

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

CONFERENCE PLANNING GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You're planning a national conference. It's an experience you'll never forget.

Each spring, the Canadian Association of Journalists holds its major event of the year -- a three-day convention and annual general meeting. The local CAJ chapter in the host city organizes the conference, with help from the CAJ's Executive Director, Board of Directors and various caucuses.

This year, it's your chapter that will play host to hundreds of journalists from across Canada -- and in some cases, other countries. You'll have about a year to get ready. This guide should make the whole process a bit easier. It's based on the experiences of volunteer organizers -- just like you -- from a number of past conferences. The aim is to help you by laying out what needs to be done, and at the same time shows you how to avoid costly mistakes, keep from re-inventing the wheel and save valuable time. Which gives your committee more time and energy to put on a great conference!

Pulling off a convention that will provoke, illuminate, educate and delight, along with highlighting your chapter and city, takes commitment, teamwork, planning and brainstorming, along with plain, old-fashioned hard work. There'll be times -- in fact, count on them -- when you'll question your sanity in getting involved at all. But there'll also be many more times when great ideas gel and results work out better than expected. The organizers of previous national conferences, from one coast to the other, have all experienced the same highs and lows you'll be going through. And lived to tell about it!

The good news is, you've already got a formidable team in your corner -- the National Board of Directors, Executive Director and various caucus heads. A member of the National Board is likely on your organizing committee. Many Board members have organized national conferences in the past and can assist you with advice, contact names, ideas and more. Ditto for the Executive Director.

One last piece of advice. Remember to have fun! This is your show. Put on the conference that YOU'D love to attend. And don't be afraid to aim high. You'll have to stay within budget, of course, but we all know how clever journalists can be at finding ways to get what they want.

GET ORGANIZED

The first thing you'll need to do is recruit a bunch of energetic volunteers for your organizing committee. Start by drawing people from your chapter. But don't rule out friends, family and colleagues who may be willing to help out in particular ways.

A good team of volunteers is essential. To repeat, a good team of volunteers is essential. The core group -- the folks who hold key positions on the organizing committee -- should number between 8-12. You'll need other volunteers too, people willing to do even one thing, but don't worry if you haven't got a long list of names right away. At each of your meetings, brainstorm about possible volunteers to take on the specific tasks that lay ahead.

You'll need a conference chair or two people acting as co-chairs -- often your chapter president or your local Board member. They oversee the planning, maintain contact between the organizing committee

and Board of Directors, and are the regular liaison with the Executive Director in Ottawa. You'll also need committee chairs for various key jobs, which will be spelled out below.

Your committee should meet and deal with these issues immediately:

- * Choose a tentative date for your conference. Submit a list of local hotels to the national office. The Executive Director in Ottawa is responsible for booking a hotel, but it's important to get the ball rolling ASAP, since hotels fill up fast and room for the size of conference you're planning may already be limited. This is a PRIORITY item! Get in contact with the Executive Director now!

- * Send out an announcement to members, especially local and regional members who may be interested in getting involved. The Executive Director can help with addresses.

- * If possible, publicize your conference at the preceding year's national conference and National Writers Symposium, as well as other CAJ events, to get people thinking about planning ahead.

- * Discuss a tentative budget and status of fundraising goals with the Executive Director in Ottawa.

- * Obtain a critical path from the Executive Director. This outline shows you where you should be, by when, and has worked well at past conferences.

- * Choose a conference chair or chairs. Assign core group members to head up various committees. The key ones are panels, workshops, keynotes, publicity, entertainment/awards banquet, registration/volunteers, program and fundraising (though the main fundraising effort will likely not be your concern, there are lots of ways contra assistance can help, such as conference logos, door prizes, etc.)

- * Develop a rough outline of the conference schedule (e.g., keynote addresses, Friday night party? Saturday or Sunday ticketed lunch?)

- * Make a first list of potential speakers, especially keynotes and other bigger names you'll want to go after early. This is a list you'll be endlessly adding to, even in the month before the conference as you scramble to fit in a timely panel on some subject. But the bulk of work HAS to be done much earlier. Contact the CAJ's Board of Directors and Executive Director for ideas -- they'll be able to tell you who couldn't make the last conference but were interested, as well as who's appeared so often everyone's already seen them three times.

Ideally, you'll be starting about a year before the conference. The conference chair or chairs should be chosen first, to ensure someone's got a handle on the big picture. Heads of key committees -- especially content like panels, workshops and keynotes, also should be in place. Brainstorm as a group at first, splitting into subcommittees as the work becomes more defined. Remember, a large group can be unwieldy so pick a chair and clear agenda. Ask everyone to come prepared to discuss progress and problems in their area and meetings can move along fairly efficiently.

Keep in mind that your organizing committee will be making many decisions on behalf of the CAJ. So keep minutes of organizing meetings and record decisions you've made, especially when it comes to booking speakers, spending money and signing contracts. This will save you a lot of grief later on if there's a misunderstanding about how much you're paying for something or what focus a panel discussion should take.

Volunteers should be in regular contact with the rest of the committee -- or at least with the key contact person for that committee. That way, they can keep the rest of the group informed of what they're working on. And they'll be up-to-date on any decisions the committee has made.

E-mail is INVALUABLE! Playing phone tag is frustrating and inefficient. Use e-mail to keep up the momentum. The overall conference chair should create a master group list of all volunteers, cc'ing the Executive Director in Ottawa, and send out regular e-mails on progress, to call meetings and to brainstorm in cyberspace. The chair should also have a second e-mail group list of the core committee chairs, as well as the Executive Director, for more detailed discussions.

WHO DOES WHAT?

As the official organizing committee, your group is in charge of putting the conference together. But you don't have to do all of this on your own! Don't forget the CAJ has a paid staff member -- our Executive Director in the CAJ office in Ottawa -- who has done many conferences before and can help make your event go smoothly. Of course, the committee chair and subcommittee heads should keep in regular contact with the Executive Director, by e-mail and phone.

