**Make the Case to Attend Convention**

We know you’re excited to attend the 2016 National AfterSchool Association (NAA) Convention…

But, you may have to convince someone in your office (your boss, your supervisor, or your organization’s executive director) as to why it’s an awesome idea. We’ve developed this toolkit to help make the case!

We understand: budgets are tight and your time is valuable. This step-by-step guide will help you advocate for attending Convention. With our candid advice and sample templates, you can show your organization the value of attending Convention and the high return on investment for sending you to Orlando.

**STEP 1:** Do Your Homework: Research the NAA Convention

**STEP 2:** Complete a Cost-Benefit Analysis

**STEP 3**: Prepare Your Pitch

**STEP 4:** Schedule a Follow-up Meeting

**Special Note:** Where to Go from “No”

We look forward to seeing you in Orlando!

**STEP 1 - Do Your Homework: Research the NAA Convention**

Budgets are tight and organizations want to know to know that conference attendance will not only benefit you, but your entire office. The best way to do this is to align conference attendance with you organization’s priorities and challenges.

 First: Make a List of Your Organization’s Top Priorities

 What are key focuses of your organization? What key programs or funding is important to leadership? What strategic goals is your organization aiming to achieve in the short of long term? Ex:

1. My organization is focused on securing more grants to fund our student mentoring program
2. My organization would like to forge more formal partnerships with youth organizations operating with in our state
3.

Second: Make a List of Your Organizations Top Challenges

Where does your organization struggle? What areas of improvement are evident in your programming? What areas do staff wish they had more resources? Ex:

1. My organization struggles with recruiting and managing volunteers
2. Staff feel overworked and often struggle with time management
3.

Third: Research the NAA Conference

Explore the conference website at <http://naaweb.org/convention> to stay up to date on keynote speakers and key deadlines for registration and accommodations. We’ll have information about 2016 sessions available in January on our website.]

Flip through the [2015 Program Book](http://naaweb.org/images/pdf/NAA_Program_Book_2014.pdf) for workshops and content offerings and identify:

1. **Key workshops** you would like to attend and how the content would benefit your organization:
2. **Key networking opportunities** research organizations or leaders you would like to connect with during the convention:
3. **Key learning expos** you would like to attend and how these would address key challenges your organization faces:

This will help you on the next step: completing a cost benefit analysis.

**STEP 2 – Complete a Cost-Benefit Analysis**

Now that you’ve done your research, it’s time to analyze the costs and benefits of attending Convention. The goal of this step is to summarize your findings in a way that effectively makes the case for your attendance.

 First: Estimate the Full Cost of Attendance

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Cost** |
| Registration (for rates, see <http://naaweb.org/attend/registration>) | $  |
| Travel(Airfare, Train, or Driving Mileage) | $ |
| Hotel Accommodations(Discounted within conference hotel block) | $209/night + plus taxes & fees. |
| Local Transportation(Ex: Taxis from airport, travel in Orlando) | $ |
| Per Diem/Meals(Not provided by conference) | $ |
| **Total Cost of Attendance** | $ |

 Fill out the following chart to estimate the cost of attendance.

**Cost of Attendance Estimator**

Make sure to indicate your registration level, as there are various discounted levels including early bird and NAA member rates. The conference also offers discounted hotel rooms at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center at the rate of $209/night plus taxes and resort fees.

 Second: Detail the Benefits of Attendance

*Session Takeaways*

List key “takeaways” anticipated from the sessions you plan to attend, based on the session descriptions. Once you have listed takeaways that you can implement in your job or with your team, consider the added value that implementation will provide your organization.

\*Please note, we will have full information about the sessions available in January 2016. In the meantime, we’ve provided examples from workshops hosted in 2015.

 Example #1

* **Session:** *High Impact in Afterschool Programming on a Tight Budget*
* **Key Takeaways**: An interactive session that provides take home creative solutions on how to navigate school relationships, find motivated staff, and ensure top quality educational programming while maintaining a healthy bottom-line budget.
* **Organizational Benefit**: Our organization has struggled to manage program costs and find trained staff. This session will provide strategies on how to save money and find staff.

In outlining the various benefits, you can also detail the cost of comparison services like in the following example:

Example #1

* **Session:** *Facilitating Strong Parent Focus Groups*
* **Key Takeaways**: I hope to learn how to strengthen my facilitation skills when it comes to parent meetings. I also aim to learn how to design productive meetings and explore other meeting formats that engage parents in a more meaningful way.
* **Organizational Benefit**: Our organization has been challenged in hosting authentic parental engagement events and focus groups. A facilitation training of similar quality and length costs around $1,500 per person. In teaching back, I would also be able to pass on knowledge and skills to all staff.

