

NER EXECUTIVE HANDBOOK		
CONVENTION HANDBOOK		
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Welcome

Thank you for your interest in hosting a Northeastern Region convention. NER conventions provide for the exchange of knowledge and fellowship which is an important part of our hobby of Model Railroading. Conventions are the NER Region's most important education tool.

The convention process is a local division effort. The Region can offer help, advice and seed money, but it cannot organize or manage your convention. Many of our divisions have different local attractions and ideas of what to do. A successful convention depends on two things: the assets and resources the area has to offer and the skills of the local committee in identifying, organizing and promoting those assets and resources. The success of any endeavor like this depends on free and continuous communication within and between the local convention committee and the NER Convention Committee.

The NER Convention Committee staff has assembled this document to guide and support your efforts. This document is based on the experiences of over fifty years of NER conventions and provides a guide to a typical convention, but it cannot possibly cover every contingency. While most of our conventions follow this guideline, some very excellent conventions have broken with this traditional plan. Others have followed the plan, but have brought in new ideas, some of which are now part of the traditional plan. With the information in this manual and the help of the NER Convention Committee, you will be able to create a convention that will be enjoyed by the attendees. If you have new ideas for a convention in your area, discuss them with the NER Convention Committee. The features and programs of our conventions have evolved over time and new ideas and approaches are always welcome.

This document will guide you through the process of evaluating and choosing your assets and resources, presenting a proposal to the NER Board of Directors, planning your convention and executing a successful convention. There is a lot of information to digest in this document. You should read through the entire document and highlight or write down important information to familiarize you with all that is discussed here. Feel free to distribute copies to your committee members. Keep in mind that this manual is a suggested procedure and while it is strongly recommended, it is not hard and fast rule.

Purpose

Northeastern Region Conventions have a dual purpose.

1. Our principal purpose is to provide an educational venue whereby our members can increase their knowledge of the many aspects of model railroading. Conventions bring together region members, which creates an environment where a tremendous exchange of useful information can take place and also allows us to share the fellowship which is the cement that binds the NMRA, the Northeastern Region, and the hobby together. Convention participants attend to share their common interests, modeling techniques and collectively solve problems. Layout tours, modeling and technical clinics and operating sessions make up the core of this effort.
2. Our second purpose is to permit the members to gain knowledge related to the many prototypes on which the hobby of Model Railroading is based. This may include prototype rail clinics and operation, railroadiana and prototype tours. It can even encompass other model railroads, as these illustrate to us what their builders know of the prototype.

Since both of these aspects of the hobby are equally important, it is important for the convention staff, both region and local, to ensure that there is a good balance between model and prototype.

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Dates and Hours

NER conventions usually begin on Thursday afternoon and continue through Sunday afternoon. Activities at the hotel generally end at checkout time on Sunday, however, open layouts can continue until about 5pm Sunday. Conventions should be generally scheduled in the months of September or October. More details about this are under bid procedures.

NER Convention Committee

The NER convention staff reports to the NER Convention Committee Chairman (NERCC), just as the local convention committee staff reports to the local chairman. The NER will be responsible for the following tasks:

- Final negotiating and/or approving and signing the contract with the host facility
- Signing any other contracts
- Registration
- Collection of funds
- Paying bills
- Final financial reporting

The local chairman is the principle connection between the local convention committee and the NER Convention Committee. The local committee performs the activities of creating and producing the convention while relying on the NER Convention Committee for information and advice.

On the following pages you will find:

- A list of the NER Convention roles, as well as a brief description of their duties. These positions are subject to change and we urge you to check with the NER Convention Chairman regarding changes just prior to starting your convention planning. Names and contact information for the people in these roles may be found in Section 4.0, NER Roster.
- A list of recommended local committee key staff members and their duties.
- A few words about how to determine if you have the necessary elements available to you, so that you might produce a good convention.
- A tutorial to explain how to prepare a convention bid.
- If your convention bid is successful, which most are, the last 12 months of the convention countdown.
- Explanation of the events of the convention, their selection and planning and discussion of the details.
- Elaboration on the fine points of the many convention events.

NER Convention Chairman (NERCC)

The NER Convention Chairman is the person who coordinates the activities of the entire NER Convention Staff with you and your local staff. If you have a general question, contact the NERCC first. They will get you an answer. You will be sending your bid proposal to the NERCC for their initial approval. They will help you make your presentation to the NER Board of Directors and assist you through the planning and execution of your convention. **The NERCC, or their representative, must sign all contracts.** This removes any financial liability for the local organization.

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NER Convention Committee (continued)

NER Convention Treasurer

The local group is not expected to incur any cost for hosting a convention. It is the NER Convention Treasurer's responsibility to guide the financial planning of the convention, and handle all the banking and bill paying. In addition to this, the NER Convention Treasurer has the records of attendance and financial records for previous NER Conventions. The NER Convention Treasurer can provide you with the financial and attendance recommendations based on this information. The NER Convention Treasurer can provide any seed money required as well as write deposit checks to any legitimate supplier. You will have to provide the NER Convention Treasurer a detailed accounting of expenses, including invoices shortly after the convention and work with him to turn in your financial report 30 days after the convention.

NER Convention Registrar

The NER Convention Registrar will design the convention and hotel registration forms, based on convention details provided by the local committee and send them to the Coupler Editor in advance of convention and provide soft copies for your convention web site. They will compile the data based on all of the returning forms and print tickets. They will provide the preregistration envelopes and will deliver the preregistrations to the convention attendees and register and ticket the "walk-in" convention attendees.

