



UNICON Conference Hosting Playbook

UNICON Conference Committee

What We Do

The Conference Committee maintains a pipeline of potential host schools and supports them in the planning and execution of relevant and high-quality conferences.



Why We Do It

- Share industry best practices
- Discuss current issues affecting the industry
- Build relationships to expand network and promote collaboration
- Support Conference Registrations
- Suggest Conference Locations



Who We Are



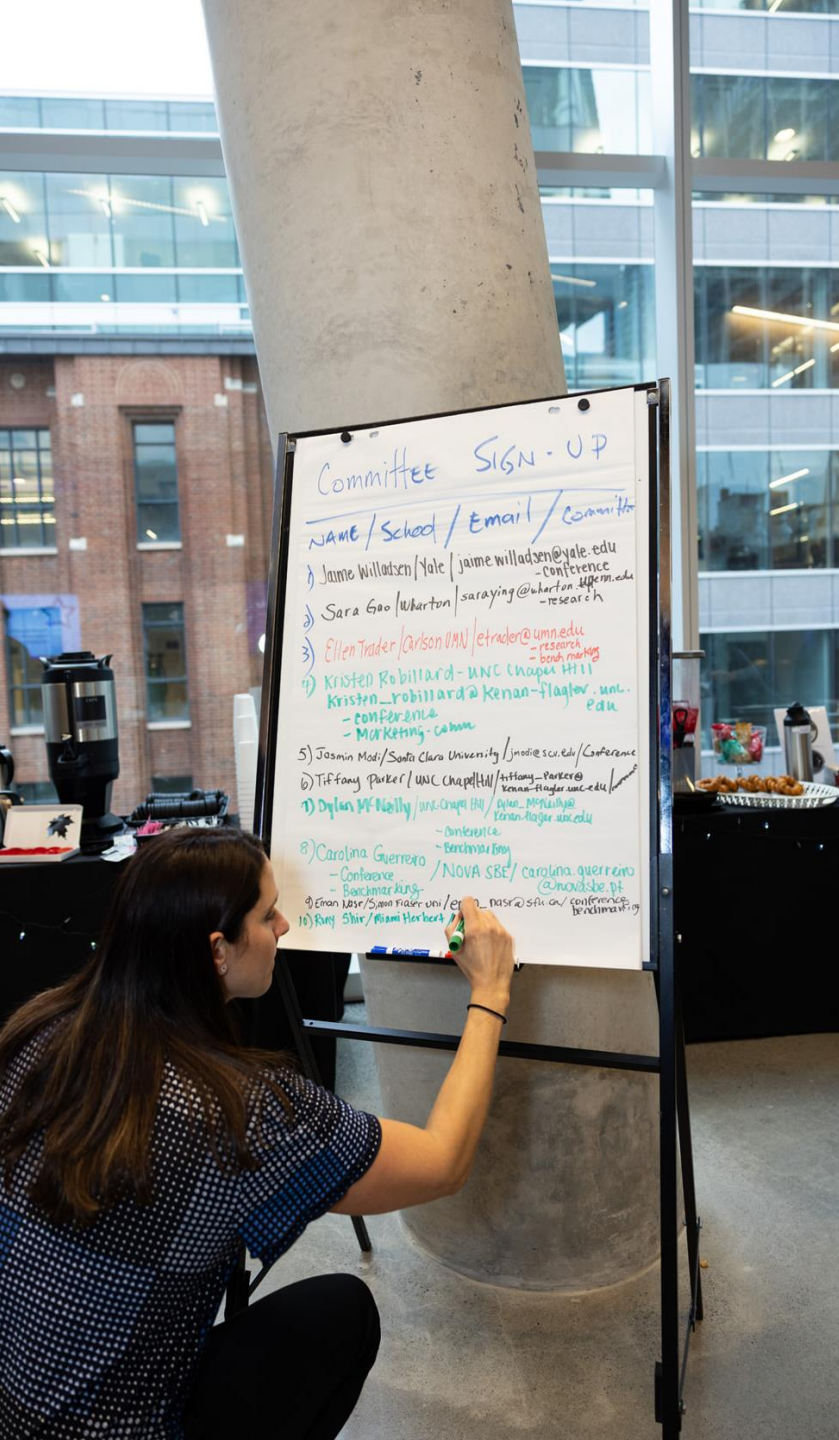
**Dennis
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(Co-chair,
2024-2025)



