



NEW YORK STATE ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

for the birds and birders of New York State since 1948

Annual Meeting Guidelines for Host Clubs

Each year NYSOA's annual meeting is hosted at a location in New York State selected by the host club(s). The official corporate business meeting of NYSOA, colloquially known as "the Delegates' meeting" is only one of many events normally included in the conference. The host club is responsible for planning and running the event, which usually begins Friday afternoon and ends around noon Sunday.

Although running such a conference represents a large project for the host club(s), it is also a chance for the club(s) to gain significant visibility both in the statewide birding community and among local businesses, agencies, and residents. In addition, host clubs usually find the project to be one that re-energizes their club(s) and renews their members' pride in and commitment to the local club(s).

This document outlines the main procedures involved in organizing and conducting an annual meeting. Included are a timetable for important decisions, financial considerations, and some helpful advice from past hosts. All host clubs are encouraged to make suggestions for updates to this document; these can be sent to the current NYSOA president via email at president2@nybirds.org.

Remember that the annual meeting is intended to be a win-win between NYSOA and the host club(s). It is in NYSOA's best interests to help you make the annual meeting a grand success! NYSOA will provide a loan of up to \$1000 if your club needs the funds during the planning period (to secure facilities before collecting registration fees, for example). In addition, feel free to contact NYSOA's president or other designated annual meeting liaison with any questions that arise.

INITIAL STAGE

(beginning as soon as your club is designated as host)

- I. Establish a core working group (aka Steering Committee). As soon as the club is designated to host the meeting, an initial group of volunteers should be established. This core group (as few as 4 or 5) will be supplemented as the planning goes on, growing to about twenty or more volunteers (including those who will lead field trips, receive checks and document registrants, handle the registration table(s) at the event, work with the hotel, etc.).
 - A chair should be chosen immediately.
 - Include individuals who will be able to devote time to the undertaking through the date of the actual meeting.

- Obtain information on recent NYSOA meetings (such as number attending, themes, speakers, costs). You may be able to get spreadsheets and other tools used by previous hosts that you can tailor to your own needs.
- II. Secure a **venue** and keynote **banquet speaker(s)** for a specific weekend, preferably in September or October. These important, interrelated decisions should be acted upon as soon as the group reaches agreement – as early as possible – to allow the best choices for speakers and meeting locations. *The Saturday banquet speaker should be the biggest name, biggest draw of the conference.* These decisions are key for estimating the overall cost of the meeting.
- III. Decide on the overall framework for the meeting. The traditional meeting format has been Friday evening workshops, Saturday morning field trips, afternoon paper session, and Saturday evening keynote address.
- Some meetings feature after-dinner speakers on both Friday and Saturday evenings, with workshops, if any, offered at a different time during the weekend.
 - In some years, there is a “poster session” on Friday and/or Saturday. Posters are solicited in advance of the meeting and the owners of the posters are available to answer questions during these sessions. Posters are available for viewing at other times as well.
 - Work with NYSOA to ensure its needs are accommodated. NYSOA will need:
 - A room for the annual business meeting (“Delegates’ Meeting”) to hold up to 75 people.
 - 2 display tables for NYSOA and NYS Young Birders Club.
 - (Possibly) a table where a NYSOA representative can offer state checklists for sale.
 - Inclusion in the banquet agenda. Work with NYSOA on specifics – at a minimum there will be an awards presentation and some words from the NYSOA president.

NOTES:

Speakers: Contact potential keynote speakers in writing regarding terms of availability, fees and topics. Consider possible program themes. Identify potential back-up speakers. Speakers should be provided with information (recent newsletters) about the host club and NYSOA. The club should also be specific about approximate duration of the talk expected (no more than an hour), whether the speaker is expected to be available for other parts of the meeting, and what expenses will be reimbursed and honorarium paid. Speaker fees vary with the individual asked.

Dates: NYSOA meetings are traditionally held in the fall, but the exact dates have ranged from September through November. Considerations include: speaker availability, conflicts with holidays, best birding times, facilities rates.

Facilities: NYSOA meetings have been held at a range of sites including conventional hotels,

college campuses, rustic camps, and resorts. Considerations include cost, availability, location relative to birding opportunities (on the grounds or ease of travel to field trip sites.) Minimum requirements include banquet space for approximately 200 and meeting space for concurrent smaller sessions. It will be important to know about audiovisual requirements and the venue's ability to accommodate them. Use the internet and your local convention bureau to identify and help screen sites. Negotiate with the hotel/facility of your choice in terms of cost per room, use of rooms, and incidentals. Most of these elements are flexible. Be sure to secure any agreement in writing.

Insurance / Liability: Ensure that your club has adequate coverage in the event of injuries at the meeting, on field trips, etc.

