



Tips to Help You Justify SAWE Attendance

For many years now, the travel and training budgets at most organizations have been the focus of increasingly intense scrutiny. Cost cutting and budget control efforts are growing every day and the approval process associated with attending a conference such as the SAWE International Conference has become extremely difficult. This can make your obtaining approval to attend challenging at best and downright overwhelming for the young professional and experienced professional alike.

Don't despair. There may be a light at the end of the tunnel. There are many steps that you can take to successfully justify your attendance to your management. These practices have proven successful for people who have traveled the same tunnel that you now face. In just about every organization, some type of justification, be it highly formalized or merely an informal memo, is needed by your management before they will commit the expenditure of time and funds necessary for you to attend a conference. When you prepare your justification to attend a conference of the SAWE, consider the following tips:

- ✓ *General benefits from attendance include the development of new technologies and improved practices that can lead to reduced labor hours and more accurate and reliable data for your organization.*
- ✓ *Contacts with other individuals within your own industry, across other allied industries, and with suppliers, regulatory and academic professionals can help your professional growth and can provide valuable assets for the future.*
- ✓ *Look at the agenda of various technical sessions and Standards and Practices workshops for particular subjects or issues relevant to a specific ongoing project or upcoming contract at your organization. Mention these in your justification.*
- ✓ *If there are items of pertinent interest to you and your organization that do not seem to be addressed at the conference, contact the appropriate Standards and Practices Chair for your industry sector. Discuss your interest with the*

chair and suggest that the subject be added to the agenda. In most cases, you will find a receptive audience because others probably have the same interest.

- ✓ *If overhead funds are necessary for your attendance, develop your travel authorization request as early as possible. Many others are likely competing for the same funds and it may come down to “first come, first served”.*
- ✓ *Training is an excellent reason for conference approval. There are many fine training courses offered by the SAWE at each conference plus there are numerous technical sessions that provide a wealth of information.*
- ✓ *If you are a registered as a Professional Engineer, attendance at SAWE Conference technical sessions and training satisfies the mandatory requirements of most states for continuing education. If your organization supports and utilizes your qualification as a PE, they may put a priority on helping you maintain it. Mention this in your justification!*
- ✓ *Mention in your request for approval that you will prepare a trip summary or memo that will be distributed to management and all interested parties within your organization. Look out for your entire organization during your attendance and, most importantly, follow through!*
- ✓ *Consider writing a technical paper or preparing a technical presentation for the conference. Being an author or presenter will greatly improve your chances for approval. Be sure to follow your organization’s process for paper approval.*
- ✓ *Highlight in your request that it is more cost effective to attend a large, multi-functional event such as the SAWE with its technical sessions, networking events, industry forums, training, vendor exposition, etc. than attend a number of smaller single purpose events to achieve the same result.*
- ✓ *In your justification, clearly articulate the connection between your organizations needs and the opportunities offered by the conference. These connections may include networking, developing an awareness of current tools and technologies or practices, identifying and interviewing candidates for employment, seeking potential suppliers or contractors for mass properties-related activities, or gaining insight into upcoming regulations or customer requirements.*
- ✓ *Just about every organization is directly affected by some new regulatory requirement. Describe in your justification the opportunity to learn more about the requirement, determine how it will impact your organization, ascertain how others in your industry plan to respond to the new requirement, or how you can influence the direction or applicability of the new regulation. Even a voluntary*

standard like a Recommended Practice or “best practice” may need input from your organization!

- ✓ *Volunteer for an office, role, or position within the SAWE at either the local chapter or international level. This demonstrates to your management that you are serious and have made a personal commitment that will benefit your employer. If you are a long-time or highly active member or hold an office within SAWE, mention it in your justification!*
- ✓ *Don't be a tourist! Your employer does not want to fund your vacation by approving travel to a SAWE conference. If you convey in your justification that you plan to actively participate and represent the interests of your organization, your chances of approval are greatly enhanced!*
- ✓ *Mitigate the cost of your attendance to your management. Help them control their budgets by the following:*
 - *If your organization is an Exhibitor, Sponsor, or Corporate Member of the SAWE, you may be able to take advantage of complimentary or discounted registration or training fees that come with that status.*
 - *Don't register late. Avoid late fees.*
 - *Book air travel and hotels rooms as early as possible to take advantage of lower rates and conference rates.*
 - *Be an author and qualify for complimentary registration for the day of your presentation.*
 - *Be on the lookout for specific subjects or issues that are relevant to a particular contract that may offer the opportunity to charge your time and expenses directly to a contract rather than general overhead.*
 - *Develop a concise and defensible estimate of your total costs of attendance considering registration fees taking advantage of any complimentary or discount rates, any separate ticketed or training fees, lodging costs using SAWE-negotiated conference rates, local transportation costs such as taxis, shuttles, or rental cars, and food per diem.*

You've done your research. You've identified the many benefits of SAWE Conference attendance and have all the information you need. The next step is up to you. Don't sit passively waiting for your organization to ask you. Be proactive and take the initiative to justify your attendance. That light at the end of the tunnel is not a train. It's the welcome sign at the next conference of the SAWE! Lastly, when you have succeeded in influencing your organization to

sponsor your attendance at a Regional or International SAWE Conference, don't forget after your attendance to:

1. *Thank your sponsor.*
2. *Provide your sponsor a timely trip report, and later a copy of the SAWE Journal highlighting pages that contain things like your Company's Exhibit Booth or Sponsorship, Technical Papers or Presentations given by your company, Training Provided or Received by your company, key technical papers or outcomes from the Standards and Practice session that are important to your company or program.*
3. *Apply what you learned to your company contracted programs and keep a running log of what you learned and applied. Use as reinforcement for your justification in following years this log of how prior attendance at SAWE conferences has benefited your organization's performance on contracted programs.*

