

WORLDCON RUNNERS GUIDE

FACILITIES

Where do you start?

Overview: Every Worldcon will need hotel sleeping rooms and space in which to hold the event. Most of the time that means a convention center and adjacent hotels (Sasquan in 2015); sometimes that means a really large hotel (Chicon 7 in 2012). Typically, a Worldcon Bid Committee (“WBC”) will have already done its homework when selecting a city to bid for Site Selection. Once the WBC selects the location they wish to bid, they ask someone (or several someones) to negotiate contracts for the convention center and/or hotels prior to the vote. That person usually becomes the Facilities Liaison for the bid, and sometimes for the con, presuming they win. Should the convention center and/or hotels not be willing to negotiate full contracts pre-vote, then that will need to happen post-vote.

Convention centers are generally owned by the city, or county, or state government. This means that there’s not much to negotiate. Start with the dates you want, such as Move-In on Monday at 8 a.m. and Move-Out on Monday at 5 p.m. the following week (also known as MIMO). Specify that Move-In is on Monday and Tuesday, Event starts on Wednesday and runs through Sunday, and that Move-Out is on Monday. Tell them how much of their space you need on each day. The convention center representative will then tell you how much you will pay for that space per day, plus tax, plus service charge (termed plus-plus, around 30%). They may sometimes give you a discount if you guarantee a minimum number of room nights into the nearby hotels (from 4,000 to 7,000, depending on your hotel contracts). They will also tell you how much it will cost to rent and refill water stations, how much each room will cost to set up or tear down or change during the event, and either recommend or require certain decorators for the large exhibit halls. Other charges will include broadband internet, wifi options and onsite parking pricing, possibly with discounts and union labor costs if the center is a union center. This will all be included in the contract you “negotiate”. Ask for an opt-out clause so that if you lose the bid after signing, then the contract is null and void. Some centers will do this; others will not. Some even won’t sign unless you win the bid and are about one year out from the event. Opt-out clauses are also possible for hotel contracts.

Hotel contracts are much more negotiable. You need to not only book a block of rooms on each of the nights you want members to attend, but also book-end nights (shoulder nights) for those wishing to arrive early or stay late to tour around. For example, in 2015, Sasquan used hotel rooms from August 13 through August 26 in their block; peak rooms per night were just over 1,500, with a total of just over 7,000 room nights. Of course, most of those were on the main nights (nights 2, 3 and 4), with slightly fewer on nights 1 and 5, then fewer still as the days went on. Also consider booking hotel function space. Will this supplement the space at the center? If so, then how much should you book, bearing in mind that it requires members to leave the

“World Science Fiction Society”, “WSFS”, “World Science Fiction Convention”,
“Worldcon”, “NASFiC” “Hugo Award”, the Hugo Award Logo, and the distinctive
design of the Hugo Award Trophy Rocket are service marks of the World Science
Fiction Society, an unincorporated literary society.

convention center? If the hotel is not attached to the center, is it close enough for most members to get to in a reasonable amount of time? Hotels can usually offset function space cost with room nights booked, but sometimes space cost is independent of nights booked. Are you having any food and beverage functions? The more you pay for food and beverage, the happier the hotel will be and—usually—the lower the space rental fee. Most hotel contracts will be independent of any other hotel contract, but some do include multiple hotels if they are part of a chain. Don't plan on this, though.

Convention Centers

You need a convention center if you do not have the needed facility space within a couple of closely spaced hotels. For a North American Worldcon, this means you will need approximately 200,000 square feet of space.

Convention centers do not intrinsically provide any benefits that a large hotel does not have, but specifics can vary from facility to facility; e.g., some convention centers have large auditoriums that can be used for major functions. If your hotel is large enough, fine, but for most cities you are going to need a convention center.

Multiple Facility Worldcons

What are the pitfalls of using multiple facilities?

