

GUIDELINES FOR JOINT STAFF SECTION MEETINGS

Introduction

These guidelines are designed to help define best practices for NCSL staff sections that meet jointly for Professional Development Seminars. These suggested steps and specific responsibilities for organizing and conducting a successful joint seminar were developed by the Subcommittee on Joint Meetings of the NCSL Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee's Strategic Planning Committee.

A suggested process for planning and decision-making is outlined below, along with a discussion of the responsibilities for each of the respective groups involved—staff section officers, planning committees and/or host state representatives, and NCSL staff. An Activity Checklist follows to allow staff sections to identify specific responsibilities for each group.

The Joint Staff Section Meeting Planning Process

1. Contact the NCSL staff liaisons for each group regarding the meeting. Each staff section may have its own requirements, policies and procedures for planning meetings that are unique to that group. The staff liaisons can help identify how the groups might best work together. For example:
 - Some staff sections hold seminars only in Capital cities or locations where legislative staff from the state have agreed to host the meeting. Other staff sections may hold seminars in locations that tend to attract a larger attendance, even when no host state staff are available or involved.
 - In some staff sections, seminar planning and decision-making is done by the executive committee; in others, by a seminar planning committee or meetings planning committee. Some groups have delegated decision making to NCSL staff.
 - Some staff sections do fundraising to support seminar social events and activities; others traditionally do not fundraise or may have policies that prohibit accepting outside funds.
2. If possible, form a joint planning committee comprised of members from each staff section and the NCSL liaisons. The joint planning committee can divide the work and eliminate duplication.
3. Working with NCSL staff liaisons, identify locations that are appealing to both or all the groups and identify topics that would be of interest to individual groups and all the groups for possible joint sessions and activities. Determine if members of the host state have connections with potential faculty.
4. Through conference calls, emails or discussions with the staff liaisons, develop a basic schedule for the seminar that identifies the meal functions, plenary and break-out sessions, and social events for the seminar. Identify which staff section (or liaison, or member of host state) will be responsible for each joint session or activity. Identify if any sessions should be considered for e-learning opportunities (e.g., record session, webinar session) and the requirements for the e-learning activity. This information will be provided to hotels to determine whether hotels can accommodate the groups' needs and requirements.
5. Decide if you would like Conference Direct (NCSL's conference planner) or NCSL meetings staff to prepare RFPs for hotels and to negotiate the contract with the hotel. If you elect to use Conference Direct, it will help you identify a location by searching a maximum of three cities. Conference Direct performs site selections and contract negotiations for a number of NCSL meetings, including staff section seminars. NCSL selected Conference Direct based on (1) the volume of its business; (2) its institutional history with NCSL; (3) its reputation within the industry; and (4) its experience with the size of meetings that NCSL conducts. NCSL's standard contract language includes a statement that asks the hotel to agree that no other group or organization could have negotiated a better price point and negotiated concessions. If you "opt out" of using Conference Direct you must have already selected a host city. NCSL meetings staff will request bids from not more than five hotels for consideration by the staff sections and will carry out the contract negotiations with the hotel.

GUIDELINES FOR JOINT STAFF SECTION MEETINGS

6. Working with the NCSL staff liaisons, identify hotels and possible social events or venues for the seminar and seminar activities or social events. Let your liaisons know your suggestions so that NCSL meetings staff can research and serve as the single point of contact with all hotels. Begin developing a preliminary budget that addresses registration fees and social events that can be used once a contract with the hotel has been negotiated and executed.
7. NCSL will do a request for proposal (RFP) and send it to the hotels/city that the groups request along with the following statistical information hotels require: sleeping room block history; meeting rooms requirements, food and beverage revenue; concessions such as suites, comp rooms for faculty, program requirements, meeting space needs, room sets, and so forth.
8. The liaisons will share information with the staff section leadership or committees about the hotels that have responded to the RFPs. The groups may want to hold a conference call with NCSL staff to discuss the hotel options and make a decision.
9. Once the hotel facility is chosen, NCSL will proceed with negotiating the contract with the hotel. A contract summary will be prepared for the committees and/or liaisons to review.
10. Determine whether the joint seminar will have a single budget for both groups or separate budgets. Some of the things to consider include 1) whether the staff sections do fundraising, 2) whether the groups generally pay honoraria and expenses for speakers, and 3) whether or how many meal functions will be held jointly. For example, if the groups differ significantly in the number of meal functions and social events that are provided as part of the seminar, separate budgets may be more appropriate. If the groups are very similar, a single budget may be a simpler approach.
11. Examine the difference between the operating styles of the two groups and try to avoid situations where those differences are uncomfortable. For example, if the two groups are working from separate budgets, or if one group does fundraising that will not be spent on both groups, consider using separate agendas and registration areas.
12. For groups that plan to do fundraising, consider whether funds will be split evenly, split on a pro-rata basis, used for specific joint functions or social events, or kept separate.
13. Work with the NCSL staff liaisons and meetings staff to finalize a seminar budget(s) and registration fee(s).
14. Develop a joint planning timeline that both groups can abide by for decision making. The timeline should include deadlines for brochure printing and mailing or other marketing materials, agenda and program development, faculty, registration and hotel deadlines. Note that the staff sections may differ in how early they begin the planning process, so it is important that both groups are aware of these differences. The groups may agree to use a single timeline for all groups or may agree only on certain key dates and deadlines (e.g., hotel reservation cutoff dates).
15. Most importantly, communicate regularly throughout the process!!

