



**Annual Conference & Expo
Volunteer Guidelines
&
Standard Operating
Procedures**

**Updated
February 2019**

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

GardenComm Annual Conference & Expo Objective

As an organization devoted to the education and professional development of garden communicators, the objective of the GardenComm Annual Conference & Expo is to provide a multi-functional event offering members the opportunity to expand their professional skills, investigate new products, collect story ideas and network with fellow garden communicators.

Conference & Expo Priorities

There will never be enough time to do everything everyone would like to do at an annual conference. Therefore, it is necessary to establish program priorities in order to utilize the available time most effectively. Accordingly, the Board of Directors has determined that time at the annual conference would ideally be allocated in the following manner:

Education Programming	40%
Story Tours	40%
Expo	20%
Networking	Throughout

Given the time available from 1:00PM Friday through 9:00PM Monday, the GardenComm Education and Local Arrangements Committees have approximately ~ 40 hours to utilize as follows:

Education Programming	~12 Hours
Story Tours	~12 Hours
Expm	~8 Hours
Break and Meals	~8 Hours
Networking	Throughout

Operational Structure

Given the high degree of effort and large number of volunteers required to produce a good conference, it is necessary that a hierarchy of control be established and understood in order to avoid duplication of efforts, conflicts and related problems. Therefore, the chain of command for the GardenComm annual conference is as follows:

Board of Directors

While the board of directors delegates functions to committees and staff, the Board of Directors has final authority over all meeting plans and arrangements. Therefore, reports to the Board of Directors are necessary as required approval procedures will explain below.

Program Committee

The Annual Conference Program Committee consists of the President, Vice President, Past President, Annual Conference Local Arrangements Committee Chair and Executive Director. The Education Committee Chair is the GardenComm vice president who is the lead volunteer for all conference activities. Though the annual conference is held in a specific geographic area, the purpose of the Program Committee is to develop an

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

educational program that meets the needs of a national audience. To ensure such national character, the Program Committee is charged with:

1. Developing the educational program content. Repeating topics in consecutive years is discouraged.
2. Recruiting speakers & negotiating fees within policies of the Board of Directors. Repeating speakers in consecutive years is discouraged.
3. Designation of the overall time schedule (time allotted for education, exhibit, social and tour programs)
 - a. Please note that members should be given a 1 hour break between changes in events (ie. Tours vs. education). This break should be extended to 1.5 hours in the event that a meal on their own is included in the break.
 - b. All tour and education scheduling must take place between 8:00AM and 5:00PM. Any scheduled event occurring outside of the allowed time slot must gain prior approval from the Board of Directors and meet all budgetary items.

It is currently Board of Directors policy that pre-conference workshops will not be accepted because of Board of Directors and committee conflict and staffing limitations.

Local Arrangements Committee

The purpose of the Local Arrangements Subcommittee is to recommend and organize local events and tour venues to maximize delegate exposure to the local gardening community, making the most effective use of allocated time and resources. The Local Arrangements Subcommittee is primarily charged with the task of:

1. Defining tour opportunities
2. Recommending local "event" sites
3. Arranging admission to facilities and private gardens
4. Providing & training tour guides and bus captains as well as providing bus captains instructions.
5. Recommending tour scheduling, i.e., morning vs. afternoon
6. Working with staff on arranging tour details such as
 - a. What routes buses will take
 - b. How much time to get from place to place
 - c. How much time at each site
 - d. Where can buses park, toilet facilities
 - e. What refreshment facilities are available
 - f. Where can we feed the delegates, etc.
7. Providing driver instructions for local transportation contractor.
8. In general, how do we show off the area in the least amount of time without rushing too much.

Program Input from Local Arrangements Committee

The Annual Conference Local Arrangements Subcommittee is also requested to support the Annual Conference Program Committee in program development in two areas:

1. **Topic Suggestions:** Does the local area have some unique educational program content to offer to all GardenComm members? If so, that should be brought to the attention of the Program Committee as early as possible in the form of a recommendation or request.

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

2. **Speaker Talent:** Once the Program Committee has determined the subjects for the educational program, the Local Arrangements Committee may be requested to suggest local speakers who have particular expertise in those subjects.

To avoid duplication and/or conflicts, the Local Arrangements Committee may not invite speakers or program participants without the prior approval of the Program Committee.

