

Standard Operating Procedures
For an
SFRH&MS CONVENTION

The Santa Fe Railway Historical and Modeling Society developed this convention SOP as a guide and reference for prospective and current convention chairpersons and convention committees planning annual Society conventions. It is not intended to cover every event or situation involved in a convention, which would be impossible to do. Rather, it is intended to guide members, both those who have convention experience and those who do not, and provide an overall view of responsibilities and actions required for a successful convention.

Purpose

The purpose of our annual convention is to gather members together for educational and social reasons, to make available SFRH&MS items for sale at the Society store, and to conduct Society business at the Annual Business Meeting. The convention itself is not intended to solely generate operating revenue for the Society

Society Board of Directors Responsibility

The Board of Directors (BOD) plays one of the most important roles in the success of conventions, as it approves both the location for each convention and the chairperson for that event. The BOD must closely evaluate the ability of the person making the request for the convention and the viability of the location being proposed.

Location:

- Is the location one that will have ample facilities to handle the attendees' housing and accompanying meeting space, without the necessity for travel between the two.
- Outside activities or trips should be a maximum of one and one-half hours by bus, one way.
- Does the person asking for the convention intend to head the convention. (This should be absolute.)

Chairperson

- The person requesting the convention should have been a member of our Society for at least five years and attended at least three prior conventions. Convention hotel employees should not be allowed to bid for conventions.
- It should be clear to both the BOD and the membership who the chairman is to be. Conventions should not be awarded to any person or group who is not ready to accept chairmanship and responsibility at the time of the bid. Joint or co-chairs will not be accepted unless it is clear that one co-chair will serve as the principal chair.
- The chairperson should endeavor in every way to minimize costs to the attendees, by carefully determining item costs, using bids and not accepting overpriced items.

Chairperson and Committee Responsibility

The chairperson and committee are responsible for planning, organizing, promoting, managing, and executing the Society's annual convention. Preparations should begin a minimum of three or more years before the Convention.

1. The committee should be structured with a chairperson and one or more vice chairs responsible for managing and executing the convention.
2. The chair may appoint the following recommended committee members.

Position	Committee Member	Assistants
▪ Registrar	1	3
▪ Treasurer	1	1
▪ Clinic Coordinator	1	1-2
▪ Audio-Visual Coordinator	1	1
▪ Contest Coordinator	1	1
▪ Vendor Room Coordinator	1	1-2

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|----|
| ▪ Extra-Fare Activities Coordinator | 1 | 1* |
| ▪ Ladies Activities Coordinator | 1 | 1 |
- *One per bus

All principal committee positions should have an individual designated for potential backup should the primary individual not be able to complete their role. Committee members should all be members of the Society. In all cases, the chairman will have the final word regarding the composition of the committee.

The committee may use non-Society members in other non-critical positions as resources for layout tours, volunteers, presenters and speakers.

One person may handle more than one coordinator position. Once the organizing, promoting, managing and executing the convention, is underway, all committee positions should be filled and should have at least as many assistants available as possible. As leaders, the chair and vice chairs should delegate/assign the work and responsibility to the coordinators.

The chairman or a specified vice chair should be responsible for:

- Promotion
- Time Table (includes chronological listing of events and provides clinic descriptions, rooms and times, and map of convention)
- Convention theme
- ALL contacts with the hotel or convention center
- Preparing a complete final convention and expenses report.
- Safety
- Budget development
- Other duties as assigned.

The Registrar is responsible for:

- mailings
- preparation and production of the registration form and registration confirmation postcard.
- working with Society webmaster and Business Manager to ensure proper on-line registration
- attendee packets
- receipt of registrations
- name badges and event ticketing

- spreadsheet showing a complete and correct list of attendees and what each person ordered
- other duties as assigned

The Treasurer is responsible for

- receipt and disbursement of all funds
- requiring and maintaining receipts for expenses
- keeping records
- keeping a file of all contracts and agreements with hotels and suppliers
- making financial reports to the convention committee and the society Board
- keeping a copy of the Society's the tax-exempt status provided by the Society's secretary/treasurer
- closing the books after the convention and remitting balances due to the Society
- establishing a "petty cash" fund that can be used for incidentals at the convention
- Any other duties as required.