NER Model Contest Chairman

The NER Model Contest Chairman will coordinate the operation and set up of the NER Model Contest. There is a section in this document defining the space requirements and room arrangements, as well as scheduling. All other activity pertaining to this required function is handled or coordinated by the NER Model Contest Chairman. Should you wish to become familiar with the details of the Model Contest, for your own information or so that you can relate them to others on request please contact the NER Model Contest Chairman.

NER Photo Contest Chairman

The NER Photo Contest Chairman will coordinate the operation and set up of the NER Photo Contest. There is a section in this document defining the space requirements and room arrangements, as well as scheduling. All other activity pertaining to this required function is handled or coordinated by the NER Photo Contest Chairman. Should you wish to become familiar with the details of the Photo Contest, for your own information or so that you can relate them to others on request please contact the NER Photo Contest Chairman.

NER Operations SIG Coordinator

The NER OpSig Coordinator will coordinate the Operations Callboard event for the convention, including making the operation assignments from the convention registration forms. There is a section under Convention Program Elements that outlines the Operations Callboard. Contact the NER OpSig Coordinator early with your projected number of layouts and operating slots open for this event.

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The Local Convention Committee

This is the staff in the local area that will actually develop, coordinate and execute the convention. There is no requirement for a specific number of people for the committee, but there are specific jobs and activities that must be accomplished. Depending on the experience of the convention committee, certain people may be able to perform several tasks, but care must be taken not to overload anyone with more than they can do. Many hands make light work and although the local committee will have much to do, hosting a convention should be a positive experience for everyone associated with it as it showcases the local area and it's people to the rest of the NER. All contingencies and possible issues that may arise cannot be covered in this manual, so as these questions or issues arise, contact the appropriate NER Convention Committee person.

This manual suggests an organizational structure that has proven to work in the past. Be aware that some people may want to avoid titles, but are still willing to work. This may be particularly true with groups that do not have a great deal of experience organizing a convention. You need to know who is doing what, but be aware that labels inhibit some people's willingness to participate. You can always apply the titles after these people complete their work.

Local Convention Committee Chairman

Someone will have to take the lead and be responsible for coordinating all aspects of the convention. This person should have good organizational and people skills. This person also needs to have, at the very least, attended several NER conventions to understand how they are run, but preferably also have been a member of a previous convention committee. This person will also be responsible for interacting with the NER Convention Committee. He or she will monitor the progress of the individual elements of the convention by the committee members and will provide encouragement and support to these people. In some cases, if a committee person is unwilling or unable to perform their assigned tasks, the Chairman may have to replace that person. When the convention takes place, the Chairman will work closely with the NER Convention Committee and hotel managers to direct the convention activities and resolve any issues.

It is best if the Chairman knows the strengths of the members of the local committee to guide those people into a position that suits them best. Coordinate, appreciate, and thank your staff. Effective and timely communication with your staff and the NER Convention Committee is key to running a successful convention. The Local Convention Chairman needs to be copied on any communication up or down between the Local Committee staff and the NER Convention Committee.

The Local Convention Chairman should also be involved with hotel selection process and the negotiations with the hotel. This means visiting the available hotels and examining every detail of their facilities. You must then negotiate a satisfactory room rate and establish the cost of the banquet meal and the cost, if any, of the function rooms, etc. **Contact the NER Convention Chairman for advice before starting this process.**

Publicity Chairman

Early and effective publicity is the key to enticing people to come to your convention. The Publicity Chairman reports to the Local Convention Chairman and will be responsible for generating all of the advertising material, i.e., logo, text, photos, maps, printed schedules as they apply to the convention events and creating the convention web site. This information is first used in preliminary form in the bid process, then in the press releases, and finally in greater detail in the convention brochure. This person is responsible for formatting, typing and seeing to the printing of the convention program booklet that will be given to the attendees.

This person can use assistance. At a minimum, the publicity chairman will need a webmaster and a proof reader. No person can cover all these tasks unassisted.

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The Local Convention Committee (continued)

Inside Activities Chairman

This person reports to the Convention Chairman and is responsible for the detailed planning of and overseeing the execution of the Contests, Clinics, Hospitality Room, Banquet, Raffle, post banquet activity, such as a Banquet Speaker or Auction and any modular layouts and/or Trade Show if on site,. This person may seek advice from the NER Convention Committee prior to any planning.

This person can use assistance. At a minimum, the inside activities person should appoint a clinic dispatcher and a raffle coordinator. If the trade show is to be on site he will need a tradeshow dispatcher. No person can cover all these tasks unassisted.

Outside Activities Chairman

This person reports to the Convention Chairman and is responsible for the detailed planning and execution of the open layout visits, Operation Callboard, any fan trips, rail and prototype tours and if the trade show is incorporated as an outside event it too must be detail planned and executed by this person. This person should seek advice from the NER Convention Committee prior to any planning.

This person can use assistance. The outside activities chairman will need a rail dispatcher, a bus transportation dispatcher, if busses are used, and a cartographer for the map book. If the tradeshow is an outside activity he will need a tradeshow dispatcher. No person can cover all these tasks unassisted.

Convention Program Elements

Now that you know who we are and the type of help we can provide as well as the people you need and their general responsibilities, we need to determine if there are enough attractions in the target area to make a good convention. These program elements are discussed in greater detail beginning on page 12.

