for lodging?
  - Do the lodging numbers look accurate?
  - Are they based on a conservative estimate? *It is always best to estimate low and aim high!*
- Attrition Amounts
  - Does your contract contain attrition?
  - If so what percentage of the overall lodging block must you meet to avoid paying attrition?
  - Is it calculated on overall room nights or based upon individual night totals?
- Deadlines
  - Is there a reasonable date for room block cutoffs?
  - What is the latest date you can cancel the event without penalty?
  - Is there a deposit due by a specific date?
- Food & Beverage Minimums
  - What minimum do you need to pay for food and beverage?
  - Does this minimum fit within your budget?
- Meeting Space Charges
  - Are you being charged for meeting space?
  - Is any of the meeting space being reduced or provided at no cost due to the food and beverage minimums?
  - Are there any special setup charges indicated? (room set fee, bar fee, etc.)

If any of these items are unacceptable, you may choose to contact the venue directly and negotiate the contract, or you may send the contract with the list of concerns to the WFC Office to negotiate.

## **THE WHERE**

### ***Executing a Venue Agreement***



You are so close to having a determined location! Now that you have a venue contract, you will need to send it to the WFC at least 30 days before you plan to launch your event.

The Executive Director will review your contract for any issues or concerns and negotiate as needed. *Even if you have chosen to negotiate your contract directly with the venue, if there are concerns with the agreement terms, or it is believed that we can use leveraging factors to get you a better deal, the Executive Director may choose to negotiate or amend the contract further. This may often times include, but not be limited to, room nights, attrition, food & beverage minimums, deposit, and cancellation terms. Our goal is to get you the best deal possible, work with you for your WFC Section's success, and ensure the WFC is entering into a sound agreement with reasonable terms.*

Once the Executive Director and Venue sign the contract, the contract will be put on file at the WFC Office, and we will be sure to provide you with a final agreement as well.

*A special note for free venues:*

Our policies and procedures require an agreement even with free venues that will require no money to change hands. If you have chosen to hold your event with a free venue, then we will need a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This MOU should outline:

- Venue Contact Information
- Planner Contact Information
- Dates of Event
- Meeting Space that will be Provided
- Room Setup Information
- Any Special Terms Regarding Food & Beverage, Venue Cleanup, or other Specific Requirements.

These MOU's should also be provided to the WFC at least 30 days before you plan to launch your event. They should be signed by both the Executive Director & a representative of the venue.



## **THE WHAT**

### ***Creating an Event Theme***



Depending on the size of your event, you may choose to create a theme, to assist with marketing and generate a memorable impression with your audience.

These themes may be practical and pertain to your topic. Here are a few examples of general themes:

- Leadership
- Education
- Fire Prevention

Or the general theme may be fun and tie in with the more specific marketing to topic:

- Greek Mythology
- Baseball
- Time Period Theme

Once the general theme or topic has been determined you can create a marketing line. This is what we will use to market your event, and needs to be a short, memorable one line theme.

Here are a few specific marketing themes the WFC has utilized for our annual conference the past few years:

- Keys to Leadership
- Seeking Solutions
- Climb to New Heights

Here are a few themes WFC Sections have utilized for their conferences the past few years:

- Leadership Promotes Safety & Training
- Sand, Surf & Sunshine
- Bringing your Education to a Classic Level
- Managing your Risk

Having a memorable theme can be instrumental in your conference. It gives your audience an impression that each year's conference is individual and unique, as well as solidifies the event in their memory as you move forward. We partner this theme with more generic "brand" marketing so that your conference is easily identified every year but never an identical event.

The WFC Office will work with your theme when designing marketing and imagery to go along with your event, so be creative!

## THE WHAT

### *Determining Agenda Topics*



It's time to pull out your brainstorming skills! Now is the time to gather up all those ideas you have been absorbing as well as feedback from previous events and create a list of ideas for topics. This list may be short if you are planning a workshop or webinar, or could be very long if you are planning a week long conference with multiple tracks.

First step is to create a list of potential topics, with associated speaker names. All of these topics should appeal to the your WFC Section demographics and your target audience determined earlier.

Once you have a list, it's time to determine an agenda. For each event you will need to map out the time blocks you would like to fill as well as social activities and meals. This can be done in a matrix format, or an agenda format.

