SMOFcon 2000

Dec. 1 - 3, 2000

Cocoa Beach, Florida

The convention for those who run conventions.

SMOFcon 2000

Contents:

Welcome to SMOFcon 2000:

SMOFcon 2000 is the 18th rendition of this seminar for conrunners. We hope you enjoy it and take home a few pointers that you might be able to adapt for your own convention.

We have spared no expense to bring you this convention! (Well, not too many at least.) With the cooperation of the federal government, we hope to bring you the most spectacular light show that any S-F convention has had. For just a few dollars more, you can join an excursion to a "sci-fi" fan's dream. Tour an actual space center with improved crowd control based on the most extensive testing by professional imagineers.

The program is varied: from demos and workshops to discussions to a straight presentation or two. At SMOFcon, the audience is often as qualified as the speakers. Some of the programs will, hopefully, take advantage of this luxury. They will be very interactive. Others will be more formal. The entire program is listed in the next few pages.

We have themed a few of the programs. The "Thinking It Through" programs should give you some of the logical points necessary to review and possibly revise your own activities. The "Create-a-Con" programs are more of a hands-on approach, providing a discussion of various techniques that different conventions use. The "Challenge Rounds" are an attempt to let you watch knowledgeable people as they approach a different or novel situation. It's a sort of improvisational role-playing of different situations. We have tried to use many panelists from many different areas to give as wide a perspective as possible.

For the few of you who have not already signed up for the banquet, get your tickets right away. We hope to have a fun time as we BBQ the Bidders at our Caribbean style barbecue buffet.

And don't forget the three rules of convention-running:
- Be sure you take running the con seriously.
- Don't take it too seriously
- Be sure to have fun. (Stop when it's not fun so you can come back later.)

- Joe Siclari

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SMOFcon 2000 Staff:

Con Suite: Judi Goodman & Glen "Scruffy" Hammer
Launch Passes: Pat Molloy
Programming: Edie Stern
   Program staff: Joe Siclari, Ben Yalow
Registration: Melanie Herz
Treasury: Bill Wilson
Web Site: Jack Weaver
Chairman: Joe Siclari

Friday	Dolphin Room	Heron Room	Con Suite / Egret Room
4:30	But you've got to have a Buffy Panel Margaret Austin (m), Stephen Boucher, Jim Mann, Ben Yalow		
6:00 - 7:30	Dinner Break		
7:30	Opening: Find out what's going to happen this weekend Joe Siclari, Edie Stern		
8:00-10:00	Mix and Match Conventions		
10:00			**Con Suite** Naomi's Surprise

Saturday	Manatee B	Heron Room	
10:00	Hot topic	Programming Brainstorm for Millenium Philcon Laurie Mann	
11:00	Thinking It Through: Organization Mark Olson, TomWhitmore	Care and Feeding of Filk Mary Kay Kare, Priscilla Olson (m), Scruffy	
12:00	Lunch	Lunch	
1:00	Create-a-Con: So, You Want/Have to Chair Your Own Convention Andrew Adams, Christian McGuire, Joe Siclari(m), Leslie Turek	Technology Today for Conventions Steve Davies, Janice Gelb (m), Erik Olson, Mike Scott	**Egret Room** Publishing Workshop: Geri Sullivan (90 mins)
2:00	Recruiting and Staffing Todd Dashoff, Tim Illingworth, Peggy Rae Pavlat, Ruth Sachter (m)	Business Style Management - Fannish Context Kent Bloom, Mark Olson (m), Edie Stern, Martin Easterbrook	
3:00	Create-a-Con: ConSuite Staff/Den Planning Gay Ellen Dennett (m), Naomi Fisher, Melanie Herz	Thinking It Through: Finance Judy Bemis, Joni Dashoff, Robert MacIntosh, Mark Olson (m)	**Egret Room** Demo Programming Software Jim Mann
4:00	Programming Challenge Round Priscilla Olson, George Peterson, Stephen Silver,Patty Wells, Edie Stern (c) [to 5:30]	Logistics Seth Breidbart, Larry Gelfand, Hal Haag, Mike Pins	

5:00		Thinking It Through: Hotel Bobbi Armbruster (m), Margaret Austin, Stephen Boucher, Ben Yalow	
6:00			
7:00	**Ocean Deck** - BBQ		
8:00 - 10:00	The bidders and standing worldcons: Worldcon bidders, SMOFcon bidders, other bidders, standing worldcons, others (Ocean Deck)		
10:00	Enjoy the consuite		

Sunday	Manatee A	Heron	
10:00	Business Meeting: Hugo Awards Vincent Docherty (m), Rick Katze, Mike Nelson		
11:00	Create-A-Con: Care & Feeding of GoHs and other guests Andrew Adams, Mary Kay Kare, Rick Katze, Peggy Rae Pavlat (m)	Preserving Conventions Laurie Mann, Joe Siclari (m), Joyce Scrivner	**Egret Room** Web Workshop Anne Gay
12:00	Lunch	Naomi's Cooking Workshop	
1:00	Hotel Challenge Round: Staff: Bobbi Armbruster, Joe Siclari, BenYalow Panel: KIM Campbell, Todd Dashoff, Deb Geisler, Tom Whitmore	Rightsizing the Convention Tim Illingworth, John Lorentz (m), Geri Sullivan	**Con Suite** Naomi's Workshop (90 mins)
2:00	Style: Developing a Character and Sense of Theatre for your Convention Tony Lewis, Edie Stern(m), Geri Sullivan, Patty Wells	Create-a-Con: Publicity Eve Ackerman, Laurie Mann (m), Scott Dennis	**Con Suite** (at about 2:30) Eating Naomi's Workshop
3:00	Art Show Management Terry Dahl, Mike Pins, Michael Siladi (m), Tim Szczesuil	Hot Topic	
4:00	Summary		

SMOFcon 2000

Program Descriptions

Art Show Management   **Sunday 3 PM**

We keep saying that art show management is a problem solved. However, it seems to be a regular topic on the SMOFs bounce, and a stumbling point for many conventions. What is it that we are doing wrong? What are the most common problems? What are some of the solutions?
Terry Dahl, Mike Pins, Michael Siladi (m), Tim Szczesuil

BBQ the bidders   **Saturday 7 PM**

Business style management in a fannish context   **Saturday 2 PM**

Kent Bloom, Martin Easterbrook, Mark Olson (m), Edie Stern
What passes for management insight among SMOFs - and hard won insight at that - is what is taught to managers by companies like IBM and GM. Are we reinventing the wheel? What wheels are we reinventing? Is real world business experience valuable for conrunning? Is there any experience that isn't? People say that it's not fannish to use business management knowledge. It's *not* unfannish to use. How can those SMOFs who are not high level managers in large companies gain this experience/education? What are some of the specific lessons which ought to be passed on? Are volunteers that different?

But You've Got to Have a Buffy Panel   **Friday 4:30 PM**

Margaret Austin(m), Stephen Boucher, Jim Mann, Ben Yalow
Every convention has to have a Buffy panel, or a B5 panel, or Star Trek, or ...Whatever the current fannish obsession, programming has to cover it in order to serve the membership of a convention. How do you make it different each time? How do you put an interesting twist so that even non-obsessives will enjoy the panel? Why has Buffy created such a fanatical audience, with such diverse roots? Why do people respond the way they do? Why do our panelists spend uncounted hours watching, analyzing and downloading Buffy the Vampire Slayer?

Care and Feeding of Filk   **Saturday 11 AM**

Glenn "Scruffy" Hammer, Mary Kay Kare, Priscilla Olson(m)
How do you serve and grow a local filk community? What do filkers need? What makes them happy and what makes them angry? Do you need filk oriented program or is it enough to have a late night room with chairs in it? How can you use filk to make a better convention? What are the common pitfalls?

Create-a-Con: Care & Feeding of GoHs and other guests   **Sunday 11 AM**

Andrew Adams, Mary Kay Kare, Rick Katze, Peggy Rae Pavlat (m)
How do select guests? Are there different criteria for different size conventions or kinds of conventions? Once you select them, how do you invite them? What amenities should you provide for a Guest of Honor? What amenities do cons provide for other guests? What do you do when your GoH orders a case of champagne and three teenagers from room service? What costs does the convention have to pick up? Do GoH need a minder? How much can you use a GoH? How can you use your GoH to reward your committee?

