

**FAMILIES ANONYMOUS, INC.
CONVENTION GUIDELINES
PPG-15**



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FA Convention Guidelines

Introduction Statement

The FA World Service Board recognizes the importance of a Convention Planning Committee's commitment to the process of hosting a successful World Service Convention. This document, unlike the FA Convention Policy, is designed to share the experiences of past convention planning committees (CPCs) in helping you reach your goal. Please remember that guidelines, unlike policies, are meant to enlighten. In the end, it is up to each CPC to make the final determination of what it deems the best choice for a successful convention experience. Attendees are looking for both a recovery experience and a flavor of your home state. Put your signature on your convention.

Your attendance at other conventions goes a long way in helping you structure your event. Convention planning is not a contest to see who can present the most elaborate convention. The convention is all about RECOVERY – ALL OF OURS! As you read through this, please remember to keep FA's principles and Traditions as the guide to your decision making. Remember to take what you like and leave the rest.

CPC Committee Structure

Successful conventions do not occur by accident. They require a strong organization and careful planning. Groups seeking to host a convention must submit their bid to the FA membership for action at the annual business meeting (ABM). The FA World Service Board (WSB) seeks to have commitments at least two years in advance. Prior to submitting a bid to host a convention, your group(s) or intergroup should, at the very least, select a chairperson, secretary, and treasurer. Meetings should be held in advance of your bid submission to ensure you have enough support and commitment from your members. Once your bid is awarded, it is advisable to form subcommittees for the many duties that must be addressed. The following are a sample of subcommittees recommended by CPCs:

- **Site Selection** – This subcommittee is responsible for selecting the venue, menus, meeting spaces, and breakout rooms.
- **Technical** – This subcommittee handles printing of programs, raffles, credentials, signage and any mailings. It is also responsible for the creation and maintenance of a convention website, procurement of audio/visual equipment, and other functions.
- **Fundraising** – A successful convention is measured, in large part, by the funds raised to underwrite the event and to provide some measure of support to the host group(s) and the FA World Service Office (WSO). It is important that any fundraising activities comply with the FA Traditions and Convention Policies as well as with local laws and regulations.
- **Hospitality** – You never get a second chance to make a first impression. The Hospitality Subcommittee handles onsite convention check-ins and giveaways, and its members are the “greeters” that help arriving members find their way. Giveaways often include nametags (which are coordinated with the Technical Subcommittee), convention “swag,” notebooks, event programs, water, and information on local attractions.

- **Program** – This subcommittee is charged with scheduling workshops, meetings, speakers, events, and entertainment. Within this important subcommittee, it is not uncommon to find additional subcommittees that handle specific elements of the program.
- **Public Information (PI)** – It is important that PI always be guided by FA’s principle of “attraction, rather than promotion.” Efforts should include outreach to the FA membership as well as the general community, including the recovery community. Hosting a convention is a great 12th Step opportunity.

Convention Dates

The FA bylaws require that our ABM be held during the month of May or June. Our World Service Conventions have become an outgrowth of the ABM and have grown into a celebration of recovery. There are many challenges to scheduling a convention during this two-month period. In the U.S., there are Mother’s Day and Memorial Day in May, Father’s Day in June, and school graduations and wedding celebrations during both these months. All these events present challenges to attendance, travel planning, and facility availability.

One of the most important reports to the membership made during the ABM is the annual financial report. FA’s fiscal year ends on April 30; thereafter, the treasurer, the accountant, and the Financial Review Committee require a minimum of three weeks to gather the figures and present a full year-end report. (This is a best-case scenario.) While it is a bonus to be able to report on the full year, our bylaws do allow for an eleven-month report, with the full final report to be presented at the following year’s ABM.

Many CPCs have traditionally chosen to hold the World Service Convention during Memorial Day weekend. In some ways, this makes sense, in that it includes extra non-work days that are available for travel. This benefit, however, may be outweighed by some of the detriments: holidays may limit the availability of speakers and the choice of venue; the costs for travel and lodging may be higher; and certain “shoulder” activities might be impacted by holiday schedules.

Convention Site Selection

Your choice of a site is likely to be based on several key items. The CPC must ensure that the venue meets the minimum rating as provided for in the FA Convention Policy. It is highly recommended that you obtain a minimum of three bids for identical services and meal packages, and that the bids include a guarantee of shoulder dates as part of the contract process. The convention date and venue should be contracted at least eight months in advance. The sooner you inform the membership of your convention plans, the more likely they are to make arrangements to attend and the easier it will be for them to make travel reservations.