For example:

<i>Registration</i>	<i>7am-8am</i>
<i>Topic, Speaker 1</i>	<i>8am-10am</i>
<i>Topic, Speaker 2</i>	<i>10am-12pm</i>
<i>Lunch</i>	<i>12pm-1pm</i>
<i>Topic, Speaker 3</i>	<i>1pm-3pm</i>
<i>Topic, Speaker 4</i>	<i>3pm-5pm</i>

It is generally a good idea to request that speakers take at least one 15 minute break during a 2 hour block. You may also consider which subjects will be livelier than others. Afternoons can be difficult with a dry topic, such as things that have to do with numbers, regulations, rules, standards or other less stimulating, but very important topics. Try to schedule these sort of topics in the morning and items with very animated speakers, or more interactive programs in the afternoon.

Now that you have topics and speaker names penciled in, you can move to the next step in contacting the speakers you would like! At this point your agenda should still be flexible, but this draft agenda will assist you in negotiating with speakers, and avoiding the dreaded "speaker clumping" where all you speakers report back that they want the same day or time slots!

## **THE WHAT**

### ***Contacting Speakers***



Depending on the size of your event, this could be quite an extensive task. If you have a large agenda, and many speakers, it's advisable to start a simple spreadsheet with your speaker's names, contact information, topic and agenda block that has been tentatively assigned, and as you contact speakers you can log the date you contacted them. This will help you determine if you are having trouble getting in touch with a speaker, if you need to choose someone else for the class.

It may also be wise to draft up a form email that will be easy to send, whether you reach out and contact via email, or call first and follow up with an email as a confirmation. Be firm with a deadline so you can move on with contracts in a reasonable amount of time.

As you hear back from speakers, add to your spreadsheet (or make a note of, if you only have a handful of speakers) any special needs, compensation and travel or lodging that will factor into contracts.

## **THE WHAT**

### ***Creating a Speaker MOU or Contract***



Now that you have tentative agreements from speakers, it's time to document their involvement with a Contract or Memorandum of Understanding. The WFC Policies and Procedures require that all speakers either have a signed contract or signed MOU, which will help avoid confusion on compensation, as well as dates, times and topic.

The WFC has both a standard contract and standard MOU available for your use. The contract is to be used when compensation is being provided in the form of monetary compensation. This form will document the speaker's information, who the check will be made out to, the name of the speaker's presentation, their bio and class description, as well as what the speaker will provide (for example, printing, travel, lodging, expenses) and what the WFC will provide in monetary compensation, as well as other concessions.

If you have made a deal with a speaker that does not include monetary compensation (monetary compensation includes reimbursements), then it is appropriate to use the MOU. This is a much simpler agreement that will document the event details, as above and a short section documenting what the WFC will provide.

These Contracts or MOU's must be signed by the instructor.

## **THE WHAT**

### ***Executing a Contract or MOU***



As you receive your signed contracts or MOU's back, you should forward them to the WFC Office to be reviewed and signed by the WFC. The Executive Director will review the costs associated with your speakers as well as your budget so be sure to have make any appropriate changes to your budget if you plan to exceed the funds budgeted for speakers for the year.

All contracts & MOU's must be provided to the WFC Office at least 30 days prior to launching your event. This will ensure that your speakers are locked in, your agenda is set, and that ample marketing material is available specific to their class or topic prior to launching your event.

## **THE HOW – AKA LAUNCH!**

### ***Creating a Registration***



The WFC Office has a full registration system that will allow your participants to register and pay for your event, as well as log vital details like class selection, preferences and more.

The first step to creating a registration is to fill out the WFC Event Request Form. This form will give the WFC Staff all the details they need to set up your registration as well as vital marketing information.

New in 2013 there is an option for an “Info Page”. This page is designed to give information about your event before individuals register. The page can be used to showcase agenda information, speaker bios and other vital information, and features a large red “Register” button in the right hand corner.

Once an individual clicks the register button they will be taken to the registration form where they will need to log in or create an account, then select a registration option, and any additional information you may have requested (for example, you could request shirt size, or class selections)

The items the WFC will need to know to build registration are:

- Event Title
- Event Theme
- Event Date(s)
- Event Location
- Speakers
- Class Descriptions
- Speaker Bios
- Registration Fees (WFC will add an amount to the base registration fee to create a non-member fee)
- Event Planner Name & Contact Info

Registration fees need to encompass all location fees, food, speaker fees & concessions and any other possible charges due to the event, as well as a small profit.

Other items that have changed in 2013, is the ability to set class or registration maximums (and display to attendees), the ability to register multiple people in one session and better use of coupon codes.

