IMPROVING MARKETING AND DISSEMINATION THROUGH EXHIBITS AND CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?
Is conference participation included in your grant’s Broader Impact Statement, Dissemination Plan, Evaluation Plan, or Marketing Plan? What are your resources and services? Who are your target markets?

WHY EXHIBIT AND PRESENT?
Share your findings and best practices; develop an awareness of your resources/services with your target audience; broaden outreach efforts by making new contacts; receive professional development; network and learn from others in your field. Conference participation allows you to do all these things with larger numbers of people with similar needs and interests in a central location.

WHICH CONFERENCES?
(See Conference Planning Chart document)
• Target a small number of conferences during your first year. Select conferences where you are most likely to encounter members of your target audiences. Determine to exhibit, present or, ideally, both! When you present you reach a more precise target and can point participants to your exhibit.
• Encouraged/Required Conference: Participation in the annual NSF ATE PI Conference is highly encouraged and, after your first year, expected by NSF.
• Suggested Conferences: ATE Center Joint Displays (best first conferences for new Centers). NSF funds a project to coordinate joint displays at approximately five conferences each year. ATE Center Joint Displays are a great way to “get your feet wet” in exhibiting. Reduce costs—the joint displays are funded by NSF so there are no exhibit fees paid by individual Centers—the cost for a booth at national education conferences is in the $500-$1,500 range and in the lower thousands for industry/professional society conferences. Learn from Experience—in a joint display you share exhibit space with experienced Center staff. You learn how to represent the ATE program and other Centers, observe and model how your colleagues interact with potential partners, build relationships with them, and learn the ins and outs of exhibiting. Once you have some experience, it may be time to branch out to other local, state, regional, and national conferences presented by other educational groups, industry and professional associations. Hi-TEC Conference (produced by ATE Centers and Projects; excellent networking and dissemination).

MAXIMIZE YOUR INVOLVEMENT
• Use pre- and post-convention marketing opportunities available to exhibitors such as mail/email lists, journals, newsletters, conference materials/programs, and online advertising.
• Use social media and your website to publicize your exhibit and perform post-conference follow up.
• Place advertisements in programs if cost effective and your budget allows it; consider design costs and time constraints, as well as ad placement costs.
• Donate items for exhibit hall prize drawings.
• Consider low-cost sponsorships for greater visibility; sponsorships are often available for receptions, events, meals, breaks, bags, promotional items, signs, and scholarships.
• Share exhibit costs with other centers, projects, or other departments in your organization (e.g., one pays for shipping and material handling, another pays exhibit fee).
PLANNING YOUR EXHIBITS

Planning is the key to conference participation success. The best conference coordinators pay close attention to the details as well as the big picture.

- **Prospectus:** obtain the conference exhibitor prospectus as soon as it is available and read it all!
- **Show Kit:** obtain the show kit document as soon as it is available and read it all! Decide which forms you will need and when/how to submit them. Many conferences use contract labor for construction/dismantling, installing electrical and Internet outlets, etc. and require different forms to be submitted via different methods to different companies.
- **Checklist:** create an event checklist.
- **Deadlines:** Record, track, and be early for all deadlines (Internet, websites, phones, and faxes are not infallible).
- **Confirmations:** Make sure to obtain confirmations for all orders.
- **Training:** Ensure that all booth staff know your mission, resources, services, partners, FAQ, how to deal with difficult people, how to interact with the press, how to set up and use display and equipment, etc. Role playing is an excellent preparation! Give clear a clear description of what is expected.
- **Dress:** Dress comfortably for your booth set-up time and save your best outfit for full-show days. Plan whether or order/wear matching logo or themed apparel. Dress in layers—exhibit hall temperatures vary during the day. Press clothing. Wear shoes that are polished and in good condition; skip the heels—wear flats and save your feet and back!
- **Grooming:** impeccable grooming is a must (hair cut/style, shaving, clean teeth/breath, deodorant)
- **Materials:** use display copies rather than sell in your booth—some locations require that local sales taxes be collected when sales are made on the exhibit floor. If you decide to sell in the booth, make sure you know how to comply with local sales tax requirements.
- **Goals:** set measurable goals for your participation (e.g., obtain contact information from 10 booth visitors to add to your mailing list; build/develop networks or collaborations with 5 other centers; enroll 12 people in your next webinar or course; share materials with 20 presentation attendees)
- **Tool Kit:** make yourself an exhibit tool kit using a vinyl pencil bag with a clear window. Include box cutter and/or scissors (must be shipped or carried in airline checked baggage; not allowed in carry-on/valet checked bags), mini stapler, rubber bands, permanent marker, pencils, pens, measuring tape for placing/centering displays, extra fasteners, Velcro, lots of tape for repacking boxes (so many people forget the tape—remember yours and be someone’s hero for the day!).
- **Will Return Sign:** if you are the sole staffer, take a “will return at” sign to put on our table when you must leave the floor for breaks or presentations. Better yet, have a colleague cover for you.
- **Expedite Return Shipping:** Use the conference shipping company. Check in with the decorator on the morning of the last day of the show to obtain return shipment forms and labels and recheck procedures.
- **Carry Return Shipping Labels:** before you leave home, preprint your own return address labels in case the decorator line is long.
- **Expedite Dismantling:** keep all your packaging material in your empty boxes; if you have a small exhibit and the conference rules allow it, store your boxes under the tables in your booth to save waiting time for empties to be returned to you for repacking at the end of the show.
- **Promotional Items:** choose promos wisely—promos should be related to your project in some way. Avoid items such as utility knives and toolkits which are not permitted in carry-on baggage; many conferences do not allow distribution of foodstuffs of any kind including wrapped candy. Select and order promos early in a quantity to last a year. Imprint with your logo, tag line, and web address.
BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