To avoid confusion and duplication of effort, here's a general breakdown of the responsibilities of the committee and the Executive Director.

The committee:

- * Decides on content and detailed schedule for conference.
- * Chooses and invites speakers, workshop leaders and other presenters.
- * Prepares text for conference brochures to be mailed out prior to conference.
- * Draws up budget in consultation with Executive Director.
- * Handles some local fundraising efforts, in consultation with Executive Director (who will ensure there's no duplication with national effort).
- * Chooses and reviews menu at hotel, in consultation with Executive Director, to ensure budget can handle what's planned.
- * Coordinates awards ceremony, with awards committee and Executive Director.
- * Submits hotel list and recommends most-preferred facilities and dates to Executive Director, who handles negotiations. Committee and ED are in regular contact.

The Executive Director:

- * Books hotel.
- * Handles most of the money, including revenue (donations, registration fees, ad revenue) and expenditures (fees, travel bills, hotel, printing).
- * Coordinates mail-outs of conference publicity and registration materials.
- * Coordinates registration of all delegates.

- * Handles travel and hotel arrangements for guests of the CAJ (e.g., workshop leaders and speakers whose costs we've agreed to pay for)
- * Informs committee of current financial situation against budget.
- * Provides background information from previous conferences (e.g., contact names, registration numbers, popularity of workshops, estimates for coffee and meals, etc.)
- * Flies to the host city between 2-3 months before conference to review progress, check out the hotel and meet with committee members. Core committee leaders are strongly encouraged to join the hotel visit.

Besides the Executive Director, your committee can count on the CAJ's Board of Directors, caucuses and other chapters to help with certain elements of the conference. Here are some suggestions of what those groups can do for your committee:

- * Help publicize the conference in their area or among journalists with specific interests.
- * Suggest possible speakers and workshop leaders to take part in panels or workshops you're organizing. May also be willing to organize a panel or workshop.
- * Approach their local media outlets for donations of money, goods or services. (Check with the Executive Director on this)
- * Raise money through special events.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Okay, take a deep breath.

Organizing a conference may, at this point, seem to be an overwhelming task. And there's no doubt, there will be times when you'll feel -- especially when mini-crises crop up, as they will -- that you're trying to push a boulder uphill.

Two pieces of advice.

One, divide the tasks up early and try to make some progress every week. That way, potential roadblocks are encountered earlier and you have the time to find solutions. And yes, there are always solutions.

Two, remember why you're doing this. The Canadian Association of Journalists exists to promote excellence in Canadian journalism. One of the primary ways that's done is through the national conference, where journalists from coast to coast can gather to sharpen their skills, debate their craft and make invaluable contacts. Your committee is putting together the most important event of the year for your colleagues across our nation.

HOTEL ARRANGEMENTS

A successful conference depends in part on the right hotel. You need a competitive room rate for your delegates, the right number and type of meeting rooms, and a staff that's willing to help your organizing committee handle all the details.

You need to discuss, with your committee, when you'd like to hold the conference and your preferred hotel locations. It will be up to the Executive Director in Ottawa to handle negotiations and to have the final say in what is do-able in terms of timing and facilities.

Here's what the CAJ needs from a hotel:

- * A block of at least 70 rooms for a smaller conference and up to 300 for a large one. Keep in mind that not every delegate stays in the hotel -- some live in the area and others bunk with friends and family. Check with the Executive Director for an estimate.

- * Between 5-8 meeting rooms for your workshops and panels for Friday and Saturday. Workshops and panels vary in attendance, so at some point you'll have to match the anticipated turnout at specific sessions with the capacities of the rooms. Some sessions may draw only a dozen people, while others may attract 50 or more. You'll have to check with workshop leaders to see what size of group they prefer to work with and plan accordingly, including indicating on registration forms the maximum openings in each session. In larger rooms, you will need a sound system and mikes on the head table. It's also good to have a sound feed for electronic media who will be covering the event.

Some workshops may be held away from the hotel -- like the computer-assisted reporting workshops, which often take place at a college or university computer lab. But remember that distance to an off-site location is a big issue -- the farther delegates have to go, the less likely they will. Holding an off-site session and having two people show up makes the CAJ and the organizing committee look bad and turns off the workshop leader, who may not want to lend their expertise in future conferences.

- * If you're holding a keynote speech or social in the hotel on Friday night, you'll need to book a ballroom and arrange bar service and/or food, if necessary. For a speech, you'll need a sound system and microphone, arranged in advance. All your audio-visual needs should be compiled ASAP before the conference and a deal worked out with one supplier.

- * For any meals (likely Saturday lunch, awards banquet and Sunday brunch), you will need to choose menus and give the hotel an estimate of the number of guests.

- * For the awards dinner and ceremony on Saturday evening, you'll need to book a ballroom that holds anywhere from 200-500 guests, depending on the size of your conference. In some cities, organizers have sold extra tickets to the banquet -- usually at the registration desk -- so be sure to factor those into your total.

- * On Sunday morning, you'll need fewer meeting rooms, perhaps 3-5, since a lot of delegates leave early or are sleeping in after the excitement of the previous night's banquet. But a lot of delegates will still come out Sunday morning, especially if the panels look interesting. Still, it's a good idea to make the start times a little later.

BLOCK OUT AN AGENDA

Over the years, the schedule for the national conference has changed, at times growing, at times shrinking. But there are some common elements at every conference.

* On Friday, delegates attend mostly workshops, both full-day and half days sessions. Offering a few panels for journalists who aren't interested in the workshops can work, as long as the number is kept small (perhaps one panel in every time block). Repeating panels on Saturday that are expected to be very popular works well.

* On Saturday, the focus switches to panels, although there should still be lots of workshops for journalists who perhaps couldn't attend the conference on Friday. Again, repeating popular workshops from Friday works well.