*The WFC Office is always happy to help set registration fees, and will review all fees for unintentional disparities such as one day registrations not adding up to full conference amounts.*

## **THE HOW – AKA LAUNCH!**

### ***Creating a Marketing Flyer***



With the increase in email marketing from all sorts of sources, and the decrease in mail marketing, the WFC has found mailed flyers to be increasingly effective.

Depending on the size of the event, the WFC Office may advise a one page tri-fold flyer or a 2 page half fold flyer. The WFC maintains templates for each, and will assist you with designing an effective and mail friendly flyer to mail out to all departments in the state, Idaho and Oregon departments, and any additional list you may have available.

It is important to provide the WFC with any speaker photos you may want to have showcased, as well as your conference theme and speaker information. The more information we have available, the more successful a flyer we can create together! We will assist you in finalizing a creative and effective design, and will provide to you to proof and give input before sending.

Our goal is to get a flyer out 3-4 months before an event. Not too soon that the event might be forgotten, and not too late where attendees might not have time to reserve the dates or obtain funding and approval.

## **THE HOW – AKA LAUNCH!**

### ***Creating a Marketing Plan***



The WFC Office now requests all events return a marketing plan. This is new, but will assist us with sending out targeted information to our members to encourage your registration numbers!

The new Marketing Plan Form will ask you to provide:

- Marketing paragraphs for each email blast requested.
- Dates for major items such as when you would like to end registration, or room block cut off.
- Any additional information we may be able to feature such as information about the venue, location, or speakers.

Items that the WFC Office have found effective:

- Featuring Classes that need increased registration.
- Letters from Speakers encouraging registration.
- Marketing paragraphs explaining the reason these topics are vital to your audience.

We will use all of this information to schedule out an email campaign. Generally we look to send an email blast every 2 weeks until 2 months prior to the event. At the two month mark we will start sending email blasts every week. Then at the 2 week mark we will switch to twice a week. This generally adds up to about 14 email blasts or more to market your event.

Don't forget we can utilize any other additional marketing lists you may be able to obtain, as well as we will share your event information with our contacts at other interested Stakeholder groups on your behalf.



## **THE HOW – AKA LAUNCH!**

### ***Watching Attendance Numbers***



The WFC Office has two solutions for watching attendance numbers. We may set up a directory for you which will allow you to view your own registration numbers at any time, or we may email you weekly with all the vital information about your numbers.

This is a good time to watch for struggling classes or waning registration numbers which may mean a change in marketing must occur, or eventually an event or class may need to be cancelled. Our preference is to always address these issues with ample time to make adjustments and try other tactics, before making a cancellation.

It's also important to note, that in the experience of the WFC Office, it takes at least a week to see a surge in registration which is attributed to a new marketing technique or the receipt of a flyer. This is due to the time it takes Fire Service Personnel to receive approval from superiors prior to registration. So don't be alarmed if you do not see an immediate change in registration numbers after a change in tactic!

This is also a good time to see whether you are on track to reach your budgeted registration numbers. If your numbers are a little low, it might be necessary to at look at ways to cut costs, or possibly find sponsorships to fill those gaps.

*Again, the WFC Office is always happy to assist in coming up with a plan. There are always situations where meeting planners may run into unanticipated scheduling conflicts, or unexpected expenses, and it is our goal to assist in creating a way to successfully navigate around those issues!*

## **THE HOW – AKA LAUNCH!**

### ***Soliciting Sponsorships***



Now that registration is under way, and a marketing plan has been developed, it is time to start thinking about your plan for sponsorships. We have many businesses and organizations involved with the WFC that may want to sponsor an event or speaker and assist you with your event.

In addition this can be a great way to partner with a business or organization to provide a little something extra to your participants.

There are several ways that a sponsor can be involved:

- Money
  - Sponsoring a Speaker or Activity can be very helpful to your event's bottom line. Please be aware that any monetary sponsorships must be sent to the WFC Office prior to paying for the service, per the WFC's Policies and Procedures.
- Giveaways
  - Many businesses and organizations have giveaway items that they are happy to share with you to give out at registration. Items such as pens, pencils, note tablets may be very useful on site at an event.

For larger events it may even be helpful to develop a Sponsorship Form documenting the types of sponsorships and levels available, as well as what benefit they might receive (for example signage at the event, a few minutes to speak to those attending, or recognition on your web pages.) If you have this sort of document, or a letter requesting assistance, be sure to provide it to the WFC Office, so we may disseminate it to all Associate members of the WFC as well.

