

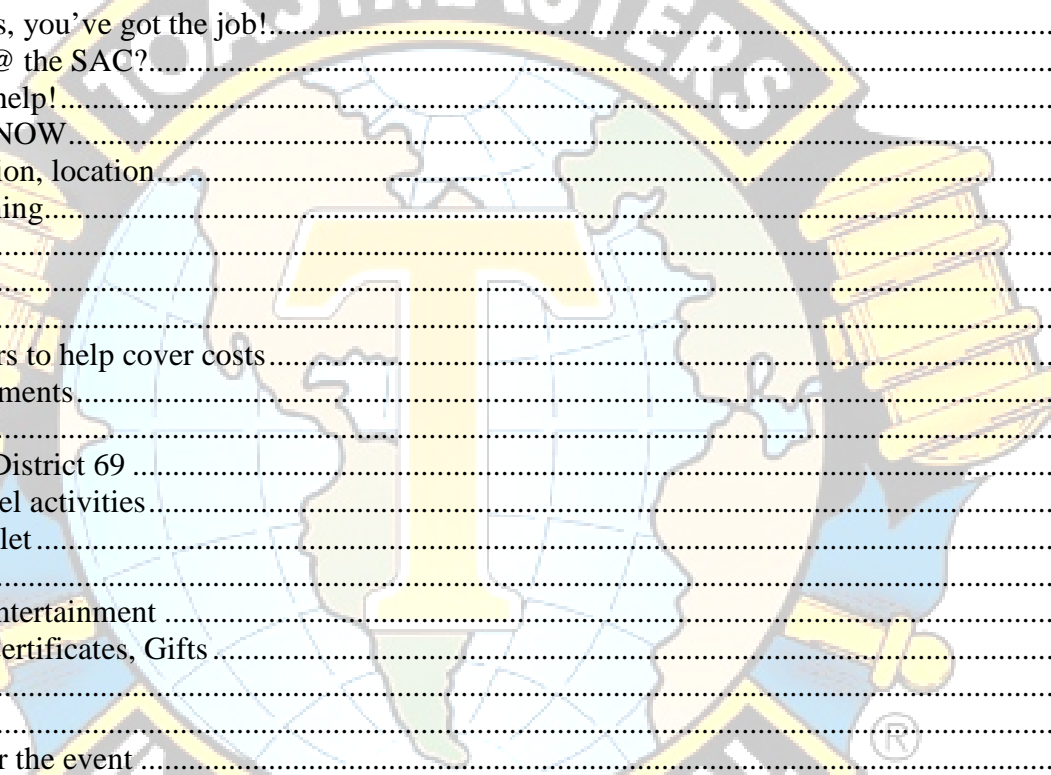


District 69 Toastmasters

Planning a Semi-Annual Conference

Everything you need to know about how to set up the Semi-Annual conference for District 69.

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Congratulations, you've got the job!

Well done!

Do you know what you've got yourself into?

If you've never had the chance to run a conference of this magnitude, then this booklet will serve as a basis for you to successfully run your semi-annual conference (SAC). You will be able to smile at your MC when the SAA calls everyone to attention on that morning, knowing that you've done everything possible to make this happen.

Your recognition for the big job would have been announced in November at the previous **Toastmasters Semi-Annual Conference**, and you will be known as The Semi-Annual Conference Convenor, which is a District role. Make sure your name is included in the District Directory as the SAC Co-ordinator.

As such, you will liaise with District Governor, Lieutenant Governor Education and Training and Lieutenant Governor Marketing to create the flavour of the event, and to promote it to other Toastmasters.

Now it's good to know that it's a **Division** that is responsible for putting together the SAC each year – and the Division responsible changes each year. While it's not traditional that the Division Governor be involved in the SAC, it may be of importance to include them in some discussion items where local Toastmasters are required to fill roles at the SAC. So be sure that your Division Governor has sufficient influence to bring appropriate people to help when required.

The SAC is the *only* official event that is run by Toastmasters that doesn't relate to *contests*. What this means is that you **don't** have the task of assigning judges, briefing contestants, etc.

As a result, you can focus more on **having fun** and **forming friendships** rather than making it diplomatic.

The only *official purpose* of the Semi-annual conference is that it is the **second council meeting** that District is required to run on behalf of Toastmasters International. In District 69, it is traditionally held on the second full weekend of November each year.

