Conference Organizational Guide

OVERVIEW

The ECC (Event Coordination Committee) provides the initial review of proposals and analyzes the financial, geographic, and logistical elements for all AES events–Conventions, Training & Development, or Conferences–aside from section-organized activities. The ECC provides input and new ideas for events and the people to lead them, and coordinates with HQ to incorporate all events into a scheduled calendar.

Conferences focus on a specific field of audio engineering and serve to create a forum amongst professionals in that field. These gatherings include presentation of peer-reviewed papers with academic and scientific focus and may include partners, tabletops, and posters.

The principal purpose of this document is to assist with the development of the framework to ensure the conference is successful academically and commercially viable.

1st STEP: SURVEY

Event planning starts with filling out a [Survey Monkey](#) form which will ask for the following info:
- Proposed Topic
- Location: city and potential venue
- Approximate date (minimum 12 months out, preferably 18 - 24 months out)
- Names of Conference Committee members (preferably not exceeding 8 members)
- Potential sponsors
- Approximate number of participants
- Proposed conference fee

Further detail on this is provided below, but if you do not have all of the info available when you submit the survey, then just include as much as you can to get the process started. The survey will be forwarded to the Conference Chair, who will follow up to discuss moving onto the next step.

2nd STEP: THE OUTLINE PROPOSAL AND PRELIMINARY BUDGET

The next steps are to shape an outline proposal and budget for initial review and comment by the ECC.

OUTLINE PROPOSAL

Topic Area and Suggested Title

Identify the topic area a conference will cover. Please research thoroughly before submitting a preliminary outline proposal; there should be enough academic and/or commercial research activity in the topic area to ensure enough papers submissions to fill the program. All AES conferences have the same title format: [Year] AES International Conference on [Topic].

Organizing Committee

Please have key members of your Organizing Committee in place for the **Preliminary Outline**:

- Conference Chair (preferably one, two is acceptable)
- Papers Chair (preferably one, two is acceptable)
- Treasurer

Chair positions are filled by AES Members who are acknowledged experts in the topic area. Other roles can be filled by any Member, Fellow, or Associate Member, or Student Member in some instances. A Conference Co-Chair may double as Treasurer.

Other Chairs can be suggested in the initial proposal or added later as needed (for example Chairs of Workshops, Lodgings, Food & Beverage, Facilities, Logistics, etc.). While every conference is unique, each should have an Event Committee which should comprise no more than eight members. While Organizing Committee positions are not paid, they come with a free pass to the event and occupy a seat that might otherwise be available to a paying attendee, so by limiting the size you can help your event to be more commercially viable. If the Event Chair(s) wishes to support a larger Committee, they should endeavor to work with and include Event Committee members who will get institutional support for their expenses.

If possible, any student volunteers working on the conference should be AES Student Members.

Key members of the full Organizing Committee may include (but are not limited to):
- Conference Chair/Co-Chairs (preferably one, two is acceptable)
- Papers Chair(s) (preferably one, two is acceptable)
- Workshops Chair(s)
- Treasurer
- Facilities/Logistics Chairs
- Sponsors Chair
- Volunteers Chair

Reasonable expenses incurred in the performance of committee member duties may be reimbursed, provided they have been approved in advance by the Committee's Treasure.

No member of the Organizing Committee is authorized to sign any contract, including those with third parties providing paid-for services such as marketing, publicity, or web/graphic design, without consulting AES HQ. Normally such services will be provided by the AES HQ staff or our approved contractors, and **entering contracts is a decision that only HQ and the Board of Directors are authorized to make**.

Suggested Dates for the Conference

Conferences should be proposed and planned at least 12 months in advance, preferably 18-24 months in advance. We have learned that planning and advertising conferences more than 12 months in advance increases their success. Before deciding on dates, please check conflicts including other audio-related events such as AES conventions, conferences, events presented by other audio-related organizations, and widely observed public and religious holidays, particularly those in the region where the conference is to be held. Local festivals, and major sports and other events likely to draw large crowds should be considered because they can have an impact on the availability and pricing of hotels and venues. AES HQ and the ECC can help when considering dates.

Location and venue

This choice will often be dictated by the country, city and/or academic establishment where the Conference is proposed, and the geographic location of the key committee members. Ultimately, the ECC Conference Committee Chair and HQ staff will help vet suggested locations/venues, and HQ staff will lead the

negotiation and contracting processes if applicable. While it is not always possible, **it is always preferred to host events at a university or corporate partner that can donate, sponsor, or subsidize the space**.

Number of anticipated participants

It is challenging to assess potential attendance. Where possible it should be based on prior experience with similar events, such as previous AES Conferences or other organizations' conferences on the same or similar topics.

