

HOSTING AN IEEE STATIONARY BATTERY COMMITTEE MEETING

INTRODUCTION:

Setting up an IEEE Stationary Battery Committee (SBC) Meeting is not rocket science, and the parts that make up the equation are really few. However, as with so many things, "the devil is in the details." There is a necessary amount of effort that must be put forth at the beginning of the process with effective follow-up undertaken periodically prior to the actual meeting date; it begins with the selection process to a final pre-meeting review with all parties involved with the meeting.

Thus, acting as a sponsor (host) or co-host for an IEEE SBC meeting does require an active commitment that begins a year to a year and a half before the actual meeting dates and follows through right up to and through the meeting.

EIGHT COMPONENTS TO A SUCCESSFUL MEETING:

1. Choosing the location for the meeting
2. Investigating the hotel options
3. Locking down the dates
4. Negotiating the Details
5. Securing the Contract
6. Follow-up on Registrations
7. Restaurant and Attractions Lists
8. "White glove" or Pre-meeting Review

THE MEETING DATES and HOTEL CHOICE:

We have traditionally held a semi-annual meeting in January and again in June. However, we can be flexible to move into early February or late May if that provides a significant advantage in securing a favorable meeting package at a more affordable rate. The Committee would prefer to do the Winter Meeting in a moderate to warm climate while the Spring Meeting can be held in the more temperate Northern area. Meetings can be held anywhere in North America (the US and Canada).

It is important that we have the meeting dates, hotel selection and contract negotiation completed (or in final stages) twelve (12) months prior to the meeting actually being held. In other words, when holding the January meeting, for example, not only is the June meeting finalized, but the January meeting for the following year should be finalized or at least in the final stages of negotiation as well.

HOTEL SELECTION

1. The goal is to obtain a complete meeting package (hotel guest rooms, meeting rooms, appropriate food & beverage, AV and ISP requirements). The total cost of the meeting package needs to be negotiated into a final room rate that will cover all aspects mutually agreed upon in the package. The committee has established a ceiling rate not to exceed \$200.00 per nite inclusive of all components (including taxes if at all possible but this could be a negotiation point based upon the final package).

An option that may be considered is to negotiate a lower room rate (government per-diem rate or most favored customer rate) and then charge a service fee to cover the meeting rooms, F&B, AV and ISP. This is something that the Committee will be discussing and this document will be revised to reflect the final resolution of those discussions.

2. The hotel needs to be large enough to handle the size of our group (generally 40-60 people) equating to 120-170 room nights total. This will become a major bargaining chip in setting the total cost/rate charged each attendee for the meeting.
3. The hotel preferably should offer in-house dining (breakfast, lunch and dinner) and have upgraded their sleeping and meeting rooms within the last 3 or 4 years so that there are no visible "shop-worn" affects. If you can find a hotel that is new (6 months to 3 years) that is ideal, but again, an older hotel with a recent and thorough upgrade within the past 2-4 years is perfectly OK.
4. Hotels that meet these criteria are typically called "full service" hotels, and while there are many independents, for consistency and staff accustomed to arranging meetings of our type, the following may be more advantageous:
 - 1) Marriott Hotels
 - 2) Hilton Hotels
 - 3) Sheraton Hotels
 - 4) Doubletree Hotels
 - 5) Westin Hotels
 - 6) Renaissance Hotels
 - 7) Hyatt Hotels
 - 8) Four-Point Hotels by Sheraton

This is not intended to exclude other good hotel properties, but to say that these particular hotel groups are in the business of hosting meetings for large and small groups and usually have the amenities we consider beneficial for a positive result.

Occasionally, an outstanding independent property or other chain like the Omni or Holiday Inn hotels can offer a good equivalent.

5. A few additional pointers:

- 1) Hotels with 250 rooms or less may be more amenable to work with our size group.
- 2) Hotels located right near airports or major tourist attractions are generally more expensive and may not have good restaurants or evening attractions nearby.
- 3) Hotels that do not outsource their AV or have built-in AV systems will be advantageous as AV costs can be negotiated more reasonably.

