



# ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

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THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT



Cover Story

## Gaming Resorts Draw Winning Numbers Every Time

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The spectacular new Aria Resort & Casino anchors CityCenter in Las Vegas

2010 Distinctive Achievement Award Ballot Inside

Photo courtesy of Aria Resort & Casino

# ViewPoint

## Project Planning



### Small Staff, Big Results

**Y**ou are starting to plan your next annual conference and are feeling a bit overwhelmed. You are short-handed, either because you are down a staff member or two, or your staffing model is intentionally lean. How can your small staff deliver big results? Here are some tips to help you keep all the balls in the air and pull off the best conference yet, without feeling stressed and stretched to the max.

Always start with a plan. There is a strong temptation to believe that if we have managed the same meeting several times we don't need to "waste" valuable staff time creating a plan; after all, planning time cuts into doing time, doesn't it? Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. The project plan will save you time down the road, keep everything on track and define expectations. Everyone involved in the annual meeting should contribute to and agree upon an overall project plan that includes the following components:

**Meeting description:** Its purpose and why you are holding it (it isn't always obvious, and it can change from year to year).

**Meeting objectives:** What you hope to achieve (same as last year, more attendees, different attendees, new content).

**Key stakeholders:** Who owns what part of the meeting (this helps to define areas of responsibility).

**Key assumptions:** For example, the number of attendees you will attract, the number of speakers you will need and the number of special events you will host.

**Project scope:** What is included and what is excluded. Are you responsible for planning a party for the past presidents, or is that out of your scope and to be handled by volunteers? A poor definition of scope can lead to nasty surprises and finger-pointing down the road.

**Deliverables and associated milestones:** What you are delivering and when. A list of critical dates is vital and must be kept current.

**Needed resources:** Can you manage the meeting with your current staff? Do you need temps or volunteers to help? Do you need to outsource parts of the project?

**Risks and dependencies:** Will the hotel construction be done prior to the meeting? Will your members be reluctant to travel to the meeting location?

**Project budget:** Build a budget for each deliverable showing the dollar amount for that initiative, expenditures to date and any anticipated savings or overruns.

**Stay on course and revise the plan when necessary:** No plan is ever "done" until the meeting has been completed. The plan is a living document, one you and your team should refer to every day. Stick to the plan, the timelines, the



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budget, etc., as closely as possible. When something happens that causes you to veer from the plan (and something always does), document it and change the plan to reflect your new course. Your project plan is not set in stone; it is like a roadmap, subject to revision when a bridge is closed or a new road is built.

**Work with the best and treat them well:**

Hire suppliers and vendors who are experts in their fields. Be sure to check references, including verification that they have worked in your facility before. Treat your suppliers and vendors like extensions of your staff; be reasonable, thorough and professional, and give them as much information as possible in a timely manner.

**Communicate frequently and effectively:**

Not everyone knows as much as you do about the meeting. Articulate all of your needs, as your coworkers cannot read your mind and, if they try to anticipate an unstated need, they may guess incorrectly. Document thoroughly and often, and be respectful of the time constraints and pressures faced by others. Don't make something a last-minute rush if it doesn't have to be; you will have enough of those as it is. When onsite, be sure to have more than one way to communicate with all staff members throughout the meeting (the walkie-talkie might not work, so be sure to have cell phone numbers as backup).

**Be a good listener:** People typically will tell

you what they need, what is going well, what is not going well and where they need help. If you are unsure, ask, and be prepared to listen and respond in a non-judgmental and non-confrontational manner. Tempers can fray onsite, and you don't want your staff to be hesitant about identifying problems.

**Ask for help:** If you end up short-staffed onsite, ask a hotel employee or vendor to help you with something. While you can't expect them to perform large or time-consuming tasks, most people are more than willing to pitch in to put up a sign, direct traffic for 10 minutes or take tickets for a luncheon.

Finally, be sure to keep a smile on your face. If you look upset or stressed, everyone around you from your staff to the attendees will pick up on your mood. Smiles make us feel welcome and relaxed, and they imply that all is going well. Putting a smile on your face is a key "task" on your onsite to-do list; one that will help your small staff stay calm under pressure and successfully deliver big results.

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