

Affordable Meetings: Tips from the Field

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Looking for cost-saving tips? Look no further than fellow meeting planners:

- Order continental breakfasts and refreshment breaks a la carte, not per person. — *Deborah K. Gaffney, director of conference planning, Tax Executives Institute, Washington, D.C.*
- We once used a classic car club to transport a small number of folks (50), and they didn't charge us. It was like a club outing. We had a photographer, beverages, and snacks for them, and they had as much fun as our group. — *Stephen J. Schick, CMP, CMM, Anheuser-Busch Cos. Inc., St. Louis*
- Have pitchers of fresh water instead of bottled water. Many hotels charge \$3 or more per bottle. — *Caprice Caster, CMP, National Cable Television Cooperative, Lenexa, Kan.*
- Always try to use an outdoor/terrace/pool venue to minimize decor. Transforming a plain ballroom or meeting room is extremely expensive and never as attractive or effective. — *Rachel Porter, president, Corporate Events, The Porter Event, Chapel Hill, N.C.*
- Using public facilities — zoos, parks, botanical gardens, museums, etc. — can be very cost-effective because you can sometimes choose your own vendors and caterer. We have even done meetings at these facilities to add a twist to the meetings. — *Stephen J. Schick*
- Read and fully understand your contract! Don't get caught because you missed the small print or didn't understand it. — *Sandy Biback, CMP, CMM, Imagination+ Meeting Planners Inc., Toronto, Ontario*
- Replate muffins and fruit from breakfast and offer them at the midmorning break. Bring your own LCD, power strips, and extension cords to avoid AV charges. — *Christy Lamagna, CMM, CMP, Strategic Meetings and Events, New York*
- Contract more than one meeting at a time. You can often get more favorable terms if the property is assured of future business. They can double their revenue if they are willing to negotiate. — *Rachel Porter*
- If a speaker that you want is booked in the area in which you'll be meeting, ask if he or she can do a keynote and/or workshop, preferably on the same day. It will save on expenses, and you may get a discount. — *Laurie H. Meyer, president, Programs Plus International Inc., New York*

- After topics have been selected, I always look inside the organization for experts on the subject (to be speakers). Obviously, they should have experience in public speaking and clear instructions on the goals of the program. — *Stephen J. Schick*
- The best speaker gifts are donations to something related to the organization — (say it's building materials folks; Habitat for Humanity would be perfect) — or to something that results in scholarships for those studying the speaker's profession. A handwritten or beautifully printed card can be given. Most speakers have enough “stuff,” and this, I've found, is so appreciated! — *Joan L. Eisenstodt, Eisenstodt Associates, LLC, Washington, D.C.*
- Ask, ask, ask. Very often hotels will have props and miscellaneous decor on-site that you can use at no charge. — *Rachel Porter*

Deals on Wheels

Ground transportation is an easy place to save money — if you know how to do it. Here are some tips from Brian Whitaker, vice president of operations, Chicagoland Transportation Solutions, Barrington, Ill.:

Less is more — The farther apart you can spread the shuttle pick up times, the better. You can save one to five vehicles by adjusting the times by 10 minutes.

Sponsorship — Get everything possible sponsored. You can even get airport transportation sponsored. Consider showing videotape advertisements on the overhead television of the bus, or having a sponsor for the coolers full of drinks for the ride.

Limos vs. Vans — In many, many cases, planners don't want to transport anyone in a limo because it looks too costly. However, the limo actually can be \$50 to \$100 cheaper than a van.

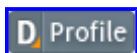
Cut down on “Greets” — This works best for sales and internal meetings. Have guests walk to a meeting point in the claim area. This reduces the number of staff at the airport.

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