

Conference Planning Guide



CONGRATULATIONS ON PLANNING A WSN EXPERIENCE IN YOUR AREA!

Your decision to connect people who stutter will change lives forever. The World Stuttering Network (WSN) will support you through your planning, and guide you in creating the MOST MEMORABLE event. Make this experience your own! We encourage you to incorporate ideas, individuals, and culture unique to your area. While you develop your conference agenda, we offer you suggestions based on our many years of support group and conference planning experience. This Conference Planning Guide is simply a guide; it is meant to be altered and enhanced for your unique event. Let's get started!

CONFERENCE PREPARATION

NAME YOUR EVENT.	What's the name of the event? The title of your event may include who is hosting, who is invited, what the theme is, or something else. Make it clear to your audience what the conference is about.
PICK A DATE.	When will it happen? What works best for the majority of your audience? if you have school aged children, consider their break times or weekends. Think about when most people are not working.
FIND A PLACE.	Where will it take place? Find some place that will host a crowd for free or low cost. Consider schools, libraries, universities, churches, community buildings, etc.
	How many people are expected to attend? How will you plan to market

<p>RECRUIT YOUR AUDIENCE.</p>	<p>the event? Consider using social media outlets to spread the word. Post messages often on different platforms.. Encourage others to share the event. Let schools, speech therapists, and physicians know about the event. Spread the word to the general public, professionals who may come in contact with people who stutter, and any other support groups nearby.</p>
<p>FIND HELPERS.</p>	<p>Who can help you conduct this event? Consider friends, colleagues or others interested in stuttering when finding conference helpers. Ask how they would like to help rather than giving a list of orders. People are more inclined to follow through on projects if it is their own idea.</p>
<p>DEVELOP WORKSHOPS.</p>	<p>Do you have a theme for your conference? Themes can be broad or specific, and can help define the purpose of the conference for your attendees. Invite speakers. <i>Create workshops that are interactive, facilitate conversation. and/or promote audience participation.</i> Have options for adults, teens, children and professionals. Consider making speech participation tasks start off easy and progress in difficulty as the conference goes on. People who stutter often find joy in TALKING at events, not passively listening for its entirety. Offer choices so everyone's needs are met. Consider the space available if hosting more than one workshop at a time. Explore indoor and outdoor spaces.</p>
<p>CREATE MEAL OPTIONS.</p>	<p>Consider the time frame of your event. How many meals or snacks will be needed? if you will not be providing food or drinks, offer a variety of options for people at different price points. For example, consider a "bring your own lunch" picnic in the park option, as well as a few restaurants with various price points. Suggesting restaurants allows people with no companions to join a larger group. Consider a "lunch meet spot" at the conference location so everyone may travel together to their preferred eating area.</p>
<p>HOST SOCIAL EVENTS.</p>	<p>Not all events need to be a lecture or group discussion. What can you offer for participants to do in an unstructured social format? You can host tourist events, group outings, beach days, bike riding, campfires, museum visits, sports events, music appreciation, etc. Consider desirable attractions in your town/city when making plans.</p>
<p>DEVELOP A REGISTRATION SYSTEM.</p>	<p>How will your participants register for the event? Ask someone who has knowledge of technology for help. Consider using Google Forms (or other programs) to make registration easy.</p>

EVENT DESCRIPTION

Sample Description

What will the event be about? Who is invited? When and where will it take place? How much will it cost? Here is an example description:

Stutter UAE and the World Stuttering Network (WSN) enthusiastically present the inaugural national conference, "Stuttering Support in the UAE". You are invited to join us for a life-changing experience on October 21, 2023 in Abu Dhabi! We welcome, adults, teens and children who stutter, their families, friends, professionals and ANYONE who is interested in learning more about stuttering. The conference will include a keynote speaker, educational presentations, interactive workshops, opportunities to further research, games, social events, easy-going meals, and group outings. Attendees will have loads of options! All individuals will be invited to participate at as much or as little as they choose; NOBODY will ever be pushed beyond their comfort zone.

THIS CONFERENCE IS FREE! There is no cost for registration. (Meals & hotel accommodations will be at your own expense.) Join the stuttering community for fun and fellowship. All are welcome!

Sample Objectives

What are you trying to achieve by holding this event? What can participants expect? List at least three objectives. Here are a few examples:

- Participants will learn more about stuttering and current best practices.
- Participants will hear from and meet others who stutter.
- Participants will feel commonality and solidarity within the stuttering community.
- Participants will receive information about local and online resources currently available to people who stutter, their families, friends and/or professionals.
- Participants will decrease worrying about the thoughts and opinions of others.
- Participants will share their stutter in a large group setting.
- Participants will support advocacy for the stuttering community by becoming involved in research, education and/or support.

