

Meeting Organizer Handbook: Lifecycle of the Local Host

The key to hosting a successful DDA meeting, and enjoying it as well, is good organization.

Before you volunteer to be a host:

- Be sure the following are available:
 - Adequate facilities, including hotel rooms (at reasonable rates), meeting and "breakout" rooms, and banquet facilities.
 - A source of emergency help, including at least two additional members of your local committee, and access to clerical assistance.
 - An airport with convenient connections to the meeting site.
- Consult your schedules (professional and personal)
 - Plan to devote about three to five 8-hr days to making arrangements in the months before the meeting.
 - Plan to devote nearly full time to the meeting itself (about 5 days for a 3 day meeting.)

Not all of these items carry equal weight (adequate facilities are critical, but the airport is much less so); however, careful attention to them now will be repaid in peace of mind in the hectic days just before and during the meeting.

When you volunteer, it is best to write a letter (see sample from the 1993 meeting) to the DDA Chair or Secretary extending your invitation and including:

- A choice of meeting dates (that you have already screened against your schedules).
- A brief description of the facilities (including cost data) and the surrounding community (including airport, transportation, hotel possibilities, and the like).
- Any special circumstances or events that the DDA Committee might find helpful in evaluating your invitation.

Before composing your invitation letter, try to obtain a written (draft) agreement with the facilities manager (such as a catering manager at a hotel). The agreement should specify in detail the facilities and services to be rendered along with itemized costs. The agreement is valuable not only in satisfying you and the DDA Committee that essential details have already been settled, but also in resolving confusion later (e.g., refreshments once failed to show up properly until the assistant manager on shift was shown the agreement).

After the DDA Committee has accepted your invitation:

- Contact the other (two) members of the organizing committee for your meeting to establish an understanding of "who is going to do what" to make the meeting a success.
- Determine from the DDA Secretary the schedule of information needed to prepare the series of DDA Newsletters announcing and then leading up to the meeting.
- Make a brief but comprehensive list of actions required by yourself and place these items **on your calendar** .

Because our meetings are small, you can probably now relax during the coming months — always watching your coming milestones. Decisions to be made include:

- How to describe in the DDA Newsletter the community, facilities, and special events so as to entice members to attend.
- What the contents of the meeting registration form should be (make a rough draft); consult

your predecessors' forms for ideas.

As the meeting dates approach, it is most important to execute a careful cost analysis so as to establish the fees to be levied on the final registration form. The degree of importance here stems in part from the difficulty of prescribing firm "how to" guidelines, since significant details vary greatly from one meeting to the next. When in doubt, consult your predecessors. The DDA Treasurer can also be counted on for (wry, ironic) advice. See also the list of expense items elsewhere in this document. Careful attention to this chore will reap **significant** dividends.

Next, establish a convenient registration procedure. At Santa Barbara in 1993, attendees were instructed on the registration form to make checks payable to the Local Host for the full meeting cost, so as to minimize money handling at the meeting itself. This worked very well in that a cash box was not necessary, less security and staff were required, and each attendee (with exception of stragglers, of course) was simply handed a package containing a receipt, banquet form, and other meeting materials. People are understandably sensitive about money matters. This procedure eliminated a lot of anxiety at an already busy, confusing time. Another tip: if the banquet menu offers a choice, a method will be necessary to keep track of the attendees' elections.

If you have come this far, trust me, the really hard part is over. You will probably have a great time. As the days dwindle down, you will need to:

- Recontact the facilities manager to review the agreement and make last minute changes.
- Recontact the "meeting hotel" to reconfirm block room set asides and any special room rates for your attendees.
- Have badges made up. A local calligrapher was once used (remember, our meetings are small); but in 1993, a Macintosh was used. Don't forget special, stand out badges for members of the local committee.
- Meet with your local committee members and give them as much to do as they will accept, since you yourself will be very busy no matter what.
- Check on arrangements for A/V equipment including extension cords, spare bulbs and the like.
- Check on arrangements for poster papers including display tables or easels and materials (e.g. foamcore and push-pins).
- Check on any special requirements indicated on the registration forms or by telephone.
- Decide on how you will arrange and manage a table for late registrants and questions from attendees.
- Consider setting up a "message center", especially if you are not meeting in a hotel with a full service front desk.
- Determine the contents of the package to be handed to each registrant. Items to be considered include a badge, a receipt, a list of attendees, a restaurant guide and handouts describing the surrounding community (often available from the local Chamber of Commerce).

Now for the fun — the meeting itself. It is surprising how gratifying a smooth running meeting is. Try to relax. Rely on your local committee members for help — especially running errands. Make sure one of you is in the meeting room at all times. Keep in mind the things the attendees want most — especially the names and locations of the "best" restaurants.

After the meeting is over, be sure all the bills are or soon will be paid. Then, write a letter to the DDA Treasurer reconciling your receipts and disbursements (see sample from the 1993 meeting for ideas). Thank the facilities/hotel staff.

Now you are done and entitled to a hefty portion of the adult beverage of your choice.

Have fun! Good luck!

[Return to Meeting Organizer Handbook](#) [1]



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Links

[1] <https://dda.aas.org/meetings/handbook>