* The biggest "name" keynote speakers usually make their address to the conference on Friday night (like Conrad Black in Ottawa in 1994 or Patrick Brown in Halifax in 2000), although sometimes they're on Sunday morning (like Peter Jennings in St. John's in 1996).

* An awards ceremony has traditionally been held after a Saturday night banquet. This works well for a lot of reasons -- it comes after two days of workshops and panels; many people have to leave during the day Sunday; and frankly, the conference builds to the banquet, so having it Friday or on another date takes away from the atmosphere.

* The conference also hosts the CAJ's annual general meeting, so you must set aside at least an hour on the schedule for that purpose. The meetings have seldom proved to be big draws, whenever they're scheduled, but try to hold them at an inviting time while lots of delegates are around and there's not a lot else going on.

Once you've plugged those events into your schedule, your committee can start developing the content of those sessions and shaping the rest of the conference.

TIME SLOTS

It's a good idea, fairly early on, to work out a tentative time slot schedule for your conference.

Once you have the hotel booked and find out the number and sizes of meeting rooms, draw up a time slot grid and make lots of copies. Give copies to the workshop and panels coordinators. Discuss how many workshops and panels you want and on which days they'll be held. Make sure everyone is on the same page as to how many speakers/sessions he or she can book. As content is confirmed, the conference chair should keep a master plan and work out conflicts as they arise.

This is the bread and butter of any conference, the sessions that delegates attend through Friday and Saturday. The key is giving people variety, interesting choices and challenging speakers and workshop leaders.

WORKSHOPS

Many people come to conferences specifically for the full-day (on Friday) or half-day (Friday and Saturday) workshops. Many journalists don't get many other opportunities to attend intensive professional development sessions. Others consider the conference a great way to sharpen rusty skills. So, they count on the CAJ for practical and relevant sessions led by some of the masters of our craft.

The workshops should include some geared for journalists in each specific medium, and others that are relevant to everyone. This list includes some of the topics covered in previous conferences:

- * Television (broadcast) performance
- * Television production
- * Radio production
- * News writing
- * Feature writing
- * Interviewing
- * Computer assisted reporting (beginners and advanced)
- * Freelancing
- * Access to Information
- * Research
- * Organization
- * Photography
- * Layout and Design
- * Legal issues
- * Editing
- * Writing a book
- * Column and editorial writing
- * Negotiating

The core committee should discuss/brainstorm about the focus of workshops during the conference and someone designated as workshop coordinator. That person oversees coordinating sessions, inviting the bulk of speakers, getting their AV needs, etc.. But other volunteers can also help, setting up one or more sessions.

Here's a list of tips drawn up by the workshop coordinator at one recent conference:

1. Arrange early!! Get as many as possible done four to six months ahead of time. That will allow you to deal with last minute changes (guests dropping out, requests, etc.)
2. Ask yourself the following questions before deciding on each workshop. What is it we want the audience to walk away with? Is it timely? Is it something that would appeal to all journalists? (print, radio, TV)
3. Delegate responsibility. But keep the circle small.
4. Communication. If someone is doing anything for you, make sure they copy you the information.
5. Try to set a cutoff date for deciding on workshops. Should be three months before the conference. (but be flexible to last minute opportunities)
6. Encourage input from the national board at least six months beforehand, e.g., suggested names with "star power." Since we are all volunteers, it takes a while to implement suggestions.

Now, about what you can and can't offer people whom you'd like to be your workshop leaders.

The CAJ does not pay a speaking or workshop fee to working journalists. However, people who make their living as trainers can be paid a fee.

Your committee may agree to cover some or all of a workshop leader's travel and hotel costs. Always encourage the workshop leader to approach their employer to see if they'll help out with costs, since their employee will be appearing on the program, making the employer look good, and they'll be helping to promote excellence in journalism. If you do cover costs, make sure you spell out exactly what the CAJ will pay for (e.g., a seat-sale airfare or the costs of three nights in the hotel). Put the details in writing by sending the leader a confirmation letter.

At this point, you should ask the leader what kind of equipment or materials they'll need, the type of set-up they'd like for their workshop room, any limits they'd like on the number of participants and the focus of their sessions. That last item is important when you describe the sessions in your brochure --

delegates like to know exactly what they will be getting from a workshop. The earlier you get all this information for your brochure, the sooner it will be printed and sent out to publicize your event.

When looking for leaders, don't forget to draw on local expertise. For example, your daily paper may have a writing coach who could lead a workshop. Or there may be a writing instructor at a nearby journalism school. Similarly, a local lawyer with an interest in the media may be able to offer a legal workshop.

The CAJ also relies on a pool of talented workshop leaders who attend many conferences over the years. Some of them offer our most popular workshops and get great reviews from delegates. The Executive Director in Ottawa can provide names and phone numbers for many of the workshop leaders who've come to previous conferences. But remember that delegates also want to see new names on the program, since recycling too many speakers can lead to people deciding not to spend the money to come to a conference.

Have the Executive Director send you the programs of the last several conferences, so you'll have an idea of the caliber of speakers and who's already gotten a lot of exposure. The Poynter Institute is a good resource in the U.S. for new, talented speakers. Check the lists of the national Newspaper Award winners, as well as past CAJ award winners as well. Get in e-mail contact with the CAJ president and other members of the board for ideas.

Lastly, you should strive, as much as possible, for diversity -- especially in gender and race. Are you over-weighted with male speakers? Are minorities represented? Also, although there are many excellent American journalists, the majority of your lineup should be Canadian.

Every conference is a combination of local journalists who rarely go to conferences with other journalists from outside the region who will be attending their third or fourth national event, at least. Every conference is also attended by students and young journalists starting out, along with much more experienced colleagues. It's a diverse mix, so try to offer, in kind, a mix of speakers so everyone can find something, in each time slot, that's of interest to them.

