

Sell the Conference!

How to convince those who control the purse strings of the value of your attendance at a NACADA Event!

Making your case for participation

All too often, people who want to attend a NACADA event simply submit a request and cross their fingers. As a prospective attendee, you may need to SELL the need for your continued professional development by showing how conference participation will relate directly to the strategies and objectives of your institution

Here are other some steps you can use to build a case for attending a NACADA regional conference!

1. **Write down** three to five most important strategies or issues being addressed at your institution now.
2. **Think about** how your work is aligned with the larger institution's strategy or mission. Make a list of your "personal contributions to strategy. "
3. **Submit a presentation proposal!** Acceptance of a presentation at a conference will not only help you share valuable information with the participants, but also gives your institution positive recognition among peer colleges. It may be the deciding factor in funding your participation.
4. **Look at** the proposed agenda for the conference and mark the sessions you want to attend that relate to your institutions strategies. Make note of people at the event that you would like to meet.
5. **Write a short** business case for how attending these sessions and meeting these people will help you contribute to the institution's strategy.

For example, part of your request 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 discuss how to incorporate relevant ideas presented in the session.

You would also want to include a copy of your **presentation proposal and abstract of the session** that was selected for the program. You may want to point out ways your presentation will give recognition to the university and provide an opportunity for positive interactions with colleagues.

Preparing for the Meeting

Once you get approval, you should prepare properly for the conference because you are going to need to demonstrate that you received the benefits (and more) 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 would 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 1-2 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 sessions you will attend and the people you're meeting.
4. When you are 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.

After the Meeting

1. Immediately following the conference (perhaps on the airplane or car ride home), **write or dictate a summary of what happened** at the conference and how you will use the information you received and contacts you made. Write this summary quickly, while the information is fresh in your mind!
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 administrators 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 other in your organization, then you might consider **rewriting portions of your summary or presentation as a blog or Twitter post** to your colleagues! The NACADA Academic Advising Today is always looking for "Sparklers" or articles to share lessons learned, so investigate that possibility and share the wealth!

Source: Meetingsnet.com, April 2009