Create-a-Con: ConSuite/Staff Den/Fan Lounge Planning   Saturday 3 PM
Gay Ellen Dennett (m), Naomi Fisher, Melanie Herz
A good consuite or staff den doesn't just happen. It's not just putting potato chips and celery (or even real food) out on the table. How do you give a consuite some identity? How do you make it a place that people naturally visit, and enjoy? How do you handle the four "p's" of food logistics from planning to purchasing to preparation and presentation? What about booze? Is a dry consuite better or worse? What special handling do you provide for special people? Who do you consider special? How is a fan lounge different from a consuite or a staff den? How does physical placement help? hurt?

Create-a-Con: Publicity   Sunday 2 PM
Eve Ackerman, Scott Dennis, Laurie Mann (m)
If you build it, how do you get them to come? There are so many conventions every weekend, how do you get mindshare for your convention? How do you get the word out through fannish circles? What are the typical fan channels for publicity? Should you use a progress report? What should you put in it? How do you get the word out through mundane channels to get the best local coverage? What's the difference between a fan press release and a mundane press release? Is there a difference? What about timing? - when do you do these things?

Create-a-Con: So, You Want/Have to Chair Your Own Convention   Saturday 1 PM
Andrew Adams, Christian McGuire, Joe Siclari(m), Leslie Turek
You've run a department at a bigger convention. Now you're running the convention. What's different? What's the same? Who do YOU ask for advice? How do you get to be chairman? What do you have to do? How do you put a team together? How do you analyze the skills of your people without getting them pissed (British translation: angry)? What is the real role of a chairman? Does he or she lead the committee? Mediate discussions? Referee? How do you manage volunteers who can walk out at any time? Should the chairman be the front man for the convention? How do you give recognition to your committee and staff? What advice would you give to a first time chairman? Who should "just say no". (Also see our program on Business style management in a fannish context).

Demo: Programming Software   Saturday 3 PM
Jim Mann
Programming, especially for larger conventions, is nearly impossible to do manually. This software has been tested under fire at large regionals and worldcons. Jim Mann demonstrates the grace with which large scale programming can be managed.

Hot Topic 1   Saturday 10 AM

Hot Topic 2   Sunday 3 PM

Hotel Challenge Round   Sunday 1 PM
Bobbi Armbruster - VP of Hotel Sales, Joe Siclari - challenger, Ben Yalow - advisor
KIM Campbell, Todd Dashoff, Deb Geisler, Tom Whitmore
In this challenge round, our panelists are negotiating with the VP of Hotel Sales to hold a large SF convention in her hotel. The moderator will give specific convention requirements to the panelists who must then negotiate with the hotel to satisfy those requirements. Some will be simple, and some complex. A few might be unusual. All will be possible. For example: We want to have Gallagher,

world famous sloppy comedian, perform at the masquerade intermission. This means a wet sloppy mess, followed by people in costume. How can the hotel help us make this work?

Hugo Awards   **Sunday 10 AM**

Vincent Docherty(m), Rick Katze, Mike Nelson
The Hugo awards have generated a lot of discussion. There are multiple committees set up. What is going on ? What's the straight skinny? Can the awards really be modified? Is there a digital gap? There's no way a web site for example, can be nominated. What about Hugos for works printed first out of North America? How can they be considered equally when most voters don't see them in the year of their eligibility? What are the current controversies, and possible solutions?

Logistics   **Saturday 4 PM**

Seth Breidbart, Larry Gelfand, Hal Haag, Mike Pins
Logistics is the behind the scenes activity that lets the convention happen. Without it nothing is where it's supposed to be when it has to be there. Logistics lacks glamour, but is critical to the success of the convention. What does this department do? What planning is necessary? When do you start? How do you keep track of what different departments need and be able to supply those needs? What equipment is necessary? Is this ever a one man job? Why do we seem to have so many problems in this area? What can other areas do to make the job of logistics easier?

Mix and Match Conventions   **Friday 8 PM**
Joe Siclari
Make sure you've filled in your Experience Summary, so you can fully participate in this program.

Naomi's Cooking Workshop (limited to 6)   **Sunday Noon**
Naomi Fisher has won awards for feeding fans. At this hands-on workshop, learn planning, technique and some of the special wisdom that make Naomi's parties great. This is 1 hour in the classroom, plus 90 minutes hands-on in the consuite kitchen. Food supplies and equipment will be provided for the participants. Afterwards, the results of the workshop will be provided for the delectation of SMOFcon members in the con suite. **Sign up immediately; this is limited to six participants.**

Opening Ceremonies   **Friday 7:30 PM**
Find Out What's Going to Happen this Weekend
Joe Siclari, Edie Stern

Preserving Conventions   **Sunday 11 AM**
Laurie Mann, Joyce Scrivner, Joe Siclari (m)
FanHistory is about preserving our fannish heritage. Most people think this means preserving fanzines and other publications, as well as physical artifacts. Conventions however, are major events that often are not documented. How can we preserve what's going on at our conventions? How can we encourage others to participate in this preservation? If we record what happens at conventions, others may be able to enjoy it, and learn from it, later on. Besides, don't you wish you could really see Harlan at 17, when the mad dogs kneed him in the groin?

Programming Challenge Round   **Saturday 4 PM**
Priscilla Olson, George Peterson, Steven Silver, Patty Wells. Edie Stern (c)
This is a challenge round for hot shot programming talent from around the country. In this program (which has an extra half an hour), the panel will be given a geographic location, a GoH, and a list of

professional attendees for a general SF convention. In this panel, you are challenged to put together a strong base for program. This gives the audience an idea on how to brainstorm programming, and how to quickly adapt to the guests on hand. We'll use transparencies and an overhead projector to record the proposed programs, and let everyone watch it take shape. For those that are very compulsive, it is OK to bring one reference book. Be glad - if this was a letter to Astounding, then we might have to actually create this convention.

Publishing Workshop   **Saturday 1 PM**

Geri Sullivan

Publications are the way we communicate with convention attendees. Flyers, progress reports, program books -- every convention has them. How can we make these attractive, readable and useful? Geri Sullivan is a professional graphics designer as well as a well respected fan editor. Her progress reports and program books, as well as her fanzine *Idea,* are among the best publications of their type. Geri will provide examples, analyze their good and bad points, and explain the process of crafting a convention publication from concept to acquiring and editing materials and to the final production.

Recruiting and Staffing   **Saturday 2 PM**

Todd Dashoff, Tim Illingworth, Peggy Rae Pavlat, Ruth Sachter (m)

We had a taste of recruiting for conventions. What do you need to know about your convention to properly recruit for it? How do you identify the skills you want? How do you put the right people in the right positions? How can you keep the wrong people out of the wrong positions? This gets more complicated, the smaller the convention gets. How can a small convention move people around to benefit the convention and to improve the skills of the people working on it. If you're working on a big convention, how do you recruit outside people without upsetting your local team? Is recruiting for conventions like hiring for business? If not, what's different (besides the money)?

Rightsizing the Convention   **Sunday 1 PM**

Tim Illingworth, John Lorentz (m), Geri Sullivan

Some conventions want to grow -- some want to shrink. Many cons have grown tremendously. Some can't seem to reach the break-even level. A few have restructured their convention to shrink or change it to what the committee felt more comfortable with. How do you know what the right size is? How do you get to the right size? What are the pitfalls of trying to change? What benefits can you derive? How can you grow without changing the focus of your convention?

Style: Developing a Character and Sense of Theater for your Convention   **Sunday 2 PM**

Tony Lewis, Edie Stern(m), Geri Sullivan, Patty Wells

Another weekend, another convention. After a while, they all start to run together. How do you put character in a convention? What kind of traditions create character? Are they all programming? Does decor/decoration count? If your committee changes every year, can you have a continuing character? What conventions do you think showed pizzazz? Why did you think so? Is it something we can emulate? How do you put your imprint on your convention? How can you create "business" or "shtick" to give your convention style. How can you develop a few dramatic or comedic bits to give your convention a sense of the theatrical.

