

How to Justify Conference Attendance

This article provides some easy-to-use tools to help you calculate the investment and identify your return.

Understanding Your Conference Expenses

Conference expenses are affected by a number of factors. Before you can even begin to justify conference expenses, you need to calculate what these expenses are. To do so, use the following *Expenses Worksheets* to develop a cost estimate for attending your selected conference.

Expenses Worksheet

<i>Expense</i>	<i>Guideline</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Conference Registration		\$
Pre & Post Conference Class Registration, if applicable	Usually optional	\$
Materials Fee (if any)	Books? Software? Media?	\$
Flight	Try a web travel service to get a quick rate with Estimate	\$
Lodging	Conferences usually have special rates w/hotel	\$
Transportation: airport to hotel	If flying: taxi? Car rental?	\$
Mileage Reimbursement	Driving to conference? To the airport for your Flight? Use mapquest to calculate distance, then multiply miles by (IRS standand)	\$
Parking Reimbursement	At airport for flight departure, or at hotel where conference is located	\$
Food per diem	See CSFA guidelines. Remember, most include breakfast, lunch & dinner	\$
Subtotal		\$
Total number of employees going		
= TOTAL		\$

Understanding the Benefits

Let's face it, many benefits from conference attendance are hard to quantify. For example, experts agree that the top benefits of conference attendance is networking value. Where else can you find so many industry contacts facing the same issues as your organization? Are there solutions you're not aware of?

Although networking is undoubtedly the most important aspect of a conference, it is also the toughest for which to quantify any value.

On the other hand, if an employee came to you and said, "I want you to fund me a \$4,000 and I don't know what it'll do for you," then you would likely scoff at the offer...and maybe even mumble a few colorful metaphors about his/her suggestions.

When you propose a conference for approvals, don't focus on how much you want to go, *focus on what you will specifically bring back to the organization as payback for the investment.*

Some specific details you'll need to identify include:

- ◆ **Session content.** What session have particular relevance to your organization's work? Specifically identify:
 - Tools (authoring tools, content management systems, etc.)
 - Technologies
 - Processes
- ◆ **Vendor Contacts.** Will the conference showcase vendors with tools you use or are evaluating for potential future use? Is this an opportunity during which you'll be able to compare competing tools.
- ◆ **Best practices.** Will there be training session in areas that will immediately benefit your group?
- ◆ **Training.** Will there be workshops designed to teach attendees a special skill and/or help your team overcome current or future challenge?

Quantifying the Benefits

Although you might understand the benefits of the conference that interests you, your manager may not. Therefore, to be most effective in justifying the conference, you need to clearly articulate the connection between your organization's knowledge requirement and the conference program. **DO NOT** assume that your manager will be able to automatically make those distinctions.

To support this process, use the following *Benefits Worksheet* to help you focus on the benefits. Use whatever make sense for your particular organization and conference, and omit the rest.

Benefits Worksheet

Your Organization's Benefits	Specific Needs and the Conference Session & Training that Meet the Need
Networking Benefits	This conference will allow [specific team members] to network with other professionals and vendors in the industry. We will be able to take the pulse of what is happening for tools, technologies & processes, and hear ideas we weren't even aware of.
Teambuilding (if sending a big part of your group)	This conference will help build our teams, providing a forum for team members to discuss tool, technologies, and processes and how we might apply them in our company to improve our information products, workflow and processes
Current Tools	
Future Tools Exploration	
Current Technologies	
Future Technologies Exploration	
Current Processes	
Future Processes Exploration	
Vendors with Tools & Technologies You are Exploring	

It's all in the Selling

After you have identified the specific knowledge benefit, you've proved both the expenses and benefits you manager needs to decide the value of your proposition.

Sell your conference proposition!