Further to this, the SAC is also the time of recognition for a number of awards, in particular **Toastmaster of the Year**. Check the Directory and The Hall of Fame booklet for a complete listing of the awards given at SAC.

And with this as a backdrop, let's discuss what goes on at the SAC.

Brad Smith and Carolyn Phillips, February 2010

What goes on @ the SAC?

The Semi-Annual Conference is a *required event* on the District Toastmasters calendar in order to run the second council meeting for the year.

However, what *really goes on at the SAC, stays at the SAC.* ☺

As you are on the SAC guidance committee, *you will be able to determine what goes on at the event.*

The main driver behind the Saturday program is to *encourage Toastmasters to interact, have fun, and form friendships.* If you can achieve this, then your event will be successful.

You will need help!

Organising a conference is a huge task and needs a committed group of people to work together on a committee.

It's preferable that you find *experienced Toastmasters* with the qualifications that you require, rather than acquire helpful people who may not necessarily be skilled in their roles.

Your committee needs to meet at least **fortnightly**, if not weekly, so that actions can be taken as required. It's best to find people who are in your Division.

You will need one person to lead the organising of the conference and delegate tasks to other people. Other committee members will also be needed to spread the load of organising.

People have different skill sets. It is recommended that a range of skills be represented in the people on the organising committee eg good organisational skills, visionary skills for trying something new, attending to finer details, financial skills for Registrar.

People who live within the Area will also be an asset to visit the venue and accommodation options.

4-7 people are a good number of people to work with on an organising committee.

SAC committee members can be signed off for tasks in their **Competent Leadership** manual for tasks that they assist with.

If you are running the SAC, then you may also want to achieve your **High Performance Leadership** award – but please ensure that you allow sufficient time for extra meetings because you will need extra time to be acquainted with this award.

Ensure that you talk about this during your planning sessions so that you can all be clear on what each of you want to achieve from being involved in organising of the SAC.

Specifically, you will need people with the following skills:

- ❖ Treasurer, to collect funds and maintain the budget- see Financial Planning page 6
- ❖ Registrations, to acknowledge members

- ❖ Secretary, for meeting minutes
- ❖ Flyers, that will be sent to all members for further promotion- see page 7
- ❖ Booklet production, for members during the weekend- see page 11
- ❖ Activities organiser, will need to work with District to identify acceptable activities- see page 10, 11
- ❖ Raffle organiser, to build extra funds into the event, see page 8
- ❖ MC, for the Saturday activities- see page 9
- ❖ SAA, assist the MC to help keep the event on time
- ❖ SAC Gofer, pick up people from the airport, and do odd jobs as required

Of course you will also need to get more people on board as the day draws near, in order to help run the activities, etc.

Start planning NOW

SAC is traditionally held on the second full weekend in November of each year. The earlier you start planning, the easier the process will be and the more naturally- coloured hair you will keep! Organise your committee early in the year and plan out the dates for meeting together. Meet weekly initially then further spaced as time goes on and keep in regular contact by phone and email to keep everyone up to date with plans.

Allow for 80- 100 members to attend.

Time Line:

January: choose host club, form an organising committee, check out local venues to hold the conference, pick a theme, dates

February: book venue and have budget reviewed in consultation with District, open a bank account

March: check out alternative accommodation options eg members may attend SAC and extend their stay to make a holiday for the family. Partners of members can be offered alternative activities in the area.

April: work with District 69 executive on their requirements

May: Raffle prizes are often donated by businesses before the end of the financial year in June. Approach businesses in the area for donations towards the raffle.

June: finalise entertainers, program, flyers

July: finalise presenters for Educational Sessions

August: send final version flyers to District Public Relations Officer to advertise conference to club members

