



## **POLICY**

### **SUBJECT AREA: ANNUAL CONVENTIONS**

**Last Updated: July 30, 2018**

**Version 1.4**

**This document supersedes all previous policies and directives relating to the above subject area**

**B&O Railroad Historical Society**

**Author: Andy White and Henry Freeman**

**Table of Contents**

**CHANGE AND ACCDPTANCE LOG .....3**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION .....4**

**2.0 CONVENTION LOCATION SELECTION.....4**

**3.0 HOTEL SELECTION.....5**

**4.0 TOUR BUS SELECTION.....6**

**5.0 SAFETY AND COMFORT OF TOUR ATTENDEES.....7**

**6.0 CONVENTION PRICING .....7**

**7.0 CONVENTION FLYER AND REGISTRATION.....8**

**8.0 CONVENTION BOOK AND COMPUTER DISC .....8**

**9.0 HOTEL COORDINATION.....9**

**A.0 APPENDIX .....10**

**A.1 POLICY FORMS AND TEMPLATES.....10**

**CHANGE AND ACCDPTANCE LOG**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>HIGHLIGHTS OF CHANGES</b>
6/3/2016	Andy White	Version 1.0 – Initial draft.
9/13/2016	Henry Freeman	Version 1.1 – Revisions
1/29/2017	D. Allen Young	Version 1.2 – Reformat to standard policy template
2/18/2017	D. Allen Young	Version 1.3 – Minor revision to section 5.0
2/25/2017	D. Allen Young	Version 1.4 – Modified Change Log page to Change and Acceptance Log, dropped separate Acceptance (signoff) page from Appendix

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to highlight all primary planning aspects of annual conventions that should be considered and addressed by the Convention Coordinator and the Convention Committee. While the make-up of each convention will vary somewhat from year to year in terms of location, tours, presentations, time of year, duration and so forth, there are some aspects that generally apply to all conventions.

## 2.0 CONVENTION LOCATION SELECTION

At any given time, the Convention Coordinator and the VP of Operations should have a working idea of the next three convention sites and will keep the President and Board of Directors informed of their current thinking. The site of the next year's convention should be chosen in time to be announced to the membership no later than the current convention.

The convention should be located in an area served by the B&O Railroad and with tours and presentations that would encourage members to attend an annual meeting. Conventions traditionally start on Thursday afternoon with an evening presentation. In most years, Friday and Saturday during the day is spent on tours with a presentation on Friday night. The banquet is held on Saturday evening with a presentation. Sunday morning is a business meeting with at least one or more activities starting after the business meeting. The activities on Sunday are available by personal transportation. If possible in alternate years, select locations that alternate between east and west of the Ohio River. As it becomes harder and harder to find sites where remnants of the B&O survive to be toured, it is anticipated that it may not be feasible to have two days of tours and that conventions will be heavier on clinics, which is a format that other railroad historical societies have already adopted.

For a convention idea to be practical, it requires an individual or individuals who have knowledge of the B&O Railroad and its history who are located in the area of the proposed convention and are willing to work on organizing a convention. It is best to form a Convention Committee of at least two or more individuals and four or five members are probably ideal. This provides redundancy in case of members being unable to attend some or all of the meeting for any reason. The Convention Committee must be able to find clinic presenters and a banquet program. The guideline for presentation length is 50 minutes, with a break in between. At least one of these breaks should be long enough to allow members to visit the company store. An evening schedule consists of at least two 50 minute presentations per night. Local presenters and presentations on the B&O Railroad history and operations in the area of the convention are important. It is customary, but not mandatory, to have eight-hour tours on Friday and Saturday. The feasibility of tours must be evaluated by the Convention Committee for sufficient stops of interest, activities and the availability of tour guides for the buses. Railroad stations, bridges, tunnels, other structures and historic locations are usually stops of interest. Railroad facility tours, industrial tours, museums and scenic railroad rides are suitable tour activities

A second consideration is the availability of a suitable hotel that meets our hotel meeting room requirements and doesn't exceed sleeping room and meeting room costs that would discourage meaningful attendance. It would be ideal to do a site visit of hotels under consideration before making the selection of a location, but an internet review of the hotel and initial phone call to the group sales manager to discuss meeting room requirements and costs, sleeping room cost and availability of open weekends often is sufficient to judge whether there are enough suitable hotels to make a choice of one for the convention.

If the convention is going to have any tours, the next consideration is the cost of the buses. An internet search will usually produce a list of bus companies. If you are not familiar with bus companies in the area, ask for recommendations from people you know, from the local Chamber of Commerce or from the hotel. Often other historical societies or NMRA organizations have experience using buses and may know smaller, quality companies that may be cheaper than the larger firms. A passenger bus with driver is normally priced according to the number of seats on the bus for buses between 56 and 44 seats. The larger bus the greater the cost. From your list of bus companies call them for a ballpark cost after giving them the time the bus is needed and estimated mileage.

