Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association

Conference Organizer’s Guide (Revised, 2015)

The Secretary should keep an updated copy of this guide, and President should send out copies to Organizers.

1. Conference Organizers’ Typical Calendar

3 Years in Advance: RMMRA contacts and appoints conference organizers.

Conference Organizers should:
1. Skim through this Guide.
2. Consider dates and potential hotels/resorts or institutional venues.
3. Start collecting samples of conference materials—calls for papers, notices, programs, etc.
4. Begin to determine how the conference finances will be handled. Consider sources of revenue as suggested below, and research how your institution prefers to deal with accounts, payments, and registration fees. Is electronic registration an option? Conference accounts should be, if possible, kept separate from RMMRA accounts.

2 Years in Advance: Conference Organizers should:
1. Skim through this Guide.
2. Establish dates of conference.
   ENSURE CONFERENCE DOESN’T CONFLICT WITH OTHER MAJOR MEDIEVAL OR RENAISSANCE CONFERENCES, OR FALL ON RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS.
3. Make preliminary arrangements with hotel/resort or university scheduling.
4. Notify dean(s) and chair(s) of upcoming conference.
5. Plan strategy for raising money to help fund conference.
6. Continue collecting samples of conference materials.

1 Year in Advance: Conference Organizers should:
1. Carry out plans for raising money, and create a clearly defined and agreed-upon funding document with the host institution.
2. Sign contracts with hotel/resort or host institution.
3. Consider possible exhibits such as from local bookstores; flyers from Medieval and Renaissance publishers and journals; Scholar’s Choice, etc.
4. Arrange any additional special events, concerts, or dramatic productions, or research relevant events in the community / institution.
5. Announce conference location, theme, proposal deadline, and local contact(s) in various standard sources of scholarly information, such as the UPenn CFP site, H-Announce, relevant listservs, the Medieval Academy, etc., as well as area universities.
6. Contact the RMMRA Webmaster to post the CFP on the RMMRA website.
7. Ensure the RMMRA secretary sends out the CFP to all members on record.
8. Work with the RMMRA president and Executive Council to establish the program-reviewing committee comprised of both RMMRA Executive Council representatives and representatives appointed by the organizers.

9 Months in Advance: Conference Organizers should:
1. Have the President of RMMRA include the call for papers in the Fall Newsletter with name(s) of confirmed plenary speaker(s), and advertise the Walton Travel Award.
2. Finalize membership of the program-reviewing panel for proposed papers.
3. Consider setting up a webpage for the conference on the institution's homepage.

3-6 Months in Advance: Conference Organizers should:
1. Shortly before the submission deadline, send out a final call for papers to the membership, area universities, and other distribution systems in the field.
2. Design Registration Forms and Conference Information Sheet.
3. Work with the program-reviewing panel to review submissions, assemble and title panels, seek and secure panel chairs, draft a preliminary program, and send registration and conference information promptly; query presenters about audio-visual equipment needed, and ensure the equipment is available.
4. Contact your own bookstore 3 months in advance to get participants' books in time for a display table (especially those of the plenary speakers).
5. Re-confirm room reservations, performances, events, etc.

1-3 Months in Advance: Conference Organizers should:
1. Work with the RMMRA Webmaster to post preliminary program on the RMMRA Website.
2. Introduce session chairs and panelists through email to provide all parties with contact information.
3. Notify presenters of session number, day, time, title, and chair.
4. Make final arrangements with hotel / venue as necessary, including the number of Executive Board members expected at the breakfast executive business meeting.
5. Make sure food arrangements have options for various dietary restrictions / allergies.
6. Work with the program-reviewing panel to prepare final program copy, and print copies for conference participants. Be sure to include information about the Breck and West awards and application deadline.
7. Prepare registration packets, name tags, meal tickets, handouts, etc.
8. Instruct Registration Desk helpers and gather materials needed at Registration Desk.
9. Check audio-visual equipment as necessary.

NB: The Executive Committee, under the guidance of the president, should judge and distribute the Walton Award shortly in advance of the conference, according to the guidelines of that award.
After the Conference: Conference Organizers should:
1. Send any membership information gathered during the conference to the Treasurer.
2. Send copies or originals of all receipts, along with a final report/summary of all receipts, contributions, and expenses to the Treasurer within a month of the Conference, or let the Treasurer know when you can (necessary for keeping our federal 501(c)(3) in good standing).
3. Send suggestions for updating and improving this Guide to the President and Secretary.
4. Send letters of thanks to plenary speakers, contributors, and helpers where appropriate.

