

Area 15 State Convention Committee presentation
July 11, 2026

TOPIC: Florida State Convention 101: Guidelines for Success

PRESENTERS: Donna W, Allen C

Part 1: Donna W, Area 15 alternate delegate

For many years, guidelines for hosting Florida State Conventions have existed for the primary purpose of assisting convention committees host conventions that are successful in every way – smooth in the planning, enjoyable for convention attendees, and free of the type of financial challenges that can plague any project run by volunteers that involves large sums of money.

The Florida State Convention Joint Advisory Committee recently identified the need to review the existing guidelines and make updates based on observations of the 68th Florida State Convention committee. Florida State Convention committee chairperson Allen C and his team identified a number of opportunities for improvement that they felt would be especially helpful to committees that are new to hosting a Florida State Convention and shared these improvements with the full Joint Advisory Committee.

Rita H, treasurer of the 67th Florida State Convention, stepped up and offered to create an improved set of guidelines based on the suggestions of the 68th Florida State Convention committee. The Joint Advisory Committee is reviewing Rita's draft and has set a goal to complete the guidelines update by the end of this year, when six of the 10 members will be rotating from the committee. What Allen and I will be offering you today is an overview of those updated guidelines.

I will begin with the Introduction to the updated guidelines:

These guidelines bring together the established processes of the multi-year bid timeline of the Florida State Convention to provide a unified, streamlined, and comprehensive overview for planning, bidding, organizing, and executing a Florida State Convention. The purpose of the guidelines is to ensure consistency, professionalism, and continuity from year to year while offering committees a clear operational framework.

We frequently hear A.A. members say we shouldn't be organized, but whenever I hear that, particularly when the project at hand has many moving parts and a considerable monetary investment, my mind always goes to the long form of the tradition that deals with this subject, Tradition Nine: "Each A.A. group needs the *least* possible organization."

From the introduction, we move into Section 1, Purpose and Philosophy of the Convention. It's always important to understand the "why" of a project before we start talking about the "how" of the project, and that's what this section helps us with.

We read that the Florida State Convention has several goals:

- To strengthen unity and fellowship among members
- To provide opportunities for education, inspiration and service
- To offer a coordinated event featuring speakers, workshops, meetings and entertainment
- To allow broader participation, access to diverse speakers, and a weekend-long experience that local groups or districts cannot easily provide

Having established the reason we have guidelines, and having shared the goals of Florida State Conventions, the guidelines document moves on to the governance structure of Florida State Conventions. This is the part where our eyes may start to glaze over, but understanding the underlying mechanism that provides oversight of conventions is crucial for anyone embarking on hosting a convention. Skipping over this part would be the equivalent of someone driving a car without being familiar with the rules of the road; a collision is almost guaranteed.

The guidelines tell us that there is more than one oversight committee for Florida State Conventions. The larger, umbrella oversight body is the Florida State Convention Joint Advisory Committee, which, in the big picture, exists to carry forward organizational knowledge and maintain continuity from one convention to the next.

The guidelines spell out a few more specific responsibilities of the Joint Advisory Committee:

- The committee reviews bid packets, including hotel contracts, of those interested in hosting a Florida State Convention
- Maintains consistent standards for all conventions
- Provides guidance to each year's planning committee

A big part of the Joint Advisory Committee's responsibility is financial oversight for Florida State Conventions. The JAC reviews, at frequent intervals, projected costs, actual costs, and other financial reports to ensure that the convention will be fiscally successful.

The Florida State Convention Joint Advisory Committee meets four times a year, in late January or early February; in May; in August; and in November. Membership of the Joint Advisory Committee changes every year in keeping with the spirit of rotation. Members of the Joint Advisory Committee include the chair of the most recently concluded Florida State Convention, who serves as chairperson; the treasurer of the most recently concluded convention; the current convention chair and treasurer; the chair and treasurer of the next convention; the alternate delegates from North Florida Area 14 and South Florida Area 15; and two additional committee members with state convention committee experience appointed by the two alternate delegates.