The registrar and treasurer can be the same person, but each is a complex and demanding job. Combining the jobs can simplify receiving registrations and money, but careful oversight is required. At the convention when things happen quickly, both the registrar and the treasurer are "go-to" people to get stuff done and resolved quickly. It is recommended that the treasurer and the chairperson both sign checks.

All monies collected as the result of the convention shall be the sole property of the Society, unless there is prior approval of the BOD. These monies are collected under the auspices of the Society and its tax exempt status. The splitting of monies received with any other group could jeopardize this status.

Do not establish debit cards, credit cards, borrow money or encumber the Society assets for any reason.

The clinic coordinator is responsible for

- programs presented and special speakers
- drafting a plan for presentations defining

- i. the number of presentations
- ii. schedule
- iii. number of rooms
- iv. equipment needed
- v. seating arrangements (theater, banquet, etc.)
- vi. amenities (water, etc) for each room.
- signs marking presentation/presenter/and room location
- get bios on each presenter
- Introduction of presenters to the audience.
- other duties as assigned.

The audio-visual coordinator is responsible for

- working directly with the presentation coordinator
- arranging for and/or renting equipment
 - i. care and maintenance of Society AV gear
 - ii. obtaining additional LCD or slide projectors
 - iii. wireless microphone
 - iv. line audio input (for sound from PowerPoint)
 - v. laser pointer
 - vi. computer control clicker
 - vii. large screen
 - viii. laser pointer
 - ix. [laptop computer]
- securing all equipment on conclusion of presentations
- other duties as assigned.

The contest coordinator is responsible for:

- Organizing the contest ballots
- Organizing the display;
- Overseeing the voting;
- Arranging photographing and proper identification of the winners;
- Presenting awards at Banquet with proper names and pronunciation;
- Ordering ribbons and awards.

The vendor room coordinator is responsible for

- contact with and getting potential vendors
- assigning space for Company Store
- assigning vendors to tables
- lining up display/operating model railroads

- contracting for items presented at the convention (pins, patches, cups, etc).
- other duties as assigned.
- [collecting vendor table fees]

As a matter of ethics and transparency, the vendor room coordinator should never be a vendor himself.

The extra-fare activities coordinator is responsible for

- transportation (bus, carpool, rail)
- secure radios or cell phones for communication
- plan extra-fare trips
- secure water and food, as necessary
- Prepare list of attendees on trip for check in and check out at each stop
- insure one person in charge of each bus
- secure waivers for liability for each visitor as required
- insure at least one assistant or person on the trip to handle emergencies (personal health, heat stroke, exhaustion, etc.)
- arrange for docents or guides
- purchase and/or collect tickets (as needed) for each person
- other duties as assigned.

The ladies activities coordinator is responsible for

- plan, schedule and guide trips for wives and significant others
- work with extra-fare coordinator for transportation
- provide information to the chair on activities for inclusion in website/registration packet.
- other duties as assigned.

There should be ample communications between committee members.

Financial Responsibilities

The Annual SFRH&MS Convention is an activity of the Society. Revenues generated by the Convention are revenues of the Society. The Board expects the Convention Committee to act as a careful steward of these revenues and to use them frugally for convention purposes. Revenues in excess of expenses are revenues of the Society.

In handling these revenues, the Board recognizes that the Convention Committee will incur expenses in bringing layouts to the Convention, providing speakers and clinicians, and similar expenses. In general, the Board believes that it is appropriate to reimburse expenses for individuals providing layouts or exhibits at the Convention, within reasonable limits, and to reimburse a specific keynote speaker of wide repute. On the other hand, the Board believes that most clinicians and committee members understand that they are donating their services for the benefit of the Society and its members. For these individuals, a reasonable recognition of services is appropriate, but waiver of the Convention fee is generally excessive. At the discretion of the Convention Chair, the fee may be reduced in part or whole for hardship cases for committee members providing unusual service. In case of doubt, the chair is urged to consult with the Board liaison.

