

AMERICAN WATER RESOURCES ASSOCIATION



AWRA
Community, Conversation, Connections

CONFERENCE PLANNING MANUAL

INTRODUCTION

The conferences of the American Water Resources Association fulfill one of the principal objectives of the association – to promote conversations about cutting edge research, management and knowledge in the many different fields of water resources. Three conferences are conducted annually – two specialty (Spring and Summer) and one general (Annual). Each year the AWRA Board of Directors identifies strategic water resources issues to be addressed at future Spring and Summer Specialty Conferences. The Annual Conference content follows basic guidelines (see attachment) developed by the AWRA Board of Directors and can be added to by each Annual Conference Organizing Committee. State Sections or local members can propose to host a specialty conference by completing a “proposal form” obtained from the AWRA Headquarters. Volunteers from the selected sponsoring state sections or local members will be sought for the Technical Program Committee.

Traditionally the **Specialty Conferences** run from Monday through Wednesday, with the Opening Reception on Monday evening and the Conference Luncheon on Wednesday. The **Annual Water Resources Conference** runs from Monday through Thursday, with the Opening Reception on Monday evening and the AWRA Annual Awards Luncheon on Wednesday.

- Spring Specialty Conference – Late March through early May, avoiding religious and national holidays.
- Summer Specialty Conference – The last week in June through August, avoiding religious and national holidays.
- Annual Water Resources Conference – Anytime during the first two weeks of November, avoiding religious and national holidays.

Locations of **Specialty Conferences** are determined by the AWRA Headquarters Staff in consultation with the sponsoring state sections/local members. The policy of the AWRA Board of Directors is to rotate the **Annual Water Resources Conference** in these geographic locations – southeast, southwest, northwest, northeast.

THE ORGANIZING TEAM

The principle purpose of the Conference Organizing Committee is to develop the best technical program possible.

People generally base their decision to attend a professional conference on the **technical program content**. The Organizing Committee’s efforts should be directed towards this goal with a focus on having a balance of oral and poster presentations, plenary session and technical field trips. The Opening Plenary Session should feature a Keynote Speaker who will set the tone of the conference. **The Organizing Committee for an AWRA conference is CONTENT focused. All administrative and logistical details will be handled by the AWRA Headquarters staff.**

Role of AWRA Board of Directors

The Board of Directors’ primary role in conferences is to approve the conference theme, Conference Organizing Committee Chair, Technical Program Committee Chair, geographical location, and budget (as part of overall AWRA budget) of proposed conferences.

- **AWRA President:** Responsible for providing guidance to the Headquarters staff for accomplishing the goals of each meeting and, if required, acts as an arbitrator for any difficulties that may arise in the planning or implementation process of a meeting.
- **Secretary/Treasurer:** Is the chief elected financial officer and is responsible for the review of all budgets, including conferences.

Headquarters' Staff

Responsible for furnishing logistical support to all persons involved in any AWRA national meeting, including but not limited to:

1. Composition, printing, general promotion, and mailing and emailing of all required materials.
 2. Record keeping of registration income, meeting expense, exhibit monies, and all other financial transactions relating to the meeting budget.
 3. Working with the Technical Program Committee to create the program (abstract review/acceptance, etc.)
 4. General assistance at the meeting within the limitations of the meeting budget.
- **Executive Vice President (EVP):** Is the **only person authorized to sign contracts or agreements obligating AWRA for meeting facilities or financial commitments for goods and services to be used at any AWRA function.** Dates and specific facilities needed for each meeting will be selected by the EVP.
 - **Program Coordinator:** Tracks all abstract submittals which are only accepted electronically via the AWRA website and accepted abstracts. Keeps presenters informed as to various deadlines, presentation instructions, and program information. Puts together the Preliminary Program and Final Program for publication on the AWRA website and printed version for handout at conference.
 - **Membership Services Manager** – Responsible for all marketing aspects of each conference.

Conference Organizing Committee

Responsible for directing the technical program content and operations of the meeting and for ensuring that all planned activities proceed on a progressive and timely basis according to the established timetable. The Committee consists of the following:

- **Conference Organizing Committee Chair:** Must be approved by the AWRA Board of Directors. Responsibilities include:
 1. Serve as the principal planner, organizer, coordinator, and focal point for the meeting.
 2. Maintain communication with the Headquarters' Staff and provide frequent updates on all facets of meeting planning.
 3. Realize that he/she is volunteering to provide active leadership and that the time required to successfully plan, coordinate, and implement the meeting will affect his/her professional and personal time over a two or three year period. He/she must have the concurrence of their family and employer to make such a commitment and possibly be able to utilize some of their employer's resources such as telephone, clerical assistance, routine mailing, email, etc.
 4. Find capable persons that will participate in some facet of committee activities.
- **Technical Program Chair(s):** Must be approved by the AWRA Board of Directors. Responsibilities include:
 1. Be technically qualified to formulate and organize the Technical Program and to review all abstracts submitted (with or without the assistance of a Technical Program Committee) and to determine those that will be selected for presentation.
 2. Manage the conference sessions with regard to presenters' requests to move to different sessions; fill holes in the program when cancellations occur; track requests from individuals interested in participating in sessions but who missed the deadline; work with AWRA Program Coordinator in all these aspects.
 3. In consultation with the Organizing Committee Chair, be responsible for the selection of, coordination with, and correspondence to the Session Moderators for the meeting. Moderators should be selected in time to be included in the Preliminary Program.
 4. Recruit technical sessions from the Various AWRA Technical Committees.
- **Technical Field Trips Committee Chair:** Technical field trips provide a forum for exposing attendees to unique technical aspects of the venue in which the meeting is being held. Full-day or half-day trips can be arranged. Past experience has proven that the day before the opening of the conference (usually Sunday) is the most successful day to schedule the field trips. The