Benefits

Will the event offer something to each individual? What benefits will they have upon leaving the conference? Enumerate at least three. Here are some examples:

- This conference aims to create short- and long-term connections among people who stutter.
- The conference aims to promote solidarity, commonality and self-advocacy for people who stutter.
- This conference will educate participants on the facts and myths associated with stuttering.
- This conference encourages participants to increase awareness and decrease the stigma of stuttering within their own families, friend groups, places of employment, communities, etc.

SAMPLE PROPOSED PROGRAM

The following is a sample program. You can make sessions shorter or longer, add more options, include a professionals' track, extend for more than one day, etc.

Start Time	End Time	Room #1: Adults	Room #2: Children & Families	Room #3: Professionals
08:00am	08:30am	WELCOME BY HOST	& KEYNOTE SPEAKER	IN ROOM #1
8:30am	9:00am	Workshop for adults Challenge Level: Easy (e.g., world friending)	Workshop for kids who stutter Challenge Level: Easy (e.g., world friending)	Updates on current research
9:00am	10:00am	Workshop for adults Challenge Level: Medium	Workshop for kids & families Challenge Level: Medium	Updates on current research
10:00	10:30	Break	Break	Break
10:30	11:00	PLENARY SPEAKER	IN ROOM #1. -----	ALL ARE WELCOME!
11:00am	12:00pm	Workshop for adults Challenge Level: Medium	Workshop for kids Challenge Level: Medium	Updates on clinical practice
12:00pm	2:00pm	Lunch is your decision! If you would like to join others for a "Picnic in the Park," please meet in room #1 by 12:15 and the group can walk together. For this option, you will bring your own lunch. The ____ park is located at ____.	Lunch is your decision! If you would like to join others for lunch at ____ restaurant, please meet in room #2 by 12:15 and the group can walk together. For this option, you will be responsible to pay your portion of the bill.	Lunch is your decision! If you would like to join others for lunch at ____ restaurant, please meet in room #3 by 12:15 and the group can walk together. For this option, you will be responsible to pay your portion of the bill.
2:00pm	2:45pm	Workshop for adults	Workshop for kids	Panel discussion

		Challenge Level: BIG (e.g., open mic,)	Challenge Level: BIG (e.g., open mic, mini-)	
2:45pm	3:30pm	TOWN HALL EVENT	IN ROOM #1 -----	ALL ARE WELCOME!
4:00pm	6:00pm	Social event option #1	Social event option #2	Social event option #3
6:30pm	9:00pm	Dinner is your decision! If you would like to join others for dinner at ____ restaurant, please meet at the restaurant by 6:30pm. For this option, you will be responsible to pay your portion of the bill. THIS RESTAURANT IS VERY CASUAL. \$	Dinner is your decision! If you would like to join others for dinner at ____ restaurant, please meet at the restaurant by 6:30pm. For this option, you will be responsible to pay your portion of the bill. THIS RESTAURANT IS SOMEWHAT CASUAL. \$\$	Dinner is your decision! If you would like to join others for dinner at ____ restaurant, please meet at the restaurant by 6:30pm. For this option, you will be responsible to pay your portion of the bill. THIS RESTAURANT IS MORE UPSCALE. \$\$\$

A FEW TIPS...

MAKE THIS CONFERENCE YOUR OWN! Design YOUR workshops around the target audience, speaker interests, conference theme, cultural priorities, etc. Here are a few ideas to keep in mind when planning for success:

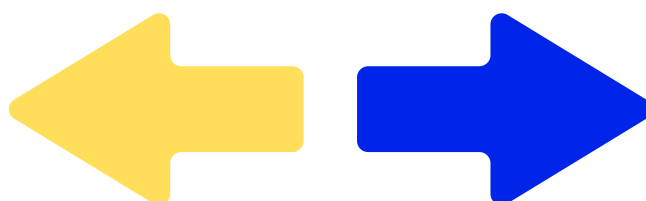
- **Give people options!** Depending on your space, you can offer a variety of workshops. You can open 1, 2, 3 or 4 rooms or more if you have a large audience. Avoid offering so many options that rooms are empty or have an inadequate number of attendees. Consider having an “always available” option in the lobby or lounge where attendees can casually connect.
- **Progress from EASY to BIG SPEAKING CHALLENGES.** Start off with an introductory speaker, then engage the audience in interactive sessions. Make the first challenge a very low stress option in which participation is brief, uncomplicated and encourages meeting others. Then progress to higher stress, more difficult tasks that require people to put themselves in a new situation with lots of support from their peers.
- **Include unstructured times.** Outdoor social events, happy hours, meals, lounge areas, etc. do not have to have a leader or guide. They can be open spaces where people may choose to gather for casual interactions, a tour of a local event, a physical activity, etc.
- **Prioritize connections.** Events throughout the conference will be most meaningful if they promote interaction. Meeting new people and reconnecting with old friends is often the highlight of stuttering support conferences. Take notice of those who stand off on their own or appear to need a little extra help being included. Invite them to join you or another group.
- **No one eats alone.** Many people who stutter avoid mealtimes if they have no one to go with. Individuals may hesitate to speak up and join a group. Have a spot where people