1. Complicated facilities negotiation—The more contracts you need to negotiate, the more sales managers you will need to deal with.
2. At-con logistics are more complex—you may need to run multiple operations centers, programming green rooms, etc.
3. If the hotels are far apart, your attendees will have problems getting from place to place in a reasonable amount of time.

Space Allocation

Put all concom (convention committee) members in a room. Issue knives. Close door until facilities allocation is complete.

All kidding aside, put one person in charge of facilities coordination, and have that person do a draft allocation. Once that is done, do a walk-through with everyone who has a vested interest in a space and then have each division submit modifications. Be flexible.

Consider the following:

1. Make and keep a written list of each location (room, lounge, etc.) in each facility (hotel, convention center, etc.) Note the size of the room and its occupancy limits.

2. Make a list of everything the convention plans to do from the initial on-site set up to the final on-site storage, and keep revising it until it looks pretty realistic. Use this list to determine what items require a physical space either as attendee space or storage space during the convention.
3. Physically seeing the facility space will make this process more rational.

Do **not** believe facility diagrams. Particularly, do not believe that electric outlets are where the facility's plans say they are or that there are no windows in a room just because the plans don't show them. Look, measure, and analyze the room yourself (if possible). If that's truly impossible, make a diagram of the room. Specify anything that might make a difference in the usefulness of the room. (For example, a program room dedicated to slide shows won't work in a room with a skylight, even if the sky light is wonderful!)

1. Take the list of things that need space and the list of the available spaces, and decide where each item could go, but do not make any definite decisions yet.
2. With this list in hand, consult people on the committee/staff for their opinions. They may think of things that need space that weren't included in your list.

It is **critical** that Programming and Special Events agree on space allocation and times. Special Events will need time for tech rehearsals and room setup changes. All day may be too long, but an hour too short. Two hours is normally about right, possibly three depending on the complexity of the setup.

1. Incorporate any newly added items to the list of room allocations. Start with the things that have the least flexibility for available locations. (You may have several that can logically go only in one place.) You may need to rework your list several times.
2. Designate one centrally located but reasonably secure room as the place where "lost" items can be brought. Tell everyone. This can save hours otherwise spent looking for missing items!)

Dealers Room and Art Show

You will need approximately 35,000 square feet for both the dealers room and for the art show. The dealers room should be large enough to hold about 250-350 tables with lots of aisle space. These spaces are usually determined by default because most facilities have so few large rooms that they are pretty obvious even to the casual observer looking at the floor plans.

Banquets

At one time the banquet functioned as the space where the Hugo Award ceremony was held. Those days are long gone, and most Worldcons don't bother with a banquet any more. But if you're going to hold a formal banquet, it would be a good idea to consult various regionals (especially in the local area) to see if they can help you determine what percentage of a con's attendees might attend. Figure your con size, the percentage of banquet attendees, and determine

from the hotel's floor plans what rooms might hold that many with banquet seating. The banquet manager should be able to provide those numbers.

Balancing Costs

Different hotels and different areas of the country have varying sets of parameters that they consider when setting their fees. For example, in some areas of the country (and world), facility fees are fixed and non-negotiable; in other areas they are happily waived if enough room nights are booked.

For varying reasons, some conventions have a lot of food functions. Windycon in Chicago, for example, has a history of no banquets under any circumstances (due to a notorious incident at an early Windycon).

In the Midwest, charges for tables and chairs in dealers rooms are not uncommon; in other areas of the country they are usually included with the function space rental.

In the end, the Facilities Liaison must try for a balance that leaves both the hotel and the fans reasonably happy.

Local laws: Fire Codes and More

1. Consult with the local fans. In Chicago, for example, there are fans who are doctors, police officers, and even on the staff of some local hotels.
2. Talk with the hotel. They'll give you a lot of that information (though it will tend to be biased in the hotel's favor).
3. Find out what conventions of similar size and makeup have been held recently (e.g., a fraternity gathering) and consult with their facilities liaison.