Once you have secured sponsors, please provide the WFC Office with the amount of the sponsorship, the sponsors information and any benefit the sponsor will receive so we may ensure all benefits are received as promised.

## **THE HOW – AKA LAUNCH!** ***Ordering Merchandise & Giveaways***



For many larger events, it is nice to provide your attendees with something they can walk away with to remember your event, whether that be an item given to them at registration, or some sort of item you are selling.

There is a process to purchase this item established in the WFC Policies and Procedures. Here are some things to consider as you plan what you may want to offer:

- Budget
  - Will the items you would like to offer be within the funds available in your WFC Section Budget?
- Event Specific Items
  - Will this item be specific to the event, or something that you may order in bulk (such as a logo wear item) that you can give away or sell year after year?
- Sponsored Items
  - Can this item be sponsored with joint logos displayed (such as on a thumbdrive) to save money?

Regardless of what you decide to order, there is a procedure that will need to be followed to successfully navigate the ordering process. Giveaways and Merchandise are not considered items that can be expensed under the Personal Reimbursement Process.

To start your order you must utilize the Item Procurement Form and provide the vendor information, item number and description as well as the purpose of the item. Please allow 30 days for review and approval. The WFC Office will also provide an expense comparison to determine if another WFC Vendor may be able to offer a better price or value. Many times due to the bulk of business we do over the course of a year with a vendor we can request more competitive pricing.

## **THE HOW – AKA LAUNCH!**

### ***Calculating Numbers for Food***



As you get closer to the event, your venue or caterers will be in contact to start planning meals and overall numbers. These numbers for food should be conservative as it is always easier to increase the numbers as you get closer to the event date, but more difficult to decrease them!

To calculate your overall food numbers there are a number of factors you need to take into account:

- Full Conference Attendee Numbers
- 1 Day Attendee Numbers (broken out by day)
- Speakers in Attendance (broken out by day)
- Sponsors, or Vendors (if you have a Vendor Show with your event) that may be at invited to a meal.
- Any additional assistance such as Board, Conference Planners or Spouses that may be in attendance and planning to eat.

It may be helpful to create a small spreadsheet to determine number of meals by day.

All venues and catering companies do plan to have an overage amount on hand should you fall a few meals short on your count. Request those numbers from the company you are working with prior to ordering meals as the exact percentage of overage may vary between venues and caterers.

Also consider as you are setting meal menus and numbers, that most venues have a Per Diem menu available that will reduce the cost of your meals to the approved Government Rate for the area you are holding the event in. Be sure to ask for these menus because most venues will not volunteer them without a special request.

All final Banquet Orders or Event Orders should be sent to the WFC Office for a final signature by the Executive Director.

## **THE HOW – AKA LAUNCH!**

### **Available WFC Resources**



During the last month, there are many preparation details that you will be dealing with, and it can be helpful to know what the WFC has available and can assist with.

Here are some of the items we can assist with:

- **Printing and Collation**
  - We can print handouts, create combbound conference books as well as any other miscellaneous printing you may need prior to your conference. We also maintain templates for Pocket Programs, Personal Agendas, Rosters and other unique items that can set your event apart from other events.
- **Signage**
  - We can print registration signage you may need to have on site and provide plastic holders to display them. We can also create tent cards to recognize sponsors or reserved tables.
- **Name Badges**
  - The WFC Office has two card printers available that can create durable and unique printed plastic name badges for your event. We can provide you with name badges for all your attendees as well as blanks that can be written on with a sharpie on site for quick additions.
- **Audio Visual Lending Program**
  - The WFC Office maintains a Lending Cache of projectors and laptops for WFC use. This is a huge cost savings considering a week's worth of projector rental charges at a venue would pay for the projector itself.
- **Conference Box**
  - We provide a conference box stocked with spare batteries, clips, overhead pens, tickets, staplers, glue sticks, receipt books, and everything else you might need on site.
- **Registration Reports**
  - We will provide you with registration reports showing class selections, different registration types and information for each registrant.

As a reminder there are several items the WFC Office *must* be involved in:

- **Contract Execution for Speakers and Venues**
- **Registration Development**
- **Marketing Plan**
- **Item Procurement for Giveaways, Merchandise and other large supply orders.**
- **Expense Reimbursements**
- **Sponsorship Program**
- **Event Wrap Up**



## **THE FINISH**

### ***On Site Common Issues & Solutions***

You have made it to the start date of the event. Now that your on site, there are some common issues that may arise that we may have a good solution for!

