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# UNIT 31 PLANNING CONVENTIONS

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## 31.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- learn how to plan a convention/meeting from the point of view of a convention organiser,
- understand the various steps involved in this planning,
- know about the way various convention suppliers plan their activities, and
- appreciate the relevance of planning in relation to conventions/meetings.

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## 31.1 INTRODUCTION

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In **Block 2** of this course, we had emphasised upon the relevance of planning in professionally running a business. You are already aware that planning plays a vital role in designing the service product. For the success of any convention/meeting, it is necessary that proper planning should be done in advance. This helps in two ways:

- when you prepare a plan it refines your own thinking and you are able to point out the missing tasks or issues,
- a written plan provides information to others, helps in soliciting support and is useful for organising, monitoring and controlling.

Different types of conventions with different purposes, themes etc. require special attention and specific details for efficient planning and success. For example a company's meeting with its distributors will differ from a convention of a computer engineers association and each will need specific plans as per its requirements. However, it is not possible to cover all types of conventions or to present a comprehensive plan that takes care of all types of conventions in a Unit. Thus in this Unit, we have discussed the various aspects related with the planning of conventions/meetings. These aspects have been dealt with from two angles i.e. from the point of view of a convention organiser (customer) and the other from the point of view of convention suppliers. The Unit, in fact, provides you with the broad outlines of the general convention planning requirements and you can, while utilising the information given here, supplement other specific details or requirements as per the purpose and need of a particular convention.

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## 31.2 ORGANISER'S PLANNING

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By convention organiser, we mean a person or an organisation who wants to organise a convention/meeting. For the suppliers of the convention industry, this person/organisation is

the customer. You are also aware that today there are professional convention organisers or consultants who advise the customers in relation to their convention/meeting demands. From the organiser's point of view, certain planning steps have to be undertaken for holding a convention and in the following Sub-sections, we will discuss them in detail.

### 32.2.1 Aims and Objectives

You have to be very clear in deciding the aims and objectives of the convention you want to host. Different organisations hold conventions for different reasons. Information sharing with members, feedback for future programmes, problem solving, election of office bearers etc. can be any one of the purpose for the convention. Whatever may be the programme, it must envisage and define the aims and objectives of a convention. For example, recently, Indira Gandhi National Open University established a Centre for Extension Education (CEE) and it was decided that a convention should be organised with the following objectives :

- to get a feedback regarding the requirements in the area of Extension Education that could be met through the distance learning,
- to know about the experiences of the non- government organisations working in different parts of the country,
- to demarcate the areas in which IGNOU can develop extension education programmes,
- to devise methods for sharing information amongst NGOs, public sector undertakings, local bodies and the Centre for Extension Education, and
- to identify the experts/organisations which can collaborate with IGNOU in its efforts.

### 31.2.2 Demarcating/Identifying Tasks

Once the objectives were stated, the next step is to demarcate or identify the various tasks related to the convention. The basic tasks to be undertaken for any convention include :

- decisions about the lead time i.e. from the planning stage to the actual date of the event,
- decisions on the dates and venue of the convention, accommodation and food arrangements. This should take into account the number of participants, hall and meeting room requirements,
- identifying the participants (individuals/organisations) to be invited,
- devising the invitation letter and asking for their concurrence (for this the objectives of the convention have to be clearly stated along with the dates and time),
- deciding about the exhibits or displays,
- deciding about the secretarial and technological requirements (secretaries, xerox and data processing facilities, visual aids, etc.),
- deciding on transportation requirements,
- deciding on receiving the participants at airport/railway station,
- budgeting for the convention,
- deciding about the type of bags, literature, etc. to be provided to the delegates,
- devising registration and feedback forms from the participants, etc.
- to take care of publicity prior to, during and after the convention.

### 31.2.3 Forming Committees

Keeping in view the above mentioned tasks, a Convention Committee and its Sub-committees or functional committees like registration committee, reception and transport committee, accommodation committee, food committee, secretarial committee, etc. should be formed to carry out these tasks. Similarly, the office bearers of the convention should also be appointed. This, in fact, is the organisation structure for the planning and carrying out of convention operations. The following is helpful in this regard :

- 1) The organisation has to appoint a convention coordinator who will be wholly responsible for the entire planning, organising and operations of the convention.
- 2) No individual can carry on such tasks by its own and hence it is necessary to have a Steering Committee/Organising Committee also. The size of this committee may depend upon the nature and requirements of the convention. This committee gets back up support from the Secretariat for correspondence, preparing reports, secretarial assistance etc. In some cases, a document processing unit is created within the secretariat if so required.