One important consideration that may help in your decision making is ensuring there are a variety of restaurant choices, either within the hotel or nearby, to service the needs of the attendees. This helps attendees in budgeting for their attendance and in socializing prior to and after the formal events.

Past CPCs have passed along their recommendations regarding transportation and parking. Many hotels have free or low-cost shuttle service from airports; if this amenity exists, be sure to note whether the service is on a 24-hour basis, needs to be prearranged, or is available “at call.” Parking in some hotels can be very expensive; this may be an item you can negotiate with facility. As an alternative, there may be less expensive parking adjacent to the venue. Investigate all options before committing to the venue.

FA members versed in finance and accounting should be involved in the evaluation of your site-selection decisions. FA convention budgets as well as attendance are typically small, relative to other organizations. This should be a major factor in guiding your commitments for minimum guarantees. It is very important to be conservative in budgeting revenues and controlling expenses.

Meals -

The planning of a convention menu can be very challenging. The cost per meal is generally determined by the highest priced entree you are offering. For example, if you are offering the choice of a steak dinner or a vegetarian meal, and the steak dinner costs \$55 while the vegetarian meal costs \$35, you will probably be looking at the higher amount multiplied by the total number of attendees.

As you explore your options, investigate whether you can have meals catered by outside vendors. Some hotels or venues may allow this for a nominal charge that is less than the net cost of a meal prepared by the venue.

It is advisable to be sensitive to dietary needs. Jewish and Muslim members may have a problem with pork products. If you choose to include bacon, ham, or pork sausage in a breakfast buffet, they should not be part of an omelet; instead, they should be made available separately for those who wish to have them.

Another suggestion from past CPCs is to include a line on the registration form for any special dietary needs. Many people have food allergies or require gluten-free choices; these are easily accommodated when you have prior notice.

The choice of whether to host a Friday night dinner at the hotel, at some other location, or not at all is solely up to each CPC. Friday night dinners are not part of the required meals and add a significant cost to the per-person fee. However, prior CPCs and many past attendees encourage light fare, such as desserts, cheese and fresh fruit, coffee, tea (decaf beverages are preferred by many), and soft drinks either during or after the Friday night activity. This would be an opportunity to seek sponsorship from another group or intergroup to cover the cost of a “get-together” event.

Snacks between workshops are also common, though not required. The choice of what to offer can vary widely, from pastries, coffee, and tea to sweets, fruit, juices, and water. This, too, is something that can be sponsored by a group, intergroup, or individual member as another way to defray costs.

Finally, keep in mind that an additional 20% to 25% service fee is usually added to all meal bills. This charge is in excess of the per-person cost of the meal and has a significant impact on your budget.

Meetings and Workshops

Speakers, Keynoters & Workshop Presenters

One of the most memorable things that attendees speak of is a particular presenter or workshop that left a positive impression. The decision on topics and speakers is left to the discretion of the CPC. Thus, each CPC can decide on the mix of speakers it wants to have. Some CPCs have invited only FA members to be speakers and presenters. Others have chosen to use only outside speakers. Experience, however, tells us that a mix of both types of speakers provides members with the greatest opportunity to grow in their recoveries.

The method used to choose your speakers is as wide as your own imagination. Your CPC can put out a call for topics and speakers to the general membership; you can invite speakers from other programs; and you can reach out to important leaders in the field of addiction, recovery, family dynamics, or law. Particularly interesting topics should be repeated at more than one workshop for the benefit of those who are caught between two “good” topics. The scheduling of topics and workshops is an art, not a science.

One strong recommendation from past CPCs is to look at the list of topics that have been part of prior conventions. Perhaps a particular topic has had too much exposure. Perhaps it has had too little exposure, and offering it will allow your convention a chance to stand out from the crowd. Perhaps a topic appears frequently because attendees look forward to it. Perhaps a particular speaker strikes a chord with attendees and is invited to return. The FA program is vast, and our experiences are many. The important thing to keep in mind is ensuring that our FA Traditions are always respected by our members and guests.

Selecting the Presenter or Speaker

The process of choosing a speaker should come from a subcommittee set up for this purpose. The subcommittee should be familiar with the speaker and, if possible, should attend other presentations or view videos of prior presentations before inviting or committing to the speaker. The Saturday workshop is no time to be surprised by what a speaker is likely to say. An inappropriate speaker or topic can quickly ruin an entire event. Spiritual speakers should also be vetted and, once chosen, be either educated about, or reminded of the importance of, adhering to our Tradition as a “spiritual” program that is open to all.

