

## Site Selection Decision-Making

There is more to site selection than simply choosing a city in which to meet. A number of factors enter into NAI's conference host city selection decision. Each city under consideration has distinct qualities and we need to select which of those fit our member profile best. Because of these differences and unique attributes it is never as easy as comparing apples to apples!

In the early years NAI was able to contract with smaller, more intimate locations, but in 1991 we first crossed the threshold of 1000 attendees. This gives our organization a different profile. It opens up possibilities of where to meet, but also closes a number of doors to the types of locations that might have worked for our group in the past.

Our members are very cost-conscious and this is always a major consideration in site-selection. This also keeps us from meeting in first-tier cities where hotel rates are very high. Typically the two largest cost centers for a conference are meeting space rental and food and beverage. When we hold the event in smaller cities, their lower charges for these two things help us keep conference registration rates low.

Many NAI members don't realize that hotels charge \$45-\$75/gallon for coffee and tea and that there are a flat 18%-22% service charge and taxes from 5-12% added to the base cost. A plated lunch may be listed on the catering menu for \$22, but taxes and service charge may mean that NAI pays \$29/lunch. It is not atypical to have a \$75,000 - \$100,000 food and beverage bill at the end of a conference.

One place where hotels are willing to work with organizations is on meeting space rental and this often is tied to the total amount of the food and beverage. We make every attempt to work with hotels or convention centers that waive meeting space rental if we serve food and beverage that costs a certain amount before taxes or service charges.

### Some of the factors to consider and questions to answer are:

- What are hotel rates?
- What is the lodging tax?
- Are there at least 400 rooms available on peak nights?
- Is there a government rate available for many of our attendees?
- Is there enough meeting space for everything our group needs to do at the conference? (i.e. 20,000 square feet of exhibit space, a general session ballroom for 800+ attendees, 15 break-out rooms, centralized registration area)
- Are there meeting rooms close to the exhibit hall?
- Can the break-out rooms be set for 50-100 attendees?
- Is there a re-set charge for meeting rooms to be re-set from one day to the next?
- How much is meeting space rental?
- Is there reasonable airport access from throughout the US?
- How many cities have direct flights into the given city?
- Is the location walkable or will attendees need to use alternative transportation to get to restaurants or night life?
- Is there green space nearby?
- Will we be the only group at the venue or will we be sharing space with other groups?
- Is there reasonable shuttle service from the airport?

- What is the comp rate? (For every certain number of paid hotel rates, NAI received a complimentary night and this is how we pay for staff rooms.)
- Can the hotel offer a cut-off date that complements our members' typical late registration pattern?
- Can we get a complimentary suite for the president for meetings and receptions he / she hosts?
- Can we get complimentary lodging for the conference committee to meet on-site 6-8 months before the event?
- If we are meeting at a convention center, how far is it from the host hotel?
- If it is too far to walk in inclement weather, will the host provide complimentary shuttle service?
- Does the hotel use any of the hotel room fees to pay convention center for meeting space rental?
- Does the local Convention and Visitors Bureau have a fund that helps off-set meeting space rental?
- Can the meeting space be put on a 24-hour hold?
- Is there discounted or complimentary guest parking?
- Is there in-house catering available? If so, what are the costs? How much is the service charge?
- Are the vegetarian and vegan options good? (Our membership is about 12% vegetarian.)
- Are there good options for off-site sessions within a 2-hour radius?
- Are there potential traffic problems?
- Is there a local transportation contractor and what are those fees?
- Can NAI bring our own projectors and set up our own AV equipment in the meeting rooms? Are we bound by State laws or venue policies to use union labor to assist with or to handle these tasks?
- Are there "green" and sustainable practices in place at the venue we will be using?
- Are there any other financial incentives to select the given city?

**SITE SELECTION GAME:** Each of the four cities listed below has met the general criteria for our national conference: they have enough hotel rooms and meeting space and the floorplan seems like it would work for us; in other words, the city looks good on paper. Staff has created a list of Pros and Cons based on the questions from above, the information received in proposals, and through site visits and follow-up questions. Which city would you select and why?

### Sample Conference Site Comparisons

City	Pros	Cons
#1	<p>Downtown close and charming Great convention center Great host hotels Exhibit Hall close to mtg. rooms 2 comp suites for duration Lots of off-site possibilities but not close Only group at convention center 13% lodging tax</p>	<p>Traffic may be problem - off-sites \$149/night (both properties); government per diem=\$125 Meeting cost \$19K—they are working on reducing it 15 direct flight cities</p>
#2	<p>Lots of off-site possibilities 1:30 comp rate \$8K check to NAI as incentive Only group at convention center 80 direct flight cities</p>	<p>3 suites @ group rate (0 comps) Only 4 meeting rooms close to exhibit hall \$129 and \$110 (2 hotels); Govt per diem=\$83 Convention center housed in different buildings Distance to downtown is 4 long block walk Traffic may be problem for off-sites 14.2% lodging tax</p>
#3	<p>Great location on River with walking trail near hotel and convention center Very walkable with lots of restaurants nearby Lots of off-site possibilities Green city and convention center New hotel Good convention center Only group at convention center 12% lodging tax + \$2/room/night</p> <hr/> <p>Alternative plan to meet in older hotel, but they would need to turn general session room into exhibit hall in 1 day (we did this in Denver)</p>	<p>5 meeting rooms close to exhibit hall in convention center 11 direct flight cities \$135; Govt per diem=\$88/S, \$98/D, \$108/T, \$118/Q with not many rooms at this rate in block 2 junior suites @ group rate (0 comps)</p>
#4	<p><i>Partners Program</i> w/ 2 sister cities; if we book both = \$14K rebate to NAI Green city / convention center Good convention center Exhibit hall across from all meeting rooms Lots of off-site possibilities 2 comp suites for duration; 1 @ group rate Need to take public transport to get to restaurants No sales tax on F&amp;B Comp public transportation tix for delegates 60 direct flight cities</p>	<p>Partners program would lock us in to two Midwestern cities back to back Comp public transportation or 3-4block walk from hotel \$139/night std rooms; 50%= premium rooms @ \$159; government per diem=\$137 Is a repeat city 14.5% lodging tax</p>