

## Guide to Planning a WCN Conference

A conference date will be selected with input from the WCN Board, the conference chair and the host synagogue. Be attentive to specific dates; Father's Day, Shavuot and other conferences such as Hava Nashira and the ACC.

### **Committee**

~Form a local committee and meet regularly to work on the conference programming. Your committee may include members from other states so the planning meetings can occur in person or via conference calls. The initial meetings should focus on ideas such as presenters, workshops, services, evening programs and if the conference you are hosting will have a theme.

~It is recommended that the planning for the annual June conference should begin at least by the Fall prior to the conference date.

~Delegate responsibility to committee members in areas such as: hotel, catering, registration, packets, vendors, tzedekah project...

~Delegate responsibility to committee members to work with presenters specifically to assist them in a variety of areas, including but not limited to, materials, audio/visual equipment, instruments, sound...

### **Programming**

Contact speakers

Confirm dates and times

Discuss honorarium (typically \$200 plus their lunch or dinner if they are presenting right before or after a meal)

What she/he/they will require logistically (space, a/v, instruments, music stands, etc)

Get biographical and workshop information

Write confirmation letter including the name and contact information of the liaison. Also include in this letter the agreed honorarium if there is one. (cc to treasurer)

At the conference – give a thank you note to the presenter along with the honorarium or gift.

Be certain that each presenter knows who their liaison is. The liaison should be a committee member.

Give major consideration to soliciting expertise of our members. It has been our practice that WCN members do not receive honoraria but rather a gift expressing our thanks.

### **Workshop**

There has been a practice of holding concurrent workshops. This is not always a popular option because many members don't want to miss anything. Try not to offer more than two or three at a time and consider

repeating them. Often, the concurrent workshops prove more effective for conferences with a larger number in attendance. It is suggested that Keynote Presentations take place in the morning while concurrent workshops are scheduled in the afternoon.

#### **Services (T'filot)**

~Invite Sh'lichei Tzibur

~Invite Torah Readers

~Siddurim-Insure that your Congregation has a sufficient number of siddurim. You may also want to borrow siddurim from another movement/synagogue in your area.

~Shacharit and ma'ariv

~D'var torah at Monday shacharit

We are obligated to present a wide range of worship services; Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Renewal...committee members should be mindful of this when asking members to lead services. Traditionally the host committee has lead the first Ma'ariv service of the conference. When considering service leaders for all other services, please be mindful of involving members who may be seeking this special opportunity and be sure to include newer members of our organization, not just our veterans. Also advise those leading that weekday nusach is an important component of our services along with beautiful and inspiring musical selections.

#### **Evening programs**

Depending on our host city, we have experienced a variety of ways to "kick off" our conference. We've enjoyed dinner at the hosting synagogue followed by a program or "ice breaker."

The WCN's tradition on the opening evening of the conference is to host a "Kumsitz" in which members can share music. Because of the growing popularity of the Kumsitz, we have assigned a committee member to take responsibility of organizing this late night event.

Guidelines for the Kumsitz include 1) signing up by a specific date, 2) limiting your presentation to 5 minutes, 3) bringing enough copies of the piece you are presenting for everyone registered for the conference. The Kumsitz will happen either at the host congregation or at the hotel.

Over the years our conferences have boasted fabulous and wide ranging evening events that are, often times, open to the community. When it is deemed appropriate, a nominal fee has been in place for non-WCN attendees. These fees either defray conference costs or are donated to the conference tzedekah project.

Evening programs have included; concerts by artists outside of the WCN, concerts by WCN members (whether an individual, a group or a variety of performers) choirs, instrumentalists, actors, storytellers,

**comedians and WCN group activities such as dancing, seeing the host city by night and visiting a museum.**

**In coordinating a conference schedule please be mindful of...**

**Posting the schedule to the WCN website**

**Allowing time for relaxation and scheduled free time**

**Scheduling WCN business meeting at a lunch or dinner- consult with President**

**Scheduling WCN board meeting – normally occurs prior to conference registration**

**Adhering to scheduled start and end times for all workshops and services.**

### **Registration**

**Programming plans should be confirmed and registration information should be made available to the membership, via our website, at least 5 months prior to a conference.**