*Networking Benefits & Goals*

List the key contacts, either other attendees or exhibitors, who you plan to meet face-to-face, network and discuss best practices or potential business with, and estimate the value that these interactions will bring to your organization.

 Example #2:

* **Networking goal**: I’m planning to meet with at least three different science curriculum specialists from national organizations.
* **Organizational Benefit**: Our science curriculum hasn’t been exactly right for our students. I hope that by talking with these vendors I can gain better insights into how we can strengthen our program. My goal is to come back with 3 curriculum products/solutions we can implement next school year that will save us at least $1,000 in material costs.

If you are privy to your organization’s budget, you can also identify potential funding streams that can support the costs of attendance.

**STEP 3 – Prepare Your Pitch**

After completing your cost-benefit analysis it’s time to prepare your pitch! Use the sample letter below using your cost-benefit analysis, review, and hit send!

Dear [Name],

The 2016 National AfterSchool Association (NAA) Convention is March 20-23 in Orlando, Florida. I would like to attend Convention because [insert your best reason!].

As the largest national gathering of afterschool and out-of-school time professionals, NAA Convention has an outstanding track record for bringing long-term professional benefits, including the sharing ideas and best practices throughout the field.

Convention offers more than 125 workshops that are directly applicable to my work on [insert]. It also provides an excellent opportunity to talk with other professionals and learn from their best practices – or even their lessons learned.

I estimate the overall cost of attending as $[insert], but the information and resources I will receive as well as the connections I will make to broaden our network are invaluable to us. I plan to present what I learn to key staff so they too can benefit from the workshops and trainings available.

I aim to gain more insight into the key questions and challenges faced by the organization including:

* [Fill in some questions you want answered at the conference]
* [Ex: How can our curriculum better align to Common Core standards?]
* [Ex: How can we better incorporate social emotional development principles into our student programming?]
* [Ex: How can we improve our grant writing competencies to secure additional funders or find new avenues for funding?]

If there are other topics you would like for me to learn more about, or think would help with my own professional development, I’m happy to share the program content with you and work together to plan how to maximize my time.

Thank you for considering this opportunity for my professional development.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

**STEP 4 – Schedule a Follow-Up Meeting**

Once you’ve sent a request in writing, schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss attendance of the Convention. Prepare by using the following talking points and gather information that answers the following questions:

1. How will you share notes from sessions, discussion groups, vendors, and useful informal conversations?
2. How will you share the list of discussion and action items you develop during Convention?
3. How will essential tasks get done while you’re away, including how technology will keep you accessible and in touch as needed?

**Talking Points**

* The National AfterSchool Association Convention is the premier national conference for afterschool professionals. It provides an unparalleled opportunity to learn from experts in the field.
* Attending Convention would allow [insert organization] to network with key organizations and experts to form partnerships that would benefit students participating in our programming.
* The 2016 NAA Convention will also provide [insert organization] the opportunity to meet with over 100 exhibitors and vendors to explore ideas around the materials and technology we use as professionals and within our student programming.
* The investment in attendance will pay dividends for the organization, helping me gather information, tools, and resources to address our organization’s highest priorities and challenges. [You can insert examples of challenges and priorities from your previous analysis].
* NAA provides the opportunity to attend skill-building workshops that would independently cost over [$xxxx.00] per person. The skills learned at the convention could be taught to the entire staff.
* The content of the conference will help me build on the experience I have gained in the last year, in my position using new information and techniques that weren’t available then.
* I will share what I learn with key staff members, to develop our internal capacities and help the team grow.

**Special Note - Where to Go from “No”**

Although the 2016 National AfterSchool Association offers unparalleled value and opportunities for growing your knowledge and skills, not every decision maker will agree to support your attendance of the convention. If your employer declines your request to attend, remember that there are many other ways for you to connect to NAA programs, resources, and services. Take advantage of some of our best offerings:

1. Participate in NAA webinars to expand your knowledge in the afterschool field. Learn about professional development and other virtual meetings at: <http://naaweb.org/resources/webinar>
2. Read *Afterschool Today* NAA’s professional journal, written by and for afterschool professionals, addressing the big issues in afterschool from various perspectives.
3. Join us for Talk Tuesdays, Talk Tuesdays provides afterschool professionals with the resources to host relevant discussions among peers, colleagues, staff, or community leaders. Connect with afterschool professionals in your area or engage your staff with relevant topics. Learn more at: <http://naaweb.org/resources/talk-tuesday>