Committee on Meetings

Overview .

General Society Sons of the Revolution (GSSR) conducts annual business meetings and social events usually around the last weekend in September or the first weekend in October. In the past these meetings revolved around a three year cycle whereby the third year is a Triennial at which time new officers/directors are elected and seated. The remaining two years usually involve business brought before the Board of Managers (BoM). The reason for my involvement on this committee is because General President Mitchell Bush and I, while I was President of the Georgia Society, were responsible for the Triennial which was held in Savannah in 2012. For those of you who did not attend, it was quite successful, enjoyed by all, and the Georgia Society was able to make a little money in the process. For the two years prior to the Triennial, I took a very active role in the organization, negotiation, and implementation for the accommodations, venues and transportation for this event. Therefore, comments and observations that I may make in this report come as a result of my involvement in that Triennial, and the little bit of research and conversations that I have recently made.

Triennials vs. Board of Manager's Meetings.

Triennials occur every three years and the Board of Manager's (BoM) meeting occur on those years in between. Please see attachment #1 which provides a list of meeting places and the cost associated thereto. You will note that the BoM meetings are scheduled over two days. Whereas, the Triennials take place over three days. The membership attendance numbers for the BoM meetings averages 62 and for the Triennial, 134, respectively. It is considered that the Triennial tend to be more of a social event and the numbers reflect that. What is interesting is that the registration fees and the hotel per night cost has remained relatively the same over the past 20 years. $120 per night for the BoM meetings vs. $124 for the Triennials. One might think that the per room rate would be less for the Triennials given the higher member numbers but the moderately higher rate could be due to wanting a more upscale facility offering more amenities.

State Societies sometimes strive to sponsor these events because of the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities, show off their State and possibly make some money for their treasury. The past three events sponsored in the State of Georgia, one BoM and two Triennials, all were quite successful and profitable. However, other State Societies cannot say the same, such as what occurred with Virginia at the last Triennial where the General Society had to come to their assistance.

Budgets and Cost Controls.

Before I agreed to accept the responsibility for the last Triennial hosted in Savannah, I talked to as many people in authority as I could find who had hosted previous Triennials, and it became apparent that budget and cost controls were paramount to making our event successful. I am sure that this does not come to anyone's surprise, but it became apparent early on that had I not talked to previous Society managers of such events, we would not have been able to host such an event in Savannah or we would have lost money.

One of the first things that we did was to eliminate the event coordinator that we had hired because of the 10 to 15% commission structure that she imposed. Given that direct flexibility, we were able to negotiate directly with the hotel chains and securing much more favorable room rates. The same applied to the other venues that we were able secure. Another important factor that we had to consider was the "big box" hotel chains vs. second tier operators (Hilton, Hyatt vs. Marriott Courtyard, Hampton Inn). The "big box" operators provide sizable meeting rooms but at a cost outside of our budget parameters. Beside the room rate being almost twice the second tier operators, they also required a specific dollar amount for food and beverage which would not have worked for us given the venues that we had planned.

Manpower.

The Georgia Society is fortunate in having a membership that is strongly based in or near the Savannah area. Consequently, our manpower base was quite good. Also, we had members and directors that had strong networking capabilities in the area which made it easier to negotiate and organize for the different venues. When the Triennial was over, we estimated that we had used the services of 23 members/wives to make this a successful event. In reviewing the membership numbers for the different State Societies, this may be a very difficult task. See attachment #2. Societies such as Alabama (6), Delaware (9), South Carolina (33), and Rhode Island (37) may not be able to host a complicated Triennial without the help of the General Society or a neighboring state. Some larger states, (Texas at 56, North Carolina with 97 and Massachusetts at 91) because of their size (dispersed membership) and diversity, may also have the same problem.

Transportation.

Accessibility to some of the more desirable areas appears to be a problem, given the guidelines established by the General Society. Savannah was not so bad in that it has direct flights from Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Charlotte, DC and Atlanta. Had we elected to hold the Triennial in either Augusta or Macon, there would have been a problem with securing acceptable flights through the larger hubs. Such was the case with St. Augustine, Florida, which was being considered for the triennial a few years back. Even though it's a great location for this type of convention, the closest airport is Jacksonville which would have made the commute over an hour. As an alternate consideration, Greensboro, NC, (Piedmont triad International Airport) has direct flights from New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, DC and Atlanta and is only 15 minutes tothe downtown area but to my knowledge, there is only one SR member in the area which would make organizing a Triennial or BoM meeting there, very difficult for the NC BoM.

Transportation of another sort is the movement of members and spouses between venues and the hotel should there be events not held at the accommodating hotel. Properly negotiated with the local van tour/services, especially in historic cities such as Savannah, this should not be a big issue. However, that should be kept in mind when determining acceptable locations and the venues planned. In our case we used a considerable amount of transportation because all of our activities were outside of the hotel.

Structure.

I am of the opinion that if a State Society wishes to compete for any of the Triennials or BoM meetings that they should have a committee (two to three members) established that is well versed in the needs that would be required to put on this kind of event. In my mind, there is a cultural difference between the two events which needs to be distinguished and understood before a State Society takes on either of these events. A BoM meeting should be more oriented towards a business environment and with less emphasis towards the social. With that in mind the cost factor for holding such an event should be less and the business productivity level much higher.