PRELIMINARY BUDGET - KEY ITEMS FOR INCLUSION

Please start with the User Configuration tab of *this spreadsheet* to propose a budget for the event (or request a copy from the ECC Conference Chair).

Setting registration fees

Determining the optimum fee structure for a conference involves comparisons with similar events and careful analysis of all anticipated costs. Costs fall into two main categories:

- **Fixed costs**: venue, audio-visual support, and any expenses incurred by the conference committee or invited speakers. Fixed costs do not vary regardless of the number of attendees.

- **Variable costs:** determined directly by the number of participants and include lunches and coffee. The number of free passes that are issued will impact this category as the cost incurred will need to be covered by paying participants.

Currency Conversion Rate

If the conference is to be held outside the U.S., the majority of costs will be incurred in the local currency. These should be converted into US Dollars at the prevailing exchange rate. All fees for participants and sponsors are set in US Dollars irrespective of where the conference is to be held.

Venue

The choice of venue has a major impact on the cost of a conference and its profitability. Using a conference venue or hotel not only incurs charges for meeting rooms and catering, but frequently a requirement to use in-house A/V, with service charges and tax being added on top. The ideal location for an AES conference is an academic institution or corporate partner, where the meeting space is either donated or provided at a subsidized price. While there's a need to pay for catering, and possibly some A/V equipment and facilities for sponsors, the charges for these are usually lower. This means we can either reduce registration fees, increase profitability, or ideally a combination of both.

5% Contingency

Venue and catering prices tend to increase annually. Try to get estimates based on the proposed conference dates, or at least an idea of the expected increase for that year – then add 5% because everything will cost more than you anticipated!

Proposed Registration Fees

Estimating fees can consider the fees of past Conferences or similar events. The easiest way to approximate conference fees is to base them on your best guess regarding cost per person. The chart below shows Conference Admission Fees *based on costs estimated to be $250 per person*. Doubling the cost to establish the fee will work on many conferences, but smaller niche conferences will typically have to exceed cost x 2 to ensure covering HQ expenses and providing a surplus.

Attendee	Cost *estimated*		*multiplied by*	Total **Members**	+ Fee * *Membership*	Total **Non-Members**
Full Participants	$250	×	2.0	$500	$125	$625
Students	$250	×	1.2 (60% of full fee)	$300	$50	$350
Authors	$250	×	1.5 (75% of full fee)	$375	$125	$500
Student Authors	$250	×	1.0 (50% of full fee)	$250	$50	$300
Workshop Presenters	$250	×	1.0 (50% of full fee)	$250	$125	$375

* Non-members will become members for one year based on the additional fee, which is credited to AES Membership. These funds should not be reflected as a credit in your budget. Membership status allows them access to the Conference proceedings posted on the AES E-Library.

25% Margin

Organizing a Conference requires a significant amount of work by the volunteers and HQ staff. To ensure this overhead is covered we expect a conference to achieve a surplus of 25% after all costs − e.g., $80,000 income less ≤$60,000 cost = ≥$20,000 surplus. Some conferences may have smaller target audiences and thereby lower income, but in all cases, we require a minimum surplus of $10,000.

Estimating Costs

Below is an example of a Preliminary Budget:

Description				Total
Initial estimate of fixed costs: venue, A/V				12,000
Initial estimate of variable costs: food/beverage/other per-delegate	150	x	120*	18,000
* Number of participants including all free passes: 120				
Total fixed and variable costs for 120 participants				**30,000**

Cost per participant: $30,000 divided by 120 Participants = **$250.00 per person**.

Registration fees will vary according to the market sector; however, we believe there should be at least a minimum ratio between the fees charged and the costs involved, and also between the various categories of participants (members, authors, students).

Presenters - Keynote, Invited Speakers, Authors

Typically, there will be **one keynote speaker.** Their conference pass and lodgings will typically be covered. Any additional featured or invited speakers will qualify only for a conference pass. On a case-by-case basis the ECC may approve additional expenses for the keynote, such as travel. **A keynote speaker or an invited speaker/author will not receive a stipend or any other pay from AES in exchange for their speech.** A sponsorship opportunity would be for a sponsor to pay any additional expenses for a keynote speaker or featured/invited speakers, as long as their speech is not commercial.

Presenters who only attend for the day of their presentation rather than the entire Conference may be offered a free day pass at the discretion of the Conference Committee.

SPONSORSHIPS

Industry support is essential but should not be relied upon to make up for any shortfall resulting from underestimating the costs of participant fees. Participation fees fund the core costs of the conference, including a 25% margin. Sponsorship income funds extra-curricular activities, such as social gatherings, ancillary catering, giveaways and, wherever possible, provide additional income from the event.