Convention Lead Time

There are several factors to consider when determining how far out you should begin planning a convention. The first is how far out does the NER have committed conventions. The second most important one is how far out are the hotels you are considering booking their events. Many hotel calendars fill in very rapidly twelve months out. You can begin planning a convention as far in advance as you wish, but it is a good idea to present your plan and receive the NER BOD approval 24–18 months in advance. Only then can any contracts, including the hotels, be signed. Although hotels do book dates this far in advance, this should give you a good shot at achieving the date you want at the hotel of your choice. The very minimum lead time you should consider is 12 months in advance. If you are still able to book a hotel that close to your date, you will have a very busy schedule putting a convention together in that short time.

Convention Hotel

Most conventions center around one hotel. As an alternative, we have at times, used a college for the convention, with a nearby motel for those not wishing to stay in dormitories. Many hotels greatly exceed our needs and may even have more than one convention booked simultaneously. NER convention attendance is usually between 150-250, depending on the program and pre-convention publicity although not everyone stays in the hotel.

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Convention Program Elements (continued)

Layouts

Generally there are open home and club layouts to visit on Thursday and/or Friday evening and Sunday afternoon. The pikes open at night should be within 15-20 miles of the hotel and easy to get to. Sunday and Thursday pikes can be as far as 50 miles from the hotel since they are to be seen on the way home by those who choose to. All pikes should be at a decent level of construction and operation.

Operation Call Board

The Operation Call Board consists of individual or club layouts that are operated using some type of car forwarding system hosting operating (op) sessions for the convention attendees.

Clinics

Clinics generally take place at the hotel or convention activity center. Clinics should include both model and prototype rail related subjects as well as some non-rail general interest subjects. If your local area is light on outside attractions, this is one area where you have full control to make up for it and provide a great program.

Hospitality Room

A room near the center of activities should be designated as the Hospitality Room to provide a place for attendees to meet and have light refreshments. This is a good location to display the raffle prizes and sell raffle tickets, or a room close by may be used.

Contest Room

A well-lighted room of a minimum 700 sq. ft., convenient to the center of activities, is required for the NMRA Model and Photo Contests.

Meeting Rooms

These rooms may be utilized for various SIGs or displays. One room will be required for the NER Annual Meeting typically held on Sunday morning. The room for the meeting will need to be set up lecture style and have a minimum capacity of 30 persons.

Fan Trips

Fan trips can include rides on railroads, or visits to rail facilities or industries served by rail. These trips can be planned for Friday and/or Saturday mornings and afternoons, but must conclude in time for attendees to attend the Saturday banquet. Bus or van transportation is normally used, but certain trips may be better handled by carpooling.

Banquet

A Banquet is held Saturday night to allow everyone to come together at one time. No other activities are held during the banquet and the post banquet program.

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Convention Program Elements (continued)

Raffle

The raffle program is a way for the sponsoring organization to augment its treasury since all raffle money collected can be retained. Prizes are obtained from people or businesses in the model railroading industry. Several non-model railroad prizes should also be included.

Optional Trade Show

Some conventions include a trade show, but unless your organization is well equipped to host one or you have another organization that can host one, this is not necessary. The Trade Show should not share space with the banquet. It is just too difficult to break down a trade show and set up a banquet in the space of a couple hours. If you have another organization host a show, ask for a free or reduced rate gate fee for your convention attendees, using their convention badges as an indication of their admission status.

NER Annual Business Meeting

The NER is required by its By-laws to hold a meeting. This meeting is usually held on Sunday morning.

Other Options

An Awards Breakfast on Sunday can take the business requirement out of the banquet, allowing the Saturday evening to be used for such things as a dinner train or dinner cruise.

Convention Bid Procedure

Determine the feasibility of a hosting a convention:

- Inquire at the local hotels as to their available convention facilities, room rates etc.
- Inquire with local railroads and/or industries as to their fan trip potential and determine rough costs.
- Inquire with local model railroaders and/or clubs as to their desire to support a convention with labor, open layouts, op sessions, clinics, etc.
- Determine the feasibility of providing a trade show. This may very well be one of the participating clubs or the local division of the NER, but don't rule out any organization. Let them run it as a package deal with only a rate consideration to the convention participants.

Based upon the results of the above survey, determine if your area and organization can host a convention.

Assuming you can, begin preparation of a convention bid package:

- Choose a specific date, satisfactory to the hotel: Our normal window is the first weekend after Labor Day to November 1, avoiding holidays.
- Select a hotel: The hotel should be capable of sleeping at least 150 of our attendees (75 rooms) and should have at least 6 meeting rooms exclusive of the banquet space. As hotel rates continually rise, check with the NER Convention Chairman as to what the max room rate should be. This person can also be used to help with the price negotiations.
- Select your railroad and/or industry fan trips. You are wide open here, but they must be easily accessible to the hotel - no more than 1 hour by bus. Get proposed costs in detail before including fan trips in your convention bid as this can be a go, no-go decision maker. Involve the NER Convention Chairman here too.