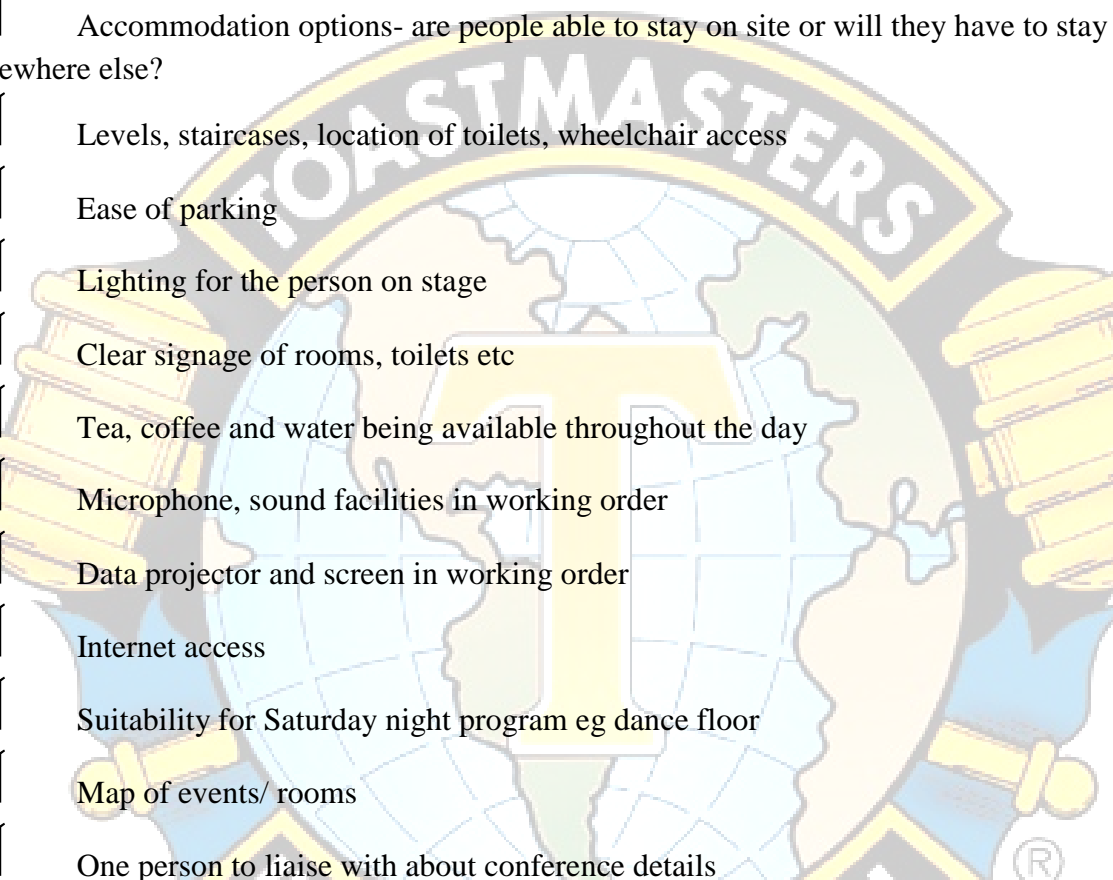
September: further promotions to division and club level

October: registrations close, final attendance numbers booked at venue

November: sleep well, rearing to go!!

Location, location, location

The venue for the conference can make or break the weekend. Carefully choose the venue for:

- 
- Food offered, people will remember being well fed!
 - Flexibility of dietary requirements for people with particular dietary needs
 - Ease of getting to and from the conference room, eg lifts, stairs
 - Accommodation options- are people able to stay on site or will they have to stay somewhere else?
 - Levels, staircases, location of toilets, wheelchair access
 - Ease of parking
 - Lighting for the person on stage
 - Clear signage of rooms, toilets etc
 - Tea, coffee and water being available throughout the day
 - Microphone, sound facilities in working order
 - Data projector and screen in working order
 - Internet access
 - Suitability for Saturday night program eg dance floor
 - Map of events/ rooms
 - One person to liaise with about conference details

Financial Planning

Your Treasurer will work on the financial aspect of the SAC. He will need to complete a budget (a template is provided below) as early as possible and have it approved by District, preferably at the previous SAC. Costs, such as venue, catering, entertainment, photocopying, keynote speakers and gifts to presenters need to be estimated, then finalised.

You will need to set up an account at a bank with any 2 of 4 signatories being able to sign on the account. Choose 2 people, one the Treasurer/ Registrar, who can be easily reached as signatories, as well as the District Treasurer and District Governor to be signatories. You will receive a cheque book and a deposit book to use for incoming money and out going expenses.

The Treasurer will need access to the bank balance regularly to know of registrations coming in via direct deposit into the bank account. Have a spreadsheet of registrations and update it every couple of days.