INTERMEDIATE STAGE

(begins by January of the year in which the meeting will be held and ends around June)

At this point the venue and speakers should already have been secured. Details will now begin to be filled in, guided by four important elements which should be addressed at this time:

- a more detailed framework / rough outline of the meeting schedule. The framework should address the elements outlined above. If at all possible avoid conflicts in the schedule and allow sufficient time between events/activities.
- a schedule of tasks to be accomplished (and by whom) between now and the event. In particular, pay attention to externally imposed deadlines such as the publication schedule of *NY Birders*.
- identify, recruit and assign an adequate number of volunteers for all aspects of the event. See below for some important committees to include.
- decide on an overall budget and establish the registration fee accordingly. Data on some past meetings may be available from the respective hosts.

NOTES:

Volunteers and Committee Chairs: At least one person should be responsible for each of the following areas:

1. **Publicity:** Material needs to be prepared for *NY Birders* and club newsletters. Depending upon publishing schedules and the meeting dates, this task may need to be addressed immediately. The Publicity chair needs to establish media contacts, prepare press releases and longer stories on the upcoming meeting.
2. **Conference Center Liaison:** Maintain regular contact with hotel as planning evolves for use of rooms, meal planning etc.
3. **Papers:** Prepare a "Call for Papers" to be published online and in *NY Birders*. Identify

and recruit paper presenters. Set up the schedule for the paper session (with each presenter being allotted the same amount of time) and prepare a brief introduction for each. Ongoing contact is required to ensure each presenter provides a written abstract, A/V needs are met, timing is understood, etc.

4. **Registration:** Three distinct tasks include: sending and receiving registration material before the event, responding to registration questions and problems prior to the event, coordinating the on-site registration for the meeting. Several additional volunteers will be needed. Contact Carena Pooth (carena@prodigy.net) if you would like a copy of the spreadsheet used by Ralph T. Waterman Bird Club to track registrations and meals, plus send an email acknowledgement to the registrant. This registration chair needs to work closely with whoever will be making the name tags.
5. **Workshops:** If workshops are to be held, presenters must be recruited and arrangements coordinated. At some meetings, there are two consecutive “sessions” of workshops, with each presenter running the same workshop twice. This allows attendees to go to two different workshops of their choice.
6. **Treasurer:** To handle incoming registration and other monies as well as disburse funds to the hotel, speakers and other vendors as needed. The host club treasurer may wish to assume this task.
7. **Audio-Visual:** Arrangements for providing the necessary equipment for the keynote speaker and other presenters, including projectors, screens, laptops, loudspeakers, microphones, extension cords, easels etc. Check what items are provided by the facility and what needs to be borrowed or rented. Backup equipment and spare bulbs are a must. Also be sure to have all the necessary cables for connecting projectors to computers (Apple and Windows machines may not use the same type of cable). Some projectors are available today that can play a slideshow of jpg files directly from a memory stick, without requiring a PC.
8. **Field Trips:** Depending on when field trips are scheduled during the meeting, the host club should develop a list of several sites that can be reached from the meeting venue. Considerations include: sites that are the most productive during this season and time of day and with birds of special interest to out-of-area birders, proximity to the hotel, and the schedule of planned NYSOA business. Include shorter, closer field trips for delegates. Transportation considerations including parking at the site. The field trip chair needs to recruit leaders and gather driving directions. Have back-up leaders available and consider options in case of severely inclement weather (e.g. local museums). Many hosts offer “one for the road” field trips on Sunday morning at locations that meeting participants traveling in different directions can include on their way home from the conference.
9. **Exhibits/Vendors:** Depending upon the facility for the meeting, it is likely there will be some modest space for exhibitors & vendors. Do any of the exhibitors have special needs for secure storage or electrical power? Tour groups, optics vendors, birding / nature stores, and artists are among the potential exhibitors. Set specific times with them for setting up and leaving; they are responsible for cleaning up if necessary.
10. **Fundraising:** This may include any or all of the following: A charge for vendor tables, advertising in the event program (in conjunction, possibly, with business promotion on the

hosting club's website), a raffle with donated items, a 50/50 cash raffle, donations from local businesses.

11. **Event Souvenir:** In past years, these gifts have been things like tote bags (bearing the logo of the hosting club), binocular wipes, and mousepads. Be sure to include this in the budget when you determine the registration fees & meal prices!
12. **Signage:** Determine what signs are needed to help attendees find what they are looking for. Indoor signs can be printed from a computer; outdoor signs may need to be laminated for weather-proofing. Ralph T. Waterman Bird Club has a large outdoor sandwich-board style sign that says **NYSOA**; this was placed at the entrance to the relatively hidden venue so that attendees would not drive past the place. Contact Carena Pooth (carena@prodigy.net) if you would like to borrow this sign.
13. **Welcome Packet:** This usually includes
 - Program booklet with the meeting schedule, field trip descriptions, club & NYSOA information, and some advertising from local businesses. NOTE: Printing of the booklet can be a considerable expense item.
 - Name tag, with club affiliation and notations to indicate which meals were purchased. May also indicate "DELEGATE" for delegates. Some hosts include the attendee's home town on the tag, which helps eliminate the question "Where is your club located?"
 - Travel information about the region, which can be obtained from the local Chamber of Commerce, tourist destinations, etc.
 - Bird checklist for the local area.
 - Birding information about the region.

