Southwestern Division  
Annual Training Conference  
Best Practices  

I. Purpose  
To establish a document that can be used to assist potential host cities when they are planning for and/or are chosen to host the annual training conference for the Southwestern Division.  

II. Scope  
A. When hosting an annual training conference, there are several functions that are required by the division's Constitution and By-Laws, as well as many functions that are not required but make for a more educational and enjoyable conference.  

B. Except for those items required by the division constitution and by-laws, nothing mentioned in this document is required. Any items mentioned that are not required by the constitution and by-laws are examples taken from successful past conferences and should be reviewed by host cities/chiefs to determine if they can be a benefit for their own conference.  

C. For additional assistance please contact division member's who have hosted previous conferences or the Executive Board of the Southwestern Division at www.swd-iafc.org.  

III. Expectations  
A. For a conference to be successful there must be a strong commitment from the host city as well as the host chief and host department. Any city wishing to host an annual conference must give careful consideration as to how much time and effort they are willing to devote toward the conference.  

B. The division expects and requires that host cities shall furnish, without cost to the division, the following building or buildings with suitable and sufficient capacity for:  
   1. Opening Ceremonies  
   2. Memorial Service  
   3. Conference Sessions  
   4. Committee Rooms
5. Exhibit Hall of ample size to accommodate apparatus and equipment. **Note - Although preferred, some cities do not have an exhibit hall for equipment and apparatus. This will not preclude a particular city from hosting a conference, provided they have an appropriate plan to deal with the apparatus and equipment. In these cases, the host hotel must have sufficient space for booth exhibitors to be indoors with apparatus outdoors. In cases where exhibited apparatus must remain outdoors, the division expects security measures to be in place at all times to prevent damage or theft of apparatus or equipment.**

C. The exhibit hall shall at all times be under the control of the host chief (See Constitution and By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Article VI, Section 2).

D. All monies collected for exhibits or displays during a Southwestern Division Conference shall be placed in the treasury of the division (See Constitution and By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Article VI, Section 2).

E. All matters pertaining to the Opening Ceremonies of each annual conference shall be arranged by the host chief. The host chief shall be responsible for securing the clergy and speakers required for the conference. The program shall be submitted to the division Board before being adopted or published (See Constitution and By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Article VI, Section 3).

F. The conference program shall be submitted to the division Board upon their arrival at the conference city. The Board reserves the right to add, take away, or otherwise revise the program if, in their opinion, it is advisable to do so (See Constitution and By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Article VI, Section 4).

IV. Host City

A. The host city is selected by the membership during the business session at the division’s annual training conference (usually held each fall). If more than one city wishes to compete for a particular conference, it is appropriate for each competing city to have a representative attend the annual conference to discuss their desire and to illustrate the benefits of hosting the annual training conference in their city (See By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Section 12).
B. Southwestern Division annual training conferences are chosen on a rotating basis allowing the annual conference to take place one time every five years in each of the five states comprising the division. For example, the 2009 training conference was held in Arkansas, the 2010 training conference in Louisiana, the 2011 conference in Oklahoma, the 2012 conference in Texas, and the 2013 conference in New Mexico (See Constitution and By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Article VI, Section 1).

C. The host city is selected two years prior to the conference occurring (See By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Section 12).

D. If, in any particular year, a state chooses not to host an annual conference or has no cities wishing to bid for a conference, the next state on the rotation will have the opportunity to host a conference (See Constitution and By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Article VI, Section 1).

V. Host Hotel

A. The host hotel should have enough available rooms to accommodate conference registers, vendors, educational providers, and guests. Any negotiated contract between the host chief and the host hotel should include a block of rooms large enough for ample accommodations.

B. It is the host city’s responsibility to furnish two hotel rooms at the host hotel, without cost to the division. One room is for the division president and one room is for the division secretary/treasurer. These rooms are needed beginning the night prior to the division board meeting and extending until the morning following the conference banquet. Any negotiated contract between the host chief and the host hotel should include these two rooms.

C. A fair and reasonable room rate should be negotiated which will allow a maximum number to attend the conference.

VI. Meeting Rooms

A. There must be meeting rooms of adequate size and quantity for all conference events which require attendees to officially meet in mass.
B. The following are functions which will require meeting rooms:

1. Opening Ceremonies/Memorial Service
2. Educational programs
3. State meetings (5)
4. Business Meeting

C. Meeting rooms should have the appropriate seating arrangement, tables (if necessary), audio/visual equipment (if necessary), head table and podium (if necessary).