FUNCTION SPACE:

1. As mentioned above, the general attendance is from 40 to 50 persons per meeting, but depending upon the Working Groups scheduled, can go as high as 60 or 70 persons, especially for the opening two days.
2. One larger room is needed for the Technical Sessions, the General Meeting and the Wrap-up session. Generally, the larger room is also used as the room for one of the two Working Groups over the four days of working group meetings.
3. A second room is needed for the second Working Group (WG) sessions that begin on Monday afternoon and carry through Thursday morning. A good split between the two WG meeting rooms is 30/30. However, if the larger room is being used as one of the WG rooms, the second room should still be looked at for 30 persons.
4. The most economical but effective room set-up is "Classroom Style." The general setup is three chairs to a table and allows adequate room for each individual to set up a laptop computer (which most do). In instances where the room space is large because that is what is available, a "U" shape can be acceptable. The tables are set up in a **U** shape with chairs stationed around the sides. Do not accept "theater" style, as then the chairs are just set up in rows and there is no space for papers or computers, as there are no tables.
5. It is important to discuss AV when discussing the function space. See comments under the Audio Visual & ISP section below.

AUDIO VISUAL & ISP:

1. Audio Visual requirements are one of the trickier parts of the meeting agenda. Many of the suitable meeting hotels subcontract out the Audio Visual (AV) piece to outside interests. These subcontractors normally have an office inside the hotel, but not always. The hotel gets a "royalty" from the AV subcontractor, who is in business to make a profit, and this "double bubble" affect causes the AV costs to be a problem in many cases. In these cases, the subcontractor may have responsibility for the ISP, especially for the meeting rooms.
2. If the hotel has built-in AV, which many of the newer hotels built in recent years do, then it is easier to negotiate the final price point. However, if the AV is subcontracted and no other adequate property is available or suitable, then you will need to understand that this becomes a difficult but manageable part of the negotiation.
3. While including the ISP Internet for guest rooms in the guest room rate is becoming more universal, many of the full-service hotels still charge a guest anywhere from \$9.95 to \$15.00 per day to use the Internet from their hotel rooms. Most hotels have a separate ISP link for their meeting rooms. It is important to get a clear understanding of how the hotel you are dealing with treats ISP. We want ISP (both guest rooms & meeting rooms) included in the rate we agree to pay.

NEGOTIATING THE CONTRACT:

1. Once a hotel is decided upon, then the hard part begins. Negotiation is in many ways an art form. It has been said that a successful negotiation winds up with both parties getting a good part of what they want but both sides not happy with what they had to give up. And remember, both sides have to feel like they have won the major parts of their baseline points.
2. We have made it easier to begin the negotiations now with the Master RFP form. This should be given to each hotel sales manager with whom you are working at your first meeting.
3. If you are not a regular traveler you may want to contact the Convention Services Bureau and discuss the overall need while providing them with a copy of the RFP. They can contact all the hotels that are a part of the CSB and help with the leg-work to quantify possible properties. However, you will still need to visit each hotel site and go through the points discussed above.
4. There are many points that are open for negotiation. It is important to understand the priority scale with respect to trade-offs. For example:
 - 1) The on-site laptop projectors can be waived as a first consideration. We have many members who have access to laptop projectors, so we can bring those with us if it saves AV cost.