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Committee Members:

- Mohammed Abdel Salam
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- Michelle Vaillancourt
- Pam Williams
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Serving on the Committee

Serving on the Conference Committee allows members to influence the location and content of our conferences and to serve as champions in supporting attendance and participation.

Recognizing that the creation of large-scale conferences is what we do professionally, working closely with the planning and execution of UNICON's conferences gives committee members the opportunity to expand their networks, share best practices, and promote collaboration.

Representatives of schools who hosted and will host conferences are included as members of the UNICON Conference Committee.

If hosting a conference in the next 2 years each host school designates a representative to serve on the committee upon full approval to host a UNICON conference and a past host school's representative will serve as a mentor to future hosts for one year after their conference.



Benefits of Hosting Conferences

UNICON conferences are central to the purpose of our organization. These conferences promote knowledge of our evolving industry and collaboration amongst our members. Each conference is a unique opportunity for member schools to:



Highlight the uniqueness of their executive education operation, as well as their local and regional landscape



Raise the visibility of their institution within the member community



Showcase integral faculty and partners of their executive education operation



Support UNICON by convening members for learning and engagement that benefits the entire member community



Diversity and Inclusion

Ensuring diversity and inclusion is central to the success of any UNICON conference.

Host schools are encouraged to design an event that reflects a range of perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences.

When selecting speakers, panelists, and facilitators, the host school should aim for diverse representation in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and geographical region, ensuring inclusivity in both speakers and content.

Additionally, participants should feel welcomed and included throughout the event, which can be fostered through inclusive networking opportunities, breakout sessions, and social events.

Best Practices:

- ✓ Ensure that conference content and discussions cover topics relevant to diversity and inclusion in executive education.
- ✓ Actively encourage schools and participants from underrepresented regions or demographics to attend and present.
- ✓ Consider accessibility needs in all physical and virtual spaces, including language services, mobility accommodations, and sensory needs.





UNICON's Annual Conferences



Directors' Conference

- Usually held annually in late March through end of May
- This **three-day conference** is for heads of executive education at member schools and typically ranges from **50 to 80 participants**.
- Typically held outside of the United States.
- US-based host schools every 3 to 4 years.





Annual Workshop

- Generally held annually in July
- This 1 to 1 ½ day themed workshop focuses on specific issues and latest research/trends that affect our industry and typically ranges from 50 to 80 participants.
- This annual workshop can have a **commercial, operational, or methodological perspective** and is designed for varying segments of ExecEd staff depending on the theme.
- Because of the short length of this event (traditionally one day), it can be offered in either **virtual, in-person, or hybrid** design modalities.





Team Development Conference

- Held annually in late November/early December (with preference to be held after the United States Thanksgiving holiday)
- This three-day conference is the largest of the three annual conferences and typically ranges from 150 to 250 participants.
- It is open to all executive education program staff at all member schools and is an opportunity for members to send multiple individuals with different responsibilities to a global conference.
- The TDC is meant to be development-oriented and focused on individual roles – functional, demographic, interest, etc.
- More often held in the United States, with non-US schools hosting every 3-4 years.

Risk Management / Contingency Planning

Risk management and contingency planning are critical components of conference planning.

The host school should proactively develop a risk management strategy that addresses potential financial, logistical, and operational risks.

This includes having contingency plans for:

- speaker cancellations
- travel disruptions
- technological failures (for hybrid or virtual events)
- health and safety concerns

Key Steps:

- ✓ Secure appropriate insurance for the event, including coverage for event cancellations or unexpected changes.
- ✓ Have backup speakers, facilitators, or virtual content readily available in case of speaker no-shows.
- ✓ Develop emergency plans for health and safety issues, including a COVID-19 contingency.
- ✓ Ensure a strong relationship with vendors and venues to handle last-minute changes efficiently.