With respect to excess revenues, the Board believes it is appropriate for the Convention Committee to arrange a reasonable donation to Museums or other charitable organizations that have supported the Convention by providing a venue or activity. Donations to other organizations fall within the Society's charitable giving program and are subject to the control of the Board to maintain consistency in Society policy. If the Convention Committee believes an organization is well-deserving, it should consult with the Board liaison about bringing the matter and a recommended donation to the Board's attention. The Board will give full consideration to such requests, but generally will not support causes that fall beyond the Society's mandate, the mandate of the Archives and Equipment Preservation funds, or are inconsistent with California Public Benefit Corporation law or Internal Revenue Service requirements for 501(c)(3) organizations.

The Board expects that seed money will be returned to the Society within 60 days of Convention close and that a final close out report will be rendered within four months unless other arrangements are made with the Board liaison or Society President. (approved unanimously 7/26/2012).

Planning the Convention

Gather a core group and make a written request to the BOD convention liaison for a specific year to conduct a convention. Allow at least three years lead time for planning and executing the convention.

Once the Board of Directors approves the request, establish a convention committee composed of the core group (chair, vice chairs and coordinators) and everyone else willing to commit to the responsibility of executing a convention.

Before appearing before the BOD, determining the following:

- a theme
- a date
- a proposed budget

After being awarded the convention, begin the following:

- potential assignments for coordinators
- start work on various tasks
 - i. finding a hotel
 - ii. making a time line for completion of tasks
 - iii. budgeting -- cost and revenue estimates
 - iv. opportunities for activities (what's in your area)
- list equipment needed
- make a draft plan for extra-fare trips (schedule, transportation, amenities, number of assistants, and costs)
- list possible presentations and presenters
- contest room and coordinator

Once you have a rough plan of action, assign and delegate tasks. (Remember, commitments change for a variety of reasons. Accept changes, work to preserve committee membership, but be ready to find new help and move on. Keep the BOD convention liaison informed on progress).

Convention Committee Chairs will work with the Board to make every effort to avoid scheduling the annual Convention in conflict with other significant national and regional events. (i.e., NMRA National, etc.).

Timeline

- Develop a timeline for tasks
- Notify the Society’s editors and webmaster to start promotion by our written and electronic sources. The dates and location are sufficient. Specifics on trips, presentations, etc. come later.
- Finalize the date of the convention at least two years ahead of time to help members plan their time
- As you fill in the plan with trips, presentations, speaker, etc. update the information to the convention liaison. Be sure to include cut-off dates in the final draft of promotional material—last date to register early, last date to reserve hotel room at group rate, etc.
- Set specific dates for completing
 - i. the budget
 - ii. mailing promotional material
 - iii. securing presenters
 - iv. securing transportation for extra-fare activities
 - v. other

Deadline & Timing for Convention Promotional Materials

Deadlines for “*The Warbonnet*” are noted in each magazine.

Contact *the Warbonnet* and *Running Extra* editors who will help with publicity and can help with logo design and similar editorial needs.

The initial mailing of registration forms must be made immediately after January 1. Make sure Steve Sandifer, the Society webmaster, has the registration form. He will post it on the website about one week later, well before the *Warbonnet* issue arrives.

The Hotel

Secure a hotel early. Desirable facilities may require two or more years lead time for securing a contract. The committee chairman and assistant coordinator must visit each potential facility, meet with the manager/convention planner, and get a draft contract specifying **EVERYTHING**.

- Be cautious and make sure you understand every detail.
- Hotels normally offer reduced room charges for large groups.
- The offer for room charges and use of facilities will be based, in part, on “room nights.” A room night is one room occupied for one night. It is usually safe to assume at least 100 to 125 rooms will be used by Society members on the night before and each night of the Convention. This number should be adjusted based on (1) location; (2) anticipated number of attendees and (3) cost. Society members are resistant to excessive room rates.
- The hotel will specify the number of room nights needed to secure the rate. The hotel will also specify a cut-off date, after which the block of rooms set aside for the group will be unblocked and may be reserved by guests outside the group.
- The number of room nights will affect complimentary offers and reduction of other individual charges. Hotel personnel will gladly provide a list of meeting room and item charges. Special care should be used in dealing with meeting facilities, so that hidden costs are not included that the committee is unprepared to pay. Remember two costs that are not always readily apparent: gratuities and taxes. These may add as much as 20 to 35% to apparent first cost for meals.

Budget

Draft a budget plan early on.