can meet up with others who need a lunch partner or dinner group. Make it easy for them join in.

- **Invite participation, never force.** Let your participants know at the very beginning (in your advertisements and welcoming speech) that they will never be forced to speak during any event, but they will ALWAYS be invited to share their thoughts.
- **Meet & greet your attendees.** At the start and end of the conference, position organizers at the doors. Greet attendees as they come and go. Help each person feel his/her attendance and contribution to the conference was appreciated and valued. Let them know they were more than a face in the crowd. NAME TAGS may be helpful.
- **Welcome first timers with extra attention.** Coming to a conference like this may be highly intimidating for newcomers. Pay special attention in your advertisements to first time attenders. If this is the first time a conference has been held in your area, then EVERYONE is a first timer. Let your potential participants know that you are ALL in it together.

WORKSHOP IDEAS

Making at least some of the workshops interactive with speaking opportunities for the participants is critical to success. Designing the conference so workshops progress from easier challenges to BIG speaking challenges will help ease attendees into participation. Below are a few workshop ideas, but there are many many more options to explore!



EASY

1:1 conversations

World friending

Walk 'n Talk

Sentence Starters

MEDIUM

Small group interactions

Interactive Games

Group problem solving

Scavenger hunt in teams

BIG SPEAKING CHALLENGES

Large group interactions

Open mic/Public speaking

Mock presentations

Make an educational video

World Friending (Easy): It's like speed-dating without the romance or speed! Set up a table or two lines where people face each other. Give a topic question to the crowd (e.g., "Discuss your family," or "Share how you spend your time during a typical week."). Allow approximately 6 minutes for the conversation to take place. Then, announce a "SWITCH". One line stays still, and the other shifts to the right. You can keep the same topic for a few turns or create a new topic each time. Repeat about 5 times.

Walk 'n Talk (Easy): Form two lines where partners are side-by-side. Propose a topic to discuss or ask a question. Then, walk around the room/building/outdoors for about 3-5 minutes. Pause the group. Ask, “Who will tell me something their partner said?” If there are no volunteers, you can get it started by saying, “I was eavesdropping, and heard ___ say ____.” Then shift one line so everyone as a new partner and propose a new topic or question. Repeat about 5 times. this task is particularly nice if you can take it outside.

Sentence Starters (Easy): Write sentence starters (e.g., “A day/trip that I remember well is _____,” or “If I had a super power, it would be _____”) on a sheet of paper. Cut them into slips with one sentence starter on each piece of paper. Put 20-30 sentence starters in a hat or a cup. Divide group into pairs. Take turns pulling a sentence starter out of the hat. Each person finishes the sentence.

Interactive games (Medium): Choose from any numerous youth or adult games that promote conversation and interaction. HeadBanz, Pictionary, Would you rather...? and Guess Who? are just a few. When choosing game options, be sure to take note of how much talking will take place (for example, UNO is a great game, but there is very little talking... so I would avoid it.) For some games, like Taboo, there are a lot of great exchanges that will take place; removing the timer from play is often beneficial for people who stutter.

Group problem solving (Medium): Give a task for a group to complete that allows a little creativity or freedom of design. Perhaps they build a bridge with popsicle sticks or random household objects. Every team is offered the same amount of time. Consider blindfolding tasks where one member of a group needs to be blindfolded while the others tell him or her how to complete a task. Members of the group take turns giving instructions for how to build something (e.g., a Lego design) or move towards a target or prize. Accomplishment is the goal, speed is not. Avoid congratulating teams for being the first one done.

