

## How to Make Your Nonprofit Conference Successful

### Go Where Your Industry's History Lives

They say that those that don't know history are doomed to repeat it. That's true. But diving into the history of an industry is more than just trying not to repeat mistakes. Sometimes it's looking at long-forgotten processes and figuring out that you now have the technology and skills to make it work.

For example, in 1875, Cincinnati became the first city to have a matching fundraiser. Reuben Springer matched funds raised for our [Music Hall](#) from Cincinnati citizens. This was at a time when communication was not as fast-paced and wide-spread, and yet it worked. By learning from local historians, your attendees could potentially flip the script on their own matching fundraisers.

### Go Where the Future is Now

There is one fact that we must all face, especially nonprofits: There will be another recession. Although economic forecasters differ on when it will happen, they all agree that it will come. How many nonprofits can really say they are prepared for when disaster hits? Or if the worst case scenario happens, can they really dig out of a hole?

One organization that has done an amazing job of coming back strong is the [Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra](#). At a time when symphonies are having trouble getting people to concerts, our symphony is reporting many sell outs. At a time when symphonies are cutting musicians, our symphony keeps hiring more. What are they doing that's different? Wouldn't that be an amazing topic for any nonprofit conference?



And when you can work with local organizations within your meeting's host city to find speakers, you are easily slashing your speaker budget by not having to pay for travel fees. And that frees up some of your budget for fun activities, while still maintaining a high level of content. That is a win-win if we have ever heard it.

### Go Where There are Affordable and Luxury Lodgings

There is a misconception within the meeting planner world that when you choose lodgings for your conference that you have to go to one hotel so everyone is together. But that is a risk: What if the hotel you choose is too expensive for some of your attendees? Or what if it's not posh enough?

A growing trend that we love is, instead, getting smaller blocks at multiple hotels. That way, your budget and luxury attendees can get the kind of accommodations that will make them comfortable. And in a [compact downtown](#) like Cincinnati's meeting rooms are still within walking distance. Worried about bad weather? The [Duke Energy Convention Center](#) is connected to several of our downtown hotels, making weather not a problem.

## Create a Retreat at Your Next Meeting

### Provide a quiet room

To be honest, there is no way that you can really know when each individual attendee will feel overwhelmed. It's smarter to let your attendees make the decision when they need to take their breaks when they need them. So what do they need from you? A dedicated place to take that break.



A room on-site means that your attendees do not have to go far to take the time they need. Just make sure that you have some rules in place that are posted in the room, including no networking. Make sure that just by entering the room, your attendees have the permission to recharge.

Also, make sure that the room is designed for relaxing. Instead of the regular conference tables and chairs, find comfortable couches and chairs. Instead of bright lights, bring it down. You may even want to consider relaxation techniques such as aromatherapy. Whatever you can do to make this the comfortable space at your conference.

### Get out of town

Getting out of town is easier said than done. With attendees coming from out of town, it becomes important that your venue is easy to get to. But the lack of distractions make getting out of town so attractive.

So look for a venue that meets you in the middle. Despite just being a short drive from Downtown Cincinnati, [Pinecroft at Crosley Estates](#) sits on seventeen acres. With gardens and beauty at every turn, you feel like you have completely escaped the hustle and bustle that can weigh you down while at a conference. You can focus more on what needs to be done. But at the same time, you can easily access city amenities, such as easy transportation.

### Use a venue that is built for a retreat

Who wants to reinvent the wheel? Save yourself time and money by having your event at a location that already has everything that makes for an amazing retreat. And an extra bonus is that the venue likely already has relationships with teachers and specialists that can help you with retreat-like activities.

In Cincinnati, you can find that at [Centennial Barn](#). In this space, you can find spaces for painting, yoga, as well as a great room for your meeting. With their regular classes, the Barn can easily help you arrange classes for your meeting that will help your attendees become more centered and ready to work. Plus, it's located on the campus of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, which means that you will have access to more traditional and nontraditional means of relaxation, including a nearby labyrinth.

## 3 Ways to Make Your Event a Family Affair

### Put the Spotlight on the Kids

The [Cincinnati Music Hall](#) is not just a gorgeous building. Its staff is also pros at incorporating children easily into events. Take, for example, the American Girl Fashion Show the Music Hall plays host to. This three day event has children as the models, and all proceeds go to a local charitable organization. This combines many things family love, especially the chance to dress their kids up and teach them values.