Hotel

- meet with hotel sales personnel and determine the ONE person the convention chairman and assistant chairman are to deal with in all transactions.
- Arrange for an adequate number of sleeping rooms (can be based on sleeping room needs from the two prior conventions). The hotel will determine costs from the number of “room-nights”, anticipated. A room night is one room for one night. (For example, 180 people attending convention, each staying 3 nights equals 540 room-nights). This number is what hotels use to determine room rate and costs of meals and, potentially, the cost of meeting rooms.

- Arrange for meeting space for entire convention, including clinic rooms, vendor rooms, contest room, Board of Directors meeting room, and storage rooms. Prices should be guaranteed, taking into consideration for the time span prior to convention date.
- Storage rooms should be lockable and the keys under the control of at least TWO people from the convention staff.
- If meals are to be purchased from the hotel, prices should be guaranteed for inflation, etc., for the time span before the convention is held, but no firm guarantee on numbers until convention time. Banquet and other meal costs will be determined again by “room-night” count.
- At this early date, it is impossible to determine every cost, but hotels are used to dealing for conventions 2-3 years in advance and some guarantee will be available.
- Determine if there is to be a pre-convention payment to reserve the hotel. This should be avoided, if possible. If not, offer a low initial payment and a higher payment approximately in January of the Convention year (after some revenue begins to flow in). The Society will make \$4000 available for seed money, with an additional \$1000 upon demonstration of need. **These funds must be repaid.**

Extra-Fare Trips (Calculate a cost/each and set maximum persons)

- cost of transportation (bus, van, rail trip)
- cost of any entry fees
- cost of amenities (food, water, ice, coolers)
- The BOD recommends reason in the number of extra fare trips and their cost. Typically, one or two events is more than sufficient to meet members’ expectations.

Promotion of the Convention

- Postage and printing
 - postage is a large cost in promoting a convention
 - use the Society website (Steve Sandifer) for promotion
 - use *The Warbonnet* and *Running Extra* for promotion

Registration

The Registrar

- While this activity is fundamental to each convention, it can be complicated and cause issues if not adequately addressed early in the planning process.
- For the convenience of the Society's members, and to provide adequate time for vacation planning, it is imperative that online registration is available via the SFRH&MS website **no later** than January 31 of the convention year, and earlier if possible.
- Registration via U.S. Mail must also be available by January 31 of the year.
- Postage expenses are a significant expense for the Society and convention committee.
 - Please plan to distribute your registration materials with the *Warbonnet* and *Running Extra* quarterly distribution (December of the prior year; submit in November), if possible. If this is not possible, it is the committee's responsibility to budget and recover this expense.
 - It would be good to use email to the greatest extent possible to confirm registrations, especially for overseas attendees. An email address, if the member has one, should be a standard requirement as part of the information gathering during the registration process. (Initial registration form).
- Establish a uniform policy regarding one-day registrations for individuals who choose not to attend all of the functions, yet would like to attend Saturday clinics, the vendor room and possibly the banquet or breakfast. Extra banquet and breakfast tickets should be available for family members.
- The cost to attend a convention for those registrants who are not members of the Society will be the cost of registration + regular membership less a \$10 discount. For example, if the cost for a member is \$165, the cost to a non-member will \$165 + \$30 (\$40 Regular Membership - \$10 discount on membership) for a total cost of \$195. (to begin with the 2017 Tulsa convention)
- Name badges should allow for the name of each attendee to be clearly visible and also include the state/country they are from. They should be printed and, when practical, include the convention logo. Badge holders and lanyards should be provided to registered attendees. The

Society will provide lanyards for use at conventions. This will allow for a standard Society lanyard.

- Clear, concise, carefully worded and formatted material should be developed to promote the convention and state what is included in the basic price, what is required in order to include a spouse or children at the dinners, and what “extra fare activities encompass.” A standardized template should be developed for registration forms that could be used from year to year, reducing cost, work and potential confusion.

Clinics

Where/when possible, clinic coordinator should work to have clinics locked in a year in advance with “stand-by” clinics/presenters available. These presenters should be included in all preparations including the speakers’ breakfast.

Clinicians should have their clinics completed not less than three months in advance of the convention. A copy of the clinic presentation (preferably PowerPoint) should be sent to the clinic coordinator for equipment testing and review to ensure computer compatibility and make certain the presentation operates properly. This will allow adequate time to make format changes and/or any corrections to ensure smooth operation during the convention. Any special requirements such as handouts that need to be photocopied must be requested at this time so copies can be produced prior to the convention. It is imperative to verify which computer operating system has been used (i.e. Mac or Windows) to develop the presentation.