Keep all receipts, deposit book, unused cheques and cheque butts for auditing after the event is over. The bank account will then be closed by the District Treasurer and excess funds returned to District.

Double click on the EXCEL document below and use it for your budget planning.



SAC Conference
Planner

Flyers, etc

Letting club members know what is going on is essential.

Flyers need to advertise the SAC with enough information for people to decide to attend. A couple of flyers may be needed to cover different aspects of the conference eg flyers about the full conference, flyers advertising accommodation options, flyers promoting parallel activities, registration forms. Decide on this information early to reduce the number of versions being circulated.

Information essential to include:

- Name of event eg Semi Annual Conference
- Dates
- Place, full address of conference venue
- Costs, broken down for full and partial attendees
- Package options eg list what Accommodation Package includes, dinner, breakfast etc
- Conference and Saturday night program theme if you want people to dress for the occasion
- When registrations close, Early Bird and the latest date registrations can be taken
- Host club, Area, Division and District
- Payment options
- Contact person
- Toastmasters Logo
- Enticing reasons to attend

Registrations

A registration flyer should be produced as soon as you know the location and have a few activities booked in.

There is no need to repeat the information from the flyers inside the Registration Form, instead just include a flyer *with* the registration form so that people can send this to the person collecting the registrations.

The registration form will need to be simple, clear and *concise*. If you try and trim it too much then it's possible that you will lose clarity of information.

Make it a single A4 page that people can either email, fax or post to the Registrar.

Here's what you need to put on the registration form:

- ❖ Name
- ❖ Toastmaster qualifications
- ❖ Name of Club/ Area/ Division/ District that they are representing
- ❖ Contact Phone
- ❖ Contact email
- ❖ Contact postal address
- ❖ Special Dietary Requirements
- ❖ Lift from airport required
- ❖ Accommodation requirements
- ❖ Costs, Early Bird Rego
- ❖ Sessions to attend (with cost of attending those sessions if full registration not paid for)
- ❖ President's Breakfast- be clear if it is a cost covered by full registration
- ❖ Raffle pre-purchase tickets, and amount
- ❖ Total cost of weekend (based on early bird offers they take up)
- ❖ First timer ?
- ❖ Where to send the form to (check that post, email, fax details are correct)
- ❖ Payment methods:
 - bank transfer with bank account details- essential to capture name of person paying
 - cheque – made out to District 69 SAC
 - cash is not a valid payment method
- ❖ Participate in parallel activities (eg. The Amazing Race)
- ❖ Be clear what alternative pricing includes eg Accommodation Package will include Saturday dinner *and* Sunday breakfast

Raffles

To lower the price of the conference and add a little spice to the event, use raffles to add around \$750 to your bottom line.

You will need at least 20 products as raffle prizes.

From past events, add the option to pre-pay for raffles when sending in the registration form. A price of \$20 per set of 30 tickets is a great incentive for members to pay up front and to bring in about \$500. The rest of the tickets can be sold during the weekend itself.

The raffles are usually sourced from donations of small businesses who allow it in their advertising budget. You need to be able to **collect these before June 30** so that it has benefits for their tax return. In effect, if you do not seek and collect raffles before June 30, it is unlikely that you will be successful in collecting any free products.

If you've collected free gifts from business owners, make sure you write and thank them for their donation, and that you will promote their business to the Toastmasters in attendance.

To take this one step further, you may also want to announce the business donor when you announce the winner of the raffle prize. This is advertising at its best!

If you need to spend money on the prizes, then please ask someone from District about how much you should spend. Rule of thumb is to keep this as low as possible to maximise the profits from the event, so around \$100 is it.

Make sure you collect enough raffle ticket booklets - at \$2 each, you will need at least 10 booklets.

Getting sponsors to help cover costs

Other than raffles, which was mentioned earlier, the other form of raising funds in previous SAC weekends has been to seek sponsors who will receive significant coverage of their business from the event.

Offer sponsorship like this:

- a) **Platinum Sponsorship** – receive full “last page” advertising in members booklet, mentioned at the Celebratory Dinner, as well as host their banner or a stand throughout the weekend, \$500
- b) **Gold Sponsorship** – receive “half page” advertisement inside the booklet, as well as mentioned at the main session, \$250
- c) **Silver Sponsorship** – receive “quarter page” advertisement inside the booklet, \$100

It is important to **actually carry through with the mentioning** for the sponsors. In some previous years, this has been forgotten, and left quite a bad taste in the sponsor's mouths who were attending the event!