Summary   **Sunday 4 PM**

Well, that's all folks. An underlying theme for this program has been to provide unexpected challenges for participants. We'll have a few more challenging, but fun, questions for you at closing. Be prepared. (Hint: Think about Joe's fannish penchants**).**

Technology Today for Conventions   **Saturday 1 PM**

Steve Davies, Janice Gelb (m), Erik Olson, Mike Scott

What current technology is a plus for convention runners? What's not ready for prime time yet? What should we use today, and what should we wait a few more years to do? We use the Internet for research, and for surveys, and so on, but should we be publishing pocket programs for Palm Pilots and Blackberries? How should we use chat/IRCs/Buddy lists/conferencing to keep committees together? What about webcams at conventions for those that can't attend? Should there be web cams at committee meetings? Are legal/privacy concerns an issue? Should conventions be archived? What works best for Internet Lounges?

Thinking It Through: Finance   **Saturday 3 PM**

Mark Olson (m), Robert MacIntosh, Joni Dashoff, Judy Bemis

Every convention has to manage its finances. Our panelists will walk you through the process, help you to think about the decision points for your convention and show you how to analyze your options.

Thinking It Through: Hotel   **Saturday 5 PM**

Bobbi Armbruster(m), Margaret Austin, Stephen Boucher, Ben Yalow

Every convention has to work with its hotel(s) and convention centers. Our panelists will walk you through the process, help you to think about the decision points for your convention and show you how to analyze your options.

Thinking It Through: Organization   **Saturday 11 AM**

Mark Olson, Tom Whitmore

Every convention has to develop an organization it can work with. Our panelists will walk you through the process, help you to think about the decision points for your convention and show you how to analyze your options.

Web Workshop   **Sunday 11 AM**

Anne Gay

Everybody thinks they know how to do a convention web site. They are easy to put up, but are often too busy or poorly defined to provide good information quickly. Anne Gay will take you from the basics of what should be in a convention website, to what kind of useful interactivity you can achieve, to how to avoid common trouble spots. . This workshop won't teach you how to put up a web site. It will teach you what makes a web site good, and how to talk to your webmaster about it.

(SMOFcon 18)

December 1-3, 2000 -- Cocoa Beach, Florida

Membership List

BBQ Reservation - Paid ♨ - Not paid 💲

#	Name	Home Port	#	Name	Home Port
118	Eve Ackerman ♨	Gainesville, FL	60	Alexis Layton	Cambridge, MA
101	Andrew A. Adams ♨	Montrose, UK	15	Hope Leibowitz 💲	Toronto, Ontario Canada
46	Bobbi Armbruster ♨	Venice, CA	24	Suford Lewis ♨	Natick, MA
76	Margaret Austin 💲	Swindon, Wilts, UK	23	Tony Lewis ♨	Natick, MA
44	Judy Bemis ♨	Wake Forest, NC	107	Danny Lieberman ♨	New York, NY
37	Ajay Bhushan	Toronto, Ontario Canada	88	John Lorentz ♨	Portland, OR
50	Kent Bloom ♨	Colorado Springs, CO	105	Perrianne Lurie 💲	Harrisburg, PA
125	Stephen Boucher ♨	Australia	49	Robert J. MacIntosh ♨	Annandale, VA
27	Seth Breidbart ♨	New York, NY	10	Jim Mann ♨	Mount Lebanon, PA
117	Elaine M. Brennan	Denver, CO	9	Laurie Mann ♨	Mount Lebanon, PA
94	James M. Briggs ♨	San Diego, CA	114	Christian B. McGuire ♨	North Hollywood, CA
110	Ann A. Broomhead	Littleton, MA	38	Pat McMurray	Bromley, Kent, UK
			75	Karen Meschke	Austin, TX

120	Phylis S. Brown	Phylis S Brown
68	Ned Bush	Plantation, FL
35	KIM Campbell	York, UK
95	Sandra L. Childress	San Diego, CA
74	Steve Cole	Orlando, FL
73	Susan Cole	Orlando, FL
85	Tammy L. Coxen	Ann Arbor, MI
65	Terry B. Dahl $	Titusville, FL
20	Joni Dashoff	Philadelphia, PA
19	Todd Dashoff	Philadelphia, PA
32	James Daugherty	Burlingame, CA
31	Katheryn Daugherty	Burlingame, CA
66	Brenda F. Daverin	Redwood City, CA
67	Robert Daverin	Redwood City, CA
8	Gay Ellen Dennett	Natick, MA
42	Jane Dennis	Lexington, KY
43	Scott Dennis	Lexington, KY
61	Vincent Docherty	Groningen, Netherlands
71	Peggy A. Dolan	Miami Beach, FL
83	Barbara Duvall	Winter Springs, FL
86	G. Patrick Molloy	Huntsville, AL
57	Cheryl Morgan	Sunnyvale, CA
51	Mary Morman	Colorado Springs, CO
26	Mike R. Nelson	Oakton, VA
98	Erik V. Olson	Saint Louis, MO
6	Mark Olson $	Framingham, MA
7	Priscilla Olson $	Framingham, MA
45	Tony Parker	Wake Forest, NC
25	Sara M. Paul	Philadelphia, PA
121	Patricia H. Peak	Key West, FL
89	Hillary Pearlman	Cooper City, FL
62	Carlos V. Perez Jr.	Coral Gables, FL
70	Becky D. Peters	Fort Lauderdale, FL
90	George W. Peterson $	Fort Lauderdale, FL
30	Michael T. Pins $	Minneapolis, MN
92	Carol Porter	Boynton Beach, FL
102	Jennifer Anne Quin	Montrose, UK
63	Dave Ratti	Orlando, FL
115	Michael "Sparks" Rennie	York, UK
64	James C. Rogers $	Titusville, FL

77	Martin Easterbrook $	Swindon, Wilts, UK	36	Ruth Sachter	Portland, OR
87	Naomi C. Fisher	Huntsville, AL	48	Juan Sanmiguel	Orlando, FL
104	George Flynn	Cambridge, MA	91	Christina Santiago $	Fort Lauderdale, FL
13	Crickett Fox $	San Jose, CA;	81	John Sapienza	College Park MD
21	Pam Fremon	Waltham, MA	82	Peggy Rae Sapienza	College Park MD
84	Anne K. Gay	Waterloo, Ontario Canada	28	Sharon Sbarsky	Needham, MA
18	Deb Geisler	Middleton, MA	124	Mike Scott $	UK
39	Janice Gelb	Los Altos, CA	113	Joyce Scrivner	Minneapolis, MN
112	Larry S. Gelfand	Brewster, NY	41	Elisa Sheets	San Diego, CA
5	Judi Goodman $	Miami, FL	1	Joe Siclari	Yorktown Heights, NY
108	Marc E. Gordon	Washington, DC	40	Michael Siladi	Mountain View, CA
79	Doyle J. Green Jr.	Palm Beach Gardens, FL	109	Steven H. Silver	Northbrook, IL
103	Halmer D. Haag	Baltimore, MD	58	Ken M. Smookler	Toronto, Ontario Canada
4	Glen Hammer	Longwood, FL	56	Kevin Standlee	Sunnyvale, CA
99	D. Larry Hancock	Toronto, Ontario Canada	2	Edie Stern	Yorktown Heights, NY
16	Teddy Harvia	Dallas, TX	72	Geri F. Sullivan	Minneapolis, MN
93	Philip Herscher	Deerfield Beach, FL	111	Timothy P. Szczesuil $	Littleton, MA
3	Melanie Herz	Palm Bay, FL	78	Mary Tabasko	Pittsburgh, PA
123	Marcia Illingworth $	UK	17	Diana Thayer	Dallas, TX
122	Tim Illingworth $	UK	97	Becky Thomson	Sumner, WA
12	Saul Jaffe $	Passaic, NJ	100	Adam Tilghman	San Diego, CA
53	Athena L. Jarvis $	Hamilton, Ontario Canada	59	Leslie Turek	Watertown, MA

52 Peter R. Jarvis $ Hamilton, Ontario
                         Canada

29 Neil Kaden   Fairview, TX

22 Mary Kay Kare $ San Ramon, CA

69 Rick Katze   Norwood, MA

116 Deborah A. King   Arlington, MA

119 Lynn F. Koehler   Center Valley, PA

106 Elspeth Kovar   Laurel, MD

55 Dina Krause $

80 Diane M. Kurilecz   Cary, NC

96 E. Thomas Veal   Chicago, IL

54 Dennis Virzi   Duncanville, TX

33 Patty Wells $ Portland, OR

11 Tom Whitmore   Seattle, WA

47 Bill Wilson   Hollywood, FL

34 Lewis H. Wolkoff   Harrisburg, PA
    $

14 Ben Yalow   Bronx, NY

Non Member BBQ Reservations

Michelle Boyce   George Krause $ Skipper W. Morris
                                             $
Ann Broomhead $ Sydnie Krause $
                                             Bill Murphy

Updated November 27, 2000. Please send any comments regarding this Web page to the
SFSFS Webmaster. Thank you.

