

## ACI Conference Planning Timeline

The following is a broad outline of the timelines involved in putting together an annual conference for ACI. Please note that this list does not cover items down to the minute detail (it is assumed that the committees will deal with these details).

### September

- Recruit and select committee members
- Initial organizational meeting
- Determine conference dates
- Develop theme for conference
- Develop working conference budget

### October

- Identify lodging options
- Determine transportation options/logistics
- Solicit input from membership regarding session topics/tracks
- Press release to publications on conference
- Gather mailing lists of ACI and other key organizations
- Information on ACI website (plus link to others)
- Committee meetings (in-person or teleconference)
- Set up bank accounts (as needed)

### November

- Lodging & meals options/decisions
- Analyze input from membership on topics/tracks
- Determine what gift bag / giveaway items will be needed
- Committee meetings (in-person or teleconference)
- Group e-mail reminder of upcoming conference and/or new developments
- Identify field trip options (full and half-day)

### December

- Finalize list of session topics, courses, tracks
- Committee meetings (in-person or teleconference)
- Design & printing of first direct mail piece (letter?)
- Solicit entries for awards
- Group e-mail reminder for upcoming conference and/or new developments
- Press release to publications on conference

January

- Committee meetings (in-person or teleconference)
- Send out first mailer (letter)
- Design second direct mail piece
- Press release to publications
- Solicit items for auction
- Solicit speakers/presenters/sponsors for conference
- Group e-mail reminder for upcoming conference and/or new developments

February

- Determine needs & solicit entertainment for conference
- Committee meetings (in-person or teleconference)
- Send out second mailer for conference (postcard?)
- Press release / publicity
- Group e-mail reminder for upcoming conference and/or new developments

March

- Committee meetings (in-person or teleconference)
- Design detailed conference brochure mailer
- Publicity
- Group e-mail reminder for upcoming conference and/or new developments

April

- Send out conference brochure mailer
- Committee meetings (in-person or teleconference)
- Publicity
- Group e-mail reminder for upcoming conference and/or new developments

May

- Publicity & press releases
- Committee meetings
- Personal calls
- Finalize details
- Group e-mail reminder for upcoming conference and/or new developments

June-July

- Publicity & press releases
- Committee meetings
- Personal calls
- Finalize details

## **Breakdown of Committees**

### **Program Committee**

Responsible for developing a conference theme, creating the agenda, developing a program budget, coordinating meeting room assignments, identifying and securing the appropriate speakers, and coordinating speaker arrangements/logistics.

### **Transportation Committee**

Responsible for arranging transportation to/from airports, developing a transportation budget, producing maps, and ensuring conference staff have walkie-talkies/cell phones, etc.

#### **On-Site Registration, Logistics, & Communications Committee**

Responsible for handling advance registrations, developing a registration budget, setting up the registration and information table at the conference (and staffing the desk), preparing welcome packets (incl. gift bags), coordinating all communication needs during the conference, and developing on-site signage as needed.

### **Lodging and Meals Committee**

Responsible for identifying lodging options (on-site and off-site), negotiating pricing, developing the lodging & meals budget, planning all meals/snacks/beverages, coordinate with on-site registration table, and coordinate with transportation committee.

### **Evening Entertainment/Hospitality Room Committee**

Responsible for planning entertainment in conjunction with meals or other program events, developing an entertainment/hospitality budget, handling all beverage needs at the hospitality room for the entire conference, handle all logistics associated with entertainment.

### **Finance Committee**

Responsible for handling all money matters of the conference, coordinating budgetary issues with all other committees, establishing an overall budget for the conference, determine registration fee, set up checking account, approve all expenses, pay all bills, and monitor the budget.

### **Marketing & Communication Committee**

Responsible for pre-conference communication and promotion, establishing a marketing budget, pre-conference marketing mailings (i.e., postcard, flyers, brochures), maintaining mailing list database, public relations I press releases to the appropriate publications, and developing registration packet.

### **Auction/Exhibitors/Vendors Committee**

Responsible for coordinating and obtaining items for the auction, recruiting exhibitors for the conference (education and/or revenue), and establishing a revenue budget.

### **Field Trip Committee**

Responsible for determining what the field trip options will be, developing a field trip budget, handle all logistical issues (transportation, admission fees, box lunches, drinks, etc).

### **Awards Committee**

Responsible for handling all aspects of the Awards Program, including collecting entries, judging entries, coordinating the awards presentation, obtaining certificates/awards/trophies, etc. Please refer to the Awards Program Protocol for more detailed information.