Dietary requirements

On the registration form, please ensure that you include **gluten free, wheat free, milk free, fish free, nut free** as selection criteria.

In some cases people have allergies to these products, and we need to allow special consideration for these situations when liaising with the caterer. Other than this, keep the meals fairly simple. You only really need to allow for a choice of 2 meals, and a dessert. The caterers are really best to be on site.

There should be a continual offering of tea and coffee and biscuits as part of the weekend. This will assist to keep the weekend as informal as possible, so that friendships can flourish and business can be conducted outside the normal sessions, when required.

The M.C.

Choosing your MC is an important factor for the success of the weekend. She will introduce each session presenter, control the timing of each session and add the energy for the conference. Your MC needs to be able to handle unexpected events, have a mature nature, and understand the flow of the SAC.

The MC will spend time preparing for each session. She will need contact details for each participant. She will contact them to understand the content of their session, the pronunciation of their preferred name and the way they would like to be introduced. The MC will gather some background information about all the speakers, and use this information as part of the lead-in to their session.

She can also organise the introduction for the SAA to introduce her on the program. She will work with the SAA to decide who will inform the group of the whereabouts of the toilets, mobile phone policy, ensuring people are sitting comfortably and the Timers are ready etc. She will need to know the protocol of introducing dignitaries invited to the conference eg "Madam District Governor".

The MC needs to have a detailed (minute by minute) program guide, and will need to work with the organisers to ensure that the weekend will flow in order. She will need to have a way to bring people back to order or get attention eg music, a bell or putting up your hand. The MC must be informed of all last minute changes to the program.

The MC will need to ensure her clothes and shoes are comfortable for the day. Suggest she wear clothes she has worn before ie straps sit correctly, trousers the right length rather than brand new clothes. Otherwise, she may end up fidgeting with new clothes which would be distracting. She will need to be aware of the audience getting fidgety in long sessions and get them to stand up and shake or do the Hokey Pokey.

Afterwards, the MC will call for a Vote of Thanks for the presenter. This is a Toastmaster who has been appointed for the task prior to session, and the MC needs to hand pick about half a dozen **Vote of Thanks** people prior to the weekend.

At the end of the night, the MC will hand over to the District SAA, and has no more direct involvement for the weekend. i.e. the Sunday council meeting, etc.

Working with District 69

The SAC is primarily a District- focussed event, so you will need to confirm early with the District Governor and Lieutenant Governor Marketing on these items:

- ❖ Location
- ❖ Budget
- ❖ Activities
- ❖ Anything else they require on the weekend, eg TM Expo, etc

It's a good thing to check in with District every fortnight to ensure that your SAC progress will meet the deadlines and will keep to budget. This can be done quite loosely, not formalised, however set aside at least an hour a month to talk about the activities.

Planning Parallel activities

“People learn most when they are having fun” -- *Ralph Smedley*

“Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand” -- *Chinese proverb*

Toastmasters International requires certain information eg DCP is covered by Educational sessions at SAC. As more people realise and utilise the different ways people learn eg auditory, visual and kinaesthetic, educational sessions can be held outside the main conference room.

In 2009 The Amazing Race was a blend of orienteering and scavenger hunting for teams. It proved most enjoyable for those who participated. The session was planned in parallel with the main sessions, and the learnings from The Amazing Race were intended to be in line with the sessions that were being held inside the walls of the SAC.

Future SAC's may want to adopt a less formal approach to afternoon activities, and plan them around inter-active events like The Amazing Race. Make sure District Governor, Lieutenant Governor Education and Training and Lieutenant Governor Marketing understand the activity so that they can promote it throughout the District.

The SAC Booklet

The last thing that usually gets put together is the Semi-Annual conference booklet. This booklet needs to lay out exactly what is happening during the weekend.

Contact your District Governor for a Welcome message to include inside the front cover. And if you are the Semi-Annual Conference Convenor, then you may also want to include a few words about the theme and style of the event.

The SAC booklet is your opportunity to advertise your **sponsors** and to promote the next **District Annual Conference**.

Ensure that there is an hourly planner – complete with times for lunch and rest breaks, as well as indicating the sessions that are available.