SMOFcon 2000
Experience Summary

Name: _____   Phone number: _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

No. of cons worked: _____

This is only for general information. We know that a lot of positions are not included. If you can summarize them into the grid, do so. Otherwise you can add notes at the end of the form. In each box, please enter the **number** of conventions for which you've held the position at the indicated level. Thanks!

Position	Local Convention Draws primarily from the local area	Regional Convention Draws from nearby states	National Convention Draws nationally	International Convention Worldcon, Eurocon, etc.
Art Show Department Head				
Art Show Staff level				
Art Show Gopher				
Chair				
Con Suite Department head				
Con Suite Staff level				
Con Suite Gopher				
Dealer Room Department head				
Dealer Room Staff level				
Dealer Room Gopher				
Hotel Department head				
Hotel Staff level				
Hotel Gopher				
Logistics Department head				
Logistics Staff level				
Logistics Gopher				
Operations Department head				
Operations Staff level				
Operations Gopher				

Programming Department head				
Programming Staff level				
Programming Gopher				
Publicity Department head				
Publicity Staff level				
Publicity Gopher				
Publications Department head				
Publications Staff level				
Publications Gopher				
Registration Department head				
Registration Staff level				
Registration Gopher				
Tech Department head				
Tech Staff level				
Tech Gopher				
Treasury Department head				
Treasury Staff level				
Treasury Gopher				
Video/Film Department head				
Video/Film Staff level				
Video/Film Gopher				

Notes:

Thinking It Through

Papers

Financial Planning for Conventions

Elayne Pelz

A good financial plan is one of the first things a committee must have to run a successful convention.

Financial plans need to be hashed out prior to the con - usually long before a con is announced or awarded. Merely to figure out where to put the money that will come in and how to pay bills, is too simple. A better plan includes a budget for expenses and income, and even such things as how to move money around to get the best interest.

If you are not already an organization or association recognized by the law, consider becoming one. At least file for a Federal Employer Tax ID Number - commonly called a "95" number. Filing is free and forms can be found on the web or at your local library. It takes about 6 weeks. If and when you start to collect interest from the banks, it can be credited to this 95 number, keeping the committee members' social security numbers off the accounts. The bank needs to credit someone or something with the interest so that Uncle Sam can get his share when appropriate. Having a 95 number will not automatically make you liable for filing tax forms, but all legal organizations have a 95 number - you must file for one when you incorporate. (If you are affiliated with a group or club, you can use theirs if they will let you.)

Creating a legal entity will cost money. To create a non-profit charitable organization in California costs about $300, and there are books to help you, but it is a difficult process, especially if you want to do it yourself. If you plan to have your convention be ongoing, it will be worthwhile in the long run to incorporate. Look for ads in a business newspaper for a lawyer who specializes in incorporations. Once you incorporate, you must file tax forms.

First and foremost, you must find someone to be your Treasurer. Someone who balances his or her own checkbook monthly is a good candidate. This person should understand that money makes money and that they should process all monies in a timely manner. Someone with an accounting background would be useful - or even someone who keeps personal records on a computer. Many a convention has been run using Quicken.

The Treasurer is one of the most important positions on a convention committee. They need to be able to stand up to others and say "NO" when necessary. A Treasurer is not simply a paymaster - someone who deposits cash and writes checks. A Treasurer must be strong and will need to emphasize that the budget is there for a purpose. There are times when a Treasurer is the enemy of the con committee - maybe a colour cover is not a viable option. The Treasurer must refuse to pay bills that over-run line items if it was not approved in advance. The Treasurer has to be a bully. The Treasurer should also be the one keeping the membership database - or at least have access to the database on a regular basis. As most of your money comes in via memberships, it is important that the database reflect the monies as they come in.

Next open a checking account in the name of the convention. This can be as easy as going to the bank and depositing some money, or as hard as filing a DBA (Doing Business As) form with your local city clerk, paying the fee to get it published, and then going to the bank... . If at all possible, get a checking account that pays interest. Investigate local banks and compare their interest rates, the types of accounts they offer, what they pay for CDs, for liquid CDs, for money market accounts. How much do you need to

keep in any account so that you are not charged fees? Make sure you can get to the bank conveniently - are they open on Saturdays? Do they have early hours? Late hours? Doing your research early will save time later when your monies can be making interest. If you are connected with a Science Fiction club, see if you can get a bank account through the same bank that they use; or, better yet, use one of their accounts. Nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organizations can sometimes get special accounts that have the fees waived or other special benefits.

Creating a budget is a job for more than just the Treasurer. The Chair and other Top Management people will need to get involved. The best way to begin is to ask for a copy of the budget used by a previous successful convention of about the size you expect for your convention. The numbers on the budget may be different for you but the line items will be mostly the same. Go on-line and ask. Large conventions such as Worldcons and Westercons have fairly complex budgets and many ideas can be borrowed from them. Building in some false expense numbers will give you a "pad" in case of problems.

When creating a budget, you should estimate what the services you want to include will cost locally - how much printing do you want to do, and how much will it cost? How much food, at what cost? How much phone service, at what cost? Each budget in existence has been cast using numbers specific to the convention for which it was created, and will vary depending on the locale. Printing may be cheaper in your city than in another. The same for other line items. You will need to do quite a lot of research. Using an already proven budget will give you the line items you need to consider. Simple things such as how much a security guard costs per hour need to be calculated. How much is coffee per gallon at the hotel? How many will it serve? Do you refresh it all day long in the Green Room? Will you have a Green Room? Each line item needs to be calculated to the best of your ability.

One of the hardest parts of budget planning is to estimate your income. Some income is easy - dealers' tables cost $75 per table and you plan on selling 100 of them. Art show space is $10 per panel and you plan on selling 200 panels. You will sell 25 pages of ads in your progress reports and program book at $75 per page. Membership income is trickier. Using an old budget will give you an idea of how many memberships came in at which rate and you can extrapolate from there. It really is pulling numbers out of a hat. You can only guess and continue to revise your income projection as time passes. There is no formula for planning memberships. You do not get 25% of your memberships every six months or anything simple like that.

If you plan correctly, you should account for the total number of memberships you think you should get - this includes all memberships before the con starts as well as the at-the-door memberships.

If you are lucky, your budget of income and expenses will be balance - you will take in the amount of money you will spend. A good Treasurer will constantly update his or her budget on an ongoing basis. This will show if you need to cancel something at the con or if you can order more coffee or pizzas for the con suite. A budget update every three hours during the con is not a bad idea.

You should decide ahead of time what to do if you actually make money. If you are an ongoing convention, one answer is to roll any profit into the next con. Refunding committee and staff memberships is something else to think about. Rolling the surplus into a local club's coffers is a possibility.

You should also decide ahead of time what to do if the convention loses money. Who will pay the bills? If you have a good Treasurer, you will never be in this position.

Budgeting Worldcons and Other Large One-Shot Conventions
Mark L. Olson
25 November 2000

Introduction

A budget is a mysterious thing and a Worldcon's budget is the most mysterious kind of budget. But it shouldn't be so.

We've all heard of conventions whose budget process (if that's not too strong a term) was a complete fiasco, or which lost money, or where the committee was set irretrievably at odds by fights over the budget. With a little luck, no one reading this has personally ever suffered through one of these disasters, but we've all worked on conventions where the budget process didn't really work. Generally, the budget was a roadblock to creativity and always seemed to be the reason why *not* to do things and of course nobody really understood it!

I don't believe that this need be so. I think that there are ways to do budgeting where the budget is a significant, creative part of convention management.

