

# STEPS FOR PLANNING A CONFERENCE

## Step 1: Set aims and objectives

Why do we want the conference? What do we hope to accomplish?

The objectives provide the base on which to decide strategies and plan activities. Objectives will usually be expressed by such words as:

- to **identify**, for example, 'to identify future markets'
- to **inform**, for example, 'to inform clients of new products'
- to **promote**, for example, 'to promote our services'
- to **display**, for example, 'to display a new range of products'
- to **train**, for example, 'to train staff in the use of a new system'.

Brainstorming is one useful method for canvassing ideas in the initial stage. A brainstorm involves shared discussion to search for new ideas. In a successful brainstorming session, all ideas are encouraged and no idea is disregarded.

In setting objectives, it is a good idea to use the **SMART** principle. Set objectives that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-related.

## Step 2: Define team and individual roles

Identify all the people who will be part of the planning team and work towards planning the conference. Each member of the team must be clearly informed of their role and responsibilities and what is expected of them.

## Step 3: Establish current situation and parameters

The current situation and the parameters to be determined include:

- the budget
- facilities available
- facilities required
- who will be invited
- who the speakers will be
- the activities to be undertaken
- health and safety requirements
- security requirements
- promotion and marketing.

These can generally be divided into four categories:

Financial:                    making estimates and forecasts to determine budget income and expenditure and ensuring the budget will balance at the end of the conference

- People: deciding who will be the organisers and support staff, expected attendees and speakers, and how they will be contacted
- Accommodation: considering possible venues and assessing their suitability in terms of size, access and cost
- Equipment: identifying the types of equipment or materials required, such as paper, posters, microphones and computers, and how to meet those requirements.

#### **Step 4: Set up systems to manage the conference**

Systems must be established and procedures put in place to enable the conference to achieve its objectives.

A timeframe also needs to be established to ensure deadlines are met.

#### **Step 5: Feedback and evaluation**

Although evaluation will take place after the conference, you need to decide at the planning stage what will be evaluated and how you are going to conduct the evaluation. This may include the use of:

- personal logs
- audiotape recordings
- interviews and discussions
- video-tape recordings
- questionnaires
- photographs
- suggestion boxes.