The scheduling of the conference day is up to you. The typical day is usually divided into four quarters, with coffee breaks between the morning sessions and afternoon sessions, with lunch in the middle. There are full day workshops, half-day workshops and even quarter-day workshops. Panels are usually quarter-days but can be longer. During each time slot, delegates choose between 6-8 different choices (although the actual number is up to you, and depends on the conference size and number of meeting rooms).

PANELS

While workshops allow journalists to hone their skills, panels allow people to talk about the issues that concern their profession.

Panel topics can be quite specific (such as "The urban bias in big city reporting") or broad in scope (like "The future of Canadian broadcasting"). Some panels from previous conferences have looked at:

- * Is the Canadian media slanting to the right?
- * Conflict of interest among journalists
- * Quotes and ethics
- * Reporting on First Nations
- * Entertainment reporting -- journalism or promotion?

- * Does 24-hour news allow for "depth"?
- * the popularity of sex columnists
- * personal journalism -- the "I" work among columnists

Topics very often relate to events that occurred in the past year, such as media ownership concentration, government cuts to the CBC or other, very specific circumstances that journalists have been debating the pros and cons of whenever they meet.

To come up with 16 - 24 interesting sessions, you'll need to sit down with your whole committee and toss around ideas.

- * Start by brainstorming. Have everyone throw in a few suggestions. Don't debate them -- just write them down. Think of new spins on sessions from earlier conferences. Jot down the things that people are talking about in your newsroom. Build on successful sessions that you've held at chapter events. Make lists of possible topics, panelists and workshops leaders.

- * Narrow the list down, allowing for a few that may fall through. Try to maintain a good balance between panel discussions and workshops.

- * Focus the sessions by giving them a title. If you have a clear sense of what the sessions will be about, it's easier to pitch the idea to panelists.

- * Suggest names of people who could take part in these sessions. Look at some of the names you've already slotted for workshops. And don't forget your keynotes! They're often very willing to do a couple of panels during the weekend. Panels with your keynotes as participants are usually among the bigger draws. The emcee(s) of your awards show is another possibility as a panelist. The journalists and others in your city, your province and your region are another good source for panels. Don't overlook the talent, experience and expertise in your own neighbourhood. And local panelists are easier on the budget. Overall, you want to strike a balance -- interesting panels at an affordable price.

- * Each panel and workshop has to have an organizer. The workshop and panels committees will handle the bulk of the sessions but other members of the organizing group can set up one or more session as well. But it's CRUCIAL that the workshop and panel committee chairs, along with the conference chair, stay on top of the big picture: how many sessions, who's involved, etc. That's why it's a good idea to make a tentative time slot schedule early, to avoid conflicts (i.e., you've got the same person running a workshop and participating in a panel at the same time -- THERE'S A PROBLEM!)

When you and your committee members start organizing individual sessions, you'll be negotiating on the CAJ's behalf. That's why it's good to have some clear guidelines. Here are some tips based on earlier conferences.

- * Start with a clear idea of the focus of your panel and the points of views you'll need represented in the discussion.

- * Look for a moderator who can introduce the discussion, the panelists and their backgrounds, and keep things moving. They need to keep each speaker's opening remarks to a set amount of time and keep him or her on topic. They should encourage questions and comments from the floor, allowing the panelists to respond.

- * The CAJ does not cover any costs for moderators. Therefore, choose someone from your area or someone who's already coming to the conference. Don't forget workshop leaders and panelists who aren't busy with their own sessions!

* Most panels include three panelists and a moderator.

* When you select your panelists, think about their gender and race, as well as the region and the type of media they represent. Aim for a diverse group of people -- it makes for more interesting discussion.

* Your panelists must be good public speakers. This may sound obvious. But at past conferences, we've seen great people on panels who just can't get their ideas across in this type of setting.

* When inviting panelists, your committee must keep an eye on costs. The CAJ is a non-profit group funded by membership fees. That means we can't offer speakers' fees to panelists and we can't cover the costs of their travel, conference registration and accommodation. It's difficult to ask someone to volunteer to be on a panel and then, ask them to pay their own way. But there are tactful ways to raise the sticky issue of money, without alienating a fellow journalist.

- Introduce yourself as a member of the organizing committee and explain where and when the conference will be held. Start by asking if they were already planning to come to the conference.

- If they say yes, ask them if they'd like to participate in a panel. Explain the focus and what we'd like them to contribute to the discussion. Tell them who the other panelists will be. Confirm that they are willing to pay for their travel, hotel, meals and registration fees.

- If they weren't already planning to attend, ask them if they're interested in taking part in the panel discussion. If they are, ask if they could cover their own costs. If they can't, ask if their employer would be willing to pay. Offer to ask their boss for them if they aren't comfortable doing that. Many media companies are willing to pay if one of their people will be speaking -- after all, it looks good on them!

* If there's no way the panelist or their employer will pay, consult your committee. Is this person the only one who can serve in this capacity? Can a local journalist do it? If you really need this person, your committee may decide to cover their costs. But don't promise anything without checking with the committee. And don't forget, if you do pay to bring someone in, consider whether they would be useful on other panels, workshops or as a moderator. You should never pay costs for more than ONE member of a panel.

* If you agree to pay for anything, make VERY sure you and the panelist are clear on the details. For example, the CAJ may agree to pay for a plane ticket, leaving the panelist responsible for their hotel bill, meals and registration fee. Spell it out on the phone and follow up in writing within a few days of your conversation. That way, any misunderstandings can be worked out ahead of time -- not at the registration desk. Bottom line -- you're booking a lot of people, making a lot of arrangements. DON'T count on your memory on what was agreed upon.

* All travel arrangements, hotel rooms, meal tickets and registration fees should be handled through the CAJ office in Ottawa. The CAJ will not cover any other types of expenses, including limousines, dry-cleaning, meals in restaurants or room service. But that hasn't stopped some speakers at past conferences from trying to get us to pay for such items.