You can have those same aspects to your event. Create your own fashion show with children by working with a local department store such as Macy's. Voting with cash for your favorite model can provide a charitable aspect and provide a little more excitement for the budding models.

### Pick a Family-Friendly Location

The easiest way to make your event welcoming to families is to simply have it at a family-friendly location. The best family-friendly locations have many activities going on while your meeting is accomplishing its goals.

The [Cincinnati Zoo](#) does a great job of this. All of those animals and exhibits provide a fantastic all-day activity to keep kids busy. And the meeting rooms still provide the quiet needed for a productive event. You also never know when you might see an animal pop its head in, which means the fun isn't just reserved for the family.



### Choose a Networking Activity That Everyone Can Do.

There is no one that can make faster friends than children, and they have no idea of titles or specialty areas. So incorporating children into the networking activities can actually help create connections across the board for your event. And that means new ideas and increased cooperation.

Luckily, there are so many ways you can do this! You can have a family dance class that the [Cincinnati Ballet](#) would happily work with you on. You could invite the penguins from the [Newport Aquarium](#) to come over and play. Or you can just have free-play at the [Duke Energy Children's Museum](#) at the Cincinnati Museum Center. The possibilities are frankly endless and full of fun.

## Tips for a better RFP for your meeting

One of the most important aspects of your meeting is the location, and so it is of great importance that you take the time and effort necessary to pick the perfect place. For many, that process includes a request-for-proposal (RFP).

But are you putting the effort in to make the RFP the best it can be? Or are you just using the same tired document year after year? And most importantly, are you getting the responses you need to make the best decision?

There are some areas that we've found have helped put together a better response to your RFP:

Giving a three year history of your event, including a history of any revenue generators, such as food and beverage or audio/visual. By providing this information, the Cincinnati USA CVB can then provide options that are best suited to your organization and can look for locations that will provide a discount based on your event's past successes. This then will make your dollar and your proposal go further.



### Be reasonable with the turnaround

One of the many reasons to work with our CVB is that we can find opportunities to wow your attendees. The best opportunities, however, take time. Be sure to give as much time as you can allow to make a timely decision, so that all aspects of the proposal can be gathered in the best possible way.

### Why are you requesting a proposal?

If you are sending your RFP to a pool of candidates, give those candidates some indication of why. Did you like a particular location? Are you in love with the food scene? Did you want your attendees to partake in a particular activity that our city offers? The more you communicate these wants, the more likely you will be to receive the proposal you need.

### Define the decision process

Give a schedule of when a decision is expected to be made and when contracts will be signed. Be very clear about your evaluation process. Is there something that will make one location rise above another? Then outline that. Are you planning on site visits? Give an approximate date, so we can plan to show you just what we have to offer. Include as many details as possible in this section, so that we can be prepared to help you make the best decision possible.

## Make a Positive Impact on Your Meeting's Community

Giving back to the community that has welcomed you into their city can have a lasting impact on both your meeting and the community that you supported. But when you are visiting from afar, it is sometimes difficult and confusing to figure out where your work can do the most good.

What can you do to help you navigate through the local charitable scene and find great projects for your meeting?

### Meet at a location that is already doing good

Right from the get-go, you know that at least some of your meeting dollars will go towards those that need it. Take, for example, the [Duke Energy Convention Center](#). This convention center works with many local charitable organizations, from putting on blood drives for the American Red Cross to hosting a party to benefit hundreds of organizations. Meeting at a location that has such a strong approach to giving back really will make your meeting a charitable endeavor without any further effort.



### Make giving fun

When are people most likely to give? When there's a fun activity involved, of course!

Take Optimist International. When the 95th Annual [Optimist International Convention](#) comes to the Duke Energy Convention Center in July, the attendees will have a different way of making an impact on the Cincinnati community. Attendees will have the option to buy rubber ducks for a duck race. All funds will go to the Children's Cancer Foundation. Is there a better way to have fun and bond with fellow attendees than to cheer for a rubber duck to win a race? Definitely not.

Look for simple ideas that could bring fun and a smile to charitable giving. And if you're extra creative, it can definitely turn into a great networking opportunity.