Transportation Outreach Planner

Public Outreach Strategies

Conferences and Summits

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Recommended Target Groups

Education
College Education
High School Diploma
No High School Diploma

Language
Creole
Other
Spanish

Disability
Hearing Impaired
Other
Physically Challenged
Sight Impaired

Income
Low Income
Middle to Affluent

Vehicle Ownership
Non-vehicle Owner
Vehicle Owner

Race and Ethnicity
Race and Ethnicity

Age

Seniors

Working Age Adults

Youth

Strategy Class

- General

Strategy Types

- Educational

Description

Conferences and summits are special gatherings of people with common interests who are brought together to discuss issues of mutual concern. These types of events generally have joint sessions that engage all participants, as well as breakout meetings where participants are able to have detailed discussions on particular topics of interest. Conferences and summits can be held in one day or over several days and often require advanced registration.[1]

- **Conference**: A conference is a "highly structured program of presentations and discussions" generally organized around a specific theme or issue. These events are intended to bring together experts, academics, practitioners and others who have an interest in the topic of discussion in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas.[2]

- **Summit**: A summit is a gathering of leaders and experts organized to address complex issues with the purpose of setting a strategic direction. Participants are decision makers who are able to make commitments on behalf of their organizations or who have influence over policy making. Although others may attend a summit, the goal is to convene top leaders and key stakeholders who can implement the vision or strategies developed at the summit.[3]

Special Uses

Conferences and summits may be used to:[4]

- Establish a shared vision, strategy or principles for future action
- Showcase, refine and evaluate policies, laws and regulations
- Facilitate discussion of complex issues
- Foster relationships and partnerships

When to Use

Agencies can hold conferences and summits at any time they want to bring attention to a policy, project, or planning process.? It is also useful to organize these types of events when it is necessary to establish consensus or greater understanding of specific projects or proposals. In addition, conferences and summits can be used to bring together groups who do not normally interact with each other. [5]

Cost

* * Moderate ($1000 to $9999)

Although conferences and summits require a great amount of resources, costs may be kept moderate if meeting space is donated and volunteers provide staff support. Basic costs include staff time, printing, publicity, meeting room rental, and food expenses. If hotel space is used and speakers are paid to attend, the cost of the conference can be substantially higher.

Low (up to $999)	*	*Disclaimer:* The cost estimates provided are intended to be a
Moderate ($1,000 to $9,999)	* *	guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature

| High ($10,000 to $50,000) | * * * | of the project. |
| Very High (Above $50,000) | * * * * | |

Time
* 1 to 3 months
Organizing a conference or summit can take from one to three months to organize, if the event is small.? The entire process has four basic phases: 1) planning;2) publicizing and pre-registering; 3) running the event; and 4) evaluating the conference/summit. The planning and pre-registration process genrally constitutes the most time consuming portion of organizing these events.

1 to 3 months	*	*Disclaimer:* The time estimates are approximations. The
6 months to a year	* *	duration of a project may vary depending on various factors,
Multiyear	* * *	including size and budget.

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions
The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for implementing a conference or a summit: [5]

- **Determine the purpose of the event.** Organizers need to know from the start the purpose for holding the conference or summit so that they may organize the event accordingly. The purpose will determine the format of the event, the topics of discussion, and the people who will be invited to participate. Some of the most common reasons for organizing a conference are for training, networking, advocacy, information dissemination, and planning. Summits can be used for problem solving, developing a joint vision, or launching a project or initiative.