Clinicians should be offered the opportunity to make a dry run with their presentation the day or night prior to their scheduled clinic.

Scheduling of clinics should include time between them long enough for attendees and clinicians to have bathroom breaks and reset presentations for the next session. The schedule should allow time for any minor last minute audio or computer glitches to be rectified. Clinics too closely bunched are a detriment to both the vendor room and/or necessary socializing. Based on experience, it is generally recommended that at least 30 minutes between clinic sessions be allowed, although flexibility to accommodate scheduling is always granted to committees.

[Clinics often contain copyrighted materials, which can be shared as part of a clinic presentation under the Fair Use Doctrine. However, copyrighted materials cannot be reproduced in printed, digital or other formats, and/or distributed.]

Audio Visual

Some of the basic A/V requirements for a convention include:

- Clinics – each clinic room should be outfitted with LCD or slide projector, wireless microphone, line audio input (for sound from PowerPoint) laser pointer, and computer control clicker. There should also be a screen large enough for the room and attendees to see the presentation. The larger, the better. Many attendees are advancing in age, so the larger the image, the better for viewing. This also applies to point size for text used in presentations – the larger, the better (18-20 point type should be the minimum).
- Banquet room - projector, wireless or podium mounted microphone, line audio input (for sound from PowerPoint) laser pointer, and computer control clicker.
 - Projector, wireless or podium mounted microphone, line audio input (for sound from PowerPoint) laser pointer, and computer control clicker for the Sunday business meeting breakfast.
 - Appropriate size screen.

A/V equipment owned by SFRH&MS will be housed between conventions at Ag Press and shipped to the convention site. Convention committee will be responsible for ensuring that the equipment is received in good order and is properly shipped back to Ag Press upon completion of the convention.

Currently, the Society owns two LCD projectors for convention use.

Committee Reporting & Presentations

Pre-convention

- The committee will keep the Board of Directors advised on progress via the Board's convention liaison.

- At the winter board meeting, all recognized convention chairmen should prepare a brief written update report for the convention liaison for presentation to the Board.
- At the summer board meeting, usually held during the convention, each chairperson, or designated representative, of the next two scheduled conventions should plan to make a brief presentation to the Board on their individual convention status.
- The convention chairman should present a budget and overall plan for the convention at least one year, and preferably two years, prior to the convention. The Board should review this budget and if the budget is realistic based on a breakeven point of approximately 200 registrants; the Board should indemnify the convention chairman against catastrophic losses.
- One year in advance of a committee's convention, a quality audio/visual presentation must be made at the convention annual business meeting. This will serve as the one-year advance notice and promotional pitch for marketing your convention-to-convention attendees.

Post-convention

Once all financial obligations have been met (i.e., convention expenses covered, etc.), the chairperson will present to the Board a final report on the convention. The report should include a brief re-cap of activities, together with a financial profit and loss analysis and explanation of profits or loss. The Board requests that this information be presented by the end of the calendar year in which the convention takes place.

Convention Traditions

The following are included as items that over the years have become convention traditions:

- Hotel room cost for "*The Warbonnet*" Editor covered by the convention. This typically comes out of the "comped" rooms from the hotel.
- Thursday welcome reception/dinner. (Optional).
- Speakers' breakfast as a token of gratitude for the clinicians, and where last minute questions and needs can be answered.
- A Saturday evening awards banquet.

- A Sunday breakfast before the business meeting.
- The convention chairman should be made aware of any special meal needs. This may need to be worked into the registration form.
- Gifts for the clinicians. These gifts should not exceed \$50.00 in value.
- Shirts etc. for convention staff/volunteers.
- The ribbons and awards for the contest entries and best of show (Bryan Moseley is helpful with this).
- An emcee for the Saturday evening banquet.
- Convention patch and pin to be included with each full registration.
- Additional patches and pins available for purchase (optional)
- Convention coffee mugs for sale.
- Preorder sales of convention shirts different from those of the convention committee.
- Raffle at Saturday banquet.