#### **Common Issues:**

- **Over Estimate of Food Numbers**
  - Sometimes less people will show up to a meal than you anticipated! If it's just one meal, there may be no way to fix it. If you believe that your overall numbers are just too high for multiple meals, it may be worth asking the caterer to decrease your food numbers. They won't always decrease them on site, but many times they will try to work with you the best they can.
- **Under Estimate of Food Numbers**
  - This can be a greater issue, when more attendees show up than were expected, and can cause you to run out of food. As mentioned earlier, venue and caterers will have an overage available for a certain amount. If you are only providing one meal, and approach the caterer, they can generally find something to serve as a "Plan B" to those additional attendees. If you have multiple meals, as soon as you realize the issue, sit down with the caterer and map out just how many additional meals you will need to add, and they should be able to adjust all future meal amounts.
- **Special Food Requirements**
  - Occasionally you will receive an on site request from an attendee that has strict dietary concerns such as allergies and intolerances. Most caterers will be able to provide some sort of alternate meal, so be sure to speak with them as soon as the request comes in.
- **Individual not Registered**
  - This is a common problem, and sometimes can stem from someone accidentally registering themselves! Ask the attendee to provide the department/organization information, and their name. The WFC Office can bill them once the event is over.
- **Attendee Would Like to Pay on Site**
  - The WFC Office prefers that all payments be made directly to the WFC; however, if an individual is willing to cut a check on site, they may be made out to Washington Fire Chiefs and returned as soon to the office as soon as the event concludes with the name of the Attendee and Department/Organization.
- **Emergency Printing**
  - If there is an item that needs to be printed urgently (such as a speaker presentation, or some other printing that was not requested ahead of time) the WFC maintains an account with Kinkos/Fed Ex and Office Depot. Contact the WFC Office and we will make arrangements for it to be printed locally near your event site.
- **Last Minute Supply Needs**
  - Should you have a need arise to provide a certain sort of supply, contact the WFC Office and we will arrange for you to pick them up at Office Depot locally near your event site.

- Equipment Failure
  - Should you have a WFC Projector or Laptop fail, and don't have a back up available, speak with the venue as they generally have extras they can loan you (for a fee). Let the WFC Office know immediately of any problems you may have had with equipment.
- Room Changes within Venue
  - There are times when a venue might need to move you to another room. If this happens, ask the venue to print out several signs and post near the original room door, at registration and near the new room door. You may also choose to make an announcement at an upcoming meal about the change as well.
- Lodging Issues
  - It is easy for things to go wrong when coordinating lodging for other people. Most hotels will work with you; however, occasionally issues can arise since most of these items are direct billed. If you are unable to resolve the issue directly with hotel staff, give the WFC Office a call and we can speak with sales and billing staff to get any issues resolved as soon as possible.
- On Site Feedback & Complaints
  - Even at the most organized events, its not uncommon to have a few suggestions or complaints. If it is something easily resolved such as a room being too cold or to hot, you may resolve it immediatley. If it's a bigger complaint than that, make a note and discuss those notes later with the WFC Office. We may have ways to avoid that in the future, or possibly a way to make the individual feel better about the event as a whole. A list of this feedback and any complaints that might have come up can be very helpful when planning your next event. Don't take it personally! Stay calm and reassure them that they are being listened to and their views are being taken to heart.



## **THE FINISH**

### ***Wrapping Up The Event***

You are done! The event is over successfully, congratulations! We know this has been a lot of hard work!

Now all that's left is to wrap up the event. Here are the items you will need to keep in mind:

- Provide the WFC Office with any Personal Reimbursement Requests
- Return any monies collected on site along with a detailed accounting to the WFC Office. This would include checks for registration, merchandise sales money and any other collected funds.
- Return all Audio Visual Equipment to the WFC Office.
- Provide any final bills that may have been sent to you or provided to you on site.

As soon as all of the final bills have been received, we will send an accounting to you to review. This report will show all of your income and expense. We would like you to review to make sure there is nothing missing before we provide you with a final event breakdown report that will document your expenses, income, and hopefully a profit.

Thank you so much for all the work that you do on behalf of the WFC. We appreciate your hard work and dedication.

Now it's time to start planning the next event!