There is a second layer of oversight which comes from each of the two areas. North Florida Area 14 has what it calls the State Convention Oversight Committee. South Florida Area 15 has the Area 15 State Convention Committee.

The area committees serve as what I like to call the entry point for those who want to host a Florida State Convention. Their first stop is one of these two committees. Those interested in hosting a state convention within the geographic boundary of North Florida Area 14 must bring a completed bid packet, including a hotel contract, to the North Florida Area 14 Oversight Committee meeting at the January assembly two years prior to the year they want to host. Those interested in hosting a state convention within the geographic boundary of South Florida Area 15 must bring a completed bid packet, including a hotel contract, to the Area 15 State Convention Committee meeting at the January assembly two years prior to the year they want to host.

Each committee has specific responsibilities in addition to reviewing bid packets for conventions held within their geographic boundaries, such as:

- Providing oversight of the legal and financial activities of the Florida State Convention
- Receiving and monitoring profit and loss/budget vs. actual financial statements of the local hosting committee
- Ensuring that the convention remains self-supporting, utilizing the existing 501(c)(3) and the Joint Advisory Committee
- Receiving full disclosure of minutes and/or treasury information as requested
- Coordinating with the Joint Advisory Committee on defining and managing the site selection process for Florida State Conventions
- Cooperating in setting the Joint Advisory Committee reserve fund level, periodically reviewing it for possible revision
- Receiving the final report at the conclusion of the convention

Moving on to what probably is the most practical information for Florida State Convention committee hopefuls, the guidelines include a multi-year timeline for activities connected with conventions, from the point where bid committees form until after the convention has concluded. The starting point can be as much as three years out from the convention, when bid committees begin gathering information, including options for convention hotels.

The timeline includes early checkpoints where potential convention committees present to the oversight committees, receive recommendations, and then report back to the oversight committees to report their progress. A key moment on the timeline comes a little more than two years out from the convention, when the Joint Advisory Committee is responsible for giving the green light for the bid committees to present at what is called a “site selection” meeting at that year’s Florida State Convention.

While the JAC and area committees have been guiding the bid committees, it’s actually the registrants of the convention two years out who select which bid committee will get to host. If there is only one bid committee in the running, there still is a site selection meeting at the convention where convention registrants affirm or deny the lone bid committee.

Things heat up for a bid committee once it's been approved by convention attendees. The word "bid" is removed, replaced by "host." The committee opens a bank account, accepts seed money from the JAC, and starts recruiting volunteers. Important points along the timeline over the next two years include developing a program with speakers and workshops, designing entertainment and sports activities, creating promotional materials, registering attendees, and of course continuing to meet with the Joint Advisory Committee and the appropriate area oversight committee for guidance.

A Florida State Convention committee's work is not over when the convention concludes. The timeline lists additional duties post-convention, such as submitting a final report to the oversight committees. Of course it is always hoped that those who participated in a convention that has just concluded will make themselves available to help the committee working on the next convention.

Because hosting a Florida State Convention carries a huge financial responsibility, the guidelines include a section on finances. This section discusses budgeting, explaining how the committee chair and treasurer work together to prepare an initial budget; and reporting requirements, which explain what the committee needs to prepare for oversight committee meetings as well as what will be expected as an accounting at the end of the convention.

We're going to move now into Part 2 of the presentation, where Allen will cover sections of the guidelines concerning convention organization and convention practices including the convention website. Included in Part 2 will be real-life scenarios drawn from the experience of the 68th Florida State Convention.

Part 2: Allen C, chair, 68th Florida State Convention

The guidelines for hosting Florida State Conventions name four formal leadership roles: the chairperson, the co-chairperson, the secretary, and the treasurer. These positions comprise the legal/organizational make up of a convention. Every convention needs at least these four people, each of whom has a defined authority.

But the list of who "leads" the convention usually grows once the convention gets under way. The core members of the 68th Florida State Convention increased to seven people: the chairperson, the co-chairperson, the treasurer, the hotel liaison, the data chair, the program chair, and the registration chair.

