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## Strategies for Gaining Approval to Attend the AASLH Annual Meeting<sup>1</sup>

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An Annual Meeting offers professional development and networking opportunities. Not only does it benefit the individual, it also benefits the institution because attendees will be bringing back valuable knowledge, skills, and ideas that they can turn around and invest into their organizations.

Here are some strategies for you to use when speaking to your supervisor about the benefits of attending an annual meeting and how to get approval.

1. Write down three issues your institution is facing right now.
2. List how you personally contribute to these issues. (Hint: Think how your work is specifically aligned with your institution's vision or mission.)
3. Review the Program Guide and mark sessions you'd like to attend that relate to your personal contributions and/or organizational strategy.
4. Draft a brief statement on why attending these sessions will help you contribute to your institution's strategies.

### **Sample Case Statement:**

- Given the economic climate, our organization is placing a priority on increasing earned income and entrepreneurial partnerships. As [insert your job title here], learning new strategies and ideas from the field, hearing firsthand about what works and hasn't worked at other organizations, and visiting sites demonstrating success in these areas in a city such as [insert city name] is an important and vital way for me to directly help our organization accomplish this goal. In reviewing the program and schedule for the conference, entrepreneurship and collaborative partnerships is a clear area of focus and there are many programs, presentations, and workshops directly relating to this topic that I can attend. In addition, I can meet in person with successful practitioners and discuss with them ideas and how we can best improve in this area. Given this opportunity and the direct relationship between our needs and the themes of this

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<sup>1</sup> adapted from Mary Boone, "How to Get Approval to Attend This Year's Annual Conference," Association Meetings, April 2009, 16-17.

conference, by attending, I will be better able to provide the leadership and strategies necessary for us to achieve success.

- As we learned from our recent visitor surveys, the largest growing guest demographic for us is families. We have also established an organizational goal of increasing our engagement with schools and local day care providers. As [insert your job title here], I am extremely interested in family and school-based learning and, particularly given our plans to enhance our permanent exhibits, opportunities to learn more about successful strategies for achieving these goals is very important. Fortunately, this conference is hosted by several museums successful in family learning and school programming and there are a number of sessions and workshops at this conference focusing specifically on these topics. By attending, I will be able to learn from these sessions and I plan to meet personally with staff, and visit the host institutions, to learn even more. In so doing, I will be better able to bring creative ideas, an innovative perspective, and real world lessons learned to our planning team and process.
- As you know, recent budget cuts and decreasing revenue has required us to not only initiate staff layoffs, but also hiring freezes and staff furloughs. This has hurt morale and caused stress for our team. One of my goals is to provide support for our team during this difficult time so our operations and programs don't suffer, but also in order to assist our staff team in remaining optimistic, committed, and energized about our work and our organization. I know from speaking with colleagues and reading trade publications that we are not alone in facing this challenge. And, in reading the program for the upcoming conference, there are several educational sessions, workshops, and networking opportunities directly relating to these topics on the schedule. Our staff is our greatest asset and while at this conference I will attend these sessions and meet with my colleagues to learn more about surviving and hopeful becoming stronger as a staff team, during these challenging times.

### **Preparing for the Meeting:**

Once you get approval, prepare properly for the conference to demonstrate you received the benefits that you promised to the person who's paying your way.

1. Make a list of people you'd like to meet at the conference and why you want to meet them. Include presenters and other "luminaries." They are more accessible than you might think, especially if you make plans with them in advance.
2. Contact the people on your list several weeks prior to the conference. Make a specific plan for a time and place to get together.
3. One week prior to the meeting, make a personal agenda for yourself. Include the people you're meeting, and sessions you'll be attending. Include cell phone numbers

or any other contact information for last-minute changes to your schedule.

4. Stick to your schedule as much as possible during the meeting. Take notes. But leave some time on your calendar in case you encounter new people with whom you'd like to spend some time.

**After the Meeting:**

1. Immediately following the conference draft a concise summary of what happened and how you will use the information and contacts to further your organization. Write this one- or two-page summary quickly, while the information is fresh. Use your notes to help you.
2. Submit the summary to the person who sponsored your attendance and thank him or her. This summary should make your next conference request even easier. Once your superiors understand you mean business when you attend a conference, they'll be more likely to quickly approve your participation.
3. If what you learned might be useful to your colleagues and peers, consider rewriting portions of your summary as a blog or Twitter post.
4. Complete the annual meeting survey. This helps AASLH plan future conferences that maximize the experience for attendees.