

# Make the Most of Conventions

## *How to save money and use your time wisely*

by Teresa Beard

Before jetting off to your next conference, scan this checklist of time and money savers. By eliminating last-minute headaches, the only thing you'll have to worry about is a fellow member asking, "Are we there yet?"

### Gearing Up

- Plan to attend conferences during the beginning of the school year or semester, so you can use new ideas immediately.
- If there are several events scheduled on the same dates, send a member to each one, if your budget allows. This way your group maximizes its representation and collects loads of new information. -Talk to your advisor, past officers, and other campus groups to find out which annual events will give you the most for your money. Then you can plan in advance and have funds left over for one-time or new meetings that you don't know about yet.
- Hold fund-raisers to cover travel and registration costs so you won't cut into your group's activities budget. Plan a few moneymaking events in the summer or late spring to leave some travel funds for next year's leaders.

### While You're There

- Get an updated itinerary before you arrive, if possible. Decide who will attend which sessions, and estimate travel time if events are scattered throughout a city. Also, get directions to all locations in advance.
- If there are several simultaneous workshops, send one member of your group to each one. That way you'll be able to get all materials such as handouts, pamphlets, stickers, and binders and benefit from all the speakers you've paid to hear.  
To get visibility for your group, set up a booth, enter awards competitions, or talk to the host group or school to see how you can get involved. Bring literature about your club to share, and wear school shirts and nametags to identify yourself. Also, take photos of yourself and members at sessions for your scrapbook, historian, and campus paper.
- Use a tape recorder or video camera, if permitted, to record lectures instead of taking notes-- then you'll hear everything and can take it home for students who couldn't attend.
- Be prepared with questions for the speakers. Besides getting a little publicity for your group, you can meet other schools with similar needs and issues. If there's a scheduled Q&A with a noted speaker or expert, research the topic and related issues ahead of time, or read something the lecturer has written, so you can be prepared.
- At the end of the day, host an informal "wind-down" time in your room to share what members of your group learned and discuss how you can apply it. Before you go to sleep, take a minute to reflect on what you learned. While it's fresh in your mind, make some notes to record your thoughts, then share this diary with your membership when you return. Use your notes to draft a detailed review of what you accomplished to report to your advisor and the press.

### Networking

- Don't just take advantage of the speakers and facilitators at events. Talk to other student leaders and participants to get ideas for what works and what doesn't on their campuses--tap into all the resources that the conference offers.
- Carry a watch, a day planner, business cards, resumes, and a pen and notepad--you never know whom you might meet or when you might hear a great idea.
- Split up your group--don't sit together at dinners, during free time, or at workshops. You're there to meet other people and to get new ideas.
- Consider taking emerging leaders, so they can network and learn about getting more involved in

the conference next year.

### **Money Savers**

- Registering way in advance can sometimes save some dough. Find out if you can get a group rate.
- Negotiate registration costs if possible to eliminate extra expenses like special recreational events or dinners.
- Ask if there's a special hotel rate for conference-goers, or find a cheaper hotel or a friend's house close to the convention center.
- Consider booking one suite that can sleep odd-numbered groups of five to seven and will cost less than two doubles. Plus, if you stay in an efficiency with a kitchen, you can fix your own food.
- Carpool with other campus groups or a nearby school, or check to see if the school has a van you can use. If not, shop around for affordable transportation like the train, bus, or a rental car, and request group rates or discounts such as AAA. Once you're there, use a hotel shuttle to get around town.
- Pump your own gas, carry your own bags, park your own car, and when possible, grab some fast food or visit a buffet, so you won't have to tip a server. Better yet, pack food from home or go to a grocery store. If you do go to a restaurant, bring coupons.
- Take toiletries, medicines, and film with you to avoid paying more at a hotel or airport gift shop.

While these tips are handy, the most important ingredients for having a great conference are the fresh ideas that you share and bring back with you. Careful planning will make your convention affordable, hassle-free, and a sound investment.