This is a good example of why a convention committee will want to go beyond what the guidelines call for. Four "leaders" are the minimum needed, but each convention can assign positions and responsibility as it sees fit. For example, negotiating a hotel contract, which includes setting room blocks, suite terms and rate changes, should not be a side task within a committee. Establishing a hotel liaison as a leadership position ensures that the important tasks that relate to this position will receive the attention they require. You don't want to wait until contract problems arise to nail down this important role.

If convention registration is going to run through more than one platform or payment system, it's a good idea to assign a data chair who will reconcile the numbers early and often, not just at the end of the convention when it's difficult to address mistakes. Assigning a dedicated registration chair and program chair is also smart. These are huge jobs requiring attention to detail as well as accountability and follow-through.

These additional chairpersons should be in the room for all convention decisions rather than simply bringing a report to the committee. The work product of each of them impacts every aspect of the convention, so they need to be included in all convention conversations.

Bottom line, from the start, figure out where the real risk and workload lie for your convention and build your leadership team around that. Don't just copy what the convention before you established.

Once you have your leadership team, you can begin forming subcommittees. Again, do what works best for your specific convention. While the guidelines suggest 13 subcommittees, you are not required to have that many, nor are you limited to that number. The 68th Florida State Convention created roughly 40 distinct chair and co-chair positions for subcommittees, which looked like this:

- Program and Content subcommittee: chair, co-chair, Grapevine, entertainment, decorations
- Registration and Data subcommittee: chair, co-chair, data chair
- Hotel and On-Site Operations: hotel liaison, security, foyer coordinator
- Hospitality and Guest Experience: chair, co-chair, greeters, coffee liaison, banquet chair, banquet co-chair, AI-Anon liaison
- Inclusion and Special Interest Meetings: accessibilities, Spanish language, YPAA, LGBTQ, oldtimers, marathon meetings
- Fundraising and Signature Events: merchandise, scholarships, golf, 5K
- Administrative and Support: secretary, archives, volunteers, activities, voice of the convention, host chair, outreach, website

Here is one point worth considering when you're organizing your human resources. Two subcommittees, Workshops and Display and Signage, are named in the guidelines, but neither has its own chair on the actual roster. Responsibility for workshops, for example, is folded into the duties of the Program subcommittee.

This is a useful thing to point out because it reveals something important to remember. If a duty in the guidelines doesn't have a name next to it on your convention roster, it's probably living inside a role that doesn't sound related. Don't assume a missing title means a missing responsibility. Go find out where the responsibility lives and make sure you assign someone to it.

And while we're on the subject of flexibility and doing what's best for your particular convention, the guidelines name a Logistics subcommittee that's responsible for hotel/venue communication, room set-up and audiovisual. The 68th Florida State Convention did not have a subcommittee with this name because the functions associated with it lived primarily with the hotel liaison, with the physical/on-site pieces split across Security, Decorations, and the Foyer Coordinator.

One crucial element of hosting a Florida State Convention is how to pick your team. What "hard" and "soft" skills should the members have? This information is not included in the current guidelines, but perhaps it should be. Here are some lessons learned from the 68th Florida State Convention committee, organized by position:

- **Convention co-chair**
The committee will want to choose someone who can be trusted to operate without needing to be managed, someone with proven service experience, who follows through on commitments and who goes the extra mile rather than just doing the minimum. The convention co-chair needs to be knowledgeable enough and ready, willing and able to step into the role of the chair at a moment's notice if the chair becomes unable to serve.
- **Convention treasurer**
Vet candidates for this position hard. It's not enough for someone to be familiar with a home group, district, or even an area budget. A Florida State Convention budget is an entirely different animal. You will need someone who understands QuickBooks, the Joint Advisory Committee's specification for an accounting system. You need someone who understands real-life accounting practices, budgeting and budget forecasting, because a Florida State Convention *is real life*. A skills gap here becomes a big problem very quickly. The treasurer is responsible for tracking the full financial operation for a multi-day, statewide event, that takes years to plan. Yes, a treasurer who doesn't pan out can be replaced in mid-stream, but it won't be necessary if you choose wisely from the start.
- **Convention secretary**
The secretary attends every convention planning meeting, creates meeting minutes, shares them with committee members, and sends reminders for all important dates. Above all, the secretary manages deadlines. This is what keeps everyone on schedule. A convention secretary must have excellent attention to detail and a commitment to good orderly direction.
- **Program chair**
The program chair builds the speakers and workshops. You need someone inventive who can use their imagination rather than just copying what a past convention did. The program chair should have a wide network of candidates to choose from so they can identify individuals capable of presenting material in an engaging way. The program chair must have a good ear for talent when it comes to booking "circuit speakers."

