

Maximize the Return on Your Agency's Investment

Help get the maximum return on the time and money your Agency invests in sending you to training conferences.

Attendance at any training program or conference is a significant expense and more and more organizations are limiting the number of folks they will send to any single event. If you want your office to continue approving your attendance year after year, consider the following recommendations to get the most bang for your employers' buck – and the greatest return on your professional development.



Put advance thought into the sessions that you will attend. Make sure that the sessions you elect will benefit both your employer and your own professional development.

Show up for sessions five minutes early. Get a seat so that you will be engaged and sit next to someone that you haven't met before. Meeting new contacts and networking with folks with similar interests is one of the key benefits of attending a conference. Be sure to add to the interactivity of the session by posing questions or sharing experiences that help others.

Divide and conquer. If other employees from your organization are attending, make sure to split up and attend different sessions and expand your ability to network. Sit next to a stranger in a workshop or at lunch. Try to make it a personal goal to evenly split your time between making the acquaintance of those you haven't met before and reconnecting with those you have.

Stay in touch with your office. Periodically check your voice and e-mail messages, especially if you have fires burning that need to be tended to by others. Keep conversations with the office focused on the educational and networking value of the conference – not on the lavish parties, great entertainment, and the host city's attractions.

Complete a trip report within a week of returning. By documenting the value that both you and your employer will receive because of your

attendance, you will help communicate the ROI. Make recommendations to share appropriate session content, handouts, or other information picked up during the trade show that will benefit your co-workers.

Build your network. Send follow-up notes and contact information to people you met with whom you would like to keep in touch. Expanding your sphere of contacts puts you in a better position to improve your performance and increase your value to your employer.

Follow through. Make your involvement in the organization that held the training conference more than a one-time event. Take an active role at the chapter level, to continue your professional development and networking throughout the year. This will also help you gain approval for attending national events.

Finally, take your own advice. Use these suggestions to maximize your own or a member of your staff's professional development when attending professional conferences.