SAMPLE PLANNING TIMELINE

December / January

Prepare brief first notice of meeting with dates, speakers, location. Send to *NY Birders* and NYSOA web coordinator, who can get it posted online as well as sent via email to all NYSOA member clubs for publication in their newsletters. Send Call for Papers to *NY Birders*.

Committee chairs should complete budgets and submit to finance and planning chairs. Registration price / policies should be determined. This includes cutoff dates and a price structure that will ensure no loss of money to the hosting club(s).

February

Decide on food issues: menus for dinners, any off-site meals to be catered, refreshment breaks.

Assemble detailed registration packet for *NY Birders* (Check with the editor for publication deadlines). One issue is usually devoted primarily to the upcoming annual meeting:

- Registration form
- Biographical sketches of speaker(s)
- General descriptions of talks, workshops, field trips.
- Information about any special events
- Hotel and general visitor information
- Avian highlights .

March

Submission of materials to *NY Birders*. Other publicity efforts, other media, on the internet. Detailed notice sent to other clubs. Decide on terms and conditions for exhibits, policies on prices, setup, etc. Initial contact with exhibitors.

April

Decide on other possible activities such as a raffle. Select volunteers and begin soliciting contributions. Determine any requirements from NYSOA. Begin soliciting for advertisements in the program booklet and vendors (if desired).

May

Submit reminder notice to *NY Birders*; continue soliciting vendors & advertisers.

June

Begin assembly of registration packet:

- Program booklet
- List of local restaurants
- Detailed information on field trips
- Information about area attractions (usually available from local convention bureau or chamber of commerce)
- Agenda for meeting
- Evaluation form
- other individualized items: (name tag, meal tickets, speaker tickets, etc.)

Ongoing --acknowledgement and directions to meeting sent to registrants.

July

Prepare detailed agenda / schedule of event including the duration and location of each event. At this point, most arrangements should be final.

August

Second notice to local club members Arrange for staffing of club tables, registration. Finalize speaker requirements, audio-visual needs Final logistics in case of problems, any last minute printing requirements. This is the time to get the program booklet completed and ready for printing.

Provide the hotel/venue with the complete, detailed schedule for the meeting weekend.

ISSUES AT THE MEETING

Ideally, all the important details were settled in advance, and necessary information was available in advance to registrants, exhibitors, and NYSOA. However, there are always last minute details, and **host club volunteers should be available throughout the meeting** to provide assistance. A **central location for messages** should be designated (a message board at the registration area, or provide a cell phone number that can be called).

Registration: The actual table should be centrally located and well staffed. It should be clearly designated, and directional signs posted as needed. Those staffing the registration table should have ample extra copies of all materials and have clear instructions. The times that registration is open should be indicated in advance, but host club members should be prepared for some inevitable confusion. Other "useful" information might also be made available such as public transportation schedules.

Past experience has shown that registrants arrive anytime between noon and dinner time (or even later) on Friday. When the registration area closes for the day on Friday and Saturday, a sign should be posted explaining where late arrivals should go.

Event Schedule: The times and locations of all events should be posted and, if possible, made available in a program or handout. Host club volunteers should be available at the start of each break in the program to help direct attendees. Have rooms at the conference facility been set up according to scheduled needs? Is the proper equipment ready and in working order?

Exhibitors & Vendors: Exhibitors should know in advance where and when they can set up, the times exhibits are open, and when they should be broken down. Have any special needs (e.g. for security or electricity) been addressed?

Field Trips: Signing up for field trips should take place at a central location (e.g., at or near registration). Descriptions and maps/directions for the trips should be available. The meeting place and times for departures should be set, and any protocol for transportation set forward.

NYSOA Business: Are there any specific requirements for NYSOA? Additional meeting rooms? Have NYSOA presentations been worked into the evening schedules?

Hotel/Conference facility: Will there be a need for any last minute changes in room usage? Are banquet facilities and set-ups as requested? Is the hotel aware of the complete schedule for the meeting?

Evaluation: In 1996 the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club included an evaluation form with the registration packet. The responses provided good feedback about aspects of the meeting: attendees liked having NYSOA business meeting limited to Saturday morning, evening speakers on Friday and Saturday, but disliked having paper sessions and workshops scheduled at the same time.

Final Reminders

- Start Planning Early! It's never too soon to line up speakers and a site for the meeting.
- Assign responsibilities. Everyone should know what needs to be done when, and especially what their job is.
- Prepare contingencies. You never know what might go wrong or when. It's best to be prepared in case of bad weather or if your speakers can't make it.