

Multiple Conferences and Multiple Locations: Within Ten Days?

Attendee Number: Three, 400 person conferences

Location: Chicago, Seattle, and Baltimore

Type of Location: Hotel

The Government Agency required conference event planning services and support for their facilitators and small groups for three forums that took place in three locations around the country. The GA Team served as the subcontractor for this contract. In this contract, we managed all logistics for the three conferences, including the site selection and hotel contract management.

Highlight of Challenges encountered and How These Challenges were Met:

1. Fluid Planning: The plans for the number of forums, number of attendees, location of forums, and other pertinent plans changed on a regular basis. In the initial planning stages, six forums were planned with the intent to hold them within a nine month period. As discussions took place, the number of forums, location and time period fluctuated as the needs of the Government Agency changed. This required the GA Staff to stay flexible and proactive in our planning. We made it a priority to find as many potential hotel properties as possible, create as many potential budgets as possible and remain a flexible partner while the Government Agency finalized their decisions. In the case study outlined below, we discuss one of our planning methods, The *Management Plan* that outlines specific deadlines and deliverables. As one would imagine, the *Management Plan* for the Forums changed on a regular basis as the plans changed. This required even more careful coordination and close communication between the GA POC and the Government Agency POC.

The GA Team was able to keep all planning on track, handle the many changes and execute three successful forums. We worked closely with the Government Agency on their budget restrictions, timelines and deadlines throughout every step, allowing us to come in under budget and deliver the forums on time with no delays.

2. Proximity of Forums: The original plan called for holding six forums within a nine month period. The final deliverable produced two forums within two weeks of each other. This meant that there were only 10 days in between the two forums for both the GA Staff and the Government Agency staff managing the forums. This required very careful planning on all parts and required careful communication between all parties in order to execute these two back to back forums. Having experience and an expertise in holding multiple conferences concurrently was instrumental for the GA Team in executing these Forums successfully.

It was critical that the attendees, speakers, and facilitators that were attending the second forum received the same level of high customer service that the first forum received. To achieve this, the GA Team trained everyone in the GA Office on answering every question regarding registration, travel, and any minor detail related to the Forum. This empowered the entire GA Office to serve as ambassadors for these Forums and be a resource for those attendees that had questions regarding the second forum – during the week that the first forum was taking place. This way, anyone who called received a knowledgeable person on the other end of the phone, continuing to provide excellent customer service to the VIP's attending these forums. We received many compliments regarding our customer service in relation to these forums.

Key Requirements Addressed in this Case Study:

- I. Site Selection
- II. Meeting Room Management
- III. Conference evaluations
- IV. Set up and tear down
- V. Pre and post activities
- VI. Developing and implementing outreach plan to coordinate stakeholders and attendees

Site Selection: The first area we focused on for the Government Agency was Site Selection. As stated in the challenges section above, the Government Agency initially planned to hold six forums across the country within a one year time period. Finding six hotels in cities that matched the criteria took extensive planning and research.

In management of the venue contract, careful attention to booked rooms and release dates avoid attrition charges for unused rooms, food/beverage penalties, and excessive electricity charges. For the Government Agency, we first learned of their preferences, history of places where similar events had been held in the past, and other important factors for consideration. This information was placed in a site selection bid sheet and approved by the Government Agency POC before we provided it to the hotels for bidding.

As the plans for forums were constantly changing, we were aggressive in forcing the hotels to provide us with a no attrition clause in the contract. We did this to protect the agency in the case that they needed to cancel any of the planned forums and to provide as much flexibility as possible as they finalized their plans.

As it turned out, one of the planned forums was cancelled and we had to cancel the signed hotel contract. As we had negotiated a no attrition clause in the contract, the Government Agency was able to cancel the hotel contract with no penalty. This was a significant savings for the Government Agency as it allowed them to walk away from a signed hotel contract without consequence.

As we had negotiated such strong contracts that provided so much flexibility for hotel cancellation and attrition, the Government Agency POC was able to focus his energy and time on the content and program of the forums without the worry of penalties for unused hotel rooms.