A final consideration is the availability of airline and/or Amtrak service for members who must travel using public transportation. After analyzing the feasibility of a convention location, a decision should be made in conjunction with the Vice President of Operations and the President.

Criteria under hotel and bus selection can be used for both the initial decision on convention location and the soliciting of final offers from bus companies and hotels. In most cases when deciding on a convention location, this information will not be as complete as when final hotel and bus proposals are solicited.

### **3.0 HOTEL SELECTION**

The hotel selection process should begin during the location selection process with the initial preliminary evaluation of hotel availability. The internet is used to screen for hotel candidates based upon cost, meeting room requirements, banquet space, guest reviews and as a departure location for tours. The final selection process requires visits to the hotels, a detailed evaluation of all costs and meeting requirements and evaluation of the contract. Costs would include meeting room charges including any service charges and audio-visual charges. The sleeping room costs include taxes, extra charges and parking fees. For the meeting room and the banquet presentations a podium, microphone, screen, extension cord and a table for the projectors will be required. It is customary for everything, but the screen to be part of the meeting room. Whether the hotel charges for the screen is a negotiated item. The availability of a complementary continental breakfast is a consideration as part of the sleeping room costs.

A suitable hotel or motel has a full service dining room and meeting rooms with one that can accommodate the banquet. Alternatively, a property that has a nearby restaurant or

other facility that can also accommodate a banquet is still a suitable candidate. Forty to forty-five sleeping rooms will be needed if approximately 90 members and their wives are expected. In our block of rooms, the hotel should have at least 14 queen or king bed rooms and the balance may be double bed rooms. Ask if the hotel will allow the same room charge for up to four people in a room. Typically, at past conventions, only one sleeping room had more than two occupants.

The hotel should have meeting room space for presentations, Company Store, model and photo display a banquet, a board of directors meeting, business meeting and a room to socialize. A presentation meeting room will be needed for approximately 80 people theater style for Thursday and Friday evening. This space should be available from 6:30 PM until 11:00 PM. A second room will require a minimum of 1,200 sq. ft. for the Company Store, model and photo display, and any remaining space can be used for member displays or vendors This space should be available from 10:00 PM Thursday morning until late Saturday night or Sunday morning. The room for the banquet will need to seat 85 individuals in round tables of eight and the room rental is included in the cost of the meal. The banquet should start at 6:00 or 6:30 PM and end by 10:30 PM after the presentation. The board of directors will need a space to meet from approximately 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM on the arrival day of the convention. Hopefully the hotel will have a smaller room available for the board meeting, although the Company Store and model and photo display rooms can be utilized if needed. A room for the business meeting is needed from 8:00 AM to 10:00PM on Sunday morning and the banquet space can usually be utilized if the tables are still set-up from the previous night. The room for socializing should be a minimum of 600 sq. ft and it is needed from 7:00 PM until midnight Thursday, Friday and Saturday night. The Company Store needs an assurance of a secure Internet connection to process credit card purchases.

If possible, try to get the meeting rooms on a complementary basis or for a lower meeting room charge. With only 65 to 70 registrations, it is very hard to have high meeting room charges and maintain a reasonable registration fee without a larger number of registrations to cover the cost. There is usually a tradeoff between the sleeping room charges and complementary or low room charges. The hotel may charge more for sleeping rooms to receive compensation for the complementary meeting rooms. The best situation for the Society is where the hotel needs to fill sleeping rooms on a weekend and uses the complementary meeting rooms to encourage us to use the hotel.

Before a contract is signed with the hotel, the Convention Coordinator should have the contract reviewed by the Treasurer. In his absence, the VP of Operations or the President may review the contract. It is not unusual for us to request exceptions to the hotel's standard contract. If the hotel requires a Society accident/liability insurance policy, the Society maintains a policy and its insurance carrier can provide a certificate of insurance.

#### **4.0 TOUR BUS SELECTION**

A bus company will be needed for the tours. For both tour planning and securing the bus company offer, the tour schedule of stops and the route must be driven to evaluate the

suitability of the suggested stops and the time required to complete the tour. This detailed itinerary usually must be provided to the bus companies in order to secure an accurate quote for the cost of the buses. Solicit offers from three to four bus companies if possible. Bus charges are usually based on the time the bus is utilized and the mileage. Ask the age and condition of the buses and whether the bus company will use buses from another company. Stress that each bus must have a clean and functioning bathroom and a public address system that works. If possible, buses should have seat belts. Bus drivers should have the ability to communicate with at least other buses, preferably by radio rather than by cell phone. Drivers will be asked to give a brief safety chat prior to leaving the convention hotel.

Bus contracts are simpler than the hotel contract. Read the contracts to insure the time and dates of the bus charter are correct. Look for any unreasonable liabilities assumed by the Historical Society and that the charter for one or all of the buses can be canceled at least six weeks prior to the trip and the deposit will be returned.