Building the workshop track and knowing what makes an engaging speaker are two different skills; the program chair must have both.

- **Hotel liaison**
The hotel liaison coordinates the hotel room block, works directly with the hotel on room setups, and manages the guest room waitlist. Anything and everything that involves logistics with the hotel runs through this person. It is the single point of contact, so the hotel isn't getting conflicting requests from multiple committee members.
- **Registration chair**
The registration chair builds the registration packages and handles badge printing, working hand in hand with the data chair. Registration and data are two sides of the same coin: registration executes on the front end and data keeps the numbers straight.
- **Data chair**
As the name implies, the data chair manages all registration data – banquets, merchandise, supplies, all of it. The data chair reports to all the committees and maintains accuracy. A good data chair ensures the trustworthiness of all other committees' numbers. If the data chair's numbers are off, banquet headcount will be off, merchandise orders will be muddled, and everyone downstream will be working from bad information.
- **Website chair**
The website chair manages the event's digital presence, oversees the design and maintenance of the convention website, and ensures that all posted information including schedules and speaker line-ups is accurate. This individual must be familiar with A.A. tradition regarding public anonymity.

Now that we've taken an up-close look at convention organization, let's take a step back and look at what the guidelines have to say about convention practices, beginning with registration policies. Here is what we find:

- The convention is funded by registrations only. There is no fundraising.
- Offering scholarships to defray the cost of registration is optional. Each Florida State Convention committee decides whether to offer them and how to do it.
- Registration lists never leave the committee. They are not shared externally, even within the Fellowship, nor are they sold or internally or externally.

Here is why it matters to say this out loud: If someone asks, "Can we allow a sponsor to cover the 5K?" or "Can we share the attendee list with a vendor?" the answer (NO) is found in this policy. It's crucial to remember that registration data is the financial and privacy backbone of the whole event.

The guidelines have this to say about merchandise and vendors:

- No outside merchandise vendors are permitted to sell at a Florida State Convention.
- Each convention contracts with an audio company. Only that company can sell recordings of speakers.

Here is why this matters: It keeps the convention's own merchandise table as the only game in the room, which protects both the monetary interests of the committee and the integrity of what's being sold, particularly speaker recordings.

The guidelines include this information on convention websites:

- No external links on the convention site are allowed except to the area website or a clearly marked host hotel.
- Registrant data must be protected at every step — from collection through export.
- Online payments must never store credit card data.

These are not random IT rules. They're what stands between a convention and a liability problem if registrant or payment data get mishandled.

We heard earlier about oversight of Florida State Conventions and how it lives within the individual Area 14 and Area 15 state convention committees as well as the umbrella Joint Advisory Committee. Along with the guidelines for conventions, the Joint Advisory Committee maintains a document that is a wealth of information for convention committees.

Called the “Record of Resolutions,” it is a compilation of every decision the JAC has discussed and approved going back decades, organized by category such as bylaws, membership, finance, website, bid packet and prudent reserve. It is strongly recommended that any bid committee interested in hosting a Florida State Convention review this document sooner rather than later and determine if it is willing and able to follow what the Joint Advisory Committee advises based on years of involvement with Florida State Conventions.

It's impossible to catalog everything a committee needs to know in a set of guidelines, no matter how comprehensive. A lot of how committees operate and function — their “current practice” — exists because the members of the Joint Advisory Committee passed a motion about it at some point. The Record of Resolutions is where precedents for things like seed money amounts, website ownership, bank account signers and reimbursement rates live. If a committee wonders, “Why do we do it this way?” and they can't find the answer in the guidelines, they probably can find it in the JAC's Record of Resolutions.