Sustainability / Green Initiatives

UNICON encourages host schools to incorporate sustainability into conference planning. This can range from reducing waste, sourcing local and sustainable food options, minimizing travel emissions by offering virtual or hybrid formats, and encouraging sustainable practices among attendees.

Ideas for Sustainable Practices:

- ✓ Use **digital materials** over printed ones whenever possible.
- ✓ Select **venues that prioritize green practices**, such as energy-efficient buildings and waste reduction systems.
- ✓ **Provide attendees with reusable items**, such as water bottles or tote bags, instead of single-use plastics.
- ✓ **Consider contributions to a local cause/charity** instead of purchasing branded gifts for attendees.
- ✓ **Promote local transportation options, walking, or ride-sharing** to reduce the conference's carbon footprint.



Host School Selection

Global representation of our membership is critical in selecting host schools for UNICON conferences.

- The Conference Committee looks for schools who can expand the thinking of our executive education profession and highlight the unique characteristics of their executive education model.
- **Host school pipeline development is typically 3 to 5 years out.** Member schools, working with the Conference Committee, make a proposal to host a conference that will be considered for approval by the UNICON board of directors.
- Once approved, the host school will receive communication from UNICON administration confirming approval from the UNICON board. The host school must then submit a [letter from the dean](#) of the school to UNICON administration confirming support to host the conference and sign the conference hosting agreement.
- The host school team can then proceed with conference planning. Host schools are highly encouraged to read the Conference section of the [UNICON Policy Guide](#) posted on the UNICON website.
- Member schools should attempt to **secure approval to host a conference approximately 2 to 3 years in advance** of the desired conference date. This will ensure that they have plenty of time for conference approval as well as planning and execution.
- The key contacts for the host school will be designated members of the UNICON Conference Committee as well as UNICON staff.



Pre-Conference Planning Timeline

Below is a rough timeline of activities involved in the planning process.

This timeline is a guide for thinking about the planning process and can be adapted per the context of each conference, as needed.

12 Months Before

- Regular meetings with host school, Conference Committee, and UNICON staff begin
 - Note: Meeting cadence is at least monthly until the conference is approximately 2 months out then weekly check-in meetings should be scheduled.
- Determine conference theme, agenda, activities, accommodations, etc.
- Begin budget planning
 - Conferences help to support the annual operating budget of UNICON. We ask that host schools plan for a worst-case scenario budget of break-even, and ideally plan for a 10% net surplus target. If the conference creates a surplus, it is not retained by the host school and is returned to UNICON.
 - Break evens are typically estimated at 50 attendees for both the Directors Conference and the Annual Workshop, and 150 attendees for the Team Development Conference

9 Months Before

- Submit [Draft Budget](#) to UNICON administration
- Create conference website and marketing assets and draft marketing timeline
 - Digital banner
 - Save the date
 - Email campaign
 - Social media event coverage plan
 - Identify other thought-leadership / future content opportunities (e.g., interviews with panelists, speakers, members) – when possible, it is useful to have a “quiet room” reserved for this at every conference

6 Months Before

- Submit Final Budget to UNICON administration
- Website goes live and early bird registration opens
 - Note: early bird pricing is at the discretion of the host school based on forecasted budget
- Marketing and recruitment begins
 - Two weeks prior to early bird registration ending, request UNICON Board support to help contact member schools who have not registered
- Recruitment of speakers, panelists, and session facilitators begins
- Begin setting up the Whova conference app

3 Months Before

- Early bird registration ends and regular registration begins
- Finalize speakers and conference logistics and operations
- Whova conference app goes live to participants registered
- Provide regular registration updates to UNICON administration and Conference Committee



Pre-Conference UNICON Board Meetings

- Prior to the start of each conference the UNICON Board of Directors meets for a full day the immediate day prior to the first day of the meeting.
- It is the responsibility of the host school to provide a meeting room, in a boardroom set up, for 12 people. In addition, the host school should arrange for food and beverages for the day meeting.
- UNICON staff may also ask for assistance in planning a Board, and Board alumni, dinner the evening of the Board meeting.