The Triennial, on the other hand, is a more festive event and should be geared more to the social aspects of our organization. Agreed that business will be conducted but not at the expense of the social gatherings and festive atmosphere. Tours of historic areas, education and exploration of the city/region and the general development of camaraderie should be the expectation.

BoM meetings usually occur over two days starting on a Friday and concluding on Saturday around noon. Saturday afternoon or Sunday then being a travel day. Spouses sometimes attend, but not as a general rule. The Friday evening event is hosted by the sponsoring State Society, and in my mind should not be a formal affair. Again, the emphasis is on business at hand.

Triennials should be an elegant affair (spouses are expected to attend, and sometimes with children) which should allow for the State Society to show off in its own surroundings. These are three day events, starting on Thursday evenings with a social function in normally cocktail attire and relaxed atmosphere. In the past this has been hosted by the Pennsylvania Color Guard, and, hopefully, they will continue to do so. Business meetings for members only do occur - Friday (full day) and Saturday (until noon). Optional tours and/or shopping are scheduled for the spouses during the business meetings. Friday night is a casual State Society event which can be held either at the accommodating hotel or at some other facility. In our case the Georgia Society held their Friday night event at a Civil War area fort. Saturday afternoon is open for casual touring or an optional venue. In our case we made available a river boat lunch/cruise. Saturday night is a formal seated affair involving the State Society and Pennsylvanian Color Guard, a speaker for the evening and music. The Triennial concludes on Sunday with a church service, a Pennsylvanian Color Guard procession and concluding sherry toast.

Considerations and Recommendations.

In reviewing our membership, the GSSR has representation in 27 states and Europe. Of that it has eleven states with less than 50 members, seven states with more than 50 but less than 100 and ten states with over 100 members. After some discussion with a few of my committee members we are of the opinion that it would be best served for the GSSR BoM to consider having the two year BoM meetings at the headquarters in Williamsburg and utilizing the skills of the Executive Director to put on this event. The thought here is that a routine would be established using certain vendors for accommodations and foodservices, which would allow cost to be reduced and simplicity of execution to be established.

Triennials on the other hand could continue to move to the different State Societies where there is a desire to host it. However, because of the manpower issues, I suspect that that only the

larger states would be willing to undertake this venture and assume all of the financial responsibilities associated with it. Another consideration would be if the GSSR would like to hold a Triennial in a state where the membership was either too small or too dispersed,(i.e. San Antonio, Texas or Charleston, South Carolina), to take on such an event, the GSSR could elect to undertake the event and underwrite it itself.

Conclusion.

As I mentioned in the beginning, as the Georgia Society President, I was adamant that we would not host the Triennial until we were comfortable with the projected budget and cost controls. This should be the case for any event, be it a GSSR or a State Society. I was quite fortunate to have a great team that worked well together and all were aware that we wanted the most "bang for the buck." I would also mention that there was a considerable amount of "thinking outside of the box" that made the event work within the cost parameters that the GSSR had imposed. Had we gone with one of the big box hotels, we would not have been able to achieve the registration cost suggested by the GSSR. Nor would we have been able to have the flexibility in the venues that we presented. The second tier hotel (Marriott Courtyard) that we chose did not have the meeting room accommodations that would have been needed for the business meeting, but neighboring University of Georgia extension service did have the space within walking distance and was close enough to make it work. Nor did the Marriott Courtyard have the banquet or food service facilities needed for the final night's formal event, but the Telfair Museum (two blocks away) did have the needed arrangements and it made for a great final event.

In reviewing the website www.hotels.com, there are plenty of facilities in the cities discussed herein that *appear* to meet the cost parameters for the time periods discussed. Agreed, if the GSSR should decide to take a proactive approach in states where there is a lack of membership or desire to host the event, the GSSR, possibly with some limited support from the State Society, could undertake to host the event at its own expense and should be able to break even on its expenses. However, to do so it would most likely require a paid committee/team to act on its behalf in this undertaking.

Postscript

1. After some discussion with my committee members, the committee understands that as part of its responsibility it will be to establish guidelines and/or standards for each event that could be applied moving forward for those hosting an event. It would be handy if there was a formulaic recipe to follow. For example:
    a. Target registration fee amount (COLA consideration)
    b. Target/range per night hotel cost and minimum "quality" of the accommodations
    c. Target amount of required walking and/or bus riding.
    d. Keynote speaker expectation and/or targets
    e. Minimum meeting space and A/V requirements.
    f. Sample itinerary for the event and business meeting agenda
    g. Number of events and activities (including separate children's events?)

2. Also included in our future discussions/recommendations will be “new” guidelines as to meeting times (days of the week), duration of meetings, attire, format, etc. The idea would be to make these meetings more productive, affordable and most of all better attended.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my committee members for their input and insight.

Mr. President, this concludes my report. Should there be any questions, you know how to reach me.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher K Frame
Past President, GA-SR