GardenComm Headquarters

Staff is tasked to:

1. Support and advise the Program Committee and Local Arrangements Committee
2. Contract for all facilities and services including hotel arrangements, A/V, exhibits, food & beverage, transportation etc.
3. Sell exhibits
4. Coordinate sponsors
5. Assemble committee results and supervise promotional materials
6. Receive fees and handle registrations
7. All conference materials print production
8. Handle all budget, monetary and contract arrangements
9. Other tasks as mutually agreed and designated by the Board of Directors

Getting Started

Assembling a Local Arrangements Committee

The first step in forming a Local Arrangements Committee is identifying a local chairperson. We recommend the chair be someone who is not affiliated with local commercial ventures such as nurseries, garden centers or manufacturers. This avoids any conflicts of interest and objections by area vendors regarding tour selection and schedules. Ideally, the composition of the Local Arrangements Committee would include:

1. A GardenComm member garden writer as chair
2. A nursery industry representative
3. A garden center industry representative
4. A local garden club official
5. A local public garden/arboreta representative
6. A master gardener official
7. An Ag Extension representative

Submitting a Host Proposal

The GardenComm Board of Directors would like to commit meeting facilities 2-3 years in advance. This early commitment allows members to plan for future events. Longer commitments are generally undesirable because extended dates subject the association to higher levels of risk in the event of unforeseen economic, travel or membership changes that might adversely impact meeting attendance. Likewise, exceptional growth may cause the GardenComm to outgrow facilities once thought adequate for our needs at the time they were committed.

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

Prior to submitting a host proposal, the Local Arrangements Committee should inquire regarding existing and planned meeting commitments such as the following:

2018: Chicago 2019: Salt Lake City 2020: Williamsburg 2021: Open 2022: Open

It is the intention of the GardenComm Board of Directors to rotate annual conferences among the 7 regions on a West-to-East pattern (including variations for North and South as permitted within a region.)

A host proposal form should be prepared at least 2-4 years in advance. Information required should be submitted to the Executive Director by January 1, prior to the mid-term meeting of the GardenComm Board of Directors. The mid-term meeting is generally scheduled for February.

A Host Proposal Form may be found in Appendix A of this document.

Determining a General Program Schedule

A general program outline is provided in Appendix B. Priority is given to educational session development and story tour opportunities and lastly to expo. Story tours that support educational programming are preferred. For example, a visit to a rose garden would support a session on roses.

The Program Committee has primary responsibility for development of the overall program schedule. The Local Arrangements Committee should submit general recommendations for story tour opportunities and time requirements for such tours as early as possible. Preference for morning or afternoon tours should be stated for each program day.

The Program Chair and the Executive Director will prepare and submit a recommended conference time table to the Board of Directors for their approval. The results of the Board of Director's decision will be conveyed to the committees for final execution.

Recommending Presentation Topics & Speakers

Primary responsibility for program development is vested in the Program Committee. If the local area of the conference has any unique educational opportunities to offer to the Program Committee, the Local Arrangements Committee should advise the Program Committee as soon as possible. These recommendations will be considered along with other topics being addressed by the committee.

Once the Program Committee has determined the session topics and the list has been approved by the Board of Directors, the Local Arrangements Committee will be requested to advise on any local personnel who should be considered as a speaker for any topic listed. ***However, no contact should be made by the Local Arrangements Committee with any speaker without the prior approval of the Program Committee. Once the proposed program is approved, the Local Arrangements Committee will be asked to communicate with local persons to encourage them to volunteer their time to speak at the GardenComm annual conference.***

Organizing Tours

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

Tour Selection Criteria

The purpose of the GardenComm conference story tours is:

- to provide members with opportunities for developing articles
- to expose members to new environments and issues represented by the local area
- to provide special access to sites and facilities not generally available to the public

The tour schedule may vary according to each year's program needs. In general, it begins on the first full day of meeting activities and ends two days later (typically Saturday-Monday). A post-conference tour **MAY** be proposed by the Local Arrangements Committee, **and if accepted**, will be offered on an optional basis on the fourth day (usually Tuesday). ***It is currently Board of Directors policy that pre-conference tours will not be accepted because of Board of Directors and committee conflicts and staffing limitations.***