Scavenger Hunt (Medium): Scavenger Hunts can be conducted in many different ways with different sized teams. The overall purpose is for a team to talk with each other to find items. You can have written clues that participants take turns reading. Players can take photos of items they are supposed to find, or pick up items from a designated location. This can be done indoors or outdoors. Again, the goal is not speed; the goal is to complete the task. All teams who complete the task can have their names put into a hat to be eligible for a prize.

Open Mic/Public Speaking (BIG): Public speaking is one of the most feared situations for humans in general, but is particularly feared for PWS. Participating in a short public speaking task with guaranteed applause makes it just a bit easier. Have a microphone or podium at the front of the room with all attendees seated in front of the mic. Ask for volunteers to come speak about how the conference impacted them or made a difference. Allow time for EVERY person who wants to speak. Have an organizer go first so they can model what an appropriate statement may look like as far as time. (Avoid telling speakers that there is a time limit.)

Improv! (BIG): Improvisation, or improv, is a form of live theatre in which the plot, characters and dialogue of a game, scene or story are made up in the moment. A bit scary? Of course!

But, it is an incredible challenge for someone who stutters to decide to take. Learn how to say “yes!” and go with the flow. Nothing is scripted. And there are no judges (or judgmental people) are watching. Enjoy knowing you have the support of the people surrounding you.

Mock presentations (BIG): Ask participants to list 3 topics they can discuss for about a minute without preparing (e.g., cooking, vacations, sports, dinosaurs). Then have them choose one topic to speak about. Have each participant stand in front of the room and talk about their preferred topic. This can be done with or without a microphone (depending on the situation).

Make an educational video (BIG): Social media is a great advertisement platform for conferences. Making short videos about why an individual liked a conference is a great way to challenge participants and let others know about the event. Ask for volunteers to “let the world know what we are doing here today.” Be sure they agree to participate and are content with what will be released. Some conference organizers may choose to make a video compilation or release them one at a time.

Town Hall: Organization leadership demonstrates its readiness to establish goals and make change with the help of the conference participants. Give the crowd a voice in planning future events, creating advocacy programs, and facilitating the feeling of togetherness all throughout the year. Depending on the number of participants and the conference set-up, you can be seated around a table, on stage in front of the audience, have microphones, etc. Plan to hear voices from the crowd. Stay open-minded. Have a whiteboard or place to document ideas. Validate the voices of your attendees.

FOOD & ACCOMMODATIONS

Attendees will have varying budgets. Offering a variety of price points for meal and lodging options will make the conference accessible to most.

MEALS: Offer 2 or 3 options for each meal and let attendees know which is which. (If funding is available to cater a meal at the conference center, that is also something to consider.) For example, in your advertisements you may state something like:

- Three meal options will be available for lunch, including:
 - **Picnic in the Park:** The picnic is a “bring your own lunch” option allowing guests to pack their own meal or pick up some quick fast food, then join the crowd. The picnic will be located at _____. \$
 - **Restaurant #1:** This restaurant is a casual place serving a variety of ____, ____, and _____. Meet in room #1 at 12:15 and we will walk over to the restaurant together. It is located at _____. Average meals at this restaurant range from ____ to _____. \$\$
 - **Restaurant #2:** This restaurant is a sit-down, upscale option serving a variety of seafood, poultry and steaks. Vegetarian options are available. Average meals at this restaurant range in price from ____ to _____. \$\$\$

HOTELS/LODGING: Offer at least 2 options for participants with varying price points. Consider asking hotels if they will reserve a block of rooms for a special price to those

attending the conference. Consider asking universities or hostels if they will make rooms available for your guests. Be sure both options are easily accessible to the conference location. For example, in your advertisements you may state:

- Two hotel options are available for conference attendees needing lodging, including:
 - **Marriott:** This hotel is a ½ mile walk to the conference location. A block of rooms was reserved with special conference pricing of \$--- per night for the dates of ___ through ___. To make reservations, call the front desk at (000) 000-0000 and give them the code WSN2023 (sample) to receive the conference discount. Breakfast is included. \$\$\$
 - **University dorms:** The ___ University has graciously offered dorm rooms for our conference attendees at a special price of \$__ per night from the dates ___ through ___. Each room includes 2 single beds with sheets and blankets. Communal showers are available at the end of each hall. Breakfast is on your own. To make reservations, call ___ at (000) 000-0000. \$

Planning a conference is hard work that requires attention to detail and support from others. Don't be afraid to make mistakes! You are doing what has not been done before... mistakes will be made. That's okay! Lean on others who have hosted conferences in other parts of the world. The most important part of the whole day is making connections among people who stutter.



Every day is a chance to change a life.



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