Conference Structure

Up to 6 hours of content per day, leaving time for meals and breaks

Session recommendations:

- Showcase **uniqueness of your school** operation and regional market
- Include content that is relevant to **global industry/hot topics**
- Showcase a variety of valuable perspectives: your school **faculty/speaker networks, exec ed industry leaders, clients/program buyers, competitors**
- **Plenary sessions:** all conference attendees attend these sessions
- **Concurrent session:** attendees can be broken into small groups to discuss different topics
- **Breakouts:** small group facilitates discussion
- **Workshop activities:** allow participants to reflect and apply insights to their own context and to walk away with useful tools for themselves and their organizations
- Think about the **flow of the conference** and introduce concepts in an intentional order to crystallize learning
- **Modality:** Decide how the conference or modules will be delivered; Options are In-person, Virtual and/or Hybrid



Mandatory Sessions to Include in Agenda

- **Antitrust policy presentation** must happen as a part of the kick-off/welcome session of all UNICON conferences.
 - It must be delivered either by the UNICON Executive Director or UNICON Board Chair
 - Includes presentation of the antitrust policy summary slide
 - Share concrete examples of what discussion is prohibited under the policy
- A **“Newcomers” session** should be offered at every conference.
 - This will be hosted/facilitated by UNICON Board representatives.
 - It is typically offered pre-conference
- At the **Team Development Conference**, time should be built into the agenda to include a session for the UNICON Benchmarking Committee to share results of the **annual benchmarking survey**.
- Many host schools offer **campus tours** as an option pre, or post, conference.
- **Cultural immersions** - showcase your city/culture/history
- **Networking opportunities:** this is an incredibly critical function of all conferences. Think carefully about how to use the conference to cultivate industry network(s)
- **Free time:** it’s very important to allow people an opportunity to spend time on their own if you can build this into the conference design
- **Fun/interactive activities**
- **Local recommendations** for before or after conference
- Think about aligning your conference to current **industry-relevant research**
- **Preference to use the Whova** conferencing mobile application for ease of the conference experience for participants

Conference App (Whova) Integration

To enhance attendee engagement and streamline logistics, host schools are requested to use the Whova app. This tool helps manage the event efficiently and improves the overall attendee experience.

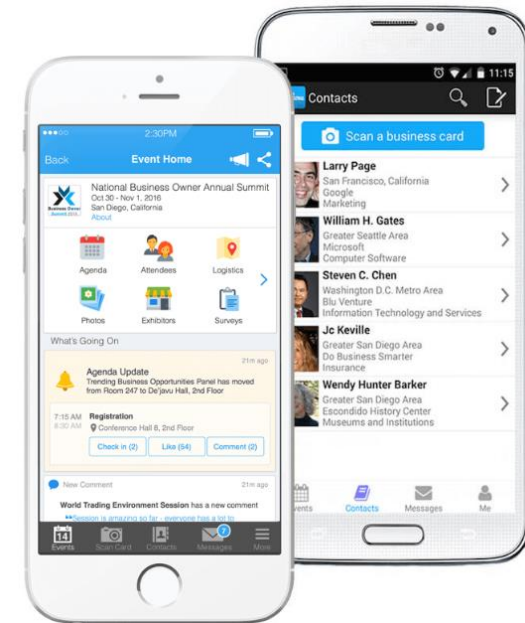
Key Features

- **Agenda:** Attendees can view and customize their schedules, access session details, speaker bios, and venue maps.
- **Networking:** Facilitates connections between members through private messaging and networking boards.
- **Real-Time Engagement:** Supports live polling, pulse evaluations, Q&A, and push notifications to keep attendees informed and engaged.
- **Paperless Conference:** Reduces the need for printed materials by offering a digital platform for all event content.

