



Things to Consider When Selecting a Conference Hotel for the NCDA Annual Conference

The Annual Conference is usually the 3rd week in June. It is important that competitive hotel bids be solicited (usually easily done through the local Convention and Visitors Bureau - which often have an RFP process on their website) because this event has the greatest opportunity for both income and loss to the organization.

The largest cost of the annual conference is the cost of hotel food and beverage and audio/visual services; therefore, *there is a need to examine these costs carefully before selecting a hotel.* These costs include:

- **Hotel Sleeping Room Costs**
 - Need to be as low as possible (especially when compared with the federal government rate)
 - Individuals should make and guarantee their own reservations. The hotel should not require NCDA to guarantee sleeping room reservations.
 - The hotel should provide you with a code and preferably a weblink so that individuals can get the group rate.
- **Hotel Sleeping Room Block**
 - This is a tricky one. The estimate of sleeping room-nights needs to be accurate because the hotel will use it to establish a guaranteed number:
 - It needs to be high enough so that most people can get rooms under the block;
 - But you must have paid room-nights at least 85-90% of the guarantee or *NCDA will have to pay for the empty rooms below that threshold.*
 - I start with a conservative estimate for the room block, such as 70% of the prior year's room count and then negotiate an increase as we get a better sense of attendance. Depending on events in the host community this may be difficult.
- **Meeting Room Costs**
 - These should always be waived. Hotels use the food/beverage minimum and/or the total room nights to determine whether to waive costs.

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Usually our food/beverage minimum (see below) is sufficient to cover this.

- **Service/Administrative Charge**
 - This is an overhead fee that hotels apply to **every cost** that they charge you, including AV costs. These days, it's in the range of 20-24% (and it seems to go up every year). Ignore this at your peril!
- **Food and Beverage Minimum**
 - This is the required minimum, prior to the application of service fee and taxes, that causes meeting room costs to be waived.
 - It's a good idea to estimate your F&B costs accurately (from the menus provided by the hotel) -- see below. *Note that if you fall below the minimum, you could be charged the difference.*
 - A F&B minimum of \$35,000 is average.
- **Food & Beverage Costs**
 - **As a part of the RFP Bid solicitation process this is very important! The difference in meal costs can be 30-40% between hotels!**
 - Use your tentative agenda (or last year's agenda) to identify the meals you will have, e.g.:
 - Continental Breakfast each day
 - Mid-morning coffee, tea refresh
 - Awards luncheon (usually hot buffet)
 - Reception (for estimation purposes):
 - 6 types of passed hors d'oeuvres - 100 pieces each
 - 3 serving stations
 - 2 carving stations (include 2 attendants)
 - Host Bar (Option 1: open bar 2 hours; cash bar 2 hours; Option 2: each registrant gets two tickets; then cash bar)
 - 2 bartenders
- **Audiovisual Costs**
 - Next to F&B Costs, AV Costs will be your most expensive.
 - Plenary and most breakout rooms will need projector & screen and microphones. Review your preliminary agenda and determine the needs for each room:
 - More than one mic or sound system - you will need a mixer
 - Most hotels have projector & screen and mic. packages you should check out.
 - Can you supply enough projectors? Hotels usually have a power/table/screen package that is cheaper than with a projector. But ensure that your projector is bright enough for the room.
 - Will there be videos? This can add to the cost if an upgraded sound system is needed.
 - The board meeting will need to be recorded. This will require at least 4 (preferably wireless) mics, mixer, & computer (to record MP3 file on a memory stick to be provided to NCDA)

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- Many hotels will charge for technicians' time - have you included this?
- Some hotels will even want to charge for bringing electricity to the registration and sponsors' tables.
- **Comped Rooms**
 - Hotels should give you one free room-night for a certain number of paid room-nights (determined after the conference). It's usually 1 per 30, although in D.C. now the standard appears to be 1 per 40. This is a potential negotiating point.
 - Comped rooms usually go to the NCDA President & staff
- **Hospitality Suite**
 - This should usually be comped (though they may want you to take it out of the comped room total - I'd resist this).
 - Suite should be available during all nights of the conference (and preferably the night before the start)
 - The Hospitality Suite manager usually gets the sleeping room portion of the suite
 - The suite is considered a sleeping room, so the prohibition about bringing outside food and alcohol to meeting rooms does not apply.
- **WiFi in Sleeping and Meeting Rooms**
 - This should be comped! Some hotels will charge as much as \$1500/day for wifi in meeting rooms. Check it out!