



Overview of Planning a Conference

(Updated 2019)

What Am I Getting Into?

The purpose of this overview is to give potential and beginning conference planners an idea of what is involved in planning an SSSA Annual Conference. The SSSA has a complete conference handbook with in-depth details on each of the topics. It is assumed that the reader has already attended a conference and/or has a basic idea of what happens during a conference from an attendee's point of view.

Planning a conference entails four main areas of work:

1. Hotel and Meals
2. Child Care
3. Speakers
4. Registration & Organization

How Much Time Does it Take?

The planning process should start 18 months ahead of time. The time commitment is reasonably gradual from 18 months to 6 months prior and tends to come in spurts such as when you're researching hotels, investigating child care or creating the registration package. The time period from 6 months to 3 months prior is busy, requiring about 5 hours per week of work. The final 3 months are very busy, requiring at least 10 hours per week of work, often more. No matter how well organized you are, the final week, you go crazy!

How Many People Are Needed?

Ideally, you should have a core committee of 2 to 4 dedicated people to plan a conference. At least 1 or 2 of them should live in or very close to the city where the conference will take place. The others can live in the general vicinity up to three or more hours away. You can do most of the planning and decision making with e-mail and telephone calls although a few face-to-face get-togethers really help move things more quickly. Also, members of the SSSA Board of Directors and the SSSA Conference Team are prepared to provide advice and take on some tasks.

How Do We Choose a Date?

The conference can be held any weekend from mid-July to early August depending on the availability of our Advisory Board professionals that offer private consultations and speak at the conference, availability of hotels and your personal schedule.

How Many People Come?

Average attendance is about 60-80 families with somewhere around 200 adults and 70 children.

What about Money?

Revenue

The SSSA Conference Liaison will help prepare the budget with you. Revenue comes from two sources: registration fees and donations. Currently, the SSSA sets registration fees around \$160 US per person (adult or child) with an early bird fee of \$135. The budget assumes that three-quarters of attendees pay the early bird fee. In order to offset costs, you are also expected to approach local organizations for donations of cash or goods or services towards the conference. Your efforts at getting donations can make a big difference to the bottom line and allow you to greatly enhance your conference.

Expenses

The SSSA budgets for each conference to break even. In the end, the SSSA is able to cover a deficit if attendance is low or there are unexpected expenses. You will not lose money yourself.

All funds will go through the SSSA. The SSSA will collect all registration money, sign all contracts and pay all major expenses directly. You should only incur minor expenses which the SSSA will reimburse with receipts.

Below is a rough idea of a conference budget. Please keep in mind that these are only approximations and figures can vary substantially.

Income

Registration Fees (135 @ \$125pp, 45 @ \$140pp)	\$23,175.
PayPal Processing Fees	(\$575.)
Donations	\$4,000.
Total Income	<hr/> \$26,600.

Expenses

Hotel (meals, meeting room rentals)	\$15,000.
Child Care (staff, room rentals, field trip)	\$5,000.
Entertainment (Friday evening)	\$300.
Speakers and Honorariums	\$2,800.
Printed Materials	\$ 1,000.
Audio-Visual Equipment Rentals	\$2,000.
Miscellaneous	\$500.
Total Expenses	<hr/> \$26,600.

Hotel

You are responsible for researching hotels and presenting options and recommendations to the SSSA. Research should be done 18 to 15 months prior to the conference so that the SSSA can sign a contract by 13 months prior. Major requirements for the hotel are:

- child-friendly
- convenient to a major airport
- block of 50 guest rooms (prefer price range of \$100-\$150/night)
- banquet facilities (for approx. 250 – 300 people)
- 2 meeting rooms (seating for approx. 75 adults each)
- 4 medium sized meeting rooms (for childcare)

Food

Food is a major expense and requires more attention than you would expect. You must organize and pay for meals for all attendees for Friday dinner, Saturday lunch and Sunday breakfast. You must also provide coffee breaks on Saturday morning and afternoon for the adults and snacks for the children. All other meals are the responsibility of the attendee.

Child Care

Organizing a quality, fun child care program is a huge task and is extremely important to the success of the conference. You need to provide both the staff and the activities (i.e. toys/entertainment/outings). Child care is required on Saturday from 8am to 5pm and Sunday from 8am to Noon and you will need 20 - 30 childcare staff. You can find child care staff in many different ways such as:

- hiring a childcare company (easiest, but tends to be very expensive)
- relief care agencies
- day home agencies
- homemaker services or babysitting agencies
- university or college students in child or health related fields of study
- volunteers from family and friends

Children are usually broken into four age groups as follows. Approximately half or more of the children will have Sotos syndrome. Depending on their level of functioning, a few adults with Sotos may also require supervision.

	Age Range	Approx. No. of Children	Child Care Ratio
Infants	0 – 3 years	10	1:2
Pre-School Ages	4 – 6 years	20	1:3
School Age	7 – 11 years	15	1:5
Teens & Adults	12 years and up	25	Depends on type of field trip

The 0 – 6 year old children stay on-site and you need to provide toys and activities for them. Having an entertainer (such as a magician) on Saturday afternoon is popular, but optional. The children stay in child care for lunch.

You need to organize a field trip for the teen group for all day Saturday including transportation, admission and lunch. Children ages 7 to 11 may also go on the field trip if it is appropriate for their age. Appropriate destinations are places like a zoo, amusement park, or other exciting tourist attraction in your area. All costs of the field trip are to be covered by the general registration fees (i.e. no extra charge to participants).

Speakers

You will need 10 to 12 speakers for the weekend. Talks are usually 60 to 90 minutes long. Two or more of our Advisory Board professionals always do presentations on Sotos syndrome. You organize the rest of the speakers from local sources such as universities, health care professionals (such as SLPs, OTs and PTs), educators and other people in the field of special needs. You should aim for at least two streams of topics: infant/young child issues and teen/adult issues. The vast majority of the speaker budget is used to pay for our Advisory Board professional from England's travel expenses leaving a smaller amount for honorariums and expenses for other speakers.

Printed Materials and Advertising

The SSSA has online registration which is put together with our webmaster. Other printed materials such as a program, name tags, feedback forms are also available to be customized and should be done you.

You will be expected to provide short newsletter articles advertising your conference. The SSSA will put this information in their newsletter and on their website.

Registration

Attendees will submit their registration forms and money directly to the SSSA. The SSSA has a Registration person who will track registrations, send confirmations, schedule doctor appointments, answer questions, and so on.

Entertainment

You must organize family entertainment for after dinner on Friday evening. Popular options have been a DJ, photo booth, local children's entertainer, puppet show. You may choose to offer one or two optional excursions/entertainment on Saturday evening to foster networking between attendees and allow them to experience your local attractions. Attendees who participate in the optional Saturday activities would pay extra to cover the cost of these activities.