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Conference Site Selection FAQ's

How does ABSA International choose a conference site?

ABSA International rotates sites across the country in a three-year rotation: East, Midwest, and West. Request for Proposals (RFP's) are sent by the ABSA Office five years in advance to a number of cities and hotels in the specific areas. We book five years out so that we have more options to choose from, as we compete with many other organizations to find a good location.

We have specific minima for conference space, exhibitor space, and pre-conference course space. We need at least 15,000 ft² for the main meeting space, 40,000 ft² for the exhibitors, and 12,000 ft² or 8 rooms for the pre-conference courses. These requirements are the major issue; only a few hotels have adequate space and most conference centers have far more space than we need and require we guarantee more hotel rooms and meeting space than we can fill. Because the ABSA International conference is too big for most hotels and too small for most convention centers we have to do a wide search.

The ABSA Office receives responses from visitor's bureaus or hotels in specific cities. The ABSA Office will then evaluate the proposals, negotiate, and visit the finalists. The feasible and recommended options are brought to Council at the October Council meeting. Council examines the data and determines the best city to perform a site visit (in conjunction with the Mid-term Council meeting). In the past, there were 2-4 hotels/city to choose from. Now, with the growing size of the association, it is frequently only one.

So, when you go to a city, what are the criteria for the winning hotel?

Council balances a number of criteria in selecting the facility, including:

- Overall cost –A variety of costs including room rates (both general meeting rates and government rates), rental fees, food & beverage, local labor costs, and more. In most cases the size of the city will be a cost factor, larger cities tend to be more expensive than smaller cities. Renting a convention center is frequently more expensive than hotel space, for both the space itself and transportation between the host hotel and the convention center.
- Accessible location The location needs to be accessible for national and international attendees and the cost of getting to and from the airport is considered.
- Functional meeting space We not only need to make sure that we have enough space for our meetings, but we need to make sure that the proximity and flow of the space is ideal for members.
- Quality of venue We look for a facility that is up to member standards physically and has a culture of quality service that will be a good partner in helping to make the members experience is a positive one.
- Availability of activities We look for facilities that are close to areas where members can dine, entertain, and experience local attractions.
- Fits in with ABSA culture A very important aspect of the ABSA conference is networking. We look for a venue where it is easy for members to connect and meet. To do this we try to avoid multiple hotels or having events in different locations.
- Optimal Dates We also need to find dates that do not conflict with holidays and related meetings.

• State vs. State laws/regulations: State laws consistently change, so it very difficult to monitor laws or regulations that may affect attendance from other states.

Could we hold conferences at a university and save on cost?

Holding the annual conference at a university conference center would mean that the conference would have to be held during the summer when the universities are on summer break. There is often considerable distance between housing and the meeting space (which itself could be in multiple buildings). A number of the large universities are not near major airports. Transportation to and from the airport and the possible need for on campus transportation could be expensive; there would be trade-offs.

Why do we have to pay for internet connections in our rooms?

Recently most hotels offer free internet in the sleeping rooms and common areas. Going forward, most of our future conference hotels will offer free internet in the hotel guest rooms.

Why can't we get free internet in the conference rooms?

In most cases, the internet in the meeting space is provided and managed by a third-party vendor and is not controlled by the hotel. The third-party provider has expenses to install the high-speed internet for hundreds of people in which they charge a fee to cover their expenses. These charges have been cost restrictive in the past but are getting more affordable in most locations. ABSA International will offer internet in the meeting space when it is possible and economical.