* Once your panelists are confirmed, ask them to send you a brief biography (50-100 words at most) and a head-shot photo for the program. Be prepared to ask most of them again, and again, and sometimes again. This is so important it cannot be stressed enough. Get the bio/photos early, and make the program editor's job/life 1000% easier.

* Find out if the panelists need any kind of equipment like overheads, slide projectors, easels, chalkboards, televisions, VCRs or tape players. You'll need an AV coordinator to keep track of the big picture. Remember, one slide projector can be used by many speakers, as long as there's no time conflict. Talk to the CAJ Executive Director about hiring an AV company to provide the equipment. In most cases, DON'T use the hotel's, their prices are usually exorbitant!

* Remind the speakers that everything at a CAJ conference is on the record and is likely to be recorded and broadcast later.

* Give your panelists a call in the week or two before the conference to confirm that everything is in order.

* Once the panel is over, be sure to personally thank the people for their time and contribution. Within a few days, follow up with a hand-written thank you card or a note typed on CAJ letterhead.

PLAN YOUR BUDGET

Once your committee starts planning the content of the weekend, you'll get an idea of the costs associated with a national conference. They include big-ticket items like meals, travel, fees, and accommodations, plus a myriad of other smaller bills.

The Executive Director can provide estimates based on previous conferences and advise the committee on costs and revenues. This list will show what you need to include. For more details, turn to the sample budgets. Although the Executive Director will do much of the big ticket negotiating, the conference committee -- especially the chair -- must be on top of where the budget stands. This allows the chair to decide if the committee can afford to bring in one more big name speaker, etc.

Revenue depends on attracting people to your conference. So, getting the word out as early and often as possible is key to the success of your event. That's why having a publicity committee is a good idea. Use the Internet, talk it up in media shops, confer with the Executive Director on mail-outs and other opportunities to publicize the conference. Every full-paying delegate allows you the revenue to do that much more, and of course show a profit at the end of your event. Profit from national conferences funds a lot of important CAJ work throughout the year -- work that assists every journalist in Canada. Similarly, on the expense side, every dollar saved counts the same way. Be frugal whenever possible, take advantage of scheduling to do more with less and always, always look for contra donations. The CAJ is a non-profit organization that many non-media companies can feel good supporting.

Revenue:

Registration Fees: This line item is based on an estimate of the paying delegates you're expecting. In the past, registration numbers have varied from around 100-150 at National Writing Symposiums and 200-250 at Women in the Media conferences to above 500 at well-attended national conventions. The number will depend in large part on your city/region. A safe average is about 250 to 300. You must also consider the number of full registration fees for members, associates and non-members, under special rates for low-income earners and students.

Donations: This includes all money and in-kind donations from media companies.

Fundraising events: This can include events launched by your chapter and others to raise money for the conference. They include dances, brunches, sports events, and raffles.

Advertising: Our by-laws do not allow us to solicit donations from non-media companies. But those companies can buy advertising packages, which include ads in the conference program. The Executive Director can provide more details.

Promotional Sales: These includes T-shirts, buttons, mugs and anything else you sell. The success, historically, of these sales has not been great. If you are looking at T-shirts, get people to order them when

they send in their registration. That keeps the CAJ from taking a loss on leftovers. Some recent conferences have not bothered with promotional sales at all, since there's already enough to do.

Expenses:

Audio-visual: This can be kept to a minimum by borrowing gear and scheduling wisely, but will likely still be hefty, since they include the awards show.

Meals: These costs range, depending on the prices charged by the hotel, the number of delegates and the number of meals served. This includes coffee breaks, catered receptions and any sit-down meal you have during the conference. Talk to the Executive Director about what has worked well at prior conferences with meal number estimates. This is crucial since, for example, 10 dinners that have been paid for but are unused represents pure loss.

Entertainment: This includes parties, receptions and performers. It depends on how much entertainment you provide and whether you must pay for it. For example, pub crawls are free but hiring a band can cost thousands of dollars.

Meeting room rental: The cost depends on the deal negotiated with the hotel. For example, it can be free if delegates check into all or most of the rooms in your hotel room block. But some hotels have charged thousands of dollars for the rooms used for panels and workshops.

Travel: This item can vary widely depending on the location of the conference and the number of people you plan to bring in from other places. Conferences on either coast may have higher costs just because of where they are. But those costs can be reduced from drawing from local media, and on people who are already attending or getting their employers to pay expenses.

Hotel rooms: Accommodations can be pricey -- it includes rooms for staff, speakers, panelists and workshop leaders. Again, this can cost less if people agree to pay for their own rooms or have their employers do so. Some committee members are open to billeting out-of-towners as well.

Postage/phone: Long distance takes a lion's share, as does postage. But use of e-mail whenever possible can keep costs down.

Printing: This line item includes the cost of printing the conference program -- but some committees have saved here by having the printing donated by a local company.

Supplies: A small amount set aside for the badges, paper materials and miscellaneous supplies you'll need.

Professional fees: Consult the Executive Director on what amount to set aside for your conference. Some conventions have paid to have someone as a sponsor liaison, so there's someone devoted to treating the people who support the CAJ well.

FUNDRAISING

In the past, conference committees have had to do most of the corporate fundraising themselves. The CAJ has, in the past, hired professional fundraising companies to do most of that work. However, there is still lots that the local committee can, and should, do to help make your event a success. As always, confer with the Executive Director on what tasks are appropriate for your committee. And put together a list of local firms worth approaching.

Here are some guidelines for corporate fundraising:

- * The CAJ policy on donations is clear -- we can only accept donations of cash from media corporations. That includes newspapers, radio and TV stations, and wire services.

- * However, we can accept advertising in our programs that allows us to raise money from non-media companies that sell computers, cars, beer or what have you.

- * Make lists of potential donors in the local and regional media community. Get the names, mailing addresses, fax numbers and e-mail addresses (if possible) of key contact persons at each outlet.