Insurance

The Board of Directors is in the process of reevaluating the insurance needs of the Society as a whole. With conventions becoming more complex, insurance for convention activities should be purchased and include: Liability for injuries at any of the convention venues; destruction or grand theft of company store inventory; errors and omissions by convention staff or organizers; protection against acts of God such as the near cancellation of the Heartland Flyer trip in 2007 because of unusual flooding.

Contest Management

- The Committee shall arrange for a person of trust and integrity to ensure that the contest room has proper staffing, security, display space, and that all who enter the contest are Society members and attending the convention.

Deadline & Timing for Convention Promotional Materials

Deadlines for “*The Warbonnet*” and *Running Extra* are November 1 for the 4th quarter issue to be delivered in mid – December, and February 1 for the 1st quarter issue to be delivered in mid – March. *Promotional material for the convention should be produced for inclusion in the 4th quarter issue so members can plan their vacation schedules.* The initial mailing of registration forms should be made immediately after January 1, and the

registration material should be ready to be placed on the website 1 week later. Many members' attention turns toward the convention right after the Christmas and New Year holiday.

Company Store

The company store is the responsibility of a member of the BOD, as the convention chairman and his staff are involved in running the convention, each convention committee should be prepared to provide space and volunteers to assist in staffing the company store. This may be in the form of several volunteers who rotate throughout the day. Such an arrangement will allow multiple members to assist with no one member obligated to be at the store all day.

The company store should be placed within the vendor room, or if that is not possible it should be placed as close as possible to the vendor room. Also, a room that can be secured should be made available where additional company store inventory may be temporarily stored.

Provision should be made to have a electrical service in the vendor area for company store credit card terminal use. **This is crucial.**

While the Company Store is generally the responsibility of the BOD, the Convention Committee needs to arrange for company store materials to be received. Typically, the Society ships by pallet from AgPress to the Convention hotel. The BOD Company Store manager will need to know if the hotel cannot receive pallets and will need to work with the committee, the hotel and AgPress on alternatives. Similarly, it is the responsibility of the convention committee to arrange for the return of the company store materials to AgPress. The BOD Company Store manager will make the basic arrangements, but delivery of return materials to the freight depot or other shipping location typically must be accomplished by convention committee or volunteers as these depots are not typically open on Sunday.

Vendor Room

Sufficient space should be available so that merchants are able to adequately display their merchandise in normal reading light and aisle space permits safe flow of customers. The room should be kept free of convention

attendees except during posted opening hours. Adequate security should be provided.

It is not unusual for the Society to have at least 40 tables for vendors. Some will require electric service access.

This room needs to be secured at overnight on Thursday and Friday.

Contest Room

Sufficient space should be available so that contestants can adequately display their models and photos and visitors can view them. Adequate security should be provided. The room needs to be secured overnight.

Final Notes

Members of the Society's Board, the Society's staff, as well as past convention chairmen and committee members, are all resources for future committees to draw upon for expertise, counsel, ideas and help. This wealth of experience should help ensure the success of each future convention. Additionally, with more than 30 conventions and countless mini meets having been executed over the past three-plus decades, just about every conceivable situation has been confronted, and addressed by prior convention committees. In most instances, there is no need to "reinvent the wheel" to get answers and accomplish convention tasks.

This is "our" Society, and the ongoing success of conventions rests in our hands. Like any worthwhile endeavor, the level of commitment, focus, collaboration, organization and communication invested in each convention will help to determine how successful we will be in meeting, or exceeding, the expectations of our fellow members. The Santa Fe Railway Historical & Modeling Society has a rich heritage built upon the values, vision and dedication of its many members who have contributed to every aspect of its success, including the national convention. It is in our hands to ensure this heritage is maintained.

Mini-Meets

Mini-meets are regionally held meetings of members of the Society, during an off-time of the national convention. They do not use the financial resources of the Society, nor should they expect assistance from the Society in that regard.

While mini-meets do not involve the resources of the Society, they are still held in the name of the Society, and as such must be conducted so as to reflect positively on the Society.

The BOD, especially the convention liaison, should be kept informed of all aspects of the mini-meet, including date, location and who is coordinating the mini-meet.

Planning should be done with ample time so that details of the mini-meet can be included on the Society webpage and in *Running Extra*.