Breakout (Workshop) Sessions

The logistics of scheduling breakout rooms is determined by many factors. One important factor is the equipment required by each speaker. Many speakers use projectors, white boards, or flipcharts during their presentations; others need audio equipment; and still others may desire a particular seating configuration. The more information the subcommittee has about a speaker’s particular needs, the better the setup experience becomes.

Projectors and audio equipment tend to be scarce or expensive resources. Depending on the facility, it may require staff to setup or operate the equipment, which is likely to involve an added expense. This should be discussed, negotiated, and committed to in writing, in advance, so you fully understand what is involved.

Another important consideration in scheduling breakouts is the physical placement of workshops. One would not want to place a workshop that is teaching meditation next to a workshop that is discussing the comedy of recovery. Breakout rooms typically have moveable walls that are not very sound proof.

Seating arrangement is important in any workshop. The choice to have attendees sit in rows versus in a circle, for example, should be left to the discretion of the speaker. The subcommittee's responsibility is to coordinate this important need and ensure the room is fully ready prior to attendees entering it. Sessions are typically only 45 minutes long, so any time lost to rearranging a room detracts from the presenter's time and may be disruptive to other workshops.

Fundraising

Fundraising is, perhaps, one of the more challenging aspects of hosting a convention. The CPC is faced with deciding on how much to charge attendees. The registration fee must cover all the costs associated with holding the convention: meals, entertainment, equipment rentals, give-away items, printing, mailing, and service fees. The CPC must also consider what people will be paying for lodging, including taxes and parking. Our members are frequently in the midst of, or recovering from, the financial devastation caused by our loved ones' choices. We have been victims of money stolen from us and have found ourselves paying for treatment and legal services, to name a few examples. Members often do their convention planning well in advance to ensure they are in a financial position to afford travel, lodging, and registration costs.

Donations, Silent Auctions, Raffles, and Program Books

Many CPCs have found that these fundraisers make the difference between breaking even or having funds left over to "carry the message" after the convention. Donations, auctions, raffles, and program books should not be depended on for convention operating expenses.

Other groups within the FA fellowship are permitted and encouraged to make donations to help support the convention. Donations can come in the form of items for a silent auction, monies to support activities, or sponsorship of some aspect of the convention (food, snacks, bags, or general usage). This eases the financial burden on the CPC, provides incentives for participating groups to attend the convention, and strengthens the bonds between members. Requests for donations, like all fundraising activities, are restricted to the FA membership. Regardless of how well-meaning an outsider is, our Traditions direct us to accept donations only from within.

Some CPCs have sold T-shirts as a fundraiser. However, there are risks associated with ordering shirts without prepayment and preorders. These include not having the correct sizes, not selling enough shirts to cover production costs, and earning only a minimal net return (if any) on the monetary outlay. A CPC should fully understand the risks before committing to this activity.

Convention Publicity

Getting the word out early and to the entire membership is very important in helping to ensure that a convention is well attended. There are many more opportunities to reach fellow members than ever before. Traditional mailings are not as effective as other, newer methods. Many members are connected through the Internet and becoming more tech savvy. A forward-thinking CPC can take advantage of this trend at little or no cost.

The excitement begins with the CPC's selection of a theme and creation of a memorable logo. CPCs are free to incorporate FA's official logo as part of their convention logo. A sample of the official logo appears at the end of this guideline. The convention logo and theme should be prominently displayed on all correspondence and notices.

Public Relations – Intra-fellowship

FA's PI Committee maintains and manages a mailing list consisting of group secretaries or contacts, interested FA members, and other people requesting timely information about our fellowship. Although the PI Committee does not share this list, it will assist the CPC with timely distribution of notices.

Additionally, CPCs should consider making use of scheduled mailings from the WSO to the group secretaries. There are two mailings that go to every registered group, intergroup, international intergroup, and national service board. The first is sent in early January; the second is sent 30 days prior to the ABM. The FA Convention Policy grants the CPC an opportunity to include up to two letter-sized sheets (can be printed front and back) per mailing at no additional cost to the CPC, except that the CPC is responsible for the printing the sheets and shipping them to the WSO. These sheets must be coordinated with the WSO through the WSB's Convention Liaison and must be received by the WSO at least two weeks prior to the scheduled mailing date.

Public Relations – Extra-fellowship

The World Service Convention is a celebration of recovery and of the FA program. It provides us with an opportunity to share FA with other recovery organizations and with the general community at large. CPCs can take advantage of this opportunity by sending out information to help attract interested people to attend. The development and deployment of a press packet (which can include a history of FA, a brief description of workshop topics scheduled for the convention, and a list of press contacts and dates) can result in important event coverage. FA's PI Committee is an important resource in helping CPCs develop press releases and press packets while staying within the bounds of Tradition Eleven.