**Tips for the coordination of the registration information-**

**~Use existing forms as template**

**~Include hotel information**

**~Include scholarship application information**

**~Include exhibitor information & application form (for members or non-members selling their goods)**

**~Return date and fee (include early bird date and fee, and others)**

**~Travel information should include nearest airports, car rentals, trains, hotel limo or shuttle if applicable and driving directions.**

**~The Treasurer and two members of the WCN Board will work together to address scholarship requests. Scholarships are typically awarded in one of three areas; travel, hotel or registration.**

### **Hotel**

**~Hotel arrangements – The committee will find a hotel that they believe will best accommodate our conference. The WCN treasurer will then negotiate the details with the hotel of choice. Typically we require 40 hotel rooms.**

**~Provide information on our website about reserving a hotel room including the deadline for the group rate. If possible, please provide reservation link to the hotel on line.**

**~Our contact person at the designated hotel should be aware that we may require a room for meal together, or for a program or for the after-hours kumsitz. We will also ask for a room for a relaxed, social gathering. This could be a special suite provided for the President of the WCN.**

**~In recent years the WCN has moved away from home hospitality.**

## **Meals**

- ~Kosher (non-meat) and/or veggie
- ~Consider having some fat-free, non-flour, sugar-free foods for people with allergies, diabetes. **INCLUDE IN THE REGISTRATION PACKETS A PLACE FOR MEMBERS TO DESCRIBE FOOD RESTRICTIONS.**
- ~Use one caterer. This can sometimes be cost effective. Vary the meals even with one caterer.
- ~Always have water/coffee/tea/fruit/snack set-up and available at all times. Please include sugar, sweetener, non-dairy creamer, etc.
- ~The WCN has made efforts to be eco-conscious. Our preference is to use a limited amount of paper and plastic products.
- ~In negotiating the hotel arrangements, the WCN treasurer will check to see if breakfast is included. If not, other arrangements will need to be made.
- ~Always include a protein at breakfast.
- ~Engage volunteers at the temple to help with meals.

## **Publicity**

***\*\*Regarding publicity and public relations, always consider the status of security at the time of the conference.***

- ~Press releases – send copies to local newspapers
- ~Is there a local paper who would be interested in covering the conference?
- ~Fliers to all local synagogues
- ~Mailings to known local cantors/soloists, not members of WCN
- ~Publicity via social media

## **Conference Registration and Packet**

- ~Packet includes schedule, name tag, music, pad of paper, tzedekah project information, pen/pencil. It may also contain miscellaneous newspaper articles.
- ~Some host cities have opted to provide a conference tote-bag to hold all the items listed above. If the budget allows and/or if congregants or local companies have agreed to donate products, sometimes the tote-bag may include a variety of “gifts” such as a kippah, water bottle, snacks, cosmetics, etc.
- ~Have several markers at the registration table so participants can label their packet or tote-bag.
- ~Committee members as well as WCN Board members will volunteer at the registration table to check-in members.

**~During the registration process, conference participants will have an opportunity to sign up to assist our Newsletter Editor in writing a brief article on one workshop.**

### **Vendors**

- ~Have vendors at specific times, when members will have time to shop.**
- ~The vendor will be charged a table fee which is due prior to the start of the conference.**
- ~Logistics: tables, location, signage**

### **Tzedekah project**

- ~The committee will choose a worthy, local project for the WCN to support on behalf on the host city. WCN will donate a designated amount to this charity per the knowledge of the President and Treasurer.**
- ~The committee may have a brief presentation on the project to present to the conference attendees.**

### **Budget**

- ~Base the conference fee on pre-determined costs (food, programming, fees for concerts, etc.) and expected number of attendees**
- ~Some scholarships to attendees are awarded and paid for by WCN.**
- ~Expect unforeseen costs**
- ~Submit budget ahead of time to the WCN Treasurer for approval.**
- ~Remember that some pre-scheduled programming may have to be altered or eliminated based on the final numbers of conference attendees.**

**The Guide to Planning a WCN Conference is respectfully submitted by Francyne Davis Jacobs, Kathy Sebo and Robin Sparr. March 2016**