CONFERENCE EVALUATION

Evaluation is the process of critically observing, measuring and monitoring the performance of a conference to assess its outcomes. Evaluation enables feedback to be provided to the conference organisers and is a tool for analysing and improving the organisation of future conferences.

Lessons learned from one conference can be incorporated into the planning for the next.

It is best to establish the method of evaluation in the planning stages. The following questions provide a guide.

- What data will be required?
- Who will be gathering the information, how and when?
- What methods of analysis will be used?
- What format will the final report be presented in and to whom?

Methods used to gather the results for the evaluation may include:

- data collection
- observation
- feedback from organisational meetings
- questionnaires and surveys.

There are three main opportunities to undertake evaluation of a conference.

**Pre-conference**

A feasibility study into the viability of the conference can establish a benchmark against which success can be assessed.

What level of resources will be required for the conference to proceed?

Market research is a tool to establish:

- the probable audience reaction
- prediction of attendance figures
- prediction of costs
- prediction of benefits.

Review a similar conference in the past – compare outcomes.
Monitoring the conference

Tracking the progress of a conference throughout the implementation stage enables the organisers to take action immediately, where required, for example:

- if registrations are slow, additional promotion of the conference may be required to create a higher profile within the media
- if more money needs to be spent on promotion, adjustments can be made to other budget items
- media coverage can be assessed to see if it is being effective
- the budget should be continuously monitored.

Post-conference evaluation

After the conference has been completed, data accumulated during the planning and implementation of the conference is analysed.

Data may be accumulated from the following:

- budget – predicted and actual
- registration schedule
- promotion schedule
- statistics of attendees
- evaluation forms.