Sponsorships are typically divided into tiers: Platinum, Gold, and Silver. Sometimes a basic Bronze level is offered. Where sponsorship from large corporations is available a top-tier Emerald category may be added. All tiers apart from Bronze will be credited on the conference pages on the AES website and in promotional materials.

The amount charged for each tier is likely dependent on the market the conference serves. With commercial operators the fees can be higher and lower for largely academic events.

Guidelines and *approximate* fees per tier:

These may be adjusted to suit the individual needs of sponsors, but the basic guidelines above should be adhered to when possible:

- Bronze (if offered) – $1,500 to include logo on conference welcome slide, brochure, or other insert in participant bag only. No registrations included. Company representatives must register and pay to attend. Does not include acknowledgement on the AES website or promotional material.

- Silver – $3,000: One complimentary registration, logo on conference welcome slide, brochure, or other insert in participant bag.

- Gold –$5,000: As Silver plus one additional registration (total 2), tabletop for display (table supplied) with space for a roll-up banner behind (not provided).

- Platinum (normally the top tier) – $7,000: As Gold plus one additional registration (total 3), option for 'Platinum Talk' (if appropriate).

- Emerald (where appropriate) – A premium tier which should carry a minimum fee of $10,000 and include: Up to 4 registrations, separate demo room or larger area in the main room, option for 'Emerald Talk' (if appropriate).

Representatives of sponsoring organizations who are not eligible for a free pass may register at Member rate without being required to pay the additional fee to join the AES (although they will need to be AES Members to access any conference proceedings in the E-Library).

Sponsorships may be offered for specific aspects of the conference such as a social event. In this instance the tier should be set in line with the value of the contribution, using the pricing guidelines above. Other sponsorship opportunities include direct sponsorship of grants for students to attend the conference or sponsorship of a second keynote speaker in covering their travel, lodgings, and expenses, provided that their talk is independent of the company's business.

No sponsorship offering should carry any guarantee of a speaking opportunity as part of the academic program. However, as an alternative, the top-tier Platinum sponsors (and/or Emerald where included) may be offered a 15–20-minute sponsored session as part of their package – for example, a 'Platinum Talk'. The fact these are promotional should be made obvious to participants and content can therefore be of a more commercial nature, although it should still be informative and relevant to the overall theme of the conference. The talks can be grouped into a single session or a series of sessions to suit the scheduling, but they must be clearly delineated as separate from the main conference program.

ECC Event Coordination Committee

If your team gets the sponsors, the sponsorships go directly to help fund your conference. As we have moved into a new executive leadership model, there is an option to have our executive leadership team seek out sponsors for you. **In that event, a percentage of those funds will go to the executive leadership team**. The committee suggests that you start looking for sponsors right away (after Board approval), and if you are not happy with the progress, we can seek help from the leadership team.

European VAT Liability

For conferences held in Europe it is crucial that the word 'Exhibition' is never used to describe the sponsor's demonstration area. Doing so could have serious implications in terms of VAT liability.

Social events

These gatherings provide participants and sponsors with extremely valuable networking opportunities and are encouraged. To keep costs under control we strongly discourage dinners or other social events paid for through the event budget. Many conferences have chosen to offer a mixer in lieu of a sit-down dinner to offer networking opportunities at a lower cost.

If a dinner is presumed, the cost of a dinner or other peripheral social activity can either be covered directly by a sponsor, by sponsorship income included in the registration fee, or a separate (optional) registration.

A separate registration fee is a useful alternative when places for a social activity are limited to a number which may be lower than the anticipated number of registered delegates, for example a sit-down meal at a restaurant or other venue with a finite capacity. This separate fee should be set at a figure which considers the overall cost per person, including transportation, gratuities, and other service fees, as well as covering any free seats which are offered to VIPs. Whether the organizing committee chooses to pay for themselves or not is at their discretion (it does of course have an impact on the cost for paying participants) but to keep the ticket price at a reasonable level it may not always be possible to offer free places to student volunteers or other *ad hoc* helpers. With this option we do not expect a 25% surplus, however we still recommend allowing a margin of at least 10% to cover contingencies.

NEXT STEP: PROPOSAL AND BUDGETS SENT TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Once the proposal and budget are worked through, revised, and approved by the Conference Committee and the ECC, they are then sent to the Board of Governors for advice and consent, and subsequently to the Board of Directors for approval. The ECC and HQ follows up with the organizers to see events through to fruition and to review with the intent to improve future events and to ensure that events stay within proposed parameters.

RELATED FORMS on the AES Propose a Conference page:
Conference Budget Template
Conference One-Sheet
Conference Survey link