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Speakers Have All the Fun

By Robert Bloom

What is more fun than attending an APCO Conference? Presenting at an APCO Conference! Not only is it a rewarding experience, but it's a chance to share your knowledge. It is also a chance to make new friends and learn from one another.

Every fall APCO opens their Call for Speakers, and this is the chance for you to submit your idea for a presentation. APCO accepts both solo presentations as well as panel discussions. After you hit the submit button, your idea is headed down the road with hundreds of others just like it.

The Professional Development Events Committee (PDEC) receives your submission. The PDEC is divided into teams for each track, and here is where the real work begins.

One of the first things PDEC members look for when grading a submission is if it's filled out correctly. That is probably the biggest section where people lose points. You want to be concise but accurate when you fill out the description for grading. Does it match the objectives you stated? Does it make sense in the track it is submitted to? Make sure to check your spelling, too! Lastly, write up a draft of the presentation and upload it with your submission. This gives the committee a better idea of what your session will look like.

Once presenters have been selected, APCO has a lot of resources to share with them. Between the time a presentation is selected and the conference, presenters receive several emails. One of the first emails introduces speakers to the speaker website, which is filled with lots of information on presenting. It also has an area to post questions, suggestions and ideas. Both returning and new speakers all have access to this website and APCO staff is always available to offer assistance. They can answer most questions and are in contact with the PDEC Committee.

Once speakers arrive at the conference, there are even more resources available. The Speaker Ready Room is staffed by conference volunteers who have phone contact with staff and PDEC members.

The room is equipped with tables and chairs as well as a projector, allowing speakers to check their laptops and test their PowerPoint presentations. Speakers should check in with the Speaker Ready Room as soon as possible so the Committee knows they made it to the conference. One question that is always asked is about handouts. It is tough to say how many attendees will be at each presentation, so it's usually easier to include handouts as part of the PowerPoint since they will be included with the recordings. One tip is to ask for cards and list your contact information on the last slide, so attendees can contact speakers directly afterward.

On the day of the presentation, the convention center audio-visual (AV) staff will stop in to help with any connections and set them up with wireless lapel microphones as well as handheld microphones. AV staff will be in and out during each presentation to monitor sound levels since all sessions are recorded. Each presentation has a dedicated room proctor who introduces the speakers and their topics, and also holds up a sign when speakers are getting close to the end of their session. PDEC staff are also moving about and usually check in on first-time presenters. So if you have some first timer jitters, just let someone know.

Once you get started, it is really easy. Besides, you are among friends that do the same kind of job that you do, so share your knowledge and experiences with them.

Now it is time for you to have fun and enjoy all of the new friends you're about to meet! ●

Robert Bloom is Public Safety Systems Administrator, Department of Emergency Communications in Alexandria, Virginia. Bob has been working in public safety for almost 30 years. He serves as APCO's Chair for Professional Development Events Committee, Vice Chair of Cyber Security Training Writing Group and a member of the Cyber Security Committee. He will also be Chair of APCO's 2019 Baltimore Conference Committee.