GUIDELINES FOR JOINT STAFF SECTION MEETINGS

PDS Activity Checklist

Outlined below is an activity checklist designed to identify who is responsible for each portion of the planning process. The checklist is organized by activity, which is denoted with **BOLDING AND SMALL CAPS**. **Bolded** items within each category signify activities for which NCSL staff is responsible, and **shaded items** within each category signify key decisions that the various groups must make together.

Activity	NCSL	Host State	Staff Section Officers	Staff Section A	Staff Section B
SELECTING THE CITY & HOTEL					
Identify potential host cities		X	X		
Approve host city		X	X		
Identify potential hotel venues based on meeting needs	X	X	X		
Meet to discuss room block and meeting room space	X	X	X		
Submit RFP to receive best hotel offers	X				
Arrange site visits	X				
Conduct site visits		X	X		
Review hotel responses for competitive bid	X	X	X		
Approve hotel finalists		X	X		
Begin contract process with hotel	X				
Negotiate and sign hotel contract	X				
Contract summary prepared and distributed	X				
VENDORS					
Identify additional vendors if needed (AV, etc.)	X	X	X		
Negotiate and sign contract with vendors	X				
AGENDA & MARKETING					
Draft meeting agenda	X	X	X		
Organize meeting time line (deadlines and benchmarks)	X	X	X		
Plan meeting content (e.g., themes, plenary and concurrent sessions)		X	X		
Establish marketing plan for meeting	X	X	X		
Provide content for marketing meeting		X	X		
Create marketing pieces (brochure and webpage)	X				
Set up meeting registration with NCSL Accounting Department	X				
Arrange session panels and speakers		X	X		

GUIDELINES FOR JOINT STAFF SECTION MEETINGS

Activity	NCSL	Host State	Staff Section Officers	Staff Section A	Staff Section B
Finalize agenda		X	X		
LOGISTICS					
Manage rooming lists and/or hotel pick up	X				
Arrange meeting needs with hotel (room sets, audio-visual, food and beverage)	X				
Create daily meeting menus	X				
Manage registration pick up	X				
FACULTY					
Determine and arrange session panels and speakers	X	X	X		
Invite speakers and moderators	X	X			
Prepare faculty approval form	X				
BUDGET					
Discuss meeting costs, revenue and registration fee, prepare budget	X	X	X		
Approval of meeting budget by staff section			X		
Approval of meeting budget by NCSL	X				
Fund raising for contributions		X	X		
Submitting invoices for contributions	X				
Follow up regarding outstanding invoices	X	X	X		
Verify and process hotel and venue billing within 30 days of receipt of correct invoice	X				
Balance and reconcile final budget	X				
ON-SITE MEETING					
Prepare name badges	X				
Staff Registration desk onsite at hotel	X	X			
Prepare information packet	X	X			
Oversee meeting needs are met onsite	X				
Ensure conference evaluations are distributed and collected	X				
SOCIAL ACTIVITIES*					
Develop evening social events	X	X	X		
Approve evening social events		X	X		
Contract with venues for evening social events	X				
Create menus for evening social events	X	X			

GUIDELINES FOR JOINT STAFF SECTION MEETINGS

Activity	NCSL	Host State	Staff Section Officers	Staff Section A	Staff Section B
Develop day trip activities	X	X			
Approve day trip activities			X		
Contracts for any day trips or activities	X				
Solicit transportation companies for social events/day trips	X				
Contract with transportation company for social events/day trips	X				
Obtain certificate of insurance from transportation company and provide to NCSL		X			
Coordinate evening social events onsite	X	X			
Coordinate day trip activities onsite	X	X			

**NCSL should be involved throughout the process due to logistics, budget and liability.*