II. Responsibilities of Conference Organizer(s) to the RMMRA

The Conference Chair or Co-Chair:
1. reports progress on conference arrangements to the Council at its annual meeting, starting two years in advance of the conference;
2. ensures that all presenters in regular sessions and others as appropriate have paid membership and conference fees;
3. sends an accurate and reasonably detailed record within four weeks of the conference’s close to the Treasurer (our status as a tax-exempt organization requires a report of all expenses and income, including contributions);
4. forwards to the Treasurer all registration forms for the Association's records as soon as possible after the Conference, as well as dues and any profit generated, as appropriate;
5. recommends changes and updates to this Guide as necessary;
6. ensures, as far as possible, that Conference finances are managed so neither the local sponsors nor the Association are left with indebtedness.

III. Establishing Conference Dates and Days

Dates: The Conference has been held variously from mid-March to early August. It is most important to not conflict with other regularly scheduled conferences, especially the International Congress on Medieval Studies (usually the first ten days of May), the Renaissance Society of America (March or April), and the Shakespeare Association of America (March or April). Please ensure that the Conference does not conflict with major religious holidays of any faith.

Days: Generally, the Conference begins on Thursday and ends on Saturday or Sunday morning. A banquet is usually on Friday evening, with the Executive Council Breakfast scheduled for early Saturday morning. The Business Luncheon (or simply Luncheon) is usually Saturday noon.

IV. Hotel / Venue Arrangements
Historically, the number of registrants has varied widely, from 30 to more than 100. A conservative estimate of the number of registrants is about 50, but dates and venue locations clearly affect numbers. There are generally more registrants than presenters, perhaps 5-10%.

Depending on number of days, events, presenters, and plenary sessions, 3-4 rooms are required for concurrent sessions. The banquet, plenary sessions, and luncheon will require larger rooms.

The organizer(s) must make sure that all hotel or catering charges are indicated on the contract. At one conference, miscommunication resulted in an unexpected expense of several thousand dollars. If wine is served at the banquet, make sure that the quality and quantities are specified.

Predicting the number of guests who will register at the hotel per night is not easy. One conference had 79 registrants but a high of 35 hotel reservations. Where alternative accommodations are less available, a higher percentage will take rooms at the conference site.

V. Strategies for Raising Money for the Conference

1. Universities, colleges, and departments often want to be involved in hosting and sponsoring significant conferences. Some organizers have had success seeking contributions from area colleges and universities. Faculty or students from supporting institutions may be admitted to the conference without paying registration fees, unless they are also presenting papers.

2. Arts and humanities deans and departments from the hosting institution(s) typically lend financial support. Our organization is regional, but we attract faculty from throughout the U.S., Canada, and abroad, and we have met annually for many years. It is good to notify deans and chairs two years in advance so that your solicitation for support is not a surprise.

3. Campus speakers’ committees and funds can help with plenary speakers.

4. Local or state development funds and memorials can be tapped. One conference received nearly $3000 from a memorial fund; another received $2000 from a state humanities council.

5. State funding can be had by associating the Conference with in-service training for secondary teachers. Several conference organizers offered credits to secondary teachers who attended.

6. The RMMRA may undertake to contribute to the Conference expenses, depending on the
availability of funds and the judgment of the Officers and Executive Council.

VI. Estimating Expenses and Registration Fees

1. Receipts:

   Contributions from local funding sources: $3,000-6,000
   Registrations and fees: $6,000-9,000

2. Expenses:

   Plenary Speakers (hotel, per diem, travel) $1,900-2,300
   Hotel Expenses (conference rooms, banquet) $3,800-5,000
   Mailing and Office Supplies $500-700
   Programs $110-150

These amounts reflect recent conferences, but check with your local vendors for more accurate numbers. Registration fees must be large enough to cover costs not otherwise covered. Organizers should also estimate how many students will be attending, as they will pay less than full-time faculty.

VII. Arrangements with the Host Institution

Be sure to work out a clearly defined financial plan with the host institution ahead of time, including the disposition of any additional profits resulting from careful management of the conference, which may be payable to the RMMRA. The financial plan should consider the use and reimbursement for the university letterhead, mailing system, copiers, and printers; it may also set up an account to handle conference transactions. If you encounter problems, the RMMRA treasurer can receive conference fees and pay expenses. Financial officers may need a W-9 with our EIN (03-0414969) signed by the President in order for the conference to receive university moneys.