Implementation Steps

1. **Setup:** Upload conference details (agenda, speaker bios, etc.) to Whova three months prior.
2. **Marketing:** Promote the app in pre-conference communications and provide instructions for download.
3. **Pre-Conference Engagement:** Encourage profile creation and networking.
4. **During the Conference:** Use push notifications for updates, live polling/Q&A for session engagement and pulse evaluations following each session.
5. **Post-Conference:** Share materials and surveys through the app and keep networking channels open.

Using Whova streamlines the conference experience, enhances member interaction, and supports sustainability.



Tech Support and Virtual Options

- If a host school will be delivering a hybrid or virtual event, they should **plan for comprehensive tech support**.
- This includes **budgeting for reliable video conferencing platforms**, **hiring trained IT staff**, and considering how to deliver an equally engaging experience for online participants.

Considerations:

- Include a **line item in the budget for technology infrastructure and support**.
- Ensure **dedicated tech support** is available during the conference to address any issues promptly.
- Design **virtual breakout sessions, networking opportunities**, and other engagement tools that mirror the in-person experience.
- **Test all technology platforms** well in advance, including video conferencing tools, mobile apps, and collaboration platforms.





Selecting speakers, panelists, and facilitators

- Select speakers, presenters, and facilitators from both your institution and network along with the Conference Committee, UNICON Board and members of the UNICON member community.
- Source **speakers who do not require a fee** (speaker fees are not allowed in the conference budget, however, the host school can choose to pay them on their own without including it as a line item in the budget).
- **Speaker travel is not covered** in the conference budget unless approved by the Conference Committee Co-chairs and UNICON Executive Director.
- UNICON administration and Conference Committee members can help the host school to identify individuals, as needed

Accommodations

- Host schools typically secure hotel options at **discounted rates** for conference attendees to help reduce the cost of attendance.
- To mitigate financial risk associated with hosting the conference, it is **not advised to contract with hotels for volume room blocks**, if avoidable.
- It is important to **not bundle hotel or accommodation costs with the registration fee**.
- If the host school has appropriate **executive housing facilities**, we would **prefer this option be offered to conference attendees**.



Participant Engagement Pre/Post Conferences

Engaging participants before and after the conference maximizes the value of the event and fosters long-term relationships.

Prior to the event, host schools can engage participants through teaser content, social media, and networking tools.

After the event, maintaining engagement through follow-up discussions and access to materials helps extend the learning experience.

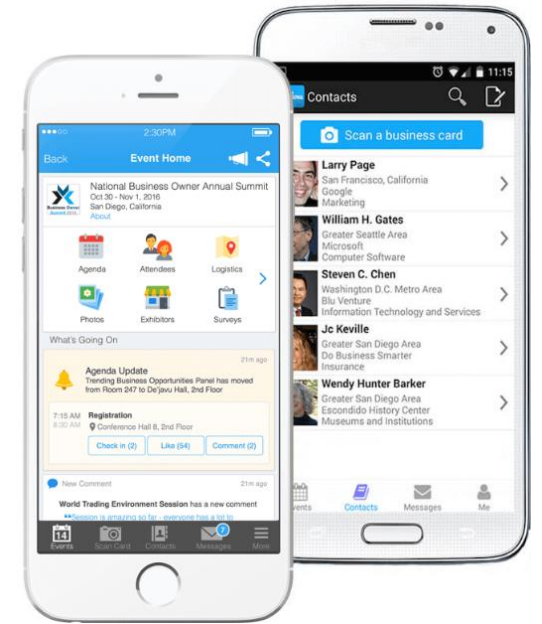
Engagement Ideas

Pre-Conference

- Provide participants with **pre-conference reading materials or videos** via the Whova conference **app** to set the stage for discussions.
- **Encourage attendees to introduce themselves**, network, and share ideas via the Whova conference app.
- Send out **pre-event surveys** via the Whova conference app to gather participant expectations or areas of interest.