The Sunday morning council meeting will already have a separate booklet prepared. To keep the theme consistent, then you may wish to supply (or copy) the template that they use for their booklet. This will give your semi-annual conference consistency throughout.

If you are running events in parallel, then this may need to be illustrated graphically.

To make it fun, you may wish to find a few suitable quotes that match the theme of your weekend.

The booklet is never released before the event, it is only for the event itself. However, you will need to ensure that it is reviewed (for accuracy) by District.

The booklets can be printed for free by your local **member of parliament**. Just call them up a week or two beforehand and explain that you are from Toastmasters (a not for profit organisation).

Explain that you would like about 100 copies (black and white only available) of a booklet, and how many pages (usually up to 8 pages).

Usually you can just email it in, and then collect the printouts a few days later. If you have them printed for you, ensure that you place a credit for this work inside the document itself. *Credit where credit is due.*

TM Expo

In 2009, the Toastmaster Expo was introduced as a way of getting Toastmasters familiar with the activities that occur in their District.

If this is to be run in future years, then it's best to ask District to confirm this, and for them to assign Toastmasters from the roles that they are engaged in to be available during the weekend.

The TM Expo may consist simply of a table with information, or it may be as much as stands that are manned during the event.

A good idea to help the attendees to connect with the TM Expo presenters would be to introduce them to everyone *over lunch*. This would give a "face to a name", and would provide some meaning to Toastmasters who wish to learn more about the great facilities that Toastmasters offers.

Click on the Word document below to see what goes on at the TM Expo.



Expo Stands

After Dinner Entertainment

After dinner on Saturday night is one of the times on the program to relax and enjoy the fellowship of fellow Toastmasters and making new friends. Appropriate entertainment will be the icing on the cake and prove the night to be memorable.

Consider the theme of the conference and plan for a fun night.

DJ's, karaoke, dancing etc are appropriate. Check the availability of local entertainers and book early to ensure a good night. Time on the program to acknowledge visitors, guests or members for particular awards may need to be slotted in between meal courses.

Formalities – Certificates, Gifts

Your event will have significant input from some high flying contributors, and as such you will need to prepare something beforehand by way of saying “thank you” for their contribution.

A gift of chocolates, wine or (typically) other edible/drinkable products make a great reward for their efforts. An approximate budget for these gifts is around \$20 each.

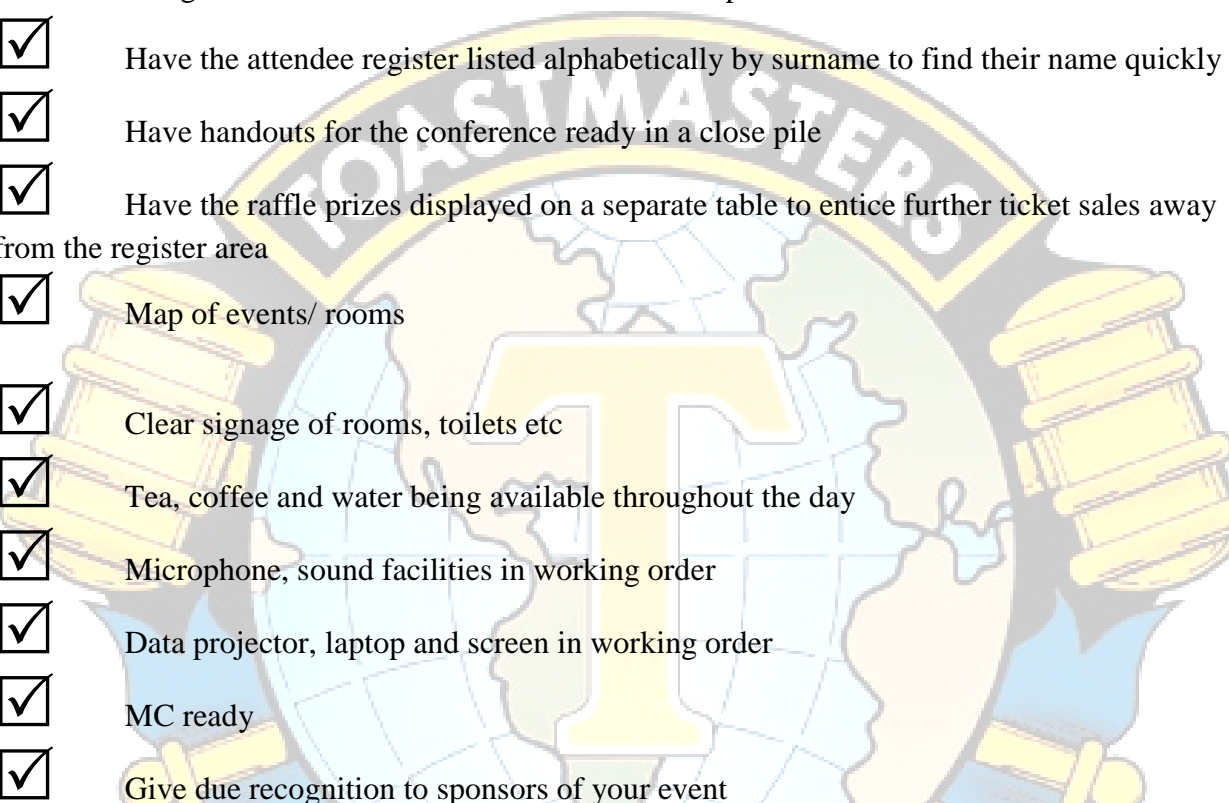
Also ensure that you pre-order **Certificates of Appreciation** from District 70 Supplies to go along with these gifts. Make sure the certificates are presented in pristine condition and signed and dated.