Chair/Committee is responsible for organizing these trips and for the complete itinerary. The Chair will provide a complete write-up of the trips for the Preliminary Program. **The AWRA HQ Staff will handle the logistical arrangements, transportation, contract negotiations, and financial commitments.**

- **Exhibits Chair:** Identifies potential local and/or regional exhibitors for the AWRA Membership Services Manager.
- **Finance Chair and Committee:** Responsible for securing financial contributors for the meeting. The committee should solicit funds from local corporate sources as a means of partially offsetting the cost of food and beverage functions. AWRA has received contributions from universities, federal and state governmental agencies in support of the technical content of the meeting. Other contributions by private sources should be budgeted, e.g., donation for specific coffee break(s), co-sponsor a luncheon, field trips, transportation, special events, etc. Each meeting should be self-sustaining. Registration Fees, Exhibitors Fees, etc. will be set to cover all meeting costs.
- **Student Activities Chair:** Usually done for the Annual Conference (Student Conference Orientation, Student Career Night, Student Presenter Competition). However, each conference lately has been having a Student Presenter Competition. The Student Competition requires the Chair to assign Poster Session judges and hand out the evaluation form packets to the various Session Moderators involved. They would also collect evaluations and tabulate the results. The Chair should have a small committee of 2 or 3 people to help with this, especially for the Annual Conference which also involves the Student Conference Orientation and the Student Career Night event. The Orientation is used to help student attendees get the most out of their conference experience and is held on Monday afternoon just prior to the Networking Reception. The Career Night is usually held on Wednesday evening and involves a number of panelists from the various water resources fields to discuss their jobs, etc. There could also be a Speed Networking that follows the panel discussion on jobs in water resources.

**** During the early stages of planning, the Conference Organizing Committee Chair, AWRA Executive Vice President, AWRA Membership Services Manager, and Finance Committee Chair will coordinate fund-raising efforts. The Finance Committee Chair, in consultation with the Organizing Committee Chair, will draft all letters requesting funding, or services for support. Costs for sponsoring specific events should be obtained from the AWRA Executive Vice President. Financial contributors will be acknowledged in all written/website material related to the meeting.****

- **Opening Plenary Session Keynote Speaker:** The Keynote Speaker should be invited to speak at the Opening Plenary Session far enough in advance so he/she can be identified in the Preliminary Program. **He/she will not pay a registration fee, but AWRA does not pay expenses or provide an honorarium.** The Organizing Committee Chair will issue the invitation. Upon acceptance, the Organizing Committee Chair shall request a short, one-paragraph, biographical sketch and a picture for the Preliminary and Final Programs (black and white head shot is preferred but color is acceptable). As viewed by AWRA, keynote speakers are individuals who have national or international eminence in their area of expertise and they should set the tone for the meeting.
- **Concurrent Session Moderators:** The Moderators should be selected, contacted, and confirmed by the Technical Program Committee Chair(s) and their names and pertinent information provided to the Program Coordinator for inclusion in the Preliminary Program. The Program Coordinator will provide the Moderators with instructions and session information (includes speakers, paper titles) approximately 3 weeks out from the conference start date. The Moderator's principle responsibility is to keep the session running smoothly with presenters in the order listed in the Final Program and using only the time allotted them.

THE PROCESS

- A **Timetable** is developed listing the sequence of actions and due dates. Regular contact should occur with the Headquarters' staff as the program is developed.
- Monthly conference calls between the committee members and the AWRA staff should be conducted starting one year out from the conference date. These calls are used for planning and assignment of tasks, discussion of issues, etc, and should be planned to last no longer than 1 hour.
- The **Call for Abstracts** will be developed by The Technical Program Chair, Conference Organizing Committee Chair(s) and the Program Coordinator. The Technical Program Chair might want to create a Technical Program Committee of individuals that can assist in the review of the submitted abstracts for approval or rejection. These individuals do not need to be considered part of the Planning Committee, but can include members of the Planning Committee. They should be selected 3 to 4 months ahead of the abstract submittal due date. They will be sent instructions on accessing the website to review assigned abstracts.
- The **Preliminary Program** contains information put together by the Conference Chair, Technical Program Chair and the other Committee Chairs. The completed information is sent to the **Program Coordinator** and should include the following: **co-sponsors, session titles, session moderators, name of each paper and presenter in order of presentation, keynote speaker(s), technical field trips (written description), and all other technical program-related information (a more extensive list will be given out at the Conference Planning Meeting)**. The Preliminary Program is used to market the meeting and **must be as complete as possible**.
- **Final Program** contents, with all revisions, should be sent to the Program Coordinator by the Conference Organizing Committee Chair. This is printed and given to the attendees on-site.
- **Special Optional Evening Events** can be proposed by the Committee for evenings where there is no scheduled AWRA activity. These can be dinner at a local site, or perhaps an historical site or scenic site or even a special local event of interest to those who have never been to the host city. This would be listed in the program and registrants would pay an extra fee to attend. The best time is generally Tuesday evening. These should be strictly social events and are self-supporting. The AWRA staff is open to other suggestions and some conferences have included a viewing of water related films after the Opening Networking Reception.

WRAP-UP

Reflections after the Meeting: The Organizing Committee Chair will submit a one page report to the Executive Vice President briefly describing the following in short outline form:

1. Pitfalls not anticipated.
2. Planned activities that did not fully meet expected results.
3. Events which occurred that were not planned but went well and might be considered for the future.
4. Planned activities which exceeded expectations.
5. Specific recommendations for improving future meetings.

The Conference Organizing Committee Chair will also prepare an article about the meeting for the upcoming issue of *Water Resources IMPACT* and submit it to the Editor.