CPC Website

Website creation has become increasingly easier, requiring little or no web-design experience, and many hosting services are available that charge little or nothing to host a website. The impact of a well-planned and well-executed website can have an extremely positive impact on your event. A website provides a focal point where potential attendees can find details about the program, registration information and forms, travel information, and, of course, links to the hotel or venue where the convention will be held.

Here, too, your CPC's PI and technical subcommittees should work together to "brand" your website and convention. Perhaps, as part of your website design, you may wish to include a short video inviting people to attend the convention and possibly describing some past conventions. The choices really are limitless. Questions about FA's policy regarding websites and social media should be consulted and followed. Remember to include your website address on all your emails and printed materials.

Security

Any time there is a gathering of people in a public place, the issue of security must be part of the planning and execution process. This is not to suggest the need for security guards or off-duty police officers, but rather for the CPC to take certain steps to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the convention attendees. Planning should include protocols for dealing with emergencies, such as food-borne illnesses and man-made and natural events (storms, power outages, fires, etc.) and for easily identifying credentialed attendees, speakers, and convention officials at all workshops and gatherings. The CPC should establish a method for quickly notifying attendees of any issues of concern and should have a readily available list of names and cell phone numbers of all conventioners and presenters.

It is important to coordinate all security efforts with the hotel or venue security personnel. This will help ensure a safe and successful convention.

Identification Badges

Convention identification badges are one of the easiest and most important items in your security portfolio. They also, of course, help members identify each other. The use of color and art help ensure the authenticity of the badge and set the tone of the convention. Many conventions use clip-on badges or lanyard-type hanging badges. Pin-on badges can make holes in clothing and tend to be less well accepted. Stick-on badges are highly discouraged because they fall off easily and cannot be transferred between clothing items during the course of the convention.

Badge design is discussed in the FA Convention Policy, which requires the use of 30-point type for ease of reading. Script fonts are discouraged in key elements of the badge.

This is 30 pt. type

Signage & Notices

Schedules, signs, and notices help convention attendees navigate the event. Signs should be clearly displayed and of a color, font size, and typeface that allow for easy reading. In addition to appearing in the program, convention schedules should be posted in locations that attendees regularly pass, such as at the entrance to dining areas, near elevators on the convention floor, and near breakout rooms.

Program Books

As desktop publishing and color printing have become more accessible and less costly, there has been a trend toward more sophisticated program books. Some type of program book is highly recommended, although the design need not be elaborate. At a minimum, the program book should include the following elements:

- ❖ Convention schedule
- ❖ Map of the convention breakout rooms
- ❖ Description of the workshops

Many program books provide blank pages for note-taking, and they commonly include biographies of the various workshop presenters and keynote speakers along with a brief description of their topics. This information helps attendees make decisions about which workshops they wish to attend and are something they can refer back to when sharing their convention experiences with their home groups.

Giveaways

What is a convention without some type of “swag,” or free giveaway? This is an area many CPCs spend a great deal of time focusing on. It is an opportunity for a CPC to get donations from other FA groups or members to help defray costs. The giveaways are usually assembled in some type of bag or pack that members carry with them throughout the convention. Common giveaways include a metal or plastic drink container, a bottle of water, perhaps some mints or other sweets, a pen, a notebook, the convention program book, brochures about area attractions, and anything else that will help attendees remember their experience at your convention.

The most important part of the giveaway is to not allow it to “break your bank.” Keep the cost reasonable, and be sure to account for each item in your expense calculations.

Final Thoughts

The decision to host an FA World Service Convention is a serious undertaking. It allows your group(s) to demonstrate recovery in action. Most CPCs report that it brings group members closer together through their shared commitment to produce the event.

Strive to make the process enjoyable and as stress free as possible for all your committee members. Remember the principles of our program: keep it simple; don’t worry about things that are out of your control; and, most importantly, rely on your group conscience to settle issues.

There are many resources available to help guide you through the process. One of the most important is your WSB Convention Liaison. Open and frequent communication with the liaison will help make your convention an enjoyable and memorable experience.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THESE GUIDELINES

ABM – Annual Business Meeting

CPC – Convention Planning Committee – The group charged with planning and executing the convention

FA – Families Anonymous

NomCom – The FA Nominating Committee

PI – Public Information

WSB – The FA World Service Board of Directors

WSO – The FA World Service Office

FA Logo

This is a copy of the official FA Logo. You may request a digital version from the WSO for inclusion in your convention material.