- * Don't limit your fundraising efforts to cash. You can also request in-kind donations of computer equipment, audio-visual equipment, printing for your programs, design services, time off for your organizers, the services of their employees as workshop leaders and similar goods and services. Samples available from national office.

- * No donation is too small. A three-thousand dollar donation is something to cheer about -- but don't forget that a \$300 cheque will pay for a coffee break or a daycare worker.

- * Your committee can also bring in some cash through money-making events. They include dances, sporting events, raffles, brunches, speakers and similar events.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

So you're planning the best conference in the CAJ's history? Well, make sure there are hundreds of people there to enjoy all of your great work. That means getting the word out about your conference -- early and often. One of the biggest ways you'll do this is through the conference brochures. There are two of them, a preliminary one a couple of months before the event and a final one 4-6 weeks prior to the conference. These are CRITICAL! Ask the Executive Director to send you a copy of a prior conference brochure early, then start inputting information as it's available.

- * As soon as you've chosen a date and booked a hotel, and a conference name chosen -- like Great Big Scrum, Deadline 99 or Halifax Ahoy -- get someone on your committee to design an eye-catching one-page flyer to announce the next great conference. If you have a conference logo, be sure to incorporate that into the flyer. The Executive Director will have the flyers printed and mailed out to all members.

- * Consult with the National office about the dates of the regular mail-outs to members. Be sure to include a similar flyer in each of those packages. That way, you keep the members informed about new additions to your agenda and whip up interest in the conference.

- * Take advantage of technology to send messages to journalists in newsrooms across Canada and beyond. The CAJ has its own web page -- you can put information about the conference on that page. Or you can create your own web-page (with the help of computer-literate volunteers) and create links to the CAJ page and vice versa.

* Use e-mail to send messages about the conference to groups of people through user groups. Get the e-mail addresses of newsrooms and send regular messages about the conference.

* A fax modem proves to be very efficient when you're faxing the flyers to large numbers of places. You can type in a bunch of names and numbers and the computer's fax will send messages all night long. Saves your time and cuts down on long-distance charges.

* The bulk of the delegates to any conference come from the surrounding area. To recruit them, you need to send specific flyers that invite local journalists to take advantage of having a national conference in their own backyards.

* Get members of your committee to cultivate contacts at those media outlets and make regular calls to get people interested in the conference.

* Ask board members, chapter presidents and caucus chairs to spread the word to journalists in their groups.

* The FIRST registration brochure goes out about two to three months before the conference. It lists all workshops with the leaders confirmed. It highlights confirmed keynote speakers and any other major events at the conference. And it includes a form for registering, choosing workshops, selecting meals and paying conference fees.

* A SECOND version of this form goes out one month to six weeks before the conference. By then, you should include most or all of your confirmed panels and workshops. And include any late additions to the agenda, include social events, sightseeing trips or new speakers.

* A last-minute flurry of publicity can attract dozens of previously undecided delegates. That's why it's good to send out a flyer that tells people it's not too late to come to the conference. That works best for neighbouring journalists who can drive or hop on a bus, instead of booking a plane ticket.

GETTING THE CAJ INTO THE MEDIA

You'd think having hundreds of journalists in one place would be a media event in itself! But the media is notoriously bad at covering its own issues. The conference is the CAJ's major event of the year -- so it's important to get the word out to local and national news outlets.

* Send press releases highlighting your keynote speaker and some of your most interesting panel discussions. If there's a big issue on the agenda at the Annual General Meeting, tell the media about that too.

* Help broadcast journalists get access to your sound system to record speeches and panel discussions. Give photographers and videographers room to get the pictures they need. Arrange personal interviews (when possible) between speakers and local media. Ensure that the national president is introduced to media when they want an official comment from the CAJ on any issue.

PLANNING MEALS AND COFFEE BREAKS

When it comes to meals, your committee should consider this -- every meal you add means you get to keep less money from the registration fees to cover the other costs of the conference. Hotel meals are

expensive and on top of the prices quoted on the menus, you must add tax and gratuity. And keep in mind that delegates usually enjoy a chance to leave the hotel and eat in local restaurants.

* If you have Saturday breakfast or a Sunday brunch, consider a buffet. It's casual and fast, allowing people to get their food in time to hear your speaker.

* If you have a banquet, it's best to choose one entree and let delegates specify if they need a vegetarian, kosher or non-dairy meal or if they have food allergies. It means speedier service and less confusion at the dinner itself.

* People usually expect to see coffee served between sessions. It's probably a good idea to have some coffee available at the registration desk in the mornings too. A cup of hotel coffee doesn't run cheap. Multiply that by 200 or 300 people and you're looking at a sizable chunk of cash. However, the CAJ's advertising packages offer companies the chance to sponsor the breaks and cover those costs.

* Many delegates, especially those visiting the area, will want a chance to get away from the hotel and sample local restaurants. Consider putting together a small restaurant guide to include in the registration package, or obtain one from the local tourism offices. In fact, the only meals you should worry about are Saturday lunch, the awards banquet and Sunday brunch.

ENTERTAINMENT

A lot of serious stuff goes on at CAJ conferences -- but you should make sure delegates have some time for a little fun.

Experience has shown us that CAJ delegates have the most fun when they leave the hotel and go to an event that has a distinct local flavour. Edmonton's Wild West Whoop-up, Newfoundland Night in St. John's and Come to the Ceilidh in Halifax all featured local bands and a taste of the local culture. In Halifax, organizers rented a local maritime museum as a setting.

But events can be costly. Bands can charge thousands of dollars and you may have to pay a bartender or rent a venue. Some conferences have used student volunteers as door staff and barkeepers, and have obtained donated beer and wine from local brewers. You may want to add a small entrance fee for the event, although that may discourage delegates already paying registration fees from attending. A better route is to consider the costs as part of the registration fees. Yet another alternative is to sell tickets to local media who are non-delegates (\$5-10). You can also look for a sponsor for the event.