D. Meeting rooms can be in the host hotel or in a nearby convention center, if available.

VII. Registration Fees

A. The conference must pay for itself with funds received from registrations, sponsorships, ad sales, etc. The division cannot be responsible to pay for any part of the conference except those expenses directly related to the division board (conference registrations, hotel rooms, etc.).

B. The division board will set the registration fees for each conference. This is done after consultation with the host chief.

C. The board will set the registration fees for:

1. Conference Registration
2. Partners Program Registration
3. Exhibitors Registration

(See By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Section 3).

D. The host chief shall receive seventy-five percent (75%) of all conference registration fees to defray expenses for hosting the annual conference (See By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Section 4).

E. The host chief shall receive twenty-five percent (25%) of all exhibit fees to defray expenses for hosting the annual conference (See By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Section 6).

F. The host chief shall receive one-hundred percent (100%) of partner program registration fees to defray expenses for hosting the annual conference (See By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Section 5). **Note - although it is the discretion of the host**
The partners program is usually structured so that it will be self-sufficient. Events/functions for the partners are included that can be paid for with the funds received from the partners registration with little or no additional funds needed.

G. From time to time host chiefs have approached the division board and requested a small amount of "start-up" or "seed" money to help pay initial conference expenses. Any initial funds approved by the division board will be deducted from the final check paid to the host chief at the conclusion of the annual conference.

VIII. Transportation

A. Transportation can be an issue at a conference, particularly if meetings and other events are conducted at a location other than the host hotel (such as a convention center).

B. Many conference attendees will fly in for a conference, not having a vehicle to drive. Plans need to be in place to transport conference registers, speakers, and guests to and from the airport.

C. Most conference attendees are unfamiliar with the host city and therefore will not be comfortable driving around the area. However, some attendees will prefer to drive their own vehicle.

D. Most successful conferences provide a mode of transportation for the conference, partners program, golf tournament, host night, etc.

E. Host cities must carefully review how those attending an annual conference will get to the various events/locations and make appropriate arrangements for transportation. Some cities provide buses while other host cities partner with a local car dealer to get vehicles that can be chauffeured by members of the host department.

IX. Registration Booth

A. A large number of conference attendees do not pre-register, preferring to register at the conference itself. This includes members registering for the conference as well as those registering for the partners program.

B. It is important for host cities to have registration booths established at the conference itself. These registration areas will need someone to staff the booth, particularly for the first day or two of the conference.
C. The hours and location for the registration booth should be included in the printed program.

X. Conference Communications

A. It is important to have good communications at any annual conference. If members of the board, other conference attendees, or exhibitors have an issue they need to have a point of contact.

B. It is recommended that a point of contact telephone number be published in the conference' printed program.

C. Several previous conferences have used hotel rooms or convention center meeting rooms as an information center/command post for the conference.

D. Several host cities have used the incident management system structure to run the conference.

XI. Conference Printed Program

A. It is important for the annual conference to have a printed program. The printed program offers location and scheduling information for everyone attending the conference.

B. The printed program should have a detailed schedule of the various events, including:

1. Division board meeting.
2. Opening ceremonies/memorial service.
3. Educational offering.
4. After-hours events (host night, banquet, etc.).
5. Golf tournament information.
6. Location of hospitality room.
7. Partners program.
8. Special locations to visit in the city/area.

C. Host cities usually sell ads in the printed program to defray the cost of having the programs printed. All fee(s) for the program ads are set by the host chief.

D. The content of the printed program must be approved by the division board prior to the final printing.

E. The printed program is solely the responsibility of the host chief.
XII. Board Meetings

A. The division board generally holds two board meetings in the host city during the year. A mid-year board meeting occurs approximately six to seven months prior to the annual conference. A second board meeting occurs just prior to the annual conference occurring.

B. Board meetings usually occur in a meeting room at the host hotel or convention center.

C. The mid-year board meeting gives the board the opportunity to speak with the host chief about the upcoming conference. It also gives the board the opportunity to tour all conference facilities, including the host hotel.

D. Working with the host chief, the division president shall schedule all board meetings.

XIII. Opening Ceremonies

A. All matters pertaining to the Opening Ceremonies shall be arranged by the host chief.

B. The host chief shall be responsible for securing the clergy and speakers for the opening ceremony (See Constitution and By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Article VI, Section 3).