I'm limiting myself here to large one-shot conventions because:

(a) Large one-shots are the hardest cons to budget, so they're more interesting to write about.

(b) Budgeting a repeat con is markedly different from budgeting a one-shot and repeat conventions which survive tend to have their own budgeting schemes in place already so there's less value in writing about budgeting repeat conventions.

(c) Since large one-shots tend to pull in senior staff from all over, it's more important for them to have a common view of the budgeting process.

Since my experience working on large one-shots is mostly limited to Worldcons, I'll derive my examples from them. I do believe that the same principles apply pretty closely to other large one-shots. And with some pruning of complexity, they also work well for *any* startup or one-shot convention.

The purpose of the budget is to make the whole convention better. This isn't as trite as it sounds: when the budget process looks at the convention as a whole it puts the interests of the convention ahead of the interests of individual areas. The budget process I'm describing will work really well only on a convention which instills in its staff *at all levels* a sense that they are working for the con and not for their area or for their particular boss. Conventions which look at themselves as a confederation of areas will not be well served by this approach. (Frankly, I don't think that the confederation-style convention works very well on other grounds, either, but that's another essay.)

I recognize that there is no One True Way to budget. What I'm presenting here is the distillation of my experience budgeting Noreascon Three, working as a division head at Magicon, working at the Division level at several other Worldcons, working on or budgeting dozens of smaller cons and listening to hundreds of hours of war stories which exhaustively (that's the only word for it) detail ways things can go wrong. Finally, this approach requires that budgeting be done by an experienced, detail-oriented, person who is well plugged-in to the convention's power structure; it would not work well for a newbie.

I am *not* discussing Treasury procedures except incidentally. I'm looking mostly at the budget function and hardly at all at the accounting or Controller function.

I also apologize for using the terms 'manager' and 'management' to refer to the people running a convention. It's for convenience and brevity only. Great conventions are run by fans who know

how to manage and plan, not by managers or engineers who aren't first and foremost fans.

Basic issues

There are some basics which appear to be true of all one-shots and which strongly color their budgeting.

Not-for-profit

Since most Worldcons are legally not-for-profit organizations, and since fannish ethics discourage large profits, anyway, ideally we want the con to just break even. But while a profit is undesirable, a loss is completely unacceptable. We're embarrassed if our convention makes too much money, but it's a disaster both for the committee and for convention fandom as a whole if a Worldcon loses money. Making a lot of money means that the con took money from its members and didn't spend it on the con, which, if deliberate, would seem to be a betrayal of a trust, and, if not deliberate, is a management failure.

In spite of that, since the penalty for a loss is so much greater than the penalty for a profit, a well-managed Worldcon will almost always make money. The disproportionate penalties for a loss make competent Worldcon management extremely risk-averse. (This is inevitable when each Worldcon is a separate organization. If Worldcons were all run by one organization – perish the thought! – the profit from one would fund the deficit from another and the average profit would be a lot smaller.)

Business models

Typical 'real life' business models don't really apply to budgeting a Worldcon, though something like the Olympics is similar on a much larger scale. One-shot cons are not like businesses because they have no history. In a normal business, budgets are created on an annual basis, and the staff which develops this year's budget already exists, is reasonably familiar with the business *before* building the budget, and is mostly the same people who developed *last* year's budget. A business' budget grows with the business.

In a Worldcon, the preliminary budget is needed long before all of the staff can be appointed, and well before the staff understands in any detail what they will be doing. (Arguably the traditional bottom-up model for constructing a budget can't be applied until after the con is over!)

The closest business analogy to a Worldcon is probably to an entrepreneurial start-up, but even there the differences are profound. Most start-ups are growing from nothing into a continuing business which forces an entirely different kind of growth than a Worldcon which is growing towards a brief crescendo followed by a very rapid *planned* shutdown. A healthy start-up is looking to create structures which will continue to scale and, ideally, is looking for a balance of income and expense from the start. (The dot-coms of 1999-2000 were remarkably similar to a Worldcon, though in most cases the crescendo followed by a very rapid shutdown wasn't part of the plan... They're probably not a good model to follow.)

People who try to apply traditional day-to-day business models to budgeting a Worldcon are doomed to disappointment – or worse.

Budget Schedule

Assume a 3-year, domestic Worldcon with a committee moderately experienced in working as a group. Assume that the committee starts out with a core of people who worked on the bid and

will have major responsibility for parts of the convention, though not that the details of that responsibility have been fixed as of the time the bid is won. Assume a strong Chairman.

The first year will be spent brainstorming the convention, working out the division structure and appointing division heads and some area heads. Very little concrete planning will take place. The second year will be spent fleshing out the management structure, developing ideas, building a consensus on what the committee wants to do and completing any facility negotiations which had been neglected. A few areas with long lead times will have settled some issues (like Art Show and Hucksters sizes and rates). During the third year nearly all concrete convention planning takes place.

Here's a rough schedule for budgeting a 3-year Worldcon. (For the sake of illustration, I've used dates for the 2005 Worldcon.) This is a schematic schedule only!

Dates	Events
Sept 02-Aug 03	Con is selected. Bid committee restructures into convention committee. Committee begins to get major cost items (facilities) tied down. Committee argues about attendance projections and rates. Committee starts to think about budget. By the end of the year all Division heads are appointed. Very little concrete planning takes place.
Sept 03-Summer 04	At this point the Committee has appointed all Division heads and some area heads. Basic decisions begin to be made about major projects and what the con will do which is special. Some proposals cost significant money, so a demand exists for a budget which tells Committee how much discretionary money it has. Note that most areas are still (a) unstaffed and (b) no planning has been done in the ones which are staffed.
Fall, 04	Most major decisions must be frozen. Most (but not all!) Area heads have been appointed, some areas are largely staffed. Some areas have preliminary plans and can provide preliminary budgets. Detailed discussions with decorator and other vendors begin (if you're lucky!).
Jan, 05	All managerial positions are filled; everyone wants firm decisions to proceed with their plans. Only rough and uncertain income estimates exist. Some major expenses begin to be firmed up with real numbers.
March, 05	Deadline for go/no-go on a lot of big projects.
April-May, 05	Typical time for first set of major budget cuts if memberships are running low or if expense are running high compared with budget projections.
June, 05	Next typical time for major budget cuts
mid-July, 05	Income budget is substantially firmed up with close of pre-reg. Several large (unpleasant) surprises in expense budget show up.
Aug, 05	Convention Treasurer heads for Rio. Income remains uncertain. Overruns start coming in and eat up convention contingency.
At-con	Income stabilizes. Expenses are still quite uncertain. If you're lucky, you know that you're in the black. If you're real lucky, you know you can afford to reimburse staff and program participant memberships. Uncertainty in surplus is ca. $40K
Sept, 05	Convention Treasurer and Chairman (nobody else is willing to work) pay bills and sort out incomprehensible paperwork. Bills come in to be paid. Some of them are unexpected.

Oct, 05	By the end of October, nearly all expenses have been submitted or at least the Committee (consisting of Chairman and Treasurer, remember!) has heard rumors about them. Uncertainty in surplus is down to $20K. It's time to start working our reimbursement list. Program and Area heads are asked for lists of workers.
Dec, 05	It is discovered that 1/3 of the areas don't know who worked for them or have gaffiated so completely that they can't even be asked. Program discovers errors in database. Chairman discovers that there is no way to correlate all the partial lists he's been given. The uncertainty in surplus remains at $20K because reimbursements are still uncertain. Treasurer notices some large collectibles which still haven't been collected.
Feb, 06	First reimbursement checks go out as Chairman finally gives up getting an accurate master list.
Apr, 06	Reimbursements are largely out. Surplus now known accurately (i.e., to within $3K.)
Jun, 06	Committee has recovered enough to engage in recriminations over the shortfall or to fight over where the surplus goes.

I would never choose to be accused of cynicism, and – believe it or not – I don't think that this is a very cynical view. I think it ranges from realistic to moderately optimistic.

Incidentally, due to the way income comes in long before expenses, a Worldcon which has cash-flow problems will inevitably go bankrupt. By the time the cash-flow problem is noticed it's way too late to do anything.