There are other less expensive routes. For example, you can organize a pub crawl that takes people to your city's best nightspots. Or you can arrange for reduced rates for delegates at an event that's already going on in your city.

Give people a chance to see your city when they're not in workshops. Arrange for tour companies and your city and provincial tourism departments to provide brochures. Some tour operators may be willing to provide sign-up sheets and arrange tours for Sunday afternoon. In Halifax, the navy provided free tours of some of their warships, including a Friday lunch harbour tour.

Also, make sure to get in touch with the Executive Director for details on the President's Reception. That's when the CAJ president hosts many of the volunteers and speakers at the conference.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The keynote speakers are a major draw for your conference, so plan early to avoid missing out on your first choice. Don't rule out anyone! ABC's Peter Jennings said "no" to organizing committees in two other cities before he said "yes" to St. John's. Sometimes it's simply a matter of timing or geography.

You'll probably want three keynotes. The main keynote is traditionally (but not always) Friday night, ending the first day of the conference. The topic is often weightier, for example a timely issue or current state of affairs type speech. Remember to leave time at the end for Q&As for all keynotes. Saturday lunch is a perfect time for your second keynote. The topic can be anything; in past conferences delegates have heard inspirational addresses on the importance of story-telling in writing (Katherine Lanpher in Vancouver) as well as what it's like to be a well-known interviewer (Lunch with Jan Wong in Halifax). The last keynote wraps up the conference at Sunday brunch and is often inspirational and/or reflective. But it's up to you to decide what you think will work best.

Once you've determined a list of top choices, assign one person to contact the speakers. Don't ask more than three until you get definite refusals. Other committees have had problems when too many choices agreed to speak. Or have a back-up plan for a fourth keynote spot, if necessary, if time is running short and you still don't have all your spots filled.

If your keynote is a working journalist, the CAJ cannot offer a speaking fee (see the CAJ policy and by-laws). However, you can negotiate about travel and hotel expenses. Make sure the contact person clears any expenses with the committee before they agree to anything. Typically, however, the conference pays all travel and hotel and provides registration for all keynotes. These are your big hitters. They're often the reason people make the decision to go to a conference. Don't be penny wise and pound foolish.

Once your speakers have agreed to come to the conference, send a confirmation letter. You should spell out the focus of the speech, the expenses you've agreed to cover, the date and time of the speech and any other details the speakers should know in advance. And, of course, don't forget to get a good photo and biography for use in your program.

If your speaker is well known to the public, you may want to publicize the event through local newspapers, radio stations and community announcements. Your committee may want to sell extra tickets to your keynote speech to the public and the local media community. Charge a higher rate than the one offered to paying delegates and use the profit to offset other costs.

The committee should arrange for someone to introduce each speaker and thank him/her after the keynote address. If you decide to give the speakers a gift, make sure the committee approves the type of gift and the cost. Talk to the Executive Director about CAJ gifts for all speakers and workshop leaders, as well as awards banquet emcee(s).

On the day of the speech, make sure the podium is set up and any audio-visual equipment is ready. (In fact, someone on the committee should be the AV on-the-ground person, ensuring all AV needs are in place during the entire conference) Post volunteers at the doors to sell or take tickets from people. If local media will be covering the speech, ensure they have a place to sit and access to the sound system if they need to record.

AWARDS CEREMONY

The CAJ Awards Committee oversees the publicity, entries and judging for the awards. The final deadline is usually February 28, allowing most organizing committees some time to plan their ceremonies.

Let the head of the awards committee know what type of ceremony you have planned for the conference. The CAJ awards have traditionally been given out after a banquet on the Saturday night.

In the past, the ceremony has worked like this:

- * The banquet is served to most delegates in a large hall at the hotel. You'll want to think about decorations for the room -- this is a job a volunteer with a flair for design is perfect for. It's fun to give a local flavour to the event -- in Halifax, lobster traps, beach rocks and driftwood, along with ambient blue lighting and floating candles, made for a very maritime feel, especially with the salmon dinner! You may want to also have entertainment during the meal. Several conferences have hired small quartets to play background music while delegates ate. One conference hired a comedian to entertain during breaks in service.

- * Once people are served dessert and coffee, the guest speaker, performer or emcee(s) are introduced and begin the proceedings with a speech, monologue or comedy routine.

- * The last few conferences have used a video presentation to identify the nominees and stories they've been recognized for. But earlier conferences used live presenters. You can also produce a list of the nominees with descriptions of their stories and include them in the conference program or distribute them at the ceremony.

- * The emcee or a presenter announces the winner's name. If the winner is not at the ceremony, the presenter can congratulate them and thank the CAJ on their behalf. If they are present, they come to the podium to accept their plaque and cheque.

- * Although the Saturday night banquet works very well for many, many reasons, if you decide to hold your awards ceremony at another time, you can change the process. Consult with the Executive Director and the Awards Committee.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

The conference program serves a number of important purposes -- the most obvious is that it tells delegates what's happening at the conference -- an overview of the panels, workshops and keynotes planned and the people who will be leading the sessions. But it's also a way to thank sponsors, bring in advertising revenue and promote the organization. Conference fund-raisers often send a copy of last year's program to potential donors to show them what the CAJ conferences have to offer.

One person should coordinate the production of the program from beginning to end. The following list includes the contents of the program. Your committee can adjust it accordingly.

- * Greeting from CAJ president and/or organizing committee.

- * One-page at-a-glance overview agenda for the whole weekend. A detailed schedule is usually printed on a single sheet and inserted in the program just before the conference. This is because it is usually impossible to know a month ahead every detail of a three-day event.

- * A detailed list of the panels, workshops and keynotes speakers for each day of the conference, along with a description of each session and photographs and bios of the participants. You'll want a longer profile of your keynotes and any other major participants (like the awards banquet emcees) That's why you've been collecting all that info from each speaker, so you can give it to the program editor early and help keep him/her sane.