Generally, each member of the Steering Committee is assigned with a responsibility like one member may be made incharge of accommodation, another of reception and registration, another of transportation and so on.

The incharge of an area then forms a small group/committee to plan and look after that area. Generally, 3-6 members are there in such committee. However, again this depends on the workload and scope of that committee.

This committee further takes the help of volunteers who would be directly handling the operations or performing the duties assigned to them.

- 3) There has to be constant interaction and perfect coordination amongst these committees alongwith information sharing.

It is necessary that the functions of each committee are clearly stated and the line of authority should be established properly alongwith the delegation of powers to carry out the tasks.

Each of these committees must plan for their activities, should identify and evaluate various alternatives before making a choice in relation to the tasks and at the same time formulate supportive plans and establish the sequence of activities. The Steering Committee, no doubt, keeps monitoring the entire aspect. For example, the registration committee will plan the contents of the registration forms and how to manage the activities related to registration. The transport committee will plan the nature of the vehicles to be used (depending on the number of delegates), assign duties to the volunteers regarding reception of delegates etc. In fact, these committees have to work in a coordinated way sharing information with each other. For example, the transport committee must have information about the arrival timings and mode of travel of the delegates and they in turn must pass on this information to the accommodation committee for the arrangements to be made by them.

### 31.2.4 Planning Schedules

Another crucial step in planning is to work out the timetable or the schedule of the convention and set deadlines for certain activities. For example look at the following formats:

- 1) **Time Table (Sample)**

1st circular	Dates
1) Invitation letter to participants	20.5.96
2) Concurrence to be received by	20.6.96
3) IInd circular to be sent on	30.6.96
4) Final circular	30.7.96
5) Receipt of travel plans (arrival & departure) of participants	30.8.96
6) Confirmation of receiving travel plans to be sent on	As and when they arrive
- 2) **Conference Schedule (Sample)**

9:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m.	Registration of delegates
10:15 a.m.	Inaugural session
11:00 a.m.	Tea
11:15 a.m.	First session
1:00 p.m.	Lunch

These schedules have to be further worked out on each session basis and the following format gives you an idea about that :

11:15 a.m.	First session
11:15 a.m.	Introductory remarks by the organiser
11:20 a.m.	Key note address by the Chief Speaker
12:00 noon	First speaker
12:20 p.m.	Second speaker
12:40 p.m.	Discussion
1:00 p.m.	Lunch

In fact, these schedules have to be planned much in advance and not only the speakers but even the delegates and convention committees have to be made aware about them. This is the reason why for all conventions/meetings, such schedules are mailed to the participants much earlier and also provided in printed form during the convention.

### 31.3 ORGANISER'S BUDGETING

The organising and operations of a convention require funds alongwith incurring monitoring and controls over expenditure. It is very crucial to plan the budget of the convention and under this estimates have to be made for various heads like, the following example:

#### Expenditure (Sample)

1)	<b>Accommodation and venue expenses</b>		
	a) Convention Halls, Meeting rooms, etc.	-	Rs. 50,000.00
	b) Delegates accommodation	-	Rs. 50,000.00
2)	<b>Transportation</b>		
	a) Delegates' travel	-	Rs.2,00,000.00
	b) Transportation (local)	-	Rs. 15,000.00
3)	<b>Food ,Tea, breakfast, lunch, dinner, etc.</b>	-	Rs.1,00,000.00
4)	Bags, stationery, and printing etc.	-	Rs.1,00,000.00
5)	Exhibitions	-	Rs. 50,000.00
6)	Entertainment	-	Rs. 50,000.00
7)	Excursions	-	Rs. 50,000.00
8)	Miscellaneous	-	Rs. 50,000.00
	<b>TOTAL:</b>		<b>Rs.7,15,000.00</b>

In certain cases, the conventions/conferences also generate some revenue as the organisers keep a registration fee for the delegates and get sponsors also for hosting lunches, dinners, etc. or from those who put up stalls for exhibitions or displays. For example, suppose 100 delegates are coming to a convention and the registration fee is Rs.500/- per delegate. The revenue earning will be Rs.50,000/-. Similarly, if you charge Rs.10,000/- per exhibition stall and you have 20 exhibitors, the revenue earning would be Rs.2,00,000/-. See the following example :

#### Income estimates (Sample)

1)	Delegates Registration Fee	Rs. 50,000.00
2)	Earnings from Exhibitors	Rs.2,00,000.00
3)	Amount received from Sponsors	Rs.4,00,000.00
	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>Rs.6,50,000.00</b>

However, such earnings depend on the nature of the convention. It is necessary that the organisers at the initial stages of planning itself should work out the expenditure requirements. This is the task of the Budget or Finance Committee.

