

Mainely Men Logistics, Etc.

Here's a partial list of issues we've confronted as we've gone through the years with Mainely Men. Obviously, some will apply in some situations, not in others. Use whatever you think is appropriate. We don't pretend that these are the issues or the answers. They're simply issues with which we have dealt. If you want elaboration or call.

Before the Conference

Advertise – publicity, dates, location; consider making a detailed map of the principle routes to the conference site, especially if it involves secondary roads. Check for accuracy; we have even sent out brochures with the wrong dates (or no dates at all)!

Set policies re: who is to attend, e.g., women, children, pets, nudity, smoking, alcohol, drugs, fires, parameters of “permissible” workshops. Decide on attendance for full conference only or part of conference (especially important if you're having to turn away applicants). Sooner or later you'll face issues of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (“the eye of the beholder”), responsibility of individuals in groups, etc.; the key is a group's being prepared to handle these and not losing its cool—how easy it is to write that in 1995!

Decide on a scholarship policy for those in need; it's good to have the policy before someone walks in and asks at the registration table. We've made a Board decision and leave the Registrar to deal with individual requests. (We like to move quickly and privately on things like this.) We've recently established a small subcommittee of the Board to deal with the scholarship issue because of the economic climate: thus the Registrar has backing if needed. We've also made a statement re: availability of

scholarships in the application materials we send out. We've been fortunate to have gifts to support some scholarships. And we've generally—though not always—limited scholarships to half of the lowest fee, feeling that each man should make a contribution to his weekend.

Insurance for the group? You DO need to ask yourself who's responsible if something happens. We have a liability policy which is in addition to the lodge's insurance coverage. At the minimum it might pay to ask what coverage exists.

Check brochure/application for accuracy; when YOU'RE finished, have someone else check it for accuracy! It can't happen to you until it happens to you! And it will!

If and when you get into this in a big way, get a business-type checkbook so that you have room to make notes on the ledger. Most of the history of Mainely Men is on the check ledger.

Food

Plan, buy, prepare food. Think about a vegetarian menu; it satisfies almost everyone for a short period and saves preparing two menus. Plan for men allergic to basic foods like wheat and milk, e.g.; we've always been able to use a small amount of soy milk. Keeping your menus and/or bills from one time to another will help with planning. We've been lax about this (and we've suffered)!

Try to find a cook; it will make the job a lot easier. Cost--\$250 ('95).

Keep food simple. Men don't come to these meetings primarily to eat, and simple foods well prepared will satisfy them. Pasta seems to work well for us. And remember that someone is going to be unhappy no matter what you do (the old army answer applies)!

Plan the first evening's food so that it can easily and quickly prepared by people unfamiliar with the facilities. Something like tomato soup or corn chowder, especially with good bread, biscuits, or corn bread, does very nicely, especially in the fall when it's cool. (It's hard to convince a food committee of this!)

It also helps with people coming in over a period of two to four hours – soup and bread (or sandwiches) are easier to provide than a sit-down meal.

Registration

Process applications and confirm registrations; develop a system for handling money. This becomes very important as you have to turn people away, return deposits, handle cancellations. I've been very compulsive about this, but every decision I've made has been the result of a need that's developed.

Confirm receipt of registration if you can. A 20¢ postcard does nicely, although a 32¢ letter and envelope may be better if you're sending a map and directions.

Think ahead of time about the way that you're going to handle registration at the conference; you'll need a "registrar" situated near a main entrance, name tags, maybe a few receipts (for those few whose companies/schools reimburse them), pens or magic markers. Small bills help in making change.

Get COMPLETE address information on those who attend, especially if you're planning any sort of follow-up. The postal service insists on the right ZIP, etc., especially in the cities. They also want apartment and box numbers. Getting everything on a computer makes registration, rosters, and mailing a lot simpler. Our current data base is on Microsoft Works and is incredibly flexible. Up till now I've put everything in capital letters, but the USPS processing centers can now scan upper and lower case letters.