When developing the story tour program, it is recommended that private garden tours be included on at least one day. For other venues, the Local Arrangements Committee should ask 3 questions:

- 1. What about the tour site is unique?** For example, GardenComm members have seen countless nurseries. Is a proposed nursery tour going to offer something unique that will captivate the attention of members and provide ideas for new articles? Tours giving members access to facilities or personnel not available to the public offer a unique incentive for members to participate.
- 2. Does the tour support the educational program?** Tour sites that can be an extension of the conference educational program would be preferred over those that are unrelated to the program.
- 3. Is the benefit offered by a particular site worth the travel time to get there?** Obviously, time is limited and more time spent traveling means less time at a site or fewer sites we can see. Also, if members can visit a sight and get the same tour as with the group, they may choose to do that as a personal option.
 - a. Maximum travel time for daily tours is 30 minutes.**
 - b. Maximum travel time for any special event is 45 minutes.**

Time Schedules

When planning a tour, consideration must be given to the dynamics of moving a crowd. Loading at the hotel for initial departure will take 25 - 30 minutes from the initial loading to the departure of the last bus. The GardenComm staff will conduct the initial loading process and all buses must have all seats occupied (with the possible exception of the very last bus).

At each intermediate site, scheduling should allow 10 minutes to unload each bus and 15 minutes to reload. Therefore, 25 minutes at each stop is required for unloading and reloading each bus. If the buses do not arrive together and reload at the same time, the total time required to get organized to tour and depart each site will be greater than 25 minutes.

Travel time between stops must also be considered. The Local Arrangements Committee should actually drive the intended route for the tour in advance. Travel at the speed limit only, buses do not travel like autos.

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

Addresses for all tour stops and a clear path/route must be provided to all bus drivers and bus captains in the tour packets for all tours. A member of the local arrangements committee MUST run each bus route IN THE ORDER it appears in the packet.

Pay attention to access limitations like low bridges, low power lines, one-way or narrow streets and no turn around or parking areas for buses. Are reasonable loading and unloading areas available? If not, build delays into the time schedule.

***NOTE:** If a tour falls seriously behind the time schedule, you may be required to curtail or skip a site visit to get back on schedule. That decision will be made by the senior GardenComm officer or staff member assigned to the tour. PLAN AHEAD AND BE CONSERVATIVE IN YOUR TIME SCHEDULES. It is easier to decide to stay at a site longer because you are ahead of schedule than to leave a site early because you are behind schedule.*

Bus Captains

The job of the bus captains is:

- to provide local information during tours
- to guide the bus drivers from site to site
- to assist staff with crowd control for unloading and reloading buses

The bus captains are expected to keep the tour on schedule and the bus drivers pointed in the right direction.

Do not assign bus captains who are not familiar with the entire route of the tour. One captain per bus is sufficient. They should know all the details of each site:

1. Where we are going
2. How to get there
3. What we will see between here and there
4. When we should arrive
5. Where we unload and load
6. Assure passengers leave nothing on buses at any stop.
7. Who is the contact person when we arrive at each stop
8. What we will do while there
9. When do we leave
10. Start over at "a"

Tour Refreshments

The Local Arrangements Committee is responsible for arranging water on each tour day. Whenever possible, the Local Arrangements Committee should arrange for larger garden sites to sponsor the water. If sponsorships are not available, the Local Arrangements Committee will be responsible for pricing bottled water (12 oz bottles) submitting a request for funds to GardenComm staff, purchasing, and delivering water.

Organizing Special Events

The typical conference schedule has the possibility of one special event and two free evenings for members to seek local assistance. In the order of occurrence, these events are:

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

Friday & Saturday Evening

Beginning no earlier than the close of the exhibit hall at 8:00PM, delegates will be seeking dinner and entertainment. A list of recommended dining establishments should be prepared by the Local Arrangements Committee. If the hotel facilities are far from adequate restaurants, a request for group transportation should be submitted to the GardenComm office. The Local Arrangements Committee should determine a destination for each evening and recommend a time table for shuttle services.