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Convention Bid Procedure (continued)

- Select an organization to run the trade show if you are planning one. If you are to do it with your staff, budget 5 or more staff positions. If an outside group is to do it, select one with experience and attend one of their shows to determine their desirability. You may have to coordinate your convention date to coincide with the date of the outside group's regular show.
- Obtain commitments from local clubs and modelers. This is primarily directed at open layouts, op sessions and clinicians.
- Prepare a proposed convention schedule. Feel free to alter the sample in this document, but use it as a starting point and carefully weigh your changes against the sample. The sample is used most of the time and is tried and proven.
- Prepare Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM) pricing. Seek help from the NER Convention Chairman in identifying the less obvious costs and in amortizing all costs over the probable attendance to obtain a ROM package cost.

Present the above information as well as proposed hotel contracts to the NER Convention Chairman. Only he has the authority to sign contracts and pay deposits. He will obtain approval of the convention bid from the NER Board of Directors.

Detailed Planning and Preparation

Once the NER BOD has approved your proposal you will need to expand your early planning into the detailed planning necessary to make the convention happen.

You will need to consider the following:

- Confirm the convention chairman.
- Identify the people who have key responsibilities.
- Create a logo for web site, program cover, pin buttons, etc.
- Establish a proposed convention schedule.
- Create a **Checklist** to assign and track jobs to completion. An example is in Appendix A. This is a great way to ensure all tasks are covered and completed. This file is available in MS Excel from the NERCC for your use.
- Create a web site to go on line as soon as the previous convention is over and provide a link to the NER Web Master. The web site should be kept up to date as new information develops. Post clinic, Operation Callboard, tour and open layout schedules as soon as they are finalized.
- Obtain a signed copy of the hotel contract from the NER Convention Chairman. Assign hotel space defined in the contract to your proposed schedule. Resolve any problems between schedule and space available.
- Fan/Rail/ Prototype Trips: consider ticket price/cost per person; cost per person for transportation to and from place of embarkation/debarkation; meals; unforeseen extras. It is important to obtain contracts for things that you may be obligated to pay for regardless of the number of people attending.
- Layouts: club and home layouts need to be visited to determine condition, completeness, and operation capability. Maps to the layout locations need to be created. Descriptions of the layouts must be written. Please follow the templates in this document to maintain continuity from one convention to the next.
- Publicity: publicity releases should be checked with the NERCC for accuracy and format. They should be sent to NMRA Magazine, MODEL RAILROADER, RAILROAD MODEL CRAFTSMAN, and MODEL RAILROAD NEWS at a minimum, more at the discretion of the NERCC. If the fan trip must be open to the public to help with costs, publicity releases must go to RAILFAN, RAILPACE and TRAINS at a minimum.

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Detailed Planning and Preparation (continued)

- **Convention Program:** a convention program is provided to each registrant that details the activities of the convention. The NERCC can send you examples from previous conventions to evaluate layout and format. A proof copy should be shown to the NERCC before the program goes out to be printed. Consider using one of the office superstores and their photocopy services for inexpensive printing with rapid turnaround. Quality will not be compromised if your master is printed from a good laser printer. Sometimes they can do the printing for you from an electronic file.
- **Banquet Program:** the convention banquet program is an important part of our convention program. Audio/visual equipment may be required. During the banquet those who have participated in the contests and the AP program are recognized and receive their awards. The program must provide a block of time to perform these tasks.
- **Finalize the menu and pricing.**
- **Modular Layouts:** a desirable element in a convention program, which may become highly desirable if the layout resources are limited in your convention area. If they are included the layouts should be operable and in a relatively complete state with regards to scenery and structures.
- **Registration Package:** the registration package is one of the most important components of the convention. It must be as complete as possible without being verbose. However, if adequate information about your convention program is not conveyed to the prospective attendee, you may not maximize attendance or you may have to answer a lot of phone calls about the program.
- **Detailed Cost Breakdown:** this is important in determining the pricing of your convention. Isolate each activity and estimate all the expense items that may be required to present that activity. Prior convention financial reports may be used to expose unforeseen expense items. The NERCC can help ensure adequate coverage.
- **Break even pricing** is usually based on 100-125 attendees. Check with the NERCC to determine what number to use.
- **Identify single day registration pricing** as well as full registration pricing. FYI – Late registration – less than one month prior to the convention - will be an additional \$5.00.
- You may have to compensate some nationally recognized people if you are asking them to contribute to your convention, but we are a volunteer organization and the members of the local committee are required to pay for registration. This requirement makes it equitable throughout the NER.
- **Raffle:** The local sponsoring organization usually holds a raffle and can retain the proceeds.
- **If offering a train show:** either work with another group, or sponsor the show yourself, in which case you will have room rental, publicity and other costs to be factored into the total convention cost.
- **Take color photos of the major convention attractions.** These will be used on the web site and for a convention promotion story board (3' x 5') to be displayed at the preceding convention(s). Photos should include: the hotel facility, the fan trip equipment/route/etc., home and club layouts to be on tour, main non rail event, and local area points of interest.

You will need to schedule meetings as required, until about six months in advance. About six months before convention you should begin meeting every month. Use the above list of events and the **Checklist** to determine that all activities are developing correctly.

The last two months are critical. During this time period you should be wrapping up all of your know issues and reacting to those that surface. However, when convention day arrives, smile, and make the whole affair fun for your invited guests, react quickly and intelligently to problems, coordinate carefully with other staff and enjoy the fun.

Following the convention, you will have to coordinate with the NER Convention Treasurer regarding the left-over expenses of the convention and preparing a final financial report of the convention.

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Key Dates

At least three weeks before the editorial deadline of the Coupler 2 issues before the convention:

- Send finalized registration info to the NER Registrar.