Post Conference

- **Share a structured discussion guide**, allowing attendees to host small group discussions at their schools or organizations or utilize UNICON Coffee Groups for further discussion.
- Provide a **digital repository** where participants can access **presentations, case studies, and additional resources**.
- Schedule **post-conference webinars or workshops** to reinforce key lessons and engage attendees who could not join live sessions.





Gifts

Gifts for participants are standard for UNICON conferences and should be included in the budget. Gifts for speakers, panelists, and facilitators are optional and can also be included in the conference budget.

All gifts should be branded with the UNICON logo or co-branded with the UNICON logo along with the logo of the host school. Any gifts which do not include the UNICON logo cannot be included in the budget.

Use this [Budget Template](#) for planning purposes (click to open)

- The following items are not allowed as a part of the conference budget. Schools can discuss special exceptions to these items with the Conference Committee Chairs.
 - Speaker/panelists/facilitator fees and travel
 - Outside events management companies
 - Staff time
- It is important to do scenario analysis to determine the per person fee for the conference
 - Generate budget drafts at breakeven with up to 10% surplus (given worst and best case scenarios)
 - Consider early-bird registration vs. full proceeds registration
 - Consider previous conference fees and registration levels
 - Consider applicable taxes (add these to the fee separately)

Registration

- **Pricing information** – the host school will work with the Conference Committee to establish pricing that will support the planned agenda, activities and conference budget
- **Registration and ecommerce portal is hosted by school**
- **Cancellation and refund policies are set by the host school in collaboration with the conference committee and UNICON administration.** Exceptions to these policies are reviewed and decided by the Conference Committee.





Marketing and Communications Timeline for UNICON Conferences

12-5 Months Before

COMMS AND TASKS	12 Months	10-12 Months	7 Months	6 Months	5 Months
Announce the conference location, dates, and host school during current conference.	UNICON + Host School joint announcement				
Distribute a "Save the Date" announcement via newsletters and social media.		UNICON to draft and send			
Launch the official conference webpage the conference theme, high-level agenda and school.			Host School to send webpage link to UNICON to feature on its website		
Email introducing the conference theme with targeted emails to prime reps, previous conference attendees, etc.				Host School (copy) + UNICON (email send)	
Open early-bird registration with emails emphasizing cost savings, a sample agenda with daily theme and key sessions.				Host School responsible for content/web, UNICON sends email/social posts	
Set up thank you emails for conference registrations.				Host School to lead	
UNICON to highlight past conference success stories in newsletters and on social media.					UNICON to draft and share
Blogs/videos featuring confirmed keynote speakers, and/or the School's Dean/Associate Dean, teams					Host School sends content, UNICON posts email/social/blog
Highlight unique aspects of the host city via a brochure or the conference website, with a mini-guide of local restaurants, attractions, useful language tips, etc					



4 Months-3 Weeks Before

COMMS AND TASKS	4 Months	3 Months	1 Month	3 Weeks
Full agenda (with speaker bios, times, and session descriptions via email incl. campus tour and newcomers session)	Host School sends content and updates web, UNICON posts on social/email/blog			
Social posts about conference highlights (e.g., cultural immersions and local tips). Feature in monthly newsletters.	Host School sends content and updates web, UNICON posts on social/email/blog			
Send countdown emails / social posts: "5 reasons to attend," "Speaker Spotlights", before closing the Early Bird.		Host School sends content and updates web, UNICON posts on social/email/blog		
Share testimonials from past attendees on social media and in emails.		UNICON to draft and send		
Share the finalized agenda with each session description, and any last-minute tips for attendees.		Host School sends content and updates web, UNICON posts on social/email/blog		
Deploy "Last Chance to Register" emails emphasizing limited spots.			UNICON to draft and send	
Add the relevant event hashtag to slides, banners, and badges #UNICONDIRECTORS / #UNICONTDC			Host School to lead	
Email with key details: Conference start and ending exact times, location, how to get there, Accommodation info / shuttle booking (if needed), Conference Hashtag reminder, Dress code / party themes (if any), Wi-Fi information on campus, Conference hashtag, Full agenda (downloadable PDF), Whova access info			Host School (copy) + UNICON (email send)	
Arrange bi-weekly stand-up check-in meetings with UNICON Marketing Director for final comms / key actions (TDC only)				UNICON + Host School
Create a live spreadsheet (e.g. on Google Drive) with conference attendees for a live mailing list, with the attendee registration date control				Host School to lead