C. Traditionally, host chiefs have utilized a local fire department honor guard to post the colors during the Opening Ceremonies.

D. It is customary to have a keynote speaker address the body during, or immediately after the opening ceremonies.

E. It is customary to have the local mayor, city manager, or some other government official welcome conference attendees by addressing the membership during the opening ceremonies.

XIV. Memorial Service

A. A Memorial Service shall be held in conjunction with the opening ceremonies on the first day of the annual conference (See By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Section 7).
B. The purpose of the service is to honor members that have died since the previous conference (See By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Section 7).

C. The Memorial Service shall be under the direction of the host chief or his designee (See By-Laws of the Southwestern Division, Section 7).

D. Some conferences have included bagpipe players and/or bugle players (to play taps) in the memorial service.

E. Some conferences have shown a moving video presentation during the memorial service.

XV. Educational Program

A. The division has established an Educational Committee that will work closely with the host chief to secure quality educational providers. This committee consists of five (5) division members appointed by the division president with one member representing each of the five states comprising the division.

B. Once a city has been awarded an annual conference, the host fire chief should (as soon as possible) contact the division’s educational committee to establish a theme for the conference and begin establishing available educational time slots for the conference. Note - many quality educational programs and speakers are booked as much as two years in advance. It is important that these people be contacted as soon as possible to determine availability for a particular conference.

XVI. Host Night Dinner/Activity

A. One night during the annual training conference will be designated as the Host Night.

B. The Host Night usually includes some form of dinner for all attendees and their partners. Note - many times this event takes place at some historic or entertainment venue. It might take place at a fire museum or some community building designed to accommodate large groups of people for dining purposes. The meal is usually something related to the geographic area such as a chuck wagon dinner, a barbeque dinner, a cajun shrimp feed, etc.
C. The dinner is usually combined with some form of entertainment such as a country music show, frontier days show, ventriloquist, comedy act, etc.

XVII. Banquet

A. A conference banquet will be held on the final evening of each conference.

B. The banquet usually occurs at the host hotel, but can occur at some other suitable location.

C. The banquet is entirely at the discretion of the host chief or his designee.

D. The cost for the banquet is included in the conference registration fee.

E. The banquet includes a nice sit-down dinner as well as presentations.

F. Some conferences have a guest speaker at the banquet.

G. New division officers are sworn in at the banquet.

H. Most banquets include some kind of reception (maybe 30 minutes prior to the banquet beginning) with a cash bar.

I. Traditionally, those attending the banquet wear a nice suit or their Class A uniform. Spouses/partners wear apparel appropriate for the banquet such as a dress or nice pants suit.

XVIII. Exhibitors Show

A. The vendors are a very important part of an annual conference. It is important the conference support the vendors as much as possible.

B. There needs to be ample time dedicated in the conference program to allow attendees to visit with the vendors.

C. Several successful past conferences have included a "vendor's reception" in the vendors area. This event attracts most of the conference attendees and it gives the vendors an excellent opportunity to speak with the conference attendees. Usually this reception will have some form of light foods.
D. Some conferences have hosted a lunch in the vendor’s area to get the attendees visiting with the vendors.

E. Many times a particular vendor(s) can help with financial sponsorship of a vendor’s reception or lunch which helps to defray the costs.

F. Some conferences have provided entertainment to draw more people to the exhibitor’s area.

XIX. Partners Program

A. Most of the conference attendees will bring their spouse/partner with them. It is important to have some activities for the spouses/partners while the conference is in session.

B. Most registers for the partners program will not pre-register, preferring to register when they arrive at the conference.

C. Some spouses/partners will not want to attend all of the partner’s activities, but will like to attend some of them. Concessions must be made to allow these individuals to attend individual activities for a fee.

D. Some previous partner’s activities have included a pottery or craft class, a trip to a winery, a shopping day, tours of museums or historic sights, a nice lunch at a scenic restaurant, etc.

XX. Meals

A. Because it means a lower cost for conference attendees, the more meals a conference can provide, the better the bargain attending the conference will be. This can be a deciding factor, particularly in difficult financial times or for small departments who do not have a large travel budget.

B. In addition to the host night dinner, many past conferences have scheduled at least one or two other dinners (included in the registration fees).

C. Many past conferences have had local groups cook for the conference attendees. The host city may have a group that enjoys cooking for civic events. Examples of past meals include catfish, ribs, steaks, etc.
D. Some conferences have included an area fire department inviting all conference attendees to their fire station and serving lunch cooked by the fire fighters.