At least nine weeks before convention:

- Confirm all layouts and provide owners with a cell phone number if they have an emergency and can't open;
- After confirming above, send layout map booklet to printer.

At least eight weeks before convention:

- Contact hotel to find out how many rooms are booked;
- Contact Registrar to determine if more rooms are needed;
- If more are needed contact hotel to see if more can be reserved at contracted rate;
- Contact the Registrar for the number of layout map booklets he needs to send out.

At least six weeks before convention:

- Send required map packages to Registrar.

At least four weeks before convention:

- Confirm all clinicians and provide them a cell phone number if they have an emergency and can't make it;
- Confirm the Annual Meeting time with the NER President – generally Sunday at 9:00AM;
- After confirming above, send program to NERCC and Registrar for review;
- Confirm you have adequate AV equipment.

At least three weeks before convention:

- Send program to the printer.

At least one week before convention:

- Final full committee meeting to review and cover last minute details.

Convention day morning:

- Meet with hotel staff to review last minute details and understand who to contact for various issues;
- Post any changes to the clinic or layout tour schedule prominently in the Registration Area.

Thirty days after convention:

- Provide NER Convention Treasurer with a final spending report as well as any unpaid bills or receipts.

Typical Convention Events and Schedule

This typical suggested schedule is a starting point and guideline and can be modified to suite your situation. Events, such as Rail/Prototype Tours and Operations Callboard, do not have to take place at every time listed. See program descriptions below for more details.

Thursday

- 1:00 PM Operations Callboard sessions begin for those preregistered traveling to the convention.
- 3:00 PM Convention Registration Desk opens
- 3:00 PM Hospitality Room opens
- 4:00 PM Rail Clinics begin
- 5:00 PM Dinner time
- 7:00 PM Layout tours begin
- 9:00 PM Convention Registration Desk closes
- 10:00 PM Hospitality Room closes

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Typical Convention Events and Schedule (continued)

Friday

8:00 AM Convention Registration Desk opens
8:00 AM Hospitality Room opens
8:00 AM Clinics begin
9:00 AM Rail/Prototype Tour
12 Noon Lunch time
1:00 PM Rail/Prototype Tour
1:00 PM Clinics begin
5:00 PM Contest Room opens for registration and viewing.
5:00 PM Dinner time
6:30 PM Clinics begin
7:00 PM Operations Callboard
9:00 PM Convention Registration Desk closes
10:00 PM Hospitality Room closes
10:00 PM Model Contest Room closes

Saturday

8:00 AM Convention Registration Desk opens
8:00 AM Hospitality Room opens
8:00 AM Clinics begin
8:30 AM Contest Room opens
9:30 AM Contest Registration closes
10:00 AM Contest Judging begins
12 Noon Convention Registration Desk closes
12 Noon Hospitality Room closes
12 Noon The final count of banquet meals must be given to the hotel. Obtain this from the registration committee.
1:00 PM Rail/Prototype Tour
4:00 PM Model Contest room closes
5:00 PM Clinics end

Saturday Evening

6:30 PM Happy Half Hour begins
7:00 PM Banquet begins.
9:00 PM Post Banquet Program begins
Contest Room reopens for viewing and model pickup after Post Banquet Program

Sunday

9:00 AM NER Annual Meeting
10:00 AM Layout tours begin
4:00 PM Layout tours end.

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Detailed Information on Specific Subjects

Hotel Facilities

Before contacting any hotels, contact the NER Convention Chairman to discuss your plans and seek advice. The hotel can do a lot to make or break a convention and there are a number of things to be aware of. It is best if two people from the local committee survey hotels in the area you are targeting. Do not use private convention planning services or bureaus to locate hotels in your area. These services will cost money which is usually added to the hotel room rate without your knowledge.

The hotel should have a restaurant located in the hotel or immediately adjacent to it. This is important not only for the Saturday evening banquet, but to also allow the attendees to grab a quick breakfast and lunch so as not to miss any activities. This quick turnaround meal requirement must be identified to the hotel when first speaking to the representative you are dealing with. All areas of the hotel must be handicap accessible. Hotels refurbish their premises every few years, so inquire about any construction plans they may have. Depending on the hotel, construction may or may not affect the convention.

With convention attendance figures of 130 to 250 it is difficult to determine how many rooms will be required, but an average of 75 double bed rooms is usually blocked for Friday and Saturday nights. Seek the guidance of the NER Convention Committee as to how many rooms to block for Thursday night. Some hotels that cater to business travelers have many rooms with only one bed. Since many of our attendees stay with another person, ensure that the hotel has an adequate number of double bed rooms.

In addition, the hotel provides meeting rooms, clinic rooms, and a banquet in their banquet facilities. Some of the meeting rooms can be achieved by subdividing the banquet space. See the details of these room requirements below. If you would like to include one or more modular layouts in your program, you will have to determine that before you begin negotiating with the hotel.

The cost of hotel rooms can vary widely around the NER. Nightly double occupancy room rates need to be kept at or below \$125.00 whenever possible. Added costs for function rooms are to be kept to a minimum with zero being the target figure. Hotels look at the total income they will derive from a convention including guaranteed meals, so room, banquet meal and activity room rates are all very negotiable. Look at several hotels in the area. You can play hotels off one another to obtain rate reductions. Hotels will offer free rooms for the booking of a certain number of rooms. These rooms can be used for nationally known out of town clinicians. This will vary with each hotel, so ask what their policy is when you begin negotiations. Negotiate, Negotiate, Negotiate, to get the best possible deal.