- * Paid ads from media and non-media companies and organizations.
- * Ads to thank major donors or recognize sponsors of specific events at the conference.
- * Agenda for CAJ Annual General Meeting and copy of any motions or proposed changes to by-laws or policies.
- * Map of the downtown area of your city.

You'll need someone to design the program (one of your volunteers?) and get it ready for printing. The Executive Director can provide guidance here, as well as give you contact names of people who were program editors for previous conferences. If you're paying for the printing, you can tell the printer when you'll need the program ready and deliver it to them accordingly. However, if the printing is being donated, the company may want to fit it into another press run so you'll have to deliver the proofs when they need them.

Copies of the program go into every conference kit. A copy to each donor, sponsor and advertiser. It shows them what the CAJ did with their contribution or how their and looked in the program. Save some for next year's committee to use in their fundraising efforts.

Here are some tips from the program editor of the 2000 conference in Halifax:

- A local printer is preferable because there is a lot of back and forth. You want to know how the printer wants things, i.e., photos as tiffs and eps's, text as text edit files, pages in Quark. And you want to know the drop dead date -- when the printer absolutely has to have the stuff.
- When you're getting quotes from printers. take a program from a previous year. It will tell them the approximate size and paper quality. You should also know how much you can do yourself. If you can deliver the program on a Zip disk -- that means the pages are complete with text, photos, and ads and every graphic element are on the disk in the format the printer wants -- it's going to be significantly cheaper.
- Get all your ads sent electronically, either by e-mail, Zip disk or CD. You do not want camera ready because it has to be physically stripped in by the printer and that will cost you. But it's good to have a hard copy faxed to you so you know what the ad should look like.
- Make sure any programs, including the versions, you use, such as QuarkXpress, are compatible with those of your printer and advertisers.
- You want bios of your workshop leaders and panelists, not resumes. You don't have time to pull a 100-word bio out of a point-form resume. It's their life, let them tell it. Also, ask workshop leaders for a brief description of their talk. It should be a short, catchy ad that will make people want to sign up for their workshop.
- Panels also need introductory descriptions. You (or another volunteer) are going to have to write these.
- You'll need the president's message and the chair's message and headshots. Get on this early. It's something you can have tucked aside and done.
- The only last-minute copy you should expect -- confirm with the Executive Director -- is the annual meeting agenda, the list of nominees, and the list of sponsors.
- The number of color ads you sell determines the number of color pages you have. The printer will tell you which flats can have color and you can pick where the color falls. The back page, the inside front cover and inside back are choice spots that might be part of a long-standing deal the CAJ has with an advertiser. You should check with the Executive Director on who is guaranteed what page. Everything else is up for grabs and you can slot it.
- The CBC has a wonderful online photo gallery with high resolution photos. They reproduce fine, but little else from the Internet does. The workshop leaders and panelists should send you a black and white photo. JPEG's over the e-mail work fine. Be sure to make sure it works once it arrives, otherwise you'll discover a corrupted file at 1 a.m. the night before it goes to press.

LAST MINUTE DETAILS

The devil's in the details, it's said. The closer you get to the actual weekend of the conference, the more it'll seem you'll have to do. But since you've already done the bulk of the work, the last minute hurdles are usually small tasks that can be divided among your committee.

It's extremely useful to have someone designated as the volunteers/logistics person for the three days of the conference -- a person who will contact the local journalism school and line up student volunteers, make a volunteer schedule to staff the registration desk and perform other tasks and generally ensure someone is on top of the logistics details of running the event.

Here's a checklist you can use in the days before the conference:

- * Pick up conference program from printers (if it's not ready before).
- * Have final meeting with hotel staff to ensure you'll have the rooms, facilities, equipment and meals you will need.
- * Make sure you've booked audio visual equipment for workshops, panels and speeches.
- * Assemble registration kits for delegates. Include conference programs, delegate badges, map, tourism information and any other material you want to give delegates. Be creative -- what would you be delighted to find in a conference kit?
- * Meet with volunteers who will staff registration desk and explain their duties and schedules.
- * Confirm details for awards ceremony, including presenters, venue, AV equipment and any other materials.
- * Make sure you have banners or other promotional materials from companies or groups who are sponsoring a particular part of the conference. Assign committee member or hotel staff to post them at appropriate place and time.

On the day of the conference, check these final details:

- * Confirm that speakers and workshop leaders have arrived and know where and when their session will be held.
- * Ensure rooms are set up for the appropriate session, with the right equipment and materials.
- * Set up registration table and supply it with conference kits, extra programs, extra delegate badges (for last-minute arrivals), paper, pens, markers (for making signs), tape, a phone (the hotel can usually provide one), receipt book, tourism information, and other materials. You should assign one member of the committee to be the logistics/registration/volunteers person. They can arrange with local journalism schools for student volunteers to help manning the desks (in return, they get free registration). The Executive Director will be handling a lot of these details as well, and your logistics volunteer can work directly with the ED to ensure everything's mapped out and ready.
- * Set up a bulletin board next to the desk for announcements, messages and displays.

WRAP IT UP

One day you'll wake up and a year's worth of hard work, planning and nerves will be yesterday's news. Congratulations!! The conference is over, the issues were thoroughly debated, everyone learned a lot and had a great time.

For the most part, your work as a committee is done. There are just a few details that should be wrapped up before everyone takes off for the summer.

- * Ensure that thank you notes and letters are written to anyone who donated time and money to conference. That includes sponsors, speakers, workshop leaders and others who contributed to the success of the conference.

- * Make sure the Executive Director is aware of all unpaid invoices, uncollected donations and other sources of revenue. Likewise, collect all bills incurred by your committee and send them to the national office to be paid.

- * Return borrowed and rented audiovisual equipment, computers, etc.

- * Look at feedback from the delegates and write down some suggestions for next year's conference. Forward a summary report to the Executive Director.

- * Finally, don't forget! Have a party for the organizing committee. You earned it.