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) How would you identify or demarcate convention tasks?

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2) Why and how should expenditure estimates be calculated?

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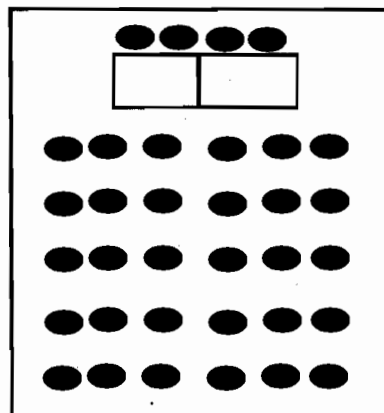
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### 31.4 SUPPLIER'S PLANNING

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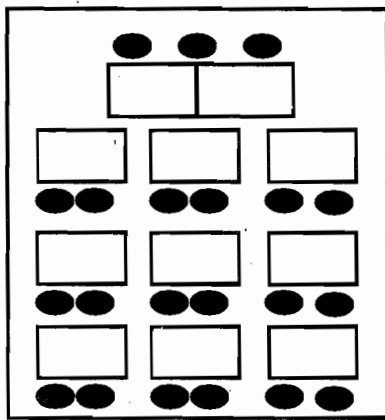
In Unit 30, we had made you aware about the different suppliers in the convention business. Each of these suppliers whether it is the hotel, transporter or exhibitor, etc. has to plan for the event. This planning is done in the areas of product design, operations and marketing, etc. The requirements of the customers play a major role in such planning as they are matched with the suppliers' capabilities and services. Every supplier has its own infrastructure as well as manpower to meet the customer's requirements but very often this needs alterations, amendments, redesigning or improvements keeping in view the organiser's needs. Let us pick up some examples in this regard. Different types of meetings/conventions would require different types of seating layout and this is affected by the number of participants as well as the nature of deliberations that are to take place. We give you here some samples of the seating layout.

#### Seating arrangements



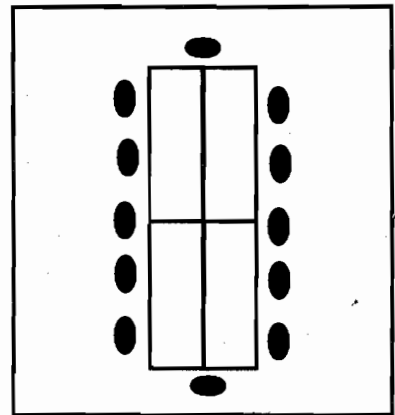
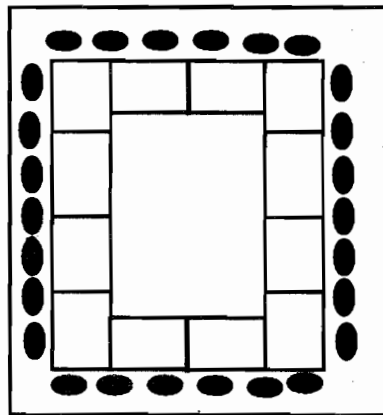
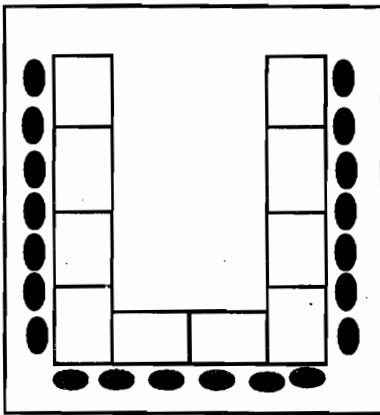
#### Theatre-Style

When the emphasis is on listening to speakers from a podium or a head table and audience participation is minimal, such as at lectures, audio-visual presentations, club and general meetings, theatre-style seating is ideal. Chairs may be divided by one or two aisles as required.