Renting AV equipment from a hotel is very expensive. Determine what your needs are and contact the NERCC. The NER owns three computer projectors and three high quality screens and has access to others if you can't supply your own. You will need a podium and microphone for at least the banquet.

A contract will be required with the hotel specifically stating what they will provide and when, inclusive of function rooms and the banquet arrangements in every detail, assuming the banquet is to be held at the hotel. For hotel room reservation purposes and to provide consistency from convention to convention, the convention name given to the hotel should be **NMRA-NER**. Hotel contracts vary widely on details and required financial commitments. **Only the NERCC, or their representative, can approve and sign the hotel contract.** This removes any financial liability from the local organization.

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Convention Registration Desk

Unless otherwise informed, you need not worry about registration desk staff or operations except to provide adequate physical location, including electrical outlets and furniture.

When planning the utilization of the hotel facility, the convention registration should be located where it is handy to the lobby or main convention function area and obvious to visitors as soon as they arrive. Some lobbies are generous enough to allow the registration desk to be right there. If it is not in the lobby, a sign in the lobby should direct people to the desk. Operations at the registration desk include checking in preregistered convention attendees and giving them their prepackaged convention information and tickets. Tables should be provided for boxes containing these packets. Walk-in registrants must fill out forms, so a table with a few chairs handy to the registration desk is desirable.

In all, two 30" x 72" tables or equal counter space are required for the registration staff plus one 30" x 72" table or equivalent space for the walk-in registrants to fill out their forms. Two lines will operate at peak arrival times, the preregistered line and the walk-in line. Sufficient space should be present for twenty to thirty people to wait for their turn at the desk without crowding.

A securable room nearby is required to store the registration materials and computers.

The Convention Program

Graphic Cover

The cover should include the convention name and logo, the convention dates and city or town. It can also include the NER logo and/or your division logo, but try not to make it too busy.

Inside

The inside cover should list the local and NER Convention Committees, as well as the NER Officers. The following page should include any acknowledgements, including a list of the raffle sponsors and a Welcome from the sponsoring group. A Table of Contents is most helpful. The convention program must contain all of the information about all the convention activities that the attendees will require except the layout tour information, which will be provided in the Layout Map Booklet. The program must include the following:

- A layout of the function room spaces with room names
- A schedule of all activities including:
 - Clinic names, presenters, times and descriptions
 - Tour descriptions, departure and return times and meeting places
 - Happy half hour and banquet location and times
 - Post banquet program description, location and time.
- The NER Annual Meeting time and location.
 - This is usually scheduled for 9:00 AM Sunday but this should be confirmed with the NER President.

The Program can also include information on local hobby shops, area non-rail attractions and nearby restaurants. At least one page at the back of the program should be left blank for notes the attendee may want to make.

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The Convention Program (continued)

Gathering Information

It is important that you get as much of the program in final form as early as possible. A lot of this information is also used in the publicity releases especially that which goes into the pre-preconvention issues of the NER Coupler and the convention web site.

Identify local restaurants and hobby shops including address, telephone number and the hours open.
List and describe local non rail assets.

The following items should be expected to be settled early:

- A plan of the lobby and meeting room areas of the hotel;
- Welcome remarks;
- Convention schedule;
- Open layout information and maps; and
- Staff credits.

Some of the items may be fluid until just before press time:

- Fan trips (rail and non-rail);
- Clinics and clinic schedule;
- Clinic room assignments; and
- The banquet speaker and program topic.

You want to be in the position of only having to take a few hours to add missing details, give the program a good careful check, and be ready to send to the printer no less than three weeks before the convention.

Printing

The program should use a two column format on standard 8 1/2" x 11" paper oriented vertically. With a cover, this creates a booklet 4 1/4" x 11" so that it will easily go in a pocket without folding. Other formats have also been used effectively, so contact the NER Convention Chairman for examples of a good program from a previous convention. You should make a mock-up so it comes out right. Keep a copy of the mock-up for yourself and send a copy of the mock-up to the printer. He will likely spot any page relationship problems and call you. If you don't have a copy to refer to you will be lost. Consider using photocopying at an office supply superstore (Office Max, Staples, etc.). The cover can be done on index stock, available in a half-dozen colors. Have 250 copies of the program folded, collated and saddle stitched (printers talk for the two staples in the center seam).

Layout Map Booklet

The Layout Map Booklet is separate from the Convention Program and includes all the information on the layouts that are open for the convention. See Appendix B for a detailed description and format for this booklet. It is important to follow this format so that the information and presentation is consistent from convention to convention. Color can drive up the cost quickly, but color maps are highly recommended for ease of use when driving, especially at night. Layouts should be segregated by Friday layout maps and Sunday layout maps, even if duplication is necessary. Verify directions by driving shortly before the convention as construction detours can make a map impossible to use to find a location. The NER has a comb binding machine available for use to reduce cost.

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Clinic Room Arrangements

Understand what your clinicians will require for the room setup. Most rooms should have at least one table in front and some will need a projector table and screen. Don't forget to have extension cords available if there are no outlets in the floor. If clinic room sizes vary, be sure to put your most popular clinics in the larger rooms. If available, a video camera and projection TV are wonderful aids for both demonstration clinics and workshop clinics. Water and glasses should be available in each room, especially for the speakers.