Final Weeks

COMMS AND TASKS

	2 Weeks	1 Weeks	Day Before	During the Conference	Conference Closing / Post
Arrange a meeting with the photographer / videographer and UNICON Marketing Director to coordinate photo and video sharing (top 20 pics provided at the end of each day, an immediate open group shot). For TDC, if possible, provide a wrap-up conference video.	Host School to lead				
Email reminder to attendees with important details shared 3 weeks before		UNICON to draft and send			
If possible, book the photographer for 1 hour the day before (e.g. for board meetings, Leadership Academy) - optional			Host School to lead		
Host school photographer to provide a group photo immediately (if possible) to UNICON Marketing Director for posting as soon as the conference begins				Host School to lead	
UNICON to post daily photo highlights and capture attendee testimonials for social channels.				UNICON to draft and send	
Host school and speakers to encourage attendee-generated content using the conference hashtag.				Host School to lead	
If producing a wrap-up conference video, host school to share with UNICON Marketing Director as soon as it's shown, for live posting on social				Host School sends content and updates web, UNICON posts on social	
UNICON to post thank-you messages and follow-up videos on social media.					UNICON to draft and send
UNICON to publish a recap email with links to videos, the full album and NPS link (on the day – 3 days post conference)					Host School to provide NPS ans album link, UNICON sends email
- If available, UNICON to share a downloadable write-up summarizing key takeaways, usually produced by IEDP - Continue to share thought-leadership post-Conference (ongoing)					UNICON to draft and send

- **School builds website** which will link from the UNICON website
- **The website should include the following information/sections:**
 - **Agenda/schedule** including the starting date/time and ending date/time of the conference
 - Information about **visa requirements** and visa letters
 - **Refund policy**
 - **Airport and transportation** information
 - **Things to do** in area
 - Whom to **contact for questions**
 - **Security Statement:** “UNICON does not provide its mailing list to outside parties. Should you or anyone on your team receive an email suggesting you can purchase such a list, be assured that it is a phishing message. Do not open the email or any attachment or link in the email and delete the email immediately.
 - **Registration Link**

Digital and Print Assets



- The host school designs conference marketing assets and abides by UNICON marketing standards. School will work with UNICON administration to ensure brand alignment of all assets.
- UNICON brand guidelines can be found at: [UNICON Brand Guidelines](#)
- Assets include:
 - Website assets
 - Email banner
 - Save the date
 - Day-of-conference assets (i.e., signage, conference materials)



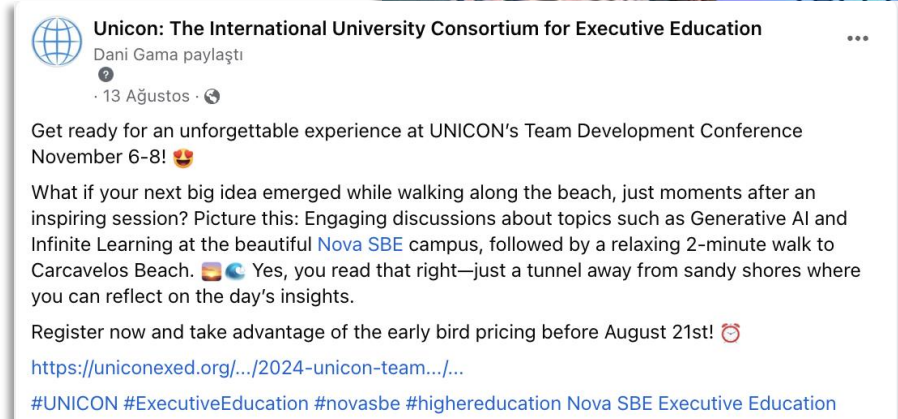
Email Campaign

UNICON Marketing Director will provide a calendar of emails and what assets are needed for each email.

