

5 Valuable Takeaways for Planners from ASAE's Annual Meeting

There is no shortage of authorities on meeting and event planning best practices. The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) stands out from other experts by providing practical, yet innovative content to help planners shine in the association world.

After this year's annual conference, we felt inspired to take some of the key learnings, blend them with our more than 30 years of experience in the industry, and develop the below list of five key takeaways you can actually use to help plan successful meetings.

- 1) Define a goal for your meeting.** This may seem basic, but it is the most important part of delivering a successful meeting, so we'd be remiss not to start here first.

Consider this: What do you want attendees to get out of your meeting? Will your goal be general awareness? Networking? Learning? Do you want them to take an action? What is that action you want them to take?

After defining the goal of your meeting, start building the plan around that goal, breaking up deliverables to reach the goal into small, manageable steps. Don't be afraid to incorporate new ideas, technology or best practices into your plan – as long as it ties back to the primary goal for your event.

- 2) Create meeting content that appeals to all types of learning.** Attendees all digest your content differently. Find ways to leverage visual, auditory, AND tactile methods of learning so attendees get the most out of the content you are presenting. Examples of each might include:

- a. **Visual Learners** – Include videos, presentations, great photos and other types of visual materials to help this learner connect visually with the content of the meeting.
- b. **Auditory Learners** – Question-and-answer panels, brainstorming and games are the best way to appeal to this type of learner.
- c. **Tactile Learners** – This learner learns best while they are touching things and moving around. Provide opportunities for hands-on experience and movement to appeal to this learner.

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- 3) Consider your audience.** Just as important as having a goal for your meeting is knowing who your meeting is for and clearly defining your target audience. When you define your target audience, you can develop strategies that engage them throughout the conference. You may even find you have more than one target audience. For example, if you know your audience may be attended by, say, mostly Gen Xers, but you'd really like to appeal to Millennials to get them interested in future events, create strategies that satisfy both audiences. For example, you may create an app for Gen Xers to follow during the conference and a Snapchat filter for Millennials to use. You may even create separate networking events for each of these audiences. Whoever your target audience is, understand their wants and needs and appeal to them.
- 4) Always have a Plan B.** The only thing that's certain in meeting and event planning is uncertainty. Natural disasters, exposure to viruses, elevated risk of violence, even gas and chemical leaks – these are things certainly outside of a planner's control. But what you can control is your preparedness.

 - a. Do you have a back-up location, vendor, speaker and other key elements for your meeting?
 - b. Do you have a disaster recovery plan?
 - c. Can you get or do you have exhibitor or organization cancellation insurance?
 - d. Do you have a communication plan to ensure all attendees can get access to the most current information in the event of an emergency?
- 5) Create dedicated space for newcomers.** Not only does creating a dedicated space for new attendees help you make valuable connections with attendees of your conference, thus providing an opportunity to see the meeting through their eyes, but it also gives the new attendee the opportunity to learn about the value of the meeting or conference from you – the expert! This engagement and opportunity to build relationships increases the likelihood newcomers will register for your event again.