Business Meeting Room

A room must be designated for the Annual Business Meeting. It is usually scheduled for 9:00 AM on Sunday. Contact the NER President before printing your program to confirm the time. Set it up theater style in the largest of the meeting rooms. The head table should have room for 8 chairs while seating should be supplied for 30 or so in the audience. Water and glasses should be provided in the back of the room.

Banquet

No other activities are held during the banquet. The Banquet should be planned for 125 -130 guests. In recent years the Region has moved away from using a head table, but arrangements should be made to seat special guests with people that you know will make them feel comfortable. Often the first few rounds are reserved for convention staff and/or members of the host club or group. A podium with microphone is required for presentations after the meal. Ensure that the hotel sets one more table than is actually required for the number of reservations received. This will allow for people who do not wish to separate the members of their party to fill in the singles which inevitably occur at some tables. The banquet is normally preceded by a happy hour. The bar is generally set up in a foyer or hall outside the banquet room. Work with the hotel to determine how long the meal should take with the emphasis on efficiency. Engage the NER Convention Chairman in timing the banquet and after dinner program.

Hotels have preset banquet meals that are higher in cost than the majority of our attendees are willing to pay. They ~~will~~ can however make arrangements for less expensive meals. Several meal options must be planned with the hotel. A beef dish is the most often ordered meal at our banquets and should be included as an option. A chicken or fish meal can be offered as a second option and a vegetarian dish must be made available. Even though the cost of the meals may vary to some degree, they will need to all be priced the same on the registration form. Meals should include an appetizer or salad, main course, dessert and coffee or tea.

Hotels have a high rate of staff turnover. The people you booked your banquet with a year ago may not be the people you deal with on convention weekend. You must get your arrangements on paper, and ensure that the hotel has a copy and is providing the required services. The provider will require the number of meals to be identified at some time before the convention. Try to arrange with the provider for a delay until noon on Saturday of convention weekend for the final count and guarantee. Hotels generally allow a 10% variance for the number of meals provided. The NER Convention Chairman or designate must approve any guarantee count before it is given to the hotel. This should be included in the hotel contract.

Plan your banquet space early and confirm with the hotel how many seats they will include at each table. Put this table layout plan on a large poster board, with blank lines in the plan for people to sign up for the table they want. The poster board plan should be displayed near the Registration Table or in the Hospitality Room when registration first opens and still be displayed during the happy half hour for those who have still not signed up.

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Banquet (continued)

Check out the P.A. system early. Set the mike high enough and the volume loud enough so that no speakers have to bend to the mike, or mouth it to be heard. Based on many comments from attendees at past conventions, we have reduced and streamlined the after banquet program to reduce the time people have to sit at their tables. The after dinner program will include award presentations and after a short break, may include a speaker, auction or some other entertaining program. If a speaker is chosen, avoid speech makers. Good results have been had from action type speakers, i.e. people who have industry experience to relate to the audience, speakers who are narrating visual media on a particular subject of rail interest, etc. Make sure your speaker is aware that he or she is to eat the meal with an official of the convention, the Region or someone who will ensure that they feel welcome.

Maintaining the time limit for the banquet is essential to avoid unpleasant and confusing delays to speakers and to events which follow the banquet. Decide who will be the Master of Ceremonies early in your planning. Generally this is the convention chairman; however some excellent leaders who have shared their talent with us in chairing a convention have chosen to yield to a more experienced hand at being M.C.

During the banquet, the Master of Ceremonies should adhere to the following format of speaking:

1. A brief welcome by the Convention Chairman (M.C.)
2. A brief speech from the President of the NER
3. Introduction of any dignitaries and the Local Convention Committee as a group
4. Awards:
 - a. Model Contest & Achievement Program awards combined
 - b. Photo Contest
5. NER Convention Chairman or President to thank the Local Committee and announce the next convention
6. MC to announce the after dinner program
7. Break between banquet and program while the hotel staff finishes clearing tables
8. MC to introduce the after dinner program
9. Thank the speaker; make concluding remarks inclusive of reminding the contest participants who have not picked up their entries to do so in the contest room.

Hospitality Room

Generally coffee, tea and baked goods are provided at the beginning of the convention and possibly sometime during the next day or two. The raffle prizes may be displayed and tickets sold in this room if it is large enough.

Auctions

Auctions have been conducted in the banquet hall as an alternative to a speaker after the awards and the hotel staff has things under control. Ten percent of the gross sales receipts are to be provided to the NER as a commission from the auction. For item identification you will find "coat room" tickets most useful. These have two parts so the prize item or prize money can be claimed. Be sure to have each person furnishing items to the auction write their registration number and a minimum bid on the ticket halves so no dispute can result when the item is sold. A brief description of the item is a great help. Choose an auctioneer with sufficient knowledge of the railroad hobby and hobby material. All decisions of the auctioneer shall be final.

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Auctions (continued)

The NER Convention Treasurer or designate shall be present. Their duty is to handle all monies and records at the auction, receive payments and keep an accurate account of all transactions, recording on the auction tag, the amount the item sold for and on a separate list, the auction tag serial number and the amount it sold for. Owners of the auction items shall be responsible for their property which has not been sold at the conclusion of the auction. They shall be required to surrender their stubs before any items are removed from the area or before collecting any money due, less 10% of the sale price, from the cashier. Profits from these sales shall be divided up equally between the host division and the region unless the region takes full responsibility for the setup and control of said auction.