## **5.0 SAFETY AND COMFORT OF TOUR ATTENDEES**

Bus tours should be set up not only with the safety, but also the comfort of the passengers in mind. Care should be taken to keep the tours from being too long. Lunch breaks should be long enough to give the passengers not only time to eat, but also to use a restroom. Lunches should be planned for covered areas whenever possible. Ideally, there should be no outdoor lunches if weather is expected to be cold. Extra restroom breaks are encouraged, as the facilities on board most buses are basic at best. Electronic megaphones should also be available for tour leaders to use when speaking at tour locations to help make it easier for attendees to hear the narration.

## **6.0 CONVENTION PRICING**

The member cost of the meeting is usually divided between a registration fee, the cost of each tour day and the banquet. The registration fee should cover all items given to registrant, including the convention book and compact disc, pins, mugs, handouts separate from the convention book, name badges, any hotel meeting room charges, presentation audio visual costs and printing and mailing cost of the convention flyer, as well as any other items that may be unique to a particular convention.

The member price for the banquet should bear the all-in cost of the food, any room charge, audio-visual costs, handouts and cost of four complementary guests. The presenter and a guest are usually two of the complementary guests. All-in cost of the food includes the cost of the meal, tax and service charge. A vendor room that is separate from the Company Store should be covered by vendor fees. These costs should be finalized nine months before the convention.

The member cost of each tour day should include the bus rental, beverages, lunches, handouts, museum fees, tickets for train rides and any evening meals that are part of the tour. If full day tours are part of the convention, lunch will need to be provided and

beverages carried in coolers for distribution during the day. At recent conventions all the items for lunch except for the sandwich are purchased from a wholesale club. Subway has provided sandwiches because of the uniform quality of the product and the large number of locations in urban and rural areas. This method requires dedicated volunteers who purchase the beverages and food and distribute the lunch and beverages at lunch stops. Our current method provides a lower cost lunch. A second and more expensive solution is to purchase a box lunch from a Subway, supermarket or other sandwich shop. Purchasing sandwiches during the day while touring avoids the extra work of preparing and carrying additional coolers from the hotel.

## **7.0 CONVENTION FLYER AND REGISTRATION**

A convention flyer must be prepared and mailed with the second quarter edition of *The Sentinel*. The current convention flyer is a four-page document that contains all the necessary information including a brief description of the location and activities, a schedule of events hotel information, directions to the hotel, convention model and photo display guidelines and the convention registration form. A template was developed based on past conventions which makes preparation of the flyer easier. The registration forms are normally mailed to one of the convention hosts who will maintain a notebook with the registration forms and a standardized spread sheet with an alphabetical list of registrants and their choices for tours, lunches and the banquet. The names and cities on the spread sheet are used in making the name badges. The counts of tour attendees and their meal selections for each day are used to create the tour tickets. The Convention Committee must work with the editors of *The Sentinel* to assure the flyer is prepared in time to meet any deadlines for the second quarter mailing as it is a considerable additional expense for the Society to do a separate mailing. The flyer must also be provided to the webmaster for posting to the Society's web page in an electronic format suitable for web site display. The webmaster should also be informed of any changes to the program so that the flyer on the web site is as up-to-date as possible.

## **8.0 CONVENTION BOOK AND COMPUTER DISC**

Traditionally a convention book and compact disc (CD) suitable for insertion into personal computers have been assembled for the convention. The CD usually has original documents, articles, photographs track charts, employee timetables and drawings from the archives, museums or Society members. A member of the Convention Committee usually coordinates the preparation of the document and utilizes the Society archives and other Convention Committee members to supply documentation. The size of the printed document must be taken into consideration to assure that the printing expense is included in the convention registration fee. If a cost overrun is expected, then additional information should be included on the CD, which will bring the printing charges back to a manageable expense.



## **9.0 HOTEL COORDINATION**

After the flyer is mailed to the Society members and registrations are received, the Convention Committee works with the staff at the hotel, the Company Store manager, and the model and photograph display chairman to plan the layout and organization of the Company store and display room. The hotel will have an individual who will plan the room setup and assist the Society during the meeting. In addition, group sales will help the Convention Committee monitor room registration and the pick-up of sleeping rooms in the meeting block of rooms. At the same time members are emailed the receipt of convention registrations, include a reminder to register for a room in order to get the convention rate. If the hotel requires a Society accident/liability insurance policy, the Society maintains a policy and its insurance carrier can provide a certificate of insurance.

## A.0 APPENDIX

### *A.1 Policy Forms and Templates*

The following templates are designed to be used in conjunction with this policy document:

- Convention Attendees Summary Template (spreadsheet)
- Convention Flyer Template
- Convention Name Tags Template
- Convention Tour Tickets Template

At a minimum, electronic copies of these templates will be maintained on a computer at Society headquarters. The most recent Convention Coordinator will usually also have copies.