VIII. Finding Assistance

It is ideal to have a department admin, graduate student, or intern to help with the many details. Without such help, organizers must be prepared to spend a great deal of time as the conference nears.

IX. Registration Form
The model form below demonstrates how the registration form might be set up. Whether on paper or online, it should include spaces for name, affiliation and department, mailing address, phones, and e-mail address. It should list the registration fee (perhaps with increased amount after a certain day), any available meals with options and costs, costs of any special events, and a total. Include how you want the checks made out, a mailing address, a phone number and e-mail for questions, as well as a notice that everyone attending (except as noted) must complete an official membership form and pay RMMRA membership dues. Writing a statement of your refund policy ahead of time is a good idea.

Plenary speakers, local faculty invited to chair sessions, and faculty from supporting departments, colleges, or universities who wish simply to attend need not pay registration fees or join RMMRA. Everyone giving a paper, however, must become members of the association and pay all fees.

Faculty from outside the U.S. may ask about alternative modes of payment. Ability to accommodate this request is ideal: you might suggest that they pre-register but pay the fees in cash upon arrival.

The Coordinator should work with RMMRA Secretary to ensure that all participants pay their dues before the conference.
Prototype Registration Form

Name: ____________________________________________

Position(s) and University Affiliation(s) (if any):
__________________________________________________

Preferred Mailing Address:
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________

Office Phone: ___________________________ Home Phone: ___________________________

E-Mail Address: ___________________________

Please list your scholarly interests, and, if any, your particular expertise:

Conference Registration:

Faculty Prior to 4/15, __$; After 4/15, __$
Student, Adjunct, Retired, Independent Prior to 4/15, __$; after 4/15, __$
One-Day Registration __$

Optional:

Luncheon, __$; times number if more than one

Banquet

Salmon, __$; times number if more than one
Chicken, __$; times number if more than one
Vegetarian, __$; times number if more than one

Special Event 1 __$; times number if more than one
Special Event 2 __$; times number if more than one

I plan ___, do NOT plan ___ to attend free event 1
I plan ___, do NOT plan ___ to attend free event 2

TOTAL ENCLOSED _________________________

Refunds are available until (date). For questions about arrangements, contact (name, address, phone, e-mail).

NOTE: Everyone giving papers at the conference must also become RMMRA members by completing
an official membership form and paying membership dues.

X. Conference Information Sheet

Include featured speakers, special events, exhibitors, conference location, hotel/resort rates, reservation information, deadlines, area attractions, travel information including shuttle service to the conference hotel/resort, and map where helpful, and the like.

XI. Review of Abstract Submissions

The ideal is to have a program-reviewing panel of three or four members charged with creating the program from start to finish, following the membership structure outlined above in Section I. Careful, critical review of all proposals is important to insure attendees a valuable experience and to allow the RMMRA to cultivate a membership that will ensure the continued vitality of the organization. The Conference Organizers may choose to serve on the panel or to appoint one or more members of the host institution to perform that task. Faculty on campus are generally pleased to be asked to review a proposal outside the expertise of committee members.

XII. The Program

The Conference program should recognize those giving support, list and include times for the Luncheon and the Executive Board Breakfast, announce/publicize the Breck and West awards, and announce the location and dates of the next Conference. NOTE: The “business” luncheon is a social occasion where the business consists of awarding the West award (when the recipient is present), a few brief announcements, and perfunctory election of new officers and Executive Council members. An index of names is helpful, especially to the organizers! If you include graphics in the program, be sure to request permissions to copy, or use materials from your institution's rare book room.

XIII. Registration Desk

Locating the Registration Desk in a central place and keeping an attendant present most of the conference is important for solving problems of all kinds—copying handouts, helping with AV needs, keeping caterers informed about meal reservations, directing registrants to downtown attractions, etc. Small snack items are often popular for students or those arriving mid-afternoon.

The following materials are necessary or helpful to keep at the registration desk: packets for all registrants with name tag, meal tickets, and other communications, including requests for
submissions to *Quidditas*; copies of completed registration forms; forms for on-site registrations; meal reservation lists with places for additions; handout with last-minute program changes, map of the venue with rooms highlighted; pens; material for signs; tape; scissors; stapler; change for registrants needing to pay in U.S. dollars; and a money purse or box and receipt book.

Having one person who will commit to being at the registration desk most of the conference is best, and the ideal is that this person be involved in planning the conference.