Sunday Evening

Sunday evening may be utilized for a special event that is recommended by the Local Arrangements Committee. Past events have been at facilities such as the San Diego Wild Animal Park, Casa Loma, Longwood Gardens, and a dinner cruise on the Potomac River in Washington, DC. When reviewing options for the Sunday evening event, the following guidelines should be considered:

1. **Cost:** This event should be fully sponsored. If not sponsored, the cost including all food & beverages (including alcohol), facility rental fees, transportation, entertainment and other out-of-pocket expenses will be added to the overall registration fee for participants. Tour locations and costs must be submitted to the GardenComm office no later than 6 months in advance with a committed sponsor.
2. **Attire:** If the event is scheduled at the end of a tour day, participants will be dressed to tour. The event should consider their attire. If they need to change, at least 60 minutes must be allowed for members to go to their rooms and return to the buses. **Ninety minutes would be preferred.**
3. **Duration:** After a day of touring, the special event **must** conclude by 9:00PM at the very latest. Members will typically begin preparing for return to the hotel around 7:30 - 8:30PM.
4. **Travel Time:** Maximum travel time for the special event is 45 minutes one way.

Monday Dinner

The Monday Awards & Honors Dinner will be held in the host hotel/facility. The banquet is a major food and beverage event for the GardenComm meeting that allows GardenComm to secure lower room rates and complimentary meeting space. Therefore, the banquet can be taken out of the hotel only if the event is covered completely by donated funds including all food, beverage, transportation and incidental expenses.

Services & Facility Contracts

All contracting for conference facilities and services is the responsibility of the GardenComm office. **No committee has authority to enter into any binding agreements in behalf of the association unless that authority is specifically conveyed by the Board of Directors.** The GardenComm office will invite recommendations from the Program and Local Arrangements Committees on hotel, catering, transportation and other contract services; however, the selection of all vendors will be the responsibility of the GardenComm office only. All facility arrangements must be made through the GardenComm meeting planner. Having the meeting planner as the one point of contact helps to eliminate conflicts and confusion with the hotels and other facilities.

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

Budget

A preliminary budget for the conference is prepared by the Executive Director and approved by the Board of Directors at each annual conference for the following year (January to December). The final budget for the fiscal year is approved by the Board of Directors at its January, mid-term meeting. Special budget requests from the Program and Local Arrangements Committees should be submitted to the Executive Director 45 days prior to each board meeting. Conference budgets must cover the full cost of each registrant in the registration fee.

Any event not covered by registration fees must be fully sponsored before it can be added to the official program UNLESS an event is needed to fulfill specific food & beverage minimum contract provisions with the conference host facility. Examples of such events include:

1. First timer reception drink tickets
2. Friday evening exhibit hall reception food and drink tickets
3. Saturday evening exhibit hall reception food and drink tickets
4. Breakfast events
5. Sunday evening event
6. Coffee breaks
7. After party
8. Lunch events

Expenses, Fees and Waivers

The Program Committee receives 60+ volunteer proposals each year for the 14-21 conference presentation times. Most of the presenters at the GardenComm conference, including local area speakers, are volunteers. GardenComm Board of Directors policy on payment for speakers is as follows:

1. **Volunteered & Invited Presentations:** Single session participants will receive a \$250 honorarium plus one-day of free registration; panelists will receive a \$125 honorarium for a two-member panel plus one-day of free registration and a \$75 honorarium for a three member panel plus one-day of free registration. A maximum of 3 panelists per 1 hour concurrent session is permitted. Any presentation requiring the assistance of the GardenComm staff in planning or presentation preparation will be done on approval of billable hours.
2. **Keynote Presentation:** Honorarium, coach air fare and lodging for one night. Only presenters slated for keynote session time slots may be offered additional compensation of any sort.
3. **Post Conference Workshop:** Fee and coach travel. Workshop costs must be self sustaining. Workshops with low attendance will be canceled 30 days out. Presenters will not receive fee or travel in the event that the workshop is cancelled.
4. **Committee:** Like officers and directors, all committee members serve without compensation and are expected to register for the conference, except the Local Arrangements Committee Chair. Committee members may register at the lowest rate regardless of when they register. Any committee promotional or onsite expenses must be approved in advance. Receipts without prior approval will not be accepted.

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

5. **Bus captains** wishing to participate in the entire conference program are expected to register for the meeting at the lowest rate. Non-member bus captains may register at the member rate. However, bus captains who only participate in tours they are working need not register.

