

Get the Most out of Your Conference Experience

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As conference registrations and program submission deadlines are flooding our inboxes, now is the time to think about how to get the best out of your conference experience. Whether this is your first conference or your twenty-first, it is always important to remember the purpose of these professional development opportunities and how you will utilize them.

DOs:

Look at the schedule ahead of time:

Before attending the conference, look at the schedule to see what program sessions, workshops, and other opportunities are being offered. If you are attending with multiple folks from your institution, develop a game plan so that you are all not going to the same sessions. Attend sessions that are related to your job functions, but also ones that discuss your passion areas or ways for you to grow personally. Once you're back at your institution, be sure to share what you learned with your colleagues in order to help implement best practices!

Network whenever possible:

The time in between sessions is a great time to mingle with folks are you are moving between rooms. Talk to presenters to learn more about their story. Introduce yourself to someone that shared during a session. Make sure to bring your business cards so that you can stay connected after the conference as well!

Get Involved:

Most conferences have multiple ways to get involved in the conference. You can volunteer by moderating a program session, taking meal tickets, or directing traffic. If folks in your group are traveling early to the conference, that is a great time to volunteer! The state, regional, and national associations also have committees where you can help plan and execute the conference, as well as give back to the organization. These committees are a great way to learn more about Housing, work in your passion area, and meet great colleagues. After a few years on a committee, you can run for an officer position within the committee or organization. You can also moderate a program. By

moderating a program, you are assisting the Program Committee ensure that the educational sessions are running smoothly, and that attendees give their feedback. (And you can ensure that you get to attend a popular session!)

Visit the Corporate Partner Area

You may or may not have buying power, but one day you might. Corporate Partners want to talk to Housing professionals on all levels. They want to know what current residents want and need and you can provide that insight. The Corporate Partner area is also a great space to learn about different products. You never know where Housing can lead you, and the Corporate Partners may have the perfect tool you need in your next position. And let's be honest, there is some great swag... but do not just grab swag and run. At least say thank you and talk for a few moments with the representatives.

DON'Ts:

Forget where you are:

Housing is the biggest small town you will ever be in. Folks know lots of people from many institutions, so be careful what you say and where you say it. We never want to criticize other institutions, professionals, or corporate partners in public. That includes elevators and restaurants around the city. If you need to talk to someone, do it professionally, and in private.

Have TOO much fun:

Depending on the conference, there could be one or more events that have alcohol. Remember that you are representing your professional self and your institution. Do not have too many alcoholic beverages or let loose too much. You need to always be in control of how you represent yourself. This also means getting sleep throughout the conference. While you may want to go explore the night life, set a time for when you will return back to the hotel. You don't want to look rough the next morning at the early sessions or sleep through half the conference because you overdid it.

Disrespect Presenters

Putting together a conference presentation takes time, which is a precious commodity at work. If you go to a session, be present in body and mind. Just like we ask our students, remember to stay off your cell phones as much as possible. We all know that work is still happening back home. If you must take a call or do some work, excuse yourself quietly and go into the hallway to do so. Also make sure to actively listen to the material. Take some notes, participate in the conversation, and do not take a nap.

Keep the information to yourself:

Your institution is probably paying for you to attend the conference, so you need to take back some information to your department. At your next staff meeting, take some time to let others know what you learned. Send an email to others that may want to hear about your new knowledge. If you received presentations, forward them on to your colleagues. Make sure you help others grow as professionals.

Put the Information on a Shelf:

You missed three days of work and now you have so much email to catch up on! Don't forget to take some time to reflect on your professional development experience. Make or update your goals to reflect new information you received. Plan to do learn more in areas of interest. Just don't put all the pamphlets, print outs, and notes on shelf to be forgotten.

Now that you have some DOs and DON'Ts, make sure that you know what conferences are out there (because there are a lot!)

Common Housing Conferences

- MAHO: Mississippi Associate of Housing Officers
 - Usually held in November
 - 2018- University of Southern Mississippi | November 6-8
 - <https://www.mahoconnect.com/>
- SEAHO: Southeastern Association of Housing Officers
 - Usually held late February/early March
 - 2019- Jacksonville, Florida | February 26-March 1
 - <https://www.seaho.org>
- ACUHO-I: Association of College and University Housing Officers- International
 - Usually held in June
 - 2019- Toronto, Canada | June 22-25
 - ACUHO-I also has job specific conferences in October
 - Business Operations, Academic Initiatives, and Housing Facilities
 - <https://www.acuho-i.org>

Other Association Conferences that may be of interest

- ASCA: Association for Student Conduct Administrations
 - <https://www.theasca.org/>
- AFA: Association for Fraternity/Sorority Advisors
 - <https://www.afa1976.org/>
- NASPA: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
 - <https://www.naspa.org/>

- Has regional conferences
- SACSA: Southern Association of College Student Affairs
 - <https://www.sacsa.org/>
- ACPA: American College Personnel Association
 - <http://www.myacpa.org/>
- ACHA: American College Health Association
 - <https://www.acha.org/>