White Elephant Table

These are sometimes held in place of auctions. The white elephant table is to function in the same manner as an auction, except the sale is direct with no bidding. All ticketing, record keeping and collection/dispersal of monies is to be handled in the same manner as an auction.

Operation Call Board

These operating (op) sessions can be held Thursday afternoon or evening, Friday morning, afternoon or evening, or Saturday morning or afternoon. The op sessions cannot take place during the banquet.

The layout owner will determine how many people can be accommodated for an op session. A description of the layout and its operations will need to be provided so that the potential operators can determine which layouts they would like to operate on. While this feature is becoming more popular, due to many factors, it is difficult to predetermine the number of attendees that will sign up. Work closely with the NER Op SIG Coordinator. Once you have the layouts, times and number of operating slots defined, he will handle the assignments.

Model Contest

When the committee first chooses a hotel or other convention space, the model contest facility must be identified early. A room of 500 sq. ft. **minimum** should be selected if it will only contain the model contest, or 700 sq. ft. **minimum** if it will contain both the model and photo contests. This room **must** be capable of being secured, available from 5:00PM on Friday until 11:00PM on Saturday, well lighted, preferably with sunlight, and easily accessible and in the main stream of the convention area where all attendees can stop and visit without difficulty.

Generally the contest room will be open from 5:00-10:00PM on Friday for registration and viewing,. On Saturday, the room will remain open from 10:00AM – approximately 4:00PM for viewing and judging. The room will close around 4:00PM to tally scores and will reopen for viewing and pickup after the banquet. Always contact the Model Contest Chairman to verify the times before publishing them in the convention program.

Tables in the model contest room should be rectangular, covered with white table cloths and arranged end to end in several rows in the middle of the room with access on both sides. Twenty chairs should be provided. Seek further advice from the Model Contest Chairman.

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Model Showcase

The Model Showcase allows people to display complete or incomplete models in the contest room without entering them in the contest for judging. This program should also be promoted in the pre-convention literature and the web site along with the Model and Photo Contests. Contact the contest chairman for specific promotional information.

Photo Contest

This contest is best located in the same room as the model contest or a separate room (see Model Contest above). Photos are received in the same manner as the model contest. The room should be set up similar to that of the model contest, but can be a minimum of 300 sq. ft. if it is in a separate room. It too should be well lighted, and **must** be securable. As with the Model Contest, photos will be picked up after the banquet. Seek further advice from the Photo Contest Chairman for times and set up.

Clinic Program

The clinic program should include clinics on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. While the majority of clinics should be rail related, two or three non-rail, non-gender specific clinics should be provided for those attending that may not be interested in rail clinics. Clinics should be scheduled for one hour each with a half hour between. This allows time for the previous clinician to break down and the following clinician to set up. It also allows ample time for people to attend to any needs they might have and to get to the next clinic without being rushed. It is best to schedule all clinics during the same time periods instead of staggering them to avoid conflicts. One or two clinics should be scheduled in the late afternoon on Thursday as attendees begin to arrive. Unless there is a fan trip that requires a large number of attendees to purchase tickets to break even, or two concurrent tours, it is best to schedule three concurrent rail clinics from Thursday evening through Saturday afternoon. One or possibly two clinics can be scheduled when people are on trips or tours out of the hotel. No clinics are to be scheduled during the banquet. Most clinicians should be recruited from local people. However, nationally known people will help to increase the number of convention attendees. Others can come from throughout the NER.

The following is a suggested clinic schedule:

Thursday:

- One or two clinics at 4:00PM
- Preferably three clinics at each of the following times:
 - 6:30 PM, 8:00 PM, 9:30 PM

Friday:

- Preferably three clinics at each of the following times:
 - 8:00 AM, 9:30 AM, 11:00 AM,
 - 1:00 PM, 2:30 PM, 4:00 PM
 - 6:30 PM, 8:00 PM, 9:30 PM

Saturday

- Preferably three clinics at each of the following times:
 - 8:00 AM, 9:30 AM, 11:00 AM,
 - 1:00 PM, 2:30 PM, 4:00 PM

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Clinic Program (continued)

- The number of clinics can be adjusted down during outside fan trips, and you don't want to schedule any popular clinicians during these times;
- Demonstrations can be difficult, but are not uncommon. These should be presented in a smaller room unless you are able to make arrangements for a video camera, an operator and one or two monitors.
- Workshops are great. The participants get to take home a model and learn, hands on, the technique being taught.
- If clinicians are willing, you may want to schedule a few of the more popular ones twice.

You will need to introduce each clinician and provide a short description of their topics in the convention program. Remember to ask them when they are available, what kind of room set up they require and what kind of equipment they require, or if they are bringing their own. The NER owns one PC projector and may be able to provide one or two more if you are unable to provide any. Ensure each room has adequate lighting for each presentation.

Try not to schedule two known popular clinicians at the same time. You will need to print a sheet with the clinic and the clinician's name to be posted at the door to each room before and during the clinic. Provide each clinician with an emergency contact number in case they are unable to attend at the last minute. It is a good idea to have at least one backup clinic to fill any last minute drop outs.

Some hotel conference rooms do not have adequate lighting for demonstration or hands on clinics. Take note of this and plan on extra lighting if needed.

Raffle Program

In place of a live auction or a silent auction a raffle program is a way for the sponsoring organization to augment its treasury since all raffle money collected can be retained. It is up to the sponsoring body to solicit raffle