- **Identify the staff needed to plan, coordinate and oversee the conference proceedings.** It is important to identify early in the process the person or team who will be responsible for planning and coordinating the event. Specific tasks should be assigned with clear deadlines. Everyone who is part of the planning team should be familiar with the timeline and the expectations of the event. The following include some of the basic planning tasks that need to be assigned:

        - Inviting speakers and special guests
        - Reserving meeting space and equipment
        - Coordinating hotel accomodations and transportation
        - Ordering food and refreshments
        - Organizing and overseeing the registration process
        - Coordinating volunteers
        - Marketing and publicizing the event
        - Overseeing room set-up for presentations

- **Assess the need to hire a conference manager or meeting planner.** Conferences and summits may be the most challenging type of events to coordinate because they often involve multiple presentations and breakout sessions. These types of events may also require coordinating travel and accommodations for participants. Agencies need to determine if their staff has the capacity to coordinate the project in-house or if it may be more effective to outsource the coordination to a professional conference manager or event planner. Things to consider include the scope of the event, staff's capacity; the amount of time that staff has available to work on the project, and the budget allocated to the event.

- **Develop an agenda and determine how the event will be structured.** Once the topics of discussion are identified, organizers must decide how those topics should be presented, who the speakers should be and the time allocated for each topic. Options include lectures, workshops, panel discussions, exhibits, tours, and multimedia presentations. Well-structured conferences and summits provide a balance between presentations and activities that enable participants to express their thoughts and interact with others. Time allocation is also critical. Sufficient time must be given to topics in order to allow for adequate discussion; however, it is important not to create information overload. The rule of thumb is "less is often best.'

- **Identify speakers and meeting moderators.** Special guest speakers, top officials and recognized experts may help to generate interest and boost attendance. Special care should be given to selecting speakers who are good

presenters and who can engage the audience.

- **Select the meeting location.** Once the agenda has been established and the speakers have been identified, it is possible to select the location that is most suited for the event. The number of breakout sessions and the amount of people that will be attending will dictate the space that is needed. The location should be accessible, and have access to ample parking and public transportation.

- **Determine who will be invited to attend.** The nature of the event will help to determine who the target audience will be. However, it is often useful to invite people with diverse perspectives and professionals from different fields in order to get a broader perspective on the issue of discussion. The following are the groups to keep in mind when identifying the target audience: professionals in the field; advocates; community leaders; public officials; civic organizations; residents from the community; the media; and the general public.

- **Determine if sponsors are needed.** Since conferences and summits can be expensive to organize, agencies may need to identify financial sponsors; thus maximizing resources and broadening the number of participants. The most important question to consider is whether the sponsors will subsidize the event in some manner or if participants will be asked to pay their way. The answer to that question will determine how many sponsors are needed. It is also important for sponsors to understand what they will be receiving for their financial contribution. This may include tickets to the conference and special events, as well as recognition on the conference material.

- **Ensure the event has adequate publicity and make sure that all potential stakeholders are invited to participate.** Invitations should be sent several months in advance, with early registration starting at least a month prior to the event. This will enable the organizer to gauge attendance. Information about the conference should be publicized to the media, special interest blogs, community leaders, civic clubs and organizations, along with special interest groups. Potential participants should be able to obtain all of the information they need about the conference from the event literature, website or telephone contact information.

- **On the day of the event, make sure key staff and resource people are available to answer specific questions and help participants.** Sufficient staff must be assigned on the day of the event to greet participants, conduct registration, set-up meeting rooms, and oversee general logistics, including meals and travel. Such individuals should be easy to identify and should have sufficient information to be able to answer questions and address problems.

RECOMMENDED TARGET DEMOGRAPHICS
Although conferences and summits can be used to garner grassroots public participation at the community level, these types of events mainly attract practitioners, public officials and community leaders. Members of the public most likely to attend conferences and summits include individuals who have flexible schedules and are able to get away for a one-day or multiple-day event. This would include middle to upper income professionals, retired individuals, and community activists.

Lessons Learned/Challenges
Below are key points to keep in mind when organizing a conference or a summit: [6]

- **Consider the option of offering web-based conferences or call-in opportunities for people who may have travel restrictions, budgetary constraints, or scheduling issues.** These options make the conference or summit more accessible to the public. However, people may experience technical issues, as well as limitations in their ability to hear and participate in meeting discussions.

- **Pre-conference registration is important to gauge attendance.** Regardless of whether a conference is a one-day or multiple day events, pre-conference registration gives organizers an estimate of the people who will be attending the event. The process can be as simple as mailing in a form, or as sophisticated as an automated website registration form.