**Classroom-Style**

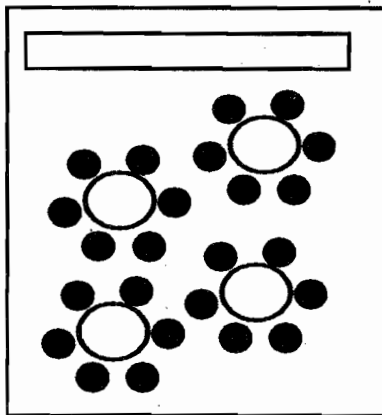
When participants require tables for writing – for instance, at sales meetins, press conferences or any meeting involving audience participation – Classroom-style seating is the most appropriate, with place cards at each desk, ashtrays, stationery and microphones.



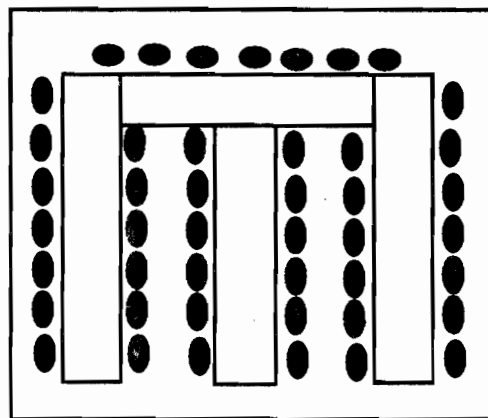
**U-Shaped**  
Ideal for audio-visual presentations

**Hollow Rectangle**  
for close interaction

**Board Room**  
for small meetings or discussions



**Round tables**  
for small group interaction



**Top table with springs**

Similarly, when a hotel or a convention centre decides to go into convention business they also have to plan the architectural style, interior decor etc. for the convention hall and meeting rooms etc. Questions like for how many numbers, should the convention hall be made – How many adjoining meeting and sub-committee rooms are to be provided? What type of audio-visual aids have to be installed, etc.? How much display area is to be provided? Have to be answered. These are certain basic requirements, however, for every convention/meeting, alterations will have to be made as per the customer's requirements. Every customer while making the venue choice knows about the facilities available with the supplier but for every convention/meeting, the customer as well as the supplier have to negotiate and plan accordingly.

The suppliers have to package a variety of services in order to meet the customer requirements. For this, it is essential that the suppliers' should have a proper database of the other services suppliers on whom they would be depending for offering the package. For example, a hotel offering convention services will have to decide on selecting the services of

a ground transport operator to meet the transport needs, etc. The way different suppliers of tourism like the travel agency or tour operators plan for their own organisational activity, in the same way the convention suppliers should plan posing the same questions and finding solutions. This should include:

- the type of service to be provided,
- infrastructure needs for providing these services,
- unique features of your service including value addition,
- making choices from the alternatives available,
- deciding on the quality of service, and
- working out time-schedules, etc.

The supplier's planning is further sub-divided into operations planning as well as a plan for marketing their products.

The planning aspect should also take into account the managing of information flow to delegates which is very crucial for the success of any convention/meeting. Each and every circular must reach the delegates giving them exact information.

In most of the cases, these circulars are sent by the organisers but in case the organisers have handed over these tasks to a professional, it becomes the job of this professional to carry out such activities.

In Unit 30, we had mentioned convention consultants and the role of professional event organisers in relation to convention business. It is always good to draw upon the services of a professionally trained convention/meeting organiser for the success of the convention/meeting. This is not relevant only from the point of view of the organisers but from the point of view of suppliers also. We had mentioned in Unit 30 that many airlines are having separate departments for looking after convention travel. Similarly, the big hotels offering convention/conference facilities now have conference departments with professionally trained managers planning and handling the operations. Costing and pricing are vital to those operations and proper planning is required in this area.