You will give these gifts and certificates to the presenter immediately after their session – just after the MC has asked a Toastmaster for the **Vote of Thanks**, who will also present the gifts.

On the Day

The conference is finally here! All the months of planning and efforts are ready to be played out. Make sure you have slept well and be early to the venue and have everything you need to set up and be ready when the first attendees arrive.

Ensure that the following items are ready:

- 
- A register table and someone to mark off each paid attendee
 - Have the attendee register listed alphabetically by surname to find their name quickly
 - Have handouts for the conference ready in a close pile
 - Have the raffle prizes displayed on a separate table to entice further ticket sales away from the register area
 - Map of events/ rooms
 - Clear signage of rooms, toilets etc
 - Tea, coffee and water being available throughout the day
 - Microphone, sound facilities in working order
 - Data projector, laptop and screen in working order
 - MC ready
 - Give due recognition to sponsors of your event

It is very important to keep the MC informed about any changes to the program and the arrival of presenters on the program.

Cleaning Up

Your event will need a “clean up” group if you have got a great deal on your venue hire. It’s also a good tradition to maintain a clean venue in order to protect the name of the Toastmasters Organisation.

You may need to enquire beforehand where large bins are located in order to dump rubbish and unwanted items. With just 4 or 5 people in your clean up group, it should take no longer than 15 minutes to get the venue looking like we were never there!

The flip to this is that some venues will charge a penalty rate for cleaning up if the place is left in poor condition. So it’s in our best interests to clean up after the event – nominate someone from your team to find 5 others to help contribute, and who will be available late on Saturday night or early Sunday morning to ensure this is completed.

Debriefing after the event

A debrief session is a review session. This is when you will learn most from any mistakes that were made.

Plan a debrief meeting within a fortnight after the conference for all committee members to reflect on what worked well and what could have worked better while it is still fresh in their memory. Give opportunity for each committee member to be open and honest about the organisation of the conference.

You will need someone to lead the discussion. Allow enough time for everyone to say what is important to them. Forming a circle helps to promote an open and face-to-face atmosphere. Give each person the opportunity to contribute their ideas and feelings.

Questions to pose:

- ❖ What worked well? (Deal with the positives first.)
- ❖ What didn't go well? (Ensure comments are given in a constructive and objective manner.)
- ❖ Why did things happen?
- ❖ What can be done differently and better next time?
- ❖ How can we use this?

Record these as notes and pass them onto the organising committee of the next SAC.

Send letters of thanks or Certificates of Appreciation to people considered worthy of recognition and thanks eg MC, Saturday night entertainers, venue liaison person.

Once this is complete, talk with your District Governor about how your semi-annual conference went.

If you have done the necessary formalities for the **High Performance Leadership** award, then ensure you follow the process through to completion and get that finalised.

And that's it.

There's no more to do – just take some time off now, breathe, and plan to take a few weeks off.

You've earned it.

Hope you had a good time doing it!

Brad Smith and Carolyn Phillips.