

TOP TEN LIST

TEN BEST WAYS TO PLAN A BAD NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH CONFERENCE

With apologies to David Letterman, and thanks for editorial assistance to Elizabeth Kirby and for their insights to the following Internet contributors:

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Number 10 Good Ol' Persons Networking

To ensure continuity and long-term organizational success, minimize turnover on the planning committee to less than 20% per year. Create as few opportunities for new members to participate as possible.

This is twice as important for the abstract review process. Only the persons who did this last year have the expertise to do so again!

Number 9

My time is the only time that matters

No one else has the audacity to schedule their conference on the dates you have selected. So, don't bother to check with related national organizations or agencies in your region.

Corollary: no one celebrates religious holidays any more. People will attend even if you schedule the conference over Easter weekend, and keynote speakers don't mind the lower attendance that inevitably occurs on those obscure Jewish or Islamic holy days.

Number 8

If You Build It, They Will Come

Issue a call for abstracts prior to establishing the dates, location, and registration fees for the conference.

Your audience will come anyway, and if anyone else does, it's because you have created a 'Field of Dreams'.

Number 7

The name goes on before the quality goes in

Ask the conference planning committee to spend hours developing a catchy theme for the conference. Most people decide to attend based on this aspect of marketing alone. Here's a few examples to put next year's planning committee in the mood:

- **My Cholesterol is High: Experience Prevention Individually**
- **We've Come A Long Way, Baby! Teratogens and Environmental Risks Are On the Run!**
- **Quality Matters: So Think, Plan, Act, Do**

Number 6

Location, Location, Location

Focus exclusively on room rates when selecting hotels, destinations, and dates. Everyone loves to visit Palm Desert, CA, Phoenix and Orlando in July and August, and Minneapolis or Detroit in late January.

Non-profits already know this, so why not public health?

Number 5

To lose, Lautrec!

Require that posters be set up prior to the opening of the conference, ask authors to attend their posters during three separate times, then discard all posters promptly at a predetermined time without telling authors that this will occur.

If there is an oral poster session, hold it opposite a thought-provoking speaker, and schedule it on the last day of the conference.

Number 4

Overdone = Well Done

Conference attendees expect to spend all their waking hours in conference activities. Need to squeeze in a little extra?

- Schedule a PowerPoint presentation with a speaker during the evening reception.
- Add on committee meetings before breakfast.
- Invite next year's planning committee to a required meeting from 6:30-9PM on the next to last night of the conference.
- Everybody's here – so facilitate as many meetings for ancillary groups (ATMCH, AMCHP, CSTE, etc.) as possible.

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Number 3

Or . . . Underdone = Well Done

On the flip side – schedule an entire afternoon ‘On the Town’ or ‘At the Beach’, followed by a dinner banquet with after dinner speaker.

This will ensure that only the diehard conference goers will attend. Everyone else will have the state agency travel requests refused.

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Number 2

One Size Fits All

Arrange for all breakout sessions to be held in similar style rooms, with chairs designed for persons with BMI of 24-26, positioned in closely spaced rows with no leg room.

Sessions that draw larger audiences can be posted on the conference web-board later, and people who are too large for their chairs should view the experience as a personal health promotion opportunity.

Number 2 (continued)

And while we're on the subject, here's a few more pointers:

- Don't secure the equipment cables and power cords, so that women in dress shoes have to run an obstacle course.
- The human voice is a precious instrument. Use microphones only as a last resort, and never for audience questions.
- Force speakers to compete with presenters in adjoining rooms, and choose facilities offering the thinnest possible partitions.
- Make sure there are no independent controls for thermostats and lighting in each subsection of the ballroom.

Number 1

“I just come here to listen to the music”

Don't offer any food or beverages, especially before the morning session each day. Most attendees are on a per diem, and everyone takes time for a healthy breakfast before sitting down on time for the first plenary session.

If you do provide food:

- Offer an imaginative menu for all tastes and fad diets.
- Provide the same offerings each morning, especially for conferences of more than two days.
- On a limited budget? Just provide regular coffee, powdered creamer, and sugar. Better yet, why offer anything?