

Section Cost Reduction Ideas

Ideas for Cost Cutting

All of the suggestions below are ones that a number of Sections have employed successfully for purposes of keeping costs down:

Use Alternative Venues for Executive Committee Meetings

Hold meetings in law firm conference rooms. Often, law firms are willing to host meetings on a complementary basis and have state-of-the-art AV equipment available for no charge.

Utilize the San Francisco or Los Angeles State Bar Offices for Executive Committee meetings and/or retreats. The meeting space is free and the catering much less expensive. AV equipment is built-in. The State Bar can get “group rates” at nearby hotels (when an overnight stay is involved).

A typical 1-day meeting at a hotel for 24-26 people that would cost \$3500-\$4000 for catering, meeting space and AV would cost under \$1,000 - \$1,500 at the State Bar office (or a local law firm meeting facility). Note: Weekend meetings at Bar offices can cost more than weekday meetings due to O.T. labor and HVAC system.

Consider Lower Cost Airport Hotels

Using lower cost airport hotels for meetings requires less travel and typically such facilities are far less expensive than resorts. Two good examples include the LAX Marriott and the SFO Westin.

Schedule Meetings Times to Reduce Catering Needs

Hotel catering is extremely expensive; for instance, the average cost for a single gallon of coffee is \$69 ++ (plus the mandatory 18% banquet gratuity and the 8.25% sales tax) for a total of \$87 per gallon. In addition, hotel catering is often far inferior to restaurant fare. Consider changing your meeting schedule to reduce the need for catering to the extent possible – thereby allowing your members to dine at places of their choice before or after your meeting.

Consider scheduling morning meetings from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm and afternoon meetings from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm (for example). If a meeting must encompass a meal hour, consider reducing the need for catering to one meal by scheduling the meeting from 10:30 am to 5:30 pm.

Combine your executive committee meetings with education programs whenever possible – particularly if executive committee members are speakers on program panels.

Schedule Meeting Times to Reduce the need for Overnight Accommodations

Schedule meetings to begin at 10:30 am or later and end by 5:00 p.m. or earlier to avoid the need for overnight accommodations.

Change Policy Related to Executive Committee Reimbursement

Executive Committee meeting costs represent the largest and fastest-growing expense category. Consider having advisors attend only the meetings in their regional areas. (Southern California advisors attend meetings held in LA, etc.)

Also consider placing a “cap” on travel reimbursements. Some sections cap expenses at \$250 for those coming from another part of the state. (This tends to penalize those coming from hard to get to places, however; if the Section chooses to adopt such a policy it can always allow for exemptions.)

Reduce the Number of Meetings

Re-think your current meeting schedule. Do you really need to have the number of meetings that you currently have to accomplish the goals of your Section? Executive Committee meetings now average \$7,000 - \$10,000 per meeting including travel costs. Do these meetings directly translate into your goal of providing education to your members? What might be done just as well “off line”?

Hold Fewer In-Person Meetings and More Conference Call Meetings

A number of Sections have reduced in-person meetings to no more than 3-4 per year, often holding their in-person in conjunction with other functions where their Committee members would otherwise be in attendance (such as the State Bar Annual Meeting, individual Section multi-day Conferences, etc.) In between, they then conduct 2-3 hour conference call meetings that are just as official as in-person meetings. In this way they members and no travel inconvenience.

Consider Imposing a Lodging “Cap” for the Annual Meeting and/or Retreats

Most Sections have now placed a lodging “cap” on Annual Meeting and retreat lodging, the most common being \$200 per night. (Members are “out of pocket” for the balance; however, in nearly all cases, those for whom this would present a “hardship” are allowed to petition for exemptions to the policy.)

Video Conferencing and Telephone Conferences

The State Bar offices in both LA and SF offer video conferencing services. Each location can accommodate approximately 18-20 participants. Those in outlying areas can connect via speaker phone. Most Sections have now substituted at least 1-2 meetings each year as a “teleconference” meeting. This not only saves costs, but is more convenient for members who can avoid unpleasant travel.

Keep “Cost Cutting Ideas” on the Agenda

Make sure that the need to brainstorm about cost-cutting measures is given high-profile attention at least once each year. Some Sections have this as a regular agenda item on their annual planning retreats, placing it in the context of reviewing the entire operation and considering ways in which to operate more efficiently while making the best use of resources and volunteer members’ time.