- **Early in the process, speakers should provide a brief description of what they will be discussing, as well as requests for special equipment or other needs.** This will enable the organizers to determine the sequencing of presentations and make arrangements for any special needs.

- **Presentations should be scheduled according to topical threads.** It there are multiple presentations on various topics, the presentations should be scheduled by themes. Care should be given not to schedule sessions on the subject at the same time, and to locate the presentations relatively close.

- **Each session should have a "host" responsible for introducing the speakers, keeping time, and overseeing room set-up, as well as other issues that may arise.** The hosts should be provided with instructions regarding their responsibilities, as well as a package with information on the speakers, a list of contacts in case of an emergency or problem, time cards for speaker countdown, a time device, and office supplies.

- **Proper staff identification and signage are important in making participants feel welcome.** Signs pointing to conference rooms, exhibits, the registration area, and other important sites will help to prevent confusion and will assist in orienting people throughout the conference. Likewise staff and volunteers should have on badges that stand out so that people can easily identify them. Organizers may also consider asking staff to wear t-shirts or other attire that makes them easy to identify.

- **Organizers should have a contingency plan for common problems that are likely to arise.** Some of the most common problems that happen at conferences and summits include presenters that back out at the last moment, equipment failure, problems with room set-up, transportation issues, and medical emergencies. Organizers should be prepared for such issues and should have a backup plan. At a minimum, someone should be assigned to deal with such problems.

Case Studies

The following are case studies of how conferences and summits can be used to enhance public participation:

- The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has used conferences and workshops effectively to encourage public participation. One example is the Environmental Justice and Transportation: Building Model Partnerships Conference held in Atlanta Georgia. Participants included grassroots leaders, civil rights activists, planners, and other community stakeholders. As a follow up to the conference, FHWA held a series of regional workshops several years later throughout the nation to obtain additional public feedback environmental justice issues (http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/dotworkshops.PDF[7] and http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/ejtc.html).[8]

- The Carroll Area Transit System of Carroll County in Maryland used a summit meeting in 2008 to help develop the strategic direction for the area's transportation system. The summit offered multiple sessions on a variety of issues, with 100 participants attending each session. Leaders from public, agencies, organizations, businesses and the community provided input on future strategies. The information from the summit was used in the development of the Transportation Development Plan (TDP) for Carroll County (http://www.carrolltransit.org/summit_report.pdf).[9]

For Further Information

Organizing a Summit, Step by Step: Provides a checklist and other recommendations on organizing a summit. (http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/ANowDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=45509).

Organizing a Conference: This site provides a guide and other useful tips on organizing a conference (http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_125.aspx>.

Sources

[1] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Conferences, Workshops, and Retreats," August 2002, FHWA, 29 March 2011 <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/contents.htm>.
[2] FHWA, "Conferences, Workshops, and Retreats."
[3] Baker, Jennifer L., CAE, and Marsha Rhea, CAE, "Organizing a Summit, Step by Step," October 2009, ASEA, Center for Association Leadership, 22 June 2011, <http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/ANowDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=45509>.
[4] FHWA, "Conferences, Workshops, and Retreats."
[5] FHWA, "Conferences, Workshops, and Retreats."
[6] Rabinowitz,Phil, "Chapter 12, Providing Training and Technical Assistance: Section 5, Organizing a Conference," The

Community Tool Box, 5 July 2011, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_125.aspx>.

[7] Environmental Justice and Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University, "Environmental Justice and Transportation: Building Model Partnerships Conference Proceedings," Clark Atlanta University, October 1998, <http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/dotworkshops.PDF >.

[8] Environmental Justice and Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University, "Environmental Justice and Transportation: Building Model Partnerships," October 1998, Clark Atlanta University, <http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/ejtc.html>.

[9] Carroll Area Transit System, "Carroll Transit Transportation Summit: Summary Report," 1 March 2008, <http://www.carrolltransit.org/summit_report.pdf>.