

Insider Secrets for a Successful Conference

PEOPLE

- Request a "Conference Buddy"! It's a great way to meet organizers from other areas and to get some pointers about conference. To request a Buddy, e-mail Meeting Coordinator, Trish Maurer at trish.maurer@napo.net.
- Talk to strangers! If you meet someone you feel a connection to, talk on the phone after the conference. Having a colleague who is in another part of the country (i.e., not a competitor) is great.
- Reach out to others – If you see an organizer looking lost, talk to him/her. If you're feeling lost, ask questions of other attendees. If you don't know anyone, look for other first-timers and ask if they have dinner plans. It's a great way to start building business relationships (and friendships).
- Get to know other organizers around the country, volunteer to serve on a national committee or task force. Extra added attraction: I've gotten referrals from organizers in other parts of the country with whom I've worked on committees and task forces.

LOGISTICS

- Dress in layers for varied meeting room temperatures. Consider bringing a light-weight shawl/wrap.
- Tote bags: we usually get one when we register —all identical. Bring a bright colored luggage tag or another item to mark yours.
- Bring plenty of business cards to share with others and to leave at vendor booths at the Expo for drawings or to be added to their mailing list.
- Leave some space in your luggage to take back conference materials, items you buy/pick up at the Expo.
- I really like having the program information online – this way I print the pages I want (the sessions for which I've registered and those I might possibly attend).

TIME

- Spend enough time in the Expo to visit all the vendors. There are great products and ideas. Stop at each booth to see what they offer, even if you don't think it's something you're interested in. It's amazing what comes in handy down the road. I usually shop for gifts at the Expo, plus items for door prizes when I do presentations, etc.
- Look at the Concurrent Session handouts ahead of time to see if the session you signed up for is what you thought it was. If not, you can attend another session. Registration requires you to select concurrent sessions so that the meeting rooms can be assigned based on space needed, but you're not locked into that session.
- Look at the session handouts for the sessions you did NOT sign up for to see if you want to purchase the recording. Purchasing it at the conference saves you shipping plus having to remember to do it later.
- Keep a separate list of your "action items" so you can do them when you return home. It's so easy to have those action items buried in your notes.
- Try not to get overwhelmed. It's okay sometimes to skip a session and spend some time alone. I love conference, but as an introvert, there are times when I need some time alone in my room.
- Take time to get some fresh air. It's so easy to stay inside the hotel from Thursday through Saturday, but consider taking an early morning walk, or go out to dinner outside the hotel with organizers you've met.

Tips Provided by:

*Susan Kousek, CPO®
Secretary, NAPO Board of Directors
Member, Washington DC Metro Chapter
Balanced Spaces®, LLC
Reston, VA*