- 2) The continental breakfast, while nice, could be waived as a further consideration. Since the full-service hotel has a nice restaurant, and some members like a full breakfast anyway, giving up the continental breakfast as a concession for a lower price is a second option. However, the two coffee breaks at mid-morning and mid-afternoon are staples.
 - 3) A point should be made that most of the guests will be eating lunch in the hotel restaurant for the days that they are there (not all, but a good %), plus if the food is really good, then many will eat dinners there during their stay as well. This is considerable revenue that while not counting in the F&B column does add considerable revenue into the hotel revenue stream.
 - 4) Most hotels pay commissions to meeting planners (CMP's) who set up meetings for a living. Part of most packages includes free rooms for "x" number of guests registered. Agreeing to forfeit those free rooms and that you are not a CMP so no commissions are expected provides a strong negotiation point.
 - 5) There may be other points that present themselves in the context of the discussions during the negotiation. A sensitivity and awareness to these points can often lead to a mutual tradeoff.
5. Most hotels will then issue a Contract which they want signed. A few points are in order here:
- 1) Don't sign on-site or without a full review. Ask for it to be sent to you electronically for review. Take a day or two to read it over a few times.
 - 2) Read the fine-print carefully. The first "cut" usually contains a few "boiler plate" mistakes that are different from what the agreement you made with the sales manager.
 - 3) Don't be afraid to cross-out provisions or write up a modification on points that you feel are important. Some points may include:
 - i. Locking the rooms during the lunch period.
 - ii. Free shuttle service to restaurants in the area at night.
 - iii. Free shuttle service to a special tourist attraction or shopping mall
 - iv. Free airport shuttle service (this will generally be for hotels within a few miles of the airport)

FOLLOW-UP ON REGISTRATIONS:

1. Hopefully your hotel has a software program that lets you track reservations. This way you can see exactly how many people have registered at various stages of the period up to the meeting.
2. Check to see if the hotel lets the Meeting Planner see the names of the registrants, the dates of their arrival and departure, the number of guests under that reservation and some supplemental information including type of room set aside, etc.. This can be extremely helpful in dealing with special reservation issues, including overflow upon occasion.
3. The upside to this is that if reservations are not where they need to be to meet room night minimums, you can alert the Chair and request an email to alert the membership that help is needed to get reservations committed for the upcoming meeting.
4. An Excel Worksheet can be created to map out the actual room nights committed by day. This will help in determining F&B commitments and possible advisory for the Chair with respect to upcoming WG session attendances.

RESTAURANT AND ATTRACTIONS OPTIONS:

1. While not directly involved in setting up the meeting with the hotel, as the Committee has evolved with spouses/significant others attending with Committee members, it is helpful to obtain two functional lists:
 - 1) A list of various restaurants in the area outside the hotel,
 - 2) A list (or promotional pieces) of various attractions that might be of interest to attendees.

The hotel sales department is often able to help. If the hotel doesn't have a good idea of what to recommend, the Sales Manager you are working with can steer you to the right person to contact at the Convention Services Bureau if you haven't already been involved with them. The Convention Services Bureau is heavily involved with promoting the community and will most likely have handouts that can be distributed at the beginning of the meeting.

Things to consider are Museums, Art Galleries, unique to the City shopping areas, etc..

FINAL PRE-MEETING REVIEW & "WHITE GLOVE" INSPECTION:

1. It is extremely important to visit the hotel a few days before the actual meeting to go over all the details, check out the meeting rooms, review the registrations and special requests. In other words, make sure that everything is properly set to enjoy a good meeting before everyone gets there. This includes making sure the breakfast set-up is scheduled for the appropriate time on Monday morning, etc..

2. If overflow has created a need for guest room space at a nearby hotel, you should make sure to check out the accommodations and condition of that hotel to be sure there are no surprises.
3. Also, make sure that the complete AV issues are resolved and proper equipment is scheduled to be in place. If laptop projectors are being brought in by SBC members, be sure to call them and remind them that we are counting on that projector for the meeting.

CONCLUSION:

While this document in no way covers every detail, it is intended (along with the Master RFP form) to provide guidance and assistance in setting up a Stationary Battery Committee Meeting.

Of course, the Meeting Selection Committee is ready and able to assist in helping with any issues you run into in setting up your meeting.

Good luck and here's to a *Great Meeting!*

The Meeting Selection Committee