Unpredictability

Overall income for a Worldcon is inherently unpredictable. There are four main classes of income with differing degrees of predictability. For each class of income, there is a time when it becomes safe to count on that income. I've illustrated this in the table below using numbers which I think are typical for a US domestic Worldcon. (These numbers are typical of the early 90's and need to be scaled up to today, but their relative proportions don't change significantly.)

Amount	Type of income
$375K	*Base members* income comes from the 5000 or so members that any domestic Worldcon can expect to get. It appears to be a fairly stable number and one can be reasonably sure of it by about January of the year of the con.
$0K-$140K	*Unpredictable advance* members are the 1200 or so members who may or may not go to a particular Worldcon. Membership curves for three-year Worldcons appear to be essentially unrelated to final attendance until about January of the year of the con, at which point they begin to diverge. Most of the divergence takes place in the May-July period and appears to be unpredictable, though it is undoubtedly affected by the con's reputation, hotel rates, travel costs, membership prices, and the state of the economy.
$40K-$100K	*At the door* income seems to have a stable base, but is still wildly variable. It may depend more on the locality and the extent of local publicity than on the con's reputation.

| $75K | *Other* includes Hucksters table fees, Art Show income, ad income, interest, pass-on funds and the like. It is stable and very predictable. |
| $490K-$690K | *Total* |

It's clear that a Worldcon can count on a certain amount of money coming in, but a big chunk of its income really isn't known until just a few months before the con. This makes budgeting very, very hard.

Fixed Expenses

A Worldcon has a fixed, base set of expenses which are only slightly affected by the size of the convention: some because they are truly fixed (e.g., convention center rental), some because they must be contracted for before the size of the convention is reliably known (e.g., print runs on many publications, the size of the Art Show, the size of Hucksters'), and some because they represent things which simply must be done for it to be a Worldcon. (Interestingly, base expenses also include some purely discretionary early expenses because the Committee makes those decisions entirely before they have a budget.)

This base set of expenses is only somewhat controllable by convention management and is probably in the neighborhood of $400K.

A Worldcon's options – its opportunity to do interesting things or to do things better or at least to do things differently – resides entirely in the money left over after the fixed expenses are met. If the above estimates are accurate, the con's optional money can range from $100K to $300K. So in January of the year of the Worldcon, the con's budget for optional items is still uncertain *by a factor of perhaps as much as three!*

Consider what this means to convention management. In January, the convention is in the home stretch. Nearly all of the staff have been appointed and – hopefully – the major outlines of the con are laid out. The areas are starting to produce really detailed plans, and in particular, are looking at the special things which may make the con memorable to the attendees and fun for the staff. But the money available to do these optional things is wildly uncertain. What choices does a responsible manager have?

One choice is to make a risky bet that income will exceed minimum and plan lots of interesting things. A responsible manager must then be prepared to make deep, painful, counter-productive, budget cuts late in the game. (This is particularly debilitating to the committee, and the stresses of major budget cutting can open rifts within the committee which otherwise might never have happened, or which might have been kept under control. To Be Avoided.)

The other option is to budget based on the money which is known to be available and forego many, neat ideas with a long lead time. Naturally, one hopes that some of these things will still be doable in May-July when the money might become available. (And of course there is a continuum of intermediate strategies.)

A key point here: better management of base expenses can have a disproportionately large impact on optional expenses. One of the most important things a con can do early in the budget and planning cycle is to devise ways of minimizing the base expenses or of pushing the decision on base expenses until later.

For example, Worldcon management can choose a suboptimal certainty over a riskier chance at optimization. E.g., when borrowing equipment from other non-profits, it may be preferable to offer to pay a larger rent post-con if the con makes money than a smaller rent up front. In effect, the other groups share some of the Worldcon's risk.

Management of Innovation

Since Worldcons have more good ideas than resources, a big piece of the art of managing a Worldcon is to decide which neat ideas to do and which to drop. Because we are dealing with volunteers, we *never* have the luxury of developing alternatives fully before deciding whether to do them. The budget evolves along with the con's plan. Each affects the other continuously.

Why do a budget at all?

I.   To avoid losing money. This may seem a commonplace observation, but most money-losing conventions didn't have and use a real budget. ("Real" in this context is defined in this essay.)

II.   To allocate and manage scarce resources. Money is one of several scarce resources a Worldcon must manage. The others are manpower (all volunteers, including management itself), management attention (the limited time the top managers of a Worldcon have to devote to it) and goodwill (fandom's willingness to tolerate mistakes on the part of the con committee). A budget is management's prime tool to organize the money resource and to allow rational discussion of tradeoffs.

III.   To get management to take a global view of the convention. Without constant watchfulness on everyone's part, area and division managers naturally tend to take a parochial view of the convention, making it revolve around their area. Used properly, the budget can help retain a convention-wide perspective.

IV.   As a tool to force management to understand what it is doing. Lord Kelvin said "It's a poor and meager sort of knowledge which can't be expressed in numbers." While this may overstate the case, few people can grasp the implications of a money decision without a detailed budget to place it in context. It's hard enough to understand money tradeoffs with a budget in place; it's nearly impossible without one. Additionally, having a budget forces people who think that "I can't be broke because I still have checks left in my checkbook" to consider the money tradeoffs when making decisions.

V.   Finally, it's a commonplace observation that many people who are perfectly capable of wisely deciding how to spend $100, can't discuss sums like $10,000 rationally. Their mental fuses blow, or something, when the amounts greatly exceed what they are used to. By providing a yardstick a budget can make intelligent decisions possible.

A workable method

So now you're convinced that a budget is necessary. How do we create one? The method I favor is one of continual refinement. The budget is built by whoever is available at the time using the best available information and thereafter is improved continuously right up through the convention.

The only known way to reliably and efficiently build a manageable budget is by creating a hierarchical budget based on detailed line items. We start with a set of initial estimates made by whoever is available. Preferably the estimates come from the lowest level possible, but that isn't as important as getting *something* down on paper.

The estimates are built up using piecewise refinement. Start out with a single line "expenses";

then break that line down into a series of expense lines, say one for each division. The division lines will typically be broken by area and the area lines by function until finally you have pieces small enough that you can make a plausible estimate. A line item is the smallest useful piece into which a budget can be broken.

If a line item isn't a single, well-defined, thing which the Treasurer can understand, then it needs to be broken down again. It should be possible to precisely describe a line item in a dozen words. If it isn't, then it probably needs to be broken down further. There are several reasons for this:

I.   If the Treasurer is to keep the books correctly, he must be able to categorize each expense report as it comes in and put it into the proper line items. If the items aren't very clear, it'll never work. (Remember, the Treasurer can't be expected to know everything that's going on in the convention; clear line items are a way to communicate to the Treasurer and for the Treasurer to communicate to the departments.)

II.   If a budget isn't clear to *everyone* (not just the Priests of the Treasury), people outside of Treasury won't spend money where the budget expects. Vague line items invite vague spending plans.

III.   One of the critical functions of the budget is to identify unused money so that it can be re-used elsewhere. Only if an item is sufficiently specific that you can be certain that no further expenses will come in on it can it be closed and its unused balance redistributed. A line item so vague it's impossible to be sure it is closeable, has lost some of its usefulness.

The initial estimates are made with the best information available. Sometime this comes from last year's Worldcon's actual budget, sometimes from personal knowledge, sometimes its a rough guess. In each case, besides the cost and the description of the line item, a brief explanation of the source of the number is included. For example, these are all perfectly good explanations:

I.   Guess
II.   Guess from area head based on XXX con's actuals
III.   Estimate based on 10% increment over first year's actual
IV.   Quote from vendor
V.   Estimate of 5500 members @ $1.50/member
VI.   Average of three quotes
VII.   250 tables @ $20/table + 20% for setup
VIII.   500 letters @ ($.03 envelope + $0.07 xerox letter + $0.33 postage)

Each of them tells the reader enough to judge the reliability of the line item and to judge when further refinement might be possible. Many of them *need* further refinement, but it's most important that this be obvious from the description.

Revising the budget

The initial construction of the budget must be followed by continual refinement. We can start by making a plausible budget based on our rough guesses of what the convention is going to be like, only if we refine it again and again as our knowledge grows.

Budget revisions and planning go hand-in-hand. The budget is a living document which should always reflect the current state of convention planning.

A budget that isn't in balance isn't a budget. It's self-deception.