## ACI Annual Conference Sample Budget Preparation Sheet

### Revenue

1. Registration Revenue (# people x registration fee): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Sponsorship Revenue (from corporate sponsors): \_\_\_\_\_
3. Lodging & Meals Revenue (if handling directly): \_\_\_\_\_
4. Grant Funds (i.e., USFWS): \_\_\_\_\_
5. State Contributions: \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Revenue** (sum of 1-5): \_\_\_\_\_

### Expenses (from individual committee budgets)

1. Program Expenses: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Transportation Expenses: \_\_\_\_\_
3. On-Site Registration, Logistics, & Communications Expenses: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Lodging & Meals Expenses: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Evening Entertainment & Hospitality Expenses: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Finance Committee Expenses: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Marketing & Communications Expenses: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Auction/Exhibitors Expenses: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Field Trip Expenses: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Awards Committee Expenses: \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Expenses** (sum of 1-10): \_\_\_\_\_

**Net Revenue** (Total Revenue -Total Expenses): \_\_\_\_\_

## Tips for Marketing Future ACI Conferences

1. **Start Early.** The more time people have to plan/prepare, the better. Planning should start by September at the latest.
2. **Get Help.** Enlist the help of other ACI members into your planning committees. Ask for their ideas & past experiences.
3. **Keep Talking.** Keep everyone apprised of your progress; this will help keep awareness of the conference high.
4. **Make It Yours.** Each state has a unique flavor. Impart yours to the conference.
5. **Think Big.** A wonderful aspect of ACI is the way in which it brings so many different people together to share ideas and learn from each other. Don't be afraid to expand the invitation list to include those who haven't attended in the past.
6. **Know What They Want to Know.** Ask potential attendees what they'd like to see and learn at the conference. Tailor your offerings around their interests. The more relevant the subjects, the better.
7. **Make it Easy.** The smoother, easier, and more comfortable you can make everyone's stay, the better. This applies to transportation, registration, rooms, meals, and activities.
8. **Time to Network.** Make sure people have time to meet, network, and socialize with their counterparts. This is one of the main reasons people attend these types of conferences.
9. **Don't Underestimate the Personal Touch.** When you talk to people, invite them to the conference. People always respond better to a personal request after receiving mailed pieces. It's also a great way to introduce newcomers to ACI.
10. **Help Next Year's Hosts.** Discuss your efforts with next year's host for the ACI annual conference. Invite them to prepare a handout for the attendees at the conference, and work with them on designing a survey.

## **VITALINK: Marketing the 2002 ACI Annual Conference**

Vitalink's role in marketing the 2002 ACI Annual Conference was broad, and encompassed a number of different areas. The following is a summary of efforts in each of these areas:

### **Creating a Baseline Index for Customer Satisfaction Sept. 2001**

In order to get a sense for the general attitudes and perceptions of the ACI conference, we analyzed the surveys from the past two conferences. Our goals were two-fold: the first goal was to establish a baseline rating or scoring of the conference from attendees; the second was to gather insight into what the attendees would like to see from future conferences. A copy of the report analyzing previous surveys is attached.

### **Determining Areas of Interest for Content/Focus of the 2002 Conference Oct./Nov. 2001**

While the baseline information contained in the above report did indicate the general topics of interest people had, it did not provide the level of detail we wanted in order to establish the "learning trails" for the conference. To this end, we decided to send out another survey to all 118 participants from the 2001 conference, as well as to a sampling of 54 non-participants. This survey was much more specific in asking respondents to indicate specific areas of interest, and the results were a key resource in setting the content of the 2002 conference. The survey and results are attached.

### **Brand Image of ACI – Oct./Nov. 2001**

As part of the marketing project we evaluated ACI's brand image as it related to existing and potential new members. This process included a group exercise session in which the group identified positive things that ACI does/provides (i.e., networking opportunities, annual conference, training sessions); areas that need improvement (i.e., marketing itself as an organization, communicating with members, attracting new members); and what they wanted the image of ACI to be (professional, innovative, insightful, supportive, vital cog). This information and direction was then used as a basis to update the ACI logo and design/layout/copy write a new membership brochure.

### **Promoting the Conference Mar/Apr/May/Jun, 2002**

We utilized four primary avenues to promote the 2002 conference: a three-part direct mail campaign, e-mail notifications, the ACI website, and articles/notices in publications such as The Balance Wheel. A key for promoting the 2002 conference was to expand the mailing list beyond just ACI members (we also targeted the State Parks and Outdoor Writers Association of America). We would suggest expanding this list even further in the future, as efforts permit.

The first mailing included a letter with the new membership brochure, and was distributed to more than 1,500 individuals in early March. The second mailing was a teaser-postcard, sent to the same mailing list in early April. The third mailing was the registration brochure, sent out in the first week of June.

Articles written by ACI members promoting the conference were included in several issues of The Balance Wheel. In addition, information regarding the conference was sent out over the ACI list-server.

### **Other Work - Oct/Nov. 2001**

As part of our scope of work, Vitalink was also asked to assist in the development of an outline for a marketing course geared toward Director-level individuals in conservation organizations. The course was designed to be a one-day introduction to marketing for government organizations. A copy of the draft outline is attached.