XXI. Hospitality Room/Networking

A. Each conference has a hospitality room for after-hours networking after the conference program has concluded each day.

B. The hospitality room is entirely at the discretion of the host chief or his designee.

C. The hospitality room should not be open while the educational programs, opening ceremonies, memorial service, business session, banquet, or the vendor's reception are occurring.

D. At many past conferences local groups such as the area fire chiefs association or the local fire fighters association have staffed the hospitality room.

E. Many times host conferences get assistance from local spirits and beer distributors to stock the hospitality room.

XXII. Golf Tournament

A. A number of people like to play in a golf tournament before the conference begins. Those who wish to play golf may include conference attendees, vendors, host department members, other people from the area, even spouses/partners.

B. The golf tournament is entirely at the discretion of the host chief or his designee.

C. The fee and structure for the golf tournament is set by the host chief or his designee. Traditionally the fee to play in the golf tournament has been around $50. The fee usually covers green fees, cart, lunch, and any prizes.

D. Although few attend, the other conference attendees who do not play golf are usually invited to join the golfers for the lunch and awards presentation.
XXIII. Gifts/Presentations/Prizes

A. Several past conferences have given away various items to conference attendees. Some of these items are given when the attendee registers for the conference and some of these items are give-aways to get increased attendance at different events.

B. Any items given away are at the discretion of the host chief and must be funded with monies received from conference/event registration, sponsorships, ad sales, etc.

C. It is customary for any person who provides an educational program or is a key note speaker for a particular event to receive a gift from the conference. This is usually in the form of a plaque, trophy, pen set, etc. Usually the year, location, and date of the conference is engraved, etched, or stamped on the gift.

D. When a person registers for the conference, it has been customary to give that person a tote bag. The tote bag contains the printed program, other information about the community (perhaps a map), as well as small trinkets and give-aways (many provided by the local convention and visitors bureau). Usually the tote bag will have the division logo on the outside as well as the year, location, and dates of the conference. Sometimes tote bags can be obtained from the convention and visitors bureau.

E. Registers for the partners program usually receive a tote bag as well. It may be the same tote bag as conference attendees, or it may be a different bag. Usually the partner’s totes contain special items specific for the partners. Past conferences have provided make-up and perfume samples, scented soaps, small change purses, etc.

F. Some past conferences have included drawings for small prizes at different functions. Maybe the partners program will give-away a nice basket of items, a craft or piece of art specific to the particular area, or a bottle of wine at each of their daily events. Perhaps items can be given away at the vendor’s reception, at the host night activity, or at each of the educational events. Some times vendors or local merchants will donate items to give away. Some times the conference has enough money to purchase give-away items.

G. Traditionally, the golf tournament has given away items to those who register for the golf tournament. The items might include a bag of tees, a sleeve of golf balls, a golf towel, a ball marker, etc. The tournament usually gives a trophy or plaque to the winning golf
team members, and maybe a similar award for the second place team, and even the third place team. Also, there is usually some kind of prize for the longest drive contest and the closest to the pin contest (occasionally a driver and a putter have been the prizes). There have been conferences where door prizes were given away at the golf tournament. Again, it is totally at the discretion of the host chief or his designee as to what (if any) prizes the golf tournament will award.

XXIV. Advertising the Conference

A. The word must get out for any conference to be successful. It must get out early and often. Chiefs need to be able to budget for the conference. People won’t attend if they don’t know about the conference.

B. The division website must be current with plenty of information about the conference listed. Information about the educational program, partner’s program, golf tournament, etc. must be listed. The host chief should work closely with the division secretary/treasurer to make sure detailed conference information gets on the website in a timely manner.

C. Make sure conference information gets into the SWIAFC newsletter.

D. Every state has chief’s organizations. Utilize the state vice-presidents to get the word out at these state conferences. Possibly get the state chief’s organizations to include our conference information in their newsletter or magazine as well as on their website.

E. Let the state vice-presidents help by contacting (probably by e-mail) all SWIAFC members in that state about the conference.

F. Particular attention should be paid to the host state. Some cities have a policy that will not allow chiefs to attend out of state training. These chiefs in particular need to be targeted. This is their one opportunity every five years to attend our conference.

G. Information needs to be disseminated at other gatherings such as local or area fire chiefs meetings.

H. Utilize the e-mail to send mass mailings to all SWIAFC members, providing information and inviting them to the conference.