

Don't just ask -- SELL the conference

Ways to convince the people holding the purse strings

All too often, people who want to attend a conference simply submit a request and cross their fingers. This article is meant to show you how to put together a business case for why you should attend the conference — and how to get the most out of a NACADA event once you are there.

As a prospective attendee you need to be able to SELL how conference participation will relate directly to the strategies and objectives of your institution. That way, you can articulate the need for your continued professional development from both your institution's perspective and your personal perspective.

How to Get Approval to Attend the 2009 NACADA Annual Conference

In our current economic climate, getting approval to attend meetings may be more challenging for you now than it has been in the past. Here are four steps you can use to build a business case for attending the 2009 NACADA Annual Conference:

1. **Write down** the three to five most important strategies or issues being addressed at your institution right now.
2. **Think about** how you personally contribute to those strategies. How is your work aligned with the larger institution's strategy or mission? Make a list of these "personal contributions to strategy."
3. **Look at** the proposed agenda and session titles (listed under Tracks on our web site) for the conference and mark the sessions you want to attend that relate to your list of personal contributions to the strategy, also make a note of speakers or other people at the meeting you would like to meet.
4. **Write a short** business case for how attending these sessions and meeting these people will help you contribute to the institution's strategy. Use this business case to make your request for attending the meeting.

For example, part of a business case might read as follows: "At present, our institution is highly focused on transitioning undecided students. My personal contribution to this strategy is to be responsible for finding ways to help students graduate in four years. At the conference there is a session entitled, "Tools for Students in Transition: Working with Undecided Students." I would like to attend this session and also meet with the presenter privately in order to get ideas about on how to incorporate the ideas presented in the session."

Preparing for the Meeting

Once you get approval, you should prepare properly for the conference because you're going to need to demonstrate that you received the benefits that you promised to the person who's paying your way.

Here are some things you can do to prepare for the conference:

1. **Make a list** of people you'd like to meet at the conference and why you want to meet them. Don't be shy about approaching presenters and other "luminaries." They are more accessible than you might think, especially if you make plans with them in advance.
2. About one to two weeks prior to the conference, **contact the people on your list**. Make a specific plan for a meal, coffee, or a time and place to get together.
3. One week prior to the meeting, **make a personal agenda for yourself** that includes the people you're meeting as well as which sessions you'll be attending.
 - a. NACADA offers you the opportunity to plan your sessions in advance by using the [Interactive Schedule Planner](#) located on our web site.
4. When you're at the meeting, **try to stick to your schedule** as much as possible and take notes during the educational sessions and during your private conversations. Leave some "white space" on your calendar in case you encounter new people at the conference with whom you'd like to spend some time.

After the Meeting

1. Immediately following the conference (perhaps on the airplane ride home), **write or dictate a concise summary of what happened** at the conference and how you will use the information you received and contacts you made to further the strategies of your institution. It's important to write this summary quickly, while the information is fresh in your mind. Use the notes you took at the meeting to help you.
2. **Submit the summary to the person** who sponsored your attendance, thanking him or her for the opportunity. The purpose of this summary is to make your next conference request even easier than the first. Once your executives understand that you mean business when you attend a conference, they'll be more likely to quickly approve your participation.
3. If the knowledge you gained might also be useful to others in your organization, then you might **consider rewriting portions of your summary as a blog or Twitter post** that could be useful to your colleagues at work.