Be prepared for a bad check or two, -- it happens! The institution in which we have our accounts appreciates being assured that we expect a certain amount of “carelessness” in a young and mobile population and that we’ll be quick to cover our losses.

Plan for needed equipment—projector, screen, newsprint, markers, tacks, staples and staplers, pens, pencils, masking tape, cassette player, extension cords, paper, scissors, ruler, sound systems, etc.

Transportation

Plan for carpooling. The computer helps, as does a ZIP Code list. I don’t get involved in the carpooling; I simply supply a printout of men from the general area of the man making the request. Occasionally I have had men object to being put on such a list; I understand their objections.

Plan for several big signs along major roads (fluorescent paint or poster paper really catches the eye, as does fluttering surveyor’s tape). It helps, of course, if these signs reflect a logo that men recognize. That may come later. Write CLEAR, DETAILED directions to your conference site. Have someone else check your directions!

Occasionally someone needs a ride in from an airport or a bus terminal; it’s handy if there’s a plan for that ahead of time. There are times that I think men’s expectations of a volunteer group are incredible. I’ve tried to keep my counsel at those times but there are times . . .

Program and Activities

Establish a program schedule; try to distribute popular workshops in all time slots.

Control your schedule, but don’t be TOO compulsive.

Plan play time, especially if you have an intense program. Men aren't used to being in emotional situations, and they need breathing time.

Plan on a signal system for starting and ending workshops—perhaps a bell; be gentle. Give yourself some leeway between workshops so that men can let down, finish a conversation, etc.

Publish a schedule for a wall. Be sure it's visible to folks with bifocals, who exist in fair numbers. Note that MM often used the dining room tables.

Consider room assignments for workshops, especially, in terms of noise or movement, etc., distracting nearby groups.

Schedule space and time for affinity groups. Encourage them; they're really what men's weekends are all about.

Set up a literature table—lots of men have never seen men's books, men's magazines (well, men's movement magazines), etc.

Do what you can to develop clear expectations for group leaders.

Arrange for an evaluation of the conference if desired. We've done this three times (Conferences #2, 16, 18).

Leadership

Split leadership responsibilities at the conference, but appoint one man as “the man with the answers.” We put a fluorescent cap on him!

Arrange for careful reception of new men—introducing cabin mates, being sure some “veterans” are available for questions and directions, introducing conference leaders, workshop facilitators. Be sensitive to those who really look uptight, and move to chat with them. Some men have simply never been around men with an earring, etc. Be honest and diplomatic. “No, this is not a gay men’s conference; yes, there are gay men, bisexual men, and straight men here. Much of the richness of the weekend comes from the diversity of men who are here.”

Be sure men know the house rules—about smoking, fires, whatever. On the lake water safety needs to be addressed.

Assign men to work details. This is especially important at the end of the conference when everyone is tired and wants to go home. It is important that someone who knows the story to be around to close up shop. Your group’s image with the site manager’s can soar or suffer.

Miscellaneous

Arrange for a group photo if you wish. Believe it or not, you’d better arrange for someone to bring the right camera! If you can, do the photo early rather than late in the conference; we’ve found that you miss fewer people that way. Midday, out from under porch roofs, etc.

Negotiate with a photo shop if you’re going to get a lot of photo prints. We’ve been getting 3x5’s (in lots of 100+) for 19¢ each by agreeing to give the shop time to process them. Color prints have been much less expensive for us than black and white. So far we’ve included the photo as an extra—no charge—and have included it with the roster mailed within a month after the conference. In recent conferences we’ve gone to a 5x7’s—more expensive by far; watch what they do to the cost of the mailing.

The roster and the photo sent to those who've attended are a nice touch and are much appreciated. (We do ask men if they wish to be left off the roster; no one ever has. We also ask men to let us know if they wish their names omitted from lists we might send to another group; I think I have three such names at the moment.) The computer makes all this so much easier!

Thank you's to significant people are always in order.

If you want clarification on any of these issues (or others these bring up) or if you like to comment on alternatives or additions, please write Dodd Roberts, 12 Gardner Rd., Orono, ME 04473 or call 207-866-2694.

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