When all payments have been made for a specific line item, close it and change its budgeted

amount to its actual amount. Savings go into the general contingency fund; shortfalls are made up from contingency.

Found money goes back to general fund (example: big drop in the cost to rent the tables for the Huckster's Room from the decorator). It frequently happens that an area manages to save a big chunk of money. These savings should *never* automatically stay within the department, but should always be returned to the general contingency fund to be reallocated where the convention's need is greatest. To do otherwise implies that the best place to spend a newly-available dollar is right where it was saved. This is nearly never true.

This approach does remove an incentive for a department to save money by not letting them keep it. This is a real problem for an on-going organization, but for a one-shot it is fairly minor. It is a *major* part of the job of senior convention management to motivate the departments to want to save money for the good of the convention as a whole. This attitude has benefits everywhere, not just it budgeting.

Each level of management should have some funds to allocate at its discretion. Provide policy makers with their own, small, contingency budget to be used to make appropriate contingency expenditures within their own line items. If the divisional or area contingency fund has been used reasonably, replenish it; if not, don't. Note: contingency funds should *never* be used to start new projects without management review; they should be used exclusively to cover the unexpected within already approved activities.

People at all levels of the con must trust management to listen to requests for new funding. This sort of scheme can't work unless there is a belief that higher management will wisely balance priorities and will provide additional funds where necessary. This is crucial. If convention staff don't trust convention upper management, then they'll hide money and thus use it inefficiently.

It's rare that enough people are in place early enough so that a budget can be built from the bottom up. Equally, it's rare that a shared vision of convention exists early enough that initial budgets are for the right convention. It takes most people many months of working on a convention before they understand how this particular convention differs from others. Until that happens, all they can do is generate a generic budget.

A budget must not be a bludgeon. In particular, because we're dealing with volunteers, budget overruns must be paid (except, of course, in cases of gross misbehavior). It is one of the classic marks of bad management to threaten not to pay honest overruns. Don't confuse hardass with professional.

Cross-charges and line items

How should the budget be organized? I'm talking about the picky details here of how to organize the Chart of Accounts. (For those of you who are not already budget smofs, a Chart of Accounts is the hierarchal arrangement of accounts from the top four accounts into which all other accounts must total (Income, Expense, Assets and Liabilities) on down to the ultimate line items into which postings occur. It's technically a tree structure with the main four accounts at the first level and with posting being allowed only on the leaf nodes.)

I prefer a budget structure which reflects the convention structure, so Expense is broken down by Division, and then by area and then within area as makes sense. (Income, Assets and Liabilities don't generally fit the Division model and probably shouldn't be organized that way.) Taking a fairly typical piece of the Magicon budget, we have

Expenses

```
Exhibits
    Art Show
        Sales
            Telephone for V/MC
            Production of forms
            Calculator rental
            Supplies
            Tables and chairs
            Electricity
            PA for auction
```

The actual line items were 4 levels down from the top. I would guess that Exhibits had about 100 line items. Exhibits spent about 10% of the convention's money, though, being quite complicated, it accounted for perhaps 20% of the convention's line items. That means that a reasonably budgeted Worldcon can expect to have around 500 line items in a fully-developed budget. I'd estimate that having fewer than 300 indicates an insufficient level of detail in the line items, while having more than 1000 means that one or more people have gone completely berserk. The N3 budget had about 700 line items.

The budget should also be hierarchical by type. A breakdown by type is essential also for several reasons: (a) Common purchasing. It's frequently the case that we wish to budget for an item in multiple areas, but have a single area responsible for procuring it. It's very useful to be able to gather all such budgets (e.g., all guard budgets) together to make clear how much is budget on that item. (b) Sorting out the bills afterwards. Even if there isn't a central procurement function, frequently vendors (e.g., the hotel or convention center master bill) will provide a lumped-together final bill. (c) Bringing all line items of a particular type together in one place can point out missing or duplicate items (e.g., the Art Show asked for guards, but didn't budget for them.)

On the other hand, don't get too caught up in cross-charges. Many things are best budgeted for by their users, but administered and paid for by a central source. (E.g., Guards, insurance, space.) Other things are best handled by central purchasing with a single budget for the whole con. E.g., ordinary office supplies. It is the height of insanity to waste the time to buy pens in bulk and then run chargebacks to each department. The wasted effort far outweighs the marginal benefits in efficiency we get from the price mechanism.

As an example, the Art Show is best able to decide how many tables and chairs are needed in the art show, but they will almost certainly be procured by some other department. The Art Show must be held responsible for the costs of the tables, but it ultimately appears in another department's budget. A cross-reference is necessary.

It is necessary to budget the Decorator at the detail level (each department deciding what it needs from the decorator) to build a valid budget, but a convention-wide view of the total expenditure is necessary, and the bills will nearly always come in the aggregate. Since it's frequently too much work to be worthwhile to separate the aggregate bill into its many pieces, don't waste the effort unless there is a practical point to be accomplished.

Post-con, one often wishes to provide a total expenses view of a particular area (e.g., the Art Show) showing all expenses vs. all income for that area. Since many items which can properly be charged to the Art Show are elsewhere (guards, space, office supplies, publications), there is work to be done to create that sort of report. Don't fall into the temptation to devise a budget system to make this post-con job easy: it's almost invariably a nice-but-not-important thing and

should not be allowed to confuse the more important parts of the budget process.

Dealing with contingency budgets

Once the budget is on a firm footing, managing the contingency budget is vital.

The contingency is the convention's store of unallocated money. One should always try to keep it positive! Budget shortfalls are funded by lowering the contingency; surpluses in line items are fed back into contingency.

A typical Worldcon has a budget of about $800K. Assuming that reimbursements for staff, gopher and program participant memberships are in the budget, (and always assuming that the budget is a good budget) reasonable levels for contingency are (all dates are in the year of the convention):

March	$80K	10%
May	$70K	8%
End of pre-reg	$55K	6%
2 weeks before con	$30K	4%
2 days before con	$25K	3%
Saturday morning	$15K	1%

The politics of budgeting

Probably the worst mistake a committee can make is to confuse the job of Treasurer with the task of budgeting. The job of the Treasurer is to manage the accounting of the convention's funds, to manage its money, to write checks and to collect money, to keep the books and to report regularly on their state, and to do the taxes and make other financial reports. The Treasurer in general has responsibility to see that funds are spent only according to the policies of the organization.

The job of deciding *where* to spend money is most emphatically *not* the Treasurer's job. It belongs to whoever or whatever in the convention has ultimate responsibility for the convention. In particular, unless the Treasurer has the final responsibility for the convention, the Treasurer does not get a veto over budget decisions.

I'm most comfortable with the strong Chairman model, and it's the only one I've ever heard of that has actually worked well in practice. (Note that a strong chairman does not mean a dictator, but it does mean that if consensus or collegiality or voting or infighting or whatever a particular organization uses to arrive at a decision break down, then one person is clearly able to permanently resolve the issue.)

I can't over-emphasize this point: *He who controls the budget controls the convention.* So make sure that the person or person who you have chosen to control the convention also controls the budget. (How you deal with a Chairman who doesn't understand budgets is a mystery to me. Frankly, I can't imagine a really successful Chairman who lacks such mastery.)

Cutting budgets

The budget cutting process is never fun, but it is sometime necessary. It's vital to distinguish between two very different kinds of budget cutting: initial cuts and emergency cuts.

The initial cuts are a normal part of the budgeting process and is the mark of a well-run convention. In their urge to excel, divisions and areas will invariably propose budgets too big for

the con's resources. (Typically the first more-or-less complete, plausible expense budget will be *at least* 20% larger than the possible income can support.) Cutting this budget to bring expenses into line with income in the first place is natural, normal, and healthy. (Though it's still no fun.)

The emergency budget cut is abnormal and shows either bad management or serious bad luck. Usually it results from the con assuming an unrealistic amount of income when it initially constructed its budget. The crash when this is discovered is invariably harmful to the convention, and it is inherently destructive to the management of the convention. To the extent that a budget is honest, cuts cannot be made to it without significant ill effects.

Look for duplications – two areas each budgeting for the same item. And beware of items falling in the cracks.

"Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves." This is pretty good advice. A typical Worldcon budget will consist of 400-800 line items. If every item is rounded up to the nearest $100 (a common habit) that line item will be high by perhaps $25. Over the entire convention, that's a hidden surplus of perhaps $20K.

Membership reimbursements

Worldcon tradition says that *no one* except the Guests of Honor and non-participants like outside speakers and hired workers gets a free membership to the con. Everyone else – the Chairman, the staff, pros, artists, hucksters – are members of the community and pay for their own memberships. Equally, Worldcon tradition says that the first use of any Worldcon surplus is to give membership reimbursements to workers and program participants. In effect, this is another risk-sharing arrangement where senior members of the SF community (smofs and pros) take an extra share of the risk of a Worldcon failing.

A typical Worldcon of 6000 members might have 300-500 committee and staff, 200-400 gophers, and perhaps 500 program participants. Including overlaps, this is typically a bit under 1000 people to be reimbursed, or about 15% of the convention. Because staff and program participants both tend to join the Worldcon early, their memberships tend to be at lower rates and the total money to be reimbursed is more like 10%.

Because membership reimbursements are a moral obligation of the convention, I believe that they must be budgeted. But because they are to be paid out of surplus, and because they have evolved as one of the major budget stabilization mechanisms of the Worldcon, their status in the budget is anomalous. My preference is to look at the reimbursements line item as the backup convention contingency line.

The ordinary contingency line is there to handle all of the reasonably foreseeable budget problems of the Worldcon. Most of the time, convention contingency will cover the unexpected, but when something really bad hits – a hotel closes, the economy crashes, major errors are made in budgeting – the reimbursements line item is there to prevent bankruptcy. Only a *very* unlucky or a *very* badly managed Worldcon will suffer a loss greater than budgeted reimbursements. Consequently, the likelihood of a loss so big that mundane third parties don't get paid is negligible, which reduces the risks to conventions at large of a bankruptcy affecting us all. (And also limits the chances of a bankruptcy touching the assets of the committee.)

It's also worth noting that the financial management skills to really successfully budget a Worldcon are as rare and as difficult as the skills to really run one well. Because we're fans, we value a fannish Worldcon at least as much as a soundly managed one. The cushion provided by membership reimbursements allows us that luxury.

If you look at the last twenty years' Worldcons, we see a half-dozen which had to use their membership reimbursements, but only one which went beyond that into bankruptcy.

Legal issues

I've had trouble writing section this because it is such a large, varied, and technical topic. So instead of pages of text, I've listed a few things to think about:

I.   What are the special budgeting and control issues for 501(c)3 organizations? (And, of course, overseas, there is an entirely different set of rules.)

II.   Are there other forms of organization than 501(c)3 which are worth considering?

III.   What sorts of things are needed for the Form 990?

IV.   What special requirements does your state have? (For example, Massachusetts requires a full audit of non-profits with more than $250,000 in income in a year.)

V.   What must you do if the convention chooses to pay a fan for working on the convention?

VI.   Issues related to fiduciary responsibility: Just what are you required to do? What happens if you don't do them?

VII.   What are your personal responsibilities as a Treasurer or Chairman?

VIII.   What can you do which might make you personally liable?

IX.   What should you do if you think your con will go bankrupt? Are there things a prudent con will do in advance even if it doesn't expect financial problems?

X.   Does event insurance (insurance to cover financial loss) make sense?

How to pad your budget

An essential piece of the art of budgeting is padding: hiding away money in your budget for a rainy day. The purpose of padding is to make certain that higher management isn't allowed to meddle with your area or division by setting priorities. Padding techniques include:

I.   Have lots of line items and round each of them up.

II.   Having contingency budgets at each level. Have a convention-wide contingency, give each Division a contingency fund, have additional contingencies in each area's budget and then allow for underestimates in each line item.

III.   Include multiple contingency lines in the same budget by calling them different things. "Contingency", "Allowance for overages", "Miscellaneous", "Other expenses", etc.

IV.   Use only worst cases in budgeting both income and expense. Assume all expense are high and all income low.

V.   Duplicate items where possible. Have two (or more if you're gutsy) widely-separated line items which pay for the same thing. *Never* use the same description, of course!

VI.   Keep obsolete line items in the budget as long as possible.

VII.   Use vague annotations for line items so nobody can be sure whether the number you put down is reasonable.

VIII.   Never allow for the resale value of capital equipment.

A skilled budget padder can keep the fat at at least the 20% level. This is always desirable: you may need the money some day and other areas will just waste it if they get a chance. And Besides, the other managers on the convention can't be trusted and would only waste the money you're

saving on their own projects.

In summary

Looking back over this essay, I'm struck both by how long it grew and by how superficially I've covered my topics. A properly detailed writeup would fill a book without even getting into the intricacies of Treasury operation! I hope that people don't take this to mean that Worldcon finance is too hard for them – it *is* complicated, and it does have significant consequences, but skeptical common sense combined with a knowledge of the past makes an excellent starting point.

A successful Worldcon stands on twin pillars: Good management (or which good budgeting is a critical part) and creative planning and programming. Without creativity, the Worldcon is dull, but without good management, few enjoy the results of the creativity. They're partners.

Some Thoughts on Negotiating With Hotels
Ben Yalow
for
SMOFcon, Dec. 2000

In general, the principles of hotel negotiation are the same for most conventions. What you have to offer the hotel is primarily room nights – the ability of the con's members to fill hotel rooms that would otherwise be vacant. There are also some other profit sources, such as a food or beverage function, or a space rental, but those are usually less important contributors.

What you want from the hotel is generally twofold: a relatively inexpensive room rate, and a bunch of function space, also relatively cheap. And, in general, those low rates are usually substantially lower than most other conventions get.

So, what this means is that each side needs to sell the other on the merits of what they have to offer. Each side's representative has to act as a salesman – to convince the other side that they're right for the other. And, while hotel sales reps are used to selling their space, it's equally vital that we understand how to sell what we have to offer. And this is especially difficult, since we're enough different from other meetings that we need to explain/sell ourselves in ways that more conventional meetings don't need to. Which means that we need to understand what the hotel is looking for, and be prepared to sell the meeting on the basis of what the hotel wants.

And, through the years, what hotels want has changed. A decade or so ago, what they wanted was full bedrooms and maybe some banquet revenue. But that's been changing; they now don't want occupancy as much as they want profit. So we need to show them how they can profit by our meetings.

And, for that, our primary weapon is still the fact that an empty bedroom on a given night can never be sold later. And bedrooms are high profit margin sales items – they typically cost about 20-30% of their average room rate for variable costs (maid salaries, cleaning expenses, amenities, etc.), so that the hotel has a lot of profit margin to negotiate with. Which is why we often can get relatively good rates – but that depends on there being nobody else who wants the rooms/space, since any competition is likely to be willing to pay a higher rate. But that means that we need to be able to show the hotel how much money they can make on the bedrooms we can fill, and we need to be pretty able to convince the hotel that nobody else would want the space. So it's important to understand the hotel's occupancy pattern, and avoid times when anybody else is likely to want it. And we need to know our history well enough to explain it, and show how we've matched in the past, and are therefore likely to do so in the future.

And, in part, this differs for repeating conventions like most regionals, as compared to one-time cons like a Worldcon or a Westercon. The hotels know a bit about how rotating meetings work – lots of regular association meetings do that, too. But they're not used to it being a different

group running each one, and it's often easier to pretend that we're local chapters of a bigger association, so that they've got the other cons as history. Of course, if it's a new con, then there's no history, and it's simply up to you to convince the hotel that your made-up numbers are worth taking a chance on – but if there's any history, it's something to use.

We do have some advantages, as compared to other cons our size. We've got a relatively high multiple-occupancy rate, with singles usually less than 30% of our normal pickup. And that means that, for a given number of bedrooms, we're likely to have more people, which means more opportunities to sell things like coffee shop food. But those are relatively low profit items, since variable cost is usually well over 70% for that, between the costs of food and labor. But it's worth selling that to the hotel, since any advantage is worth using.

But, in the end, the key is knowing what you need from the hotel, and what you have to offer. The first comes from understanding the membership of the con, and what the con needs to be successful. The second is comes from understanding the hotel's operations well enough to be able to build a model of how much money they'll be able to make off your meeting, and show the hotel that this is likely to be more than they're able to make elsewhere.