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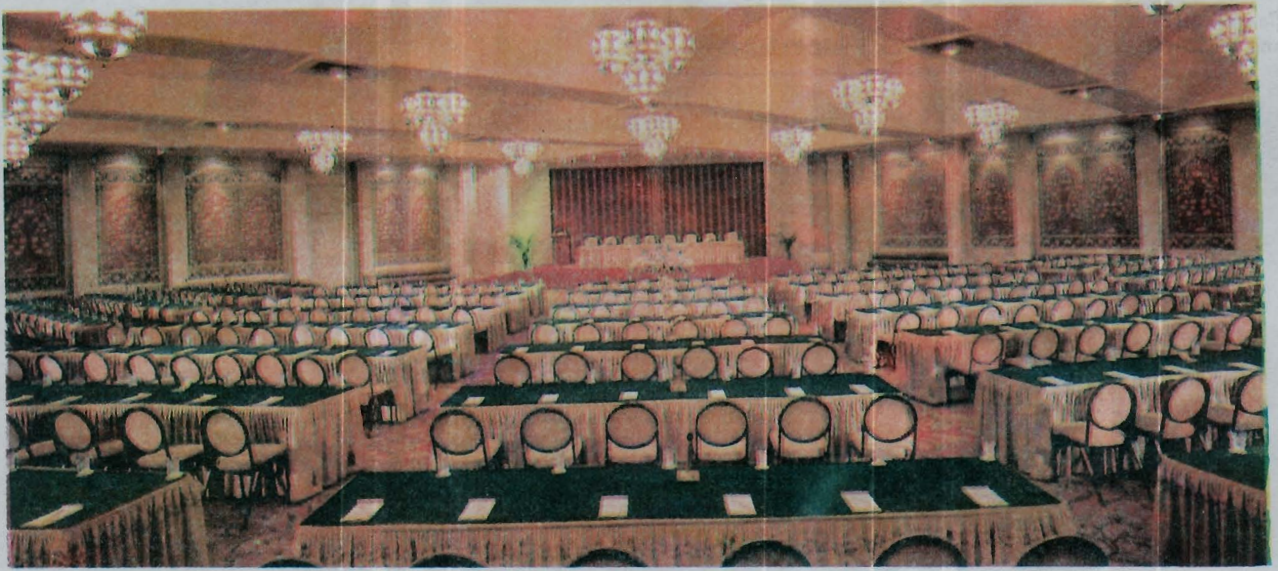
## 31.5 TRADE FAIRS AND SHOWS

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Besides international and national conventions, today we have different types of **trade fairs** or **trade shows**. You might have heard of the **Pragati Maidan Complex** in New Delhi which is a permanent venue for hosting different types of trade fairs etc. The **Indian Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO)** is a permanent body which plans and manages these trade fairs and shows throughout the year at different intervals of time. These fairs and shows cover a variety of themes like, **Industrial Trade Fair, Leather Expo, Textiles Fair, Book Fair**, etc. All these come under the category of mega events and encourage not just business travel but also the convention business. Many conventions, conferences and meetings are held during these fairs. For example, at the time of a book fair, there are meetings of the publishing industry, seminars addressed by prominent authors, etc. and these are a part of the entire mega event. The ITPO has to plan in a big way for such events as per the requirements of the theme on which a trade fair is being held. This planning starts much in advance and in many cases the lead time may even be 2 to 5 years.

In the case of trade fairs or shows, the role of the exhibition industry is vital and gradually the exhibition industry has also taken a specialised form. It has its own planning requirements in relation to various operations and activities. These may include planning about the display areas, graphics, printing, managing of stalls, etc.





THE SHAH JEHAN ROOM ARRANGED THEATRE STYLE



THE LONGDON ROOM ARRANGED WITH BOARDROOM STYLE SEATING



THE CONFERENCE HALL WITH CLASSROOM STYLE SEATING



**Check Your Progress-2**

1) What aspects should be considered by a supplier while planning a convention?

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2) How do trade fairs promote convention business?

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**31.6 LET US SUM UP**

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Planning for conventions/meetings is a professional task and is an essential component for their success. Different organisations plan for their conventions/meetings etc. as per their requirements and this planning is based on a critical analysis of the needs and objectives of the organisation. Planning is crucial not only for the organisers but also for the suppliers of such facilities. Though the basic requirements may remain the same for every event but in case of every new convention, a new set of plans has to be provided because the requirements of the customers may vary or they may have special requirements. Teamwork is the key to success in any planning activity and this has to be backed up with proper budgets etc. The organisers do their own planning whereas the suppliers plan in relation to their services and in between comes the role of convention consultants/professional even organisers. Each and every activity i.e. right from deciding the venue, time etc. to the receiving of feedback forms from delegates has to be properly planned. Not only this, at the initial planning stage itself, a post- convention analysis also must be planned by both the organisers as well as the suppliers. Such an analysis is helpful in pointing out the lacunae and making improvements.

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**31.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES**

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**Check Your Progress-1**

- 1) See Sub-sec. 31.2.2 for your answer.
- 2) See Sec.31.3.

**Check Your Progress-1**

- 1) Sec. 31.4 deals with the supplier's planning aspects.
- 2) It is natural that when professionals related to a particular field are there at a trade fair, certain conventions or conferences should be organised. See Sec.31.5.