

HOSTING AN AREA CONFERENCE & ENCAMPMENT

National Sojourners, Incorporated

The intent of this document is to provide prospective Chapter Officers with the information they need to host an Area Conference and Encampment.

The most important task is gaining support from your Chapter members. While the President can volunteer to have his Chapter host the event, unless he has full agreement from his fellow members, the event will most likely fail. So, long before the event is to take place, the Leaders and Members of a Chapter must agree that they are willing to put forth the effort required to successfully develop and then execute a well thought out plan of action. Once committed, they must develop a sound plan, then, execute it.

Serving as the Host Chapter includes a number of elements. Specific jobs require expertise to successfully complete the task. Identifying Chapter members who possess the time and talent to devote to each facet is necessary to ensure a great meeting. The following is a list of items that need to be considered to better ensure a successful event:

- 1. Make your desire to host a C&E known to your Area Representative, as soon as possible, with enough lead time to accommodate his schedule, as well as that of the Chapter. The Area Rep will give the go ahead to the Chapter he chooses to hold a given event, at a specific date, time and place.**
- 2. Determining the specific date you wish to host the event: Some Areas hold C&Es at a specific date, annually. Some Areas schedule the events when it is most convenient to the Chapters in the Area. You must consider other Masonic events taking place in you City, State or Nationally at the time you wish to hold the Area meeting. It is not always possible to schedule an event that does not conflict with some other event, but try to plan it for a time there are none or few other events taking place. This will better ensure your meeting is the one to attend.**
- 3. Determining what you wish to accomplish during the Conference portion of the meeting. There are several items that much be addressed at every C&E; these include:**
 - a. Area Representative led Conference. An Area Conference Meeting Guide is available and has a complete agenda for the Area Rep to follow.**
 - b. Introductions of all Masonic and National Sojourner dignitaries.**
 - c. Current National and Area issues may be presented and discussed.**
 - d. All Area Chapter Officers should report on their activities related to all aspects of our National Programs, such as, BOL, Americanism, Flag Programs, Essay Contest, and FFVF and YLC. This not only allows Chapters to indicate how active they are but also provides ideas for those Chapters who do not participate in the activities presented.**
 - e. Training for Chapter Officers and Members. Topics such as By-Laws, Officer Duties, National Regulations are some examples of items. Our**

National Education and Training Committee has been tasked to develop training modules for use at C&E and Chapter meetings. These modules will be available on our National Website.

- f. Announcements of National and Area events, giving dates, times and locations. This information will provide the attendees with vital details they need for their personal planning of future travel to these events.**
- 4. Locating a suitable hotel and signing a contract. Ensure that the hotel is willing to provide the rooms required for all meetings, luncheons and Banquets. Some hotels may provide Comp rooms for high ranking dignitaries attending the meeting. All hotels will require a minimum number of room nights as well as a minimum total of food/beverages. Make sure that if you cannot collect sufficient registrations to cover the room nights or total for food/beverages, you are able to reduce your original number estimates. If you do not monitor this issue closely, you stand to lose money, a lot of money. A Chapter should not approach hosting an Area event with the thought of making a profit. This endeavor should be a break even affair at which all attendees enjoy themselves and receive good information to use in their Chapters. You will have to provide the hotel with the NSI 501(c)10 Federal Tax Form, as well as signing a State Tax and Use form to preclude you from having to pay tax on the event costs.**
- 5. Planning meals – Make sure to work with the Food Manager at the hotel. They are usually willing and able to negotiate a meal and price. Do not just take the “list” price that is indicated in the hotel’s offerings. For example, at the Bennington Banquet, we usually offer two choices. You want the cost of those choices to fall within \$2 to \$3 of each other. If they offer a steak dinner for \$35, and a chicken for \$28, you need to get them to lower the price of the steak dinner. They can do this by reducing the size of the steak (to 8oz, instead of 10oz) in order to reduce the price to \$31.00 Again, Food Managers are always willing to work with you to arrive at the ideal meal and price for everyone.**
 - a. Hosting a breakfast is up to you. Most hotels have very good restaurants. A most important consideration is whether or not your Lady wishes to get up to be at a 7am breakfast. Some may, some may not. It is a risky financial issue if you fail to reach your minimum requirement.**
 - b. Ladies Luncheon – This is an excellent idea, especially arranging a Guest Speaker. Our Ladies deserve to be treated well. The Ladies of the Chapter Officers can take care of the whole thing. All that has to be done is provide an acceptable meal and an appropriate room in which to hold the luncheon.**
 - c. Men’s Luncheon – This is another given. A good idea is to make sure the meal is ample, without going overboard. A turkey wrap beats a Chicken Fried Steak lunch. After all, the Bennington Banquet is in the evening and we do not wish our Brothers to be so full from lunch that they cannot enjoy their dinner.**
 - d. Pre-Banquet Social – If possible get the hotel to provide a cash bar. This allows everyone to drink what they wish and requires no one to sell and distribute tickets. These are always a pain. Besides, the cash bar goes toward your minimum food and beverage requirement, and can help you over the top, if you are falling short on meals ordered.**