Social Media

UNICON Marketing Director will create social media posts to promote the conference, and, when appropriate, work alongside the host school for collaborative posts.

In some instances, UNICON uses IEDP to produce a summary report of each conference. The host school and UNICON administration and Conference Committee will collaborate on this effort.



Customer Service / Staffing

Needs to host a UNICON Conference

Proper staffing and exceptional customer service are essential for a successful conference. It is recommended that the host school assign a dedicated conference coordinator to manage all aspects of planning and execution.

This individual should serve as the primary contact for the UNICON staff and Conference Committee to ensure all logistical details are handled professionally.

Staffing Needs:

- Designate a conference coordinator who oversees all aspects of the event, from registration to post-conference follow-up.
- Identify a team of customer service representatives or volunteers who can assist with participant inquiries, both in-person and online. Strive to respond to email/customer service inquiries within 24 hours or shorter.
- Ensure that sufficient staff is on hand to handle registration, room setup, and tech support during the event.

Recommended Roles

Needs to host a UNICON Conference

- **Conference Coordinator:** Central point of contact, responsible for overall management and coordination.
- **Registration Team:** Handles attendee check-ins, badge distribution, and registration inquiries.
- **Technical Support Team:** Manages AV equipment, handles any technical issues, and supports virtual attendees if applicable.
- **Hospitality Team:** Assists with accommodations, catering, and attendee comfort.
- **Marketing and Communications Team:** Manages on-site marketing materials, signage, and attendee communications.
- **Post-Conference Follow-Up Team:** Coordinates surveys, feedback collection, and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

Post Conference



UNICON - The International University Consortium for...

2,822 followers
6mo · Edited ·

Spoiler Alert! 📢 Some of the official #UniconDirectors conference photos have just become available! Take a sneak peek at the memorable moments and inspiring sessions. Conference highlight videos and the full album will ...more



95

5 comments



UNICON - The International University Consortium for..

2,822 followers
1mo · Edited ·

What an afternoon at #UNICONTDC! From an unexpected power drop ⚡ to us to an impromptu outdoor session 🌱 (shoutout to the amazing Nova Sci Business and Economics team for handling it so smoothly!) to gaining ...



156

13 comments · 3

- When possible, the conference photographer will provide UNICON with highlight photos/videos halfway through the event for social media purposes, with the rest delivered the day after the conference.
- On the last day of the conference, the host school will provide the UNICON [evaluation survey](#) to conference attendees. This survey is developed in collaboration with the Conference Committee.
- Within 2 months after the conference concludes, the host school submits a fully reconciled budget to UNICON administration and Conference Committee for review. After the reconciled budget is approved, if there is a conference surplus, the host school submits payment to UNICON. The host school will absorb any loss that occurs from a deficit.



Conference Evaluations


UNICON will collaborate with the Conference Committee on a plan for live and post-event communications, including event photos, videos, and highlight blog posts.

UNICON gathers timely and actionable feedback on conference sessions, logistics, and overall experience to drive continuous improvement and align with attendee expectations.

We utilize **two types of evaluations**: pulse evaluations for immediate session feedback and a final summary evaluation for comprehensive insights on the entire conference.

Please reference the UNICON [evaluation](#) strategy document for instructions and details.

Bom Dia UNICON Member!



Thank you for joining the 2024 UNICON Team Development Conference at Nova SBE in Carcavelos/Lisbon, Portugal, such an inspiring and memorable event!

Did You Have a Great Experience? How Valuable Did You Find It? 🌟 Post-Event Survey 🎉

We'd love to hear from you! Please take **2 minutes** to complete our [post-event survey](#). Your insights are invaluable in helping us improve future conferences, and all responses will remain anonymous. **Deadline:** November 15, 2024

[Complete Our Feedback Survey](#)



Thank You.