Sponsor Solicitation

Coordinating sponsors is the responsibility of the GardenComm office and Sponsorship Committee. In order to avoid problems with companies being solicited for different events of the same meeting or being solicited for events already sponsored, the GardenComm office will coordinate contact with potential sponsors. Committee sponsor contacts should be sent to the GardenComm office by January of the year of the meeting to coordinate recruitment activities. Sponsor recruitment usually begins in January of each year.

Other Activities

Local Information Table

A table is reserved in the registration area for local information items. Maps, restaurant guides, public parks/gardens and similar information of a *NON-COMMERCIAL* nature may be distributed from the local information table. Commercial or promotional literature for companies or individuals may not be displayed. All commercial literature should be distributed from the exhibit booths only. Inappropriate material will be removed from the information table by GardenComm staff as necessary.

Tote Bags and Give-Aways

The conference budget does not always allow for provision of tote bags and similar give-aways. Such items may be sponsored; however, no give-aways may be accepted from vendors for distribution from the registration desk unless it is part of a paid sponsorship package. All other commercial promos must be distributed from booths in the exhibit hall only.

Jim Wilson Mentoring Award (Local Recognition Award)

The Local Arrangements Subcommittee is responsible for submitting to the GardenComm Board of Directors one nominee for the Jim Wilson Mentoring Award. Nomination and award criteria is provided on the GardenComm website.

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

GardenComm Annual Conference & Expo Host City Invitation [Appendix A]

Host invitation submitted by

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Proposed City _____ Year _____

Tentative Committee Members (Names/Organizations)

What sites/tours would be of interest to GardenComm members?

Are there any special incentives being offered GardenComm?

Please describe why you feel GardenComm members would benefit from visiting your host site:

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

GardenComm Annual Conference & Expo Sample Schedule [Appendix B]

Time	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
7:00AM			Early AM			
			Photo Shoot			
8:00AM			Story Tours			Optional Tour
				Learning	Learning	
9:00AM	Executive	Board of		Session	Session	
	Committee	Directors				
10:00AM	Meeting	Meeting		Learning	Learning	
				Session	Session	
11:00AM						
				Learning	Closing	
12:00PM	Board of			Session	Keynote	
	Directors					
1:00PM	Meeting	Regional	Opening			
		Meetings	Keynote	Story Tours	Story Tours	
2:00PM		First Timer	Business			
		Meeting	Meeting			
3:00PM			Roundtables			
4:00PM		Expo Hours	Expo Hours			
5:00PM						
6:00PM				Evening		
				Event		
7:00PM				(if funded)	Awards	
					Dinner	
8:00PM						
9:00PM					After Party	
					(if funded)	
10:00PM						

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

GardenComm Annual Conference & Expo Timeline [Appendix C]

Based on August Meeting Date

Four Years Prior to the Event

December Submit host city application to Executive Director

Three Years Prior to the Event

February Board of Directors selects meeting city pending acceptable hotel negotiations by staff

February Staff negotiates with hotel facilities

Two Years Prior to the Event

February Board approves hotel recommendation and finalizes city selection

April City selection advertised in membership directory

August Local Arrangements Subcommittee organized

One Year Prior to the Event

December Local Arrangements Subcommittee investigates local tour options

August Local Arrangements Committee invitation presented to members at preceding Annual Conference Business Meeting/Awards & Honors Dinner

October Call for Presentation Proposals Released

December Volunteer presentation offers collected by the Program Chair

December Local Arrangements Committee chair submits program recommendations and tour suggestions to Program Chair & GardenComm staff

Year of the Event

January Program Committee chair, Local Arrangements Committee Chair and Executive Director negotiate conference time schedule. Program Committee chair assembles recommended program for review by Board of Directors

February Board of Directors reviews proposed program outline for sessions & story tours
Exhibitor marketing materials released
Sponsor marketing materials released

Annual Conference & Expo Volunteer Guidelines & Standard Operating Procedures

March	Speakers confirmed and speaker agreements signed Local Arrangements Committee stories due for April <i>On the QT</i> All speaker and tour info due to Executive Director for conference marketing
April	Conference marketing released
May	2nd Local Arrangements Committee article for <i>On the QT</i> (June Issue)
June	Conference mailer released
July	Bus Captain list submitted to GardenComm office Samples of Local Arrangements Committee transportation routes submitted to GardenComm office
August /September	Meeting takes place