- e. **Bennington Banquet – This is the ultimate event that attendees will most remember. Plan for a great function. You will need a Guest Speaker. If a Masonic Dignitary is the Recruit for the Heroes of '76 Degree, he will probably be willing to serve as the Guest Speaker. You should plan for a Head Table, with a podium and microphone. Also include introductions of Dignitaries. If there is a Camp Followers' Degree at the Banquet, make sure to provide a wireless mike for that function. Entertainment, such as a band or DJ, is up to the Chapter members, but, remember, if you already have a Camp Followers' Degree and a Guest Speaker scheduled, you might be overdoing it by including anything else in the evening's activities.**
 - f. **Possible BOL Event – The Bennington Banquet can serve as an excellent BOL event by inviting local DDGMs and WMs, as well as Grand Lodge Officers. It will be up to the Chapter members to either collect the cost of the meals from the Masonic invitees or have volunteers to pick up the tab for "their" DDGM or WM.**
- 6. Now that everything above has been considered and the event has been scheduled, the real work begins. The development of all materials for this event will be handled by either the Chapter Secretary or some other member chosen to complete the task. Whoever is designated to take care of these materials must be computer literate and have access to equipment to make everything look top-notch.**
- a. **An Agenda and a Registration Form must be developed and sent to the National Webmaster to be placed on our National Website, under Area and Regional Meetings. These documents must contain all the information attendees need in order to make hotel reservations and meal selections. Additionally, these items need to be sent to all the Chapters in your Area. If you are planning the BOL event, discussed above, invitation letters must also be developed and mailed to give the invitees time to work this event into their schedules.**
 - b. **Registration Packets – Large envelopes containing event materials will need to be made available to the Registration Committee to hand out to attendees, as they register. These include copies of the Agenda (both full page and miniature pocket-size schedules), tickets for all meals selected, Name Tags for Brothers and their Ladies, a copy of their registration form, and maps of the hotel interior to locate meeting and luncheon rooms (hotels will provide at no cost).**
 - i. **Name Tags must be prepared for all attendees and their Ladies. Include on the tag the most significant position/positions the attendee holds/held – for example, Chapter President, Chapter Commander, PP/PC, Committee of 33, PNP, PNC, LOH, or Grand Lodge office. Include the Chapter name and number, under the position. Name Tags for Ladies should indicate Camp Follower, Grand Dame or Den Mother, Chapter Secretary, etc.**
 - ii. **Agendas, both full page and pocket-size, will allow the attendees to be in the right place at the right time.**
 - iii. **A small envelope containing the meal tickets selected make it easy for the attendees to find the tickets and prevent loss of the items.**
 - iv. **The hotel can provide the maps, so the attendees will be able to locate the meeting or luncheon room.**

- c. **Programs for Bennington Banquet** – These will add a touch of class to the event. The contents are up to the Chapter. The front cover usually presents the NSI and Heroes of '76 Logos, the name of the host Chapter, date, location, etc. The back cover can provide the Purposes of National Sojourners and/or a Patriotic or Masonic quote, etc. The inside pages should provide, on the left, a list of dignitaries attending the Banquet. On the right, the Host Chapter and Camp Officers and the agenda of the evening's events.
 - d. **Table decorations** are usually best left to the Ladies of the Chapter. These can be elaborate or simple, but either way, they will be appreciated by all and add class to the event.
 - e. **Place Cards for the Head Table at the Bennington Banquet** must be created to prevent an uncomfortable, confusing issue, when the dignitaries take their seats.
 - f. **List of Dignitaries** – This list must be carefully prepared. An example of the correct order of introductions may be found in the Area Conference Meeting Guide.
 - g. **Meal Tickets** – Distinctive tickets for each meal must be produced. These may be printed on Business Card stock. As mentioned above, tickets for the meals indicated on the Registration Form should be placed in a small envelope and included in the packet. Distinctive tickets assist the attendees as well as the hotel waitstaff.
 - h. **Ditty Bags** – These are always a source of information as well as appreciation for those attending the event. Use your local Chamber of Commerce or City Information Center to supply you with local maps and information about your local community. These are provided free of charge. Also include packets of crackers, gum, M&Ms, bottles of water, or any other creature comforts you wish to provide. An Appointed Committee will handle this issue.
 - i. **Hospitality room** – An Appointed Committee will put together a place where Brothers and their Ladies can relax and enjoy the company of old friends, while also enjoying the goodies available in the room. Most often, hotels will allow food and beverages, including alcoholic, to be brought into the hotel at no charge, for use in the Hospitality Room. A tip jar in the room will garner a lot of appreciative tips from those visiting the room, and help offset the cost of the offerings. The head of the Committee will provide the Chapter Secretary with the receipts for the items purchased for the room, so that they may be reimbursed.
 - j. **Transportation** – If you have several people coming to the event by air and the hotel does not provide transportation, you should consider setting up a Transportation Committee to handle pick up from and return to the airport. This requires only a few individuals to complete the task and truly upgrades your effort to top shelf.
7. **Tours** – While this type of event is usually reserved for National Meetings, there is nothing preventing a Host Chapter from planning a tour for the Ladies on Saturday morning, while the Brothers are attending the Conference. If a tour is planned, care must be taken to ensure return to the hotel for the Ladies Luncheon. Of course, a tour with lunch included might preclude a separate Ladies Luncheon. Again, this decision is up to the Host Chapter and either way will be a hit with the Ladies.

- 8. Heroes of '76 Degree – As the center of detail for the Encampment, a well presented Heroes of '76 Degree is an essential. Care must be taken to ensure that the participants recite their parts from memory. If this is impossible and some of the parts must be read, ensure that those presenting these parts do not sound as if they are reading it for the first time.**
- 9. That is it in a nutshell. Remember, hosting a conference and encampment is a matter of consensus of the members, and commitment to complete the tasks that will make the event both enjoyable and memorable.**

In conclusion, if your Chapter wishes to host a Mid-Winter Meeting or Annual National Convention, the process is much the same. With the primary difference that only NASOCOCO can sign a hotel contract and all money flows through their Treasurer. The rest of the items above apply to all meetings, National or Area.

PLAN WELL AND GOOD LUCK!!