Meeting Rooms: These forums were unique in their use of meeting room space as it was imperative that an interactive and comfortable learning environment was created for the attendee experience. This meeting brought together significant thought leaders for problem solving discussions, led by strong facilitators for most of the three day program. These small groups stayed together in their breakout sessions for most of the workgroup meetings, only breaking for the large group report out sessions to report on progress and large group discussion. Each small group required its own meeting room space that was conducive to lively discussion, wall space for placing ample amounts of flip chart paper, and space for working groups within the small group.

One of our key roles was to be sure each of the working groups had all of the supplies they needed and that the rooms were comfortable for the attendees. We also made ourselves available to find additional meeting space on demand, when a facilitator chose to do an activity that required more space. While there was a set schedule for when the groups were to break, it was rarely followed as the facilitators were

empowered to continue discussion as they needed. Therefore, while we were onsite, we spent considerable time working with the hotel to adjust the times of the breaks and coordinating with the Government Agency POC to keep everything on track.

Registration Staffing: Personalized Attention: Another unique factor in the Government Agency Forums was the type of attendee for the meeting. Each attendee played an important role within either the agency or local community and had been specifically invited to attend these forums. The hope was that these individuals would become part of a greater outreach in the future to help advance the Government Agency's goals. It was clear that an expectation of the GA Team was to be sure that each person received personalized attention when they approached the registration desk to receive their conference welcome materials. The Government Agency wanted each attendee to feel comfortable to ask questions. This requirement fit well with our registration staffing expertise.

For the Government Agency Forums, we utilized technology and placed all conference materials on a flash drive, rather than create hard copy conference materials for distribution. We searched for an inexpensive provider to place the materials on the flash drives and to design the cover of the flash drive with the conference theme. We keep budget and costs in mind at all times, always delivering under estimated cost when possible and never coming in over budget.

Conference Evaluations: For the Government Agency Forums, we provided both electronic evaluations that were emailed to all attendees after they returned from the conference; and also provided a copy of the evaluation on the flash drive that was provided to them in the conference materials. We use the conference evaluations as part of our way of creating the Final Conference Report we provide to the Government Agency POC.

Set up and Tear Down: We always arrive enough time in advance to be sure everything is set up and 100% ready and tested before the first attendee arrives. We balance our arrival time with the budget constraints and do our best to get our hotel rooms at no cost to the government agency so that our arrival time does not have budget implications. In the best case scenario, all is set up the day before, with A/V and sound system checked; staging checked; all breakout rooms and set up checked; and all registration materials out and ready for welcoming attendees. It is absolutely critical that nothing is rushed on the day of arrival for the attendees. The first impression plays such a critical role in the attendee's experience the meeting. We do our part to be sure the logistics run flawlessly to add to a very positive first experience for your conference.

For the tear down for the Forums, we carefully determined what pieces needed to be sent to the 2nd forum taking place two weeks later and what pieces needed to return to our office. By organizing the materials in this fashion, we saved considerable money on shipping costs. Those items that were needed for the 2nd forum were shipped the slowest way possible to the next hotel. For all of our clients, we stay until the end of the conference and help with all tear down and clean up of the event. We are there for all vendors and attendees to assist them with their questions as they make their departure plans.

Pre and Post Activities: When we were first awarded the contract to manage the logistics of the Forums, the first thing we did was create the *Management Plan*. The *Management Plan* outlines every specific deadline, deliverable, and the persons responsible for each item. It was the key agenda item during the initial meeting as the GA POC and the Government Agency POC held their first meeting to discuss expectations, working together, and overall plans for the meeting. This *Management Plan* indicates

scheduled conference calls, in person meetings and all other pertinent dates that are necessary to executing a successful conference.

After the conference ends, we provide feedback to the Government POC on what went well and areas for innovation and changes for the future. This is a great way to improve upon the meetings for the next time and believe our years of meeting planning experience prove useful in these cases. We also pay close attention to the financials and to all deadlines and provide feedback in this area. ***We have a track record of delivering on time and under budget.***

Developing And Implementing Outreach Plan To Coordinate Stakeholders And Attendees: The Forums were designed with the specific goal that outreach plans would be a result and that the attendees would leave the forums with the momentum and the motivation they needed to make a difference in their community. A key objective for the meeting planning aspect for these forums was to create an environment conducive to this type of interaction and motivation. We kept this key goal in the forefront of all of our planning as we identified hotels, chose meeting space and finalized all logistics.