- Exhibit fees
- Exhibit equipment costs—start small with just your NSF ATE banner stand and build up over time
- Design and printing costs for collateral materials
- Shipping fees to conference—ship early using freight or ground service
- Shipping fees from conference—use the conference shipper to save time and effort at end of show
- Carpet—determine if booths and aisles are covered in carpet. Some conferences have permanent carpet throughout; others may only carpet the aisles and may require you to rent or ship carpeting for your booth.
- Furniture—some conferences include a furniture package in booth cost, others do not
- Material Handling Charges—many conferences require you to use their material handling services and most have a minimum fee (NSF ATE PI conference is very low at approximately $100 for 100-pound minimum; most conferences have a 200-pound minimum so even if you ship 50 pounds you will pay for 200 pounds; costs for educational conference are in the $150-$200 per 100-pound range.
- Utility costs—costs for electric and Internet are often prohibitive, try to plan your exhibit without them.
- Hotel Cost—conference hotels tend to be expensive—reserve early to obtain best discounts and make sure to use the conference discount code.
- Transportation costs—local mileage, airport parking, airfare, car rental, taxi, shuttle (research and take advantage of conference discount codes offered by airlines and local transportation providers)
- Staff salaries
- Meals

PRESENTATION TIPS

- Plan for presenting by first attending presentations by other center and project staff.
- Gain experience by assisting/facilitating/co-presenting with others.
- Track, plan, and meet proposal application deadlines.
- When applying for a presentation, request the most appropriate venue for your presentation:
  - Exhibitor Workshops (10-60 minutes, formal or informal demonstration in the exhibit hall)
  - Poster Sessions (10-60 minutes, informal question & answer, posters/signs on a bulletin board)
  - Concurrent/General Sessions (60 minutes, formal presentation, theatre style)
  - Roundtable Discussions (60 minutes, informal facilitated discussion of participants and small group activities at small tables)
  - Panel Discussions (60 minutes, formal moderated discussion of experts, panel/interview style)
- Plan, prepare, and print handouts for advance shipping whenever possible.
- Know technical capabilities of your presentation room (wired/wireless Internet, computer, podium, electrical outlets, LCD projector, screen, speakers, microphones, lights, who to call for A/V help).
- Set up 30-60 minutes early whenever possible so that you can focus on attendees as they arrive, rather than logistics.
- Familiarize yourself with fire/emergency exits and procedures, nearest restrooms, heating/cooling adjustments, times/locations of other conference events, meals, breaks.
- Use humor, visuals, handouts, and hands-on activities.
EXHIBITING TIPS

• Stay at the conference hotel—the conference hotel may be expensive but the benefits are well worth the price when you consider convenient access to exhibit and presentation rooms; networking opportunities in elevators, restaurants, and shops; avoiding long walks, taxi expense, and commute time between your hotel room and the conference site. Discount hotel blocks fill rapidly so reserve your room even before you reserve your exhibit space!
• If your travel schedule will allow, use shared local shuttle transportation from the airport when available—it may be slower but there can be considerable cost savings.
• Arrange travel to arrive early for the setup time so that you can finish and have time to help others! Setting up during the show may cause you to ignore potential clients or damage your public image.
• Arrange travel to allow you enough time to tear down and repack your exhibit. Don’t tear down early unless absolutely necessary: it is disrespectful to attendees and some exhibit contracts require your booth to stay open for the duration of the show hours. Many conferences determine booth selection priorities for the next year on a point basis; points can be lost if you tear your booth down before the official show time is over or if you violate other show rules.
• Carry camera, pain reliever, bottled water, snacks, hand sanitizer or wipes, tissues, paper towels.
• When you arrive, familiarize yourself with fire/emergency exits and procedures, nearest restrooms, times/locations of other conference events, meals, breaks.
• Greet with care and respect every guest that approaches your booth—you never know who you will meet or who may become your next best client or partner. Relationships may take years to develop but first impressions will last!
• Use open-ended questions to discover each prospect’s interests and needs, then explain your resources/services that match their needs.
• Avoid conversing with other exhibitors when visitors are at your booth.
• Keep your booth organized, neat, and clean at all times.
• Maintain good posture and eye contact.
• Avoid, or limit as much as possible, eating, drinking, sitting, texting, or computing in your booth.
• Set a 7-day goal to follow up all contacts with a personal note and requested information.
• Use your website and social media for conference reporting.

EXHIBITING RESOURCES

OP-TEC Collection of Conference Participation Tips:
http://www.op-tec.org/exhibits

AACC Trade Show Tips Checklist:

Exhibitor Magazine:
Geared toward high-end shows but offers tons of resources for exhibitors of any size including a magazine, e-newsletter, a "Tips" webpage, Trade Show Topics, and Article Library arranged by topic, glossary of terms, free online articles, and multiple low cost downloadable articles ($5 fee):
http://www.exhibitoronline.com

Skyline Trade Show Tips:
Skyline sells trade show displays, exhibits, booths and equipment but shares best practices and tips as a service to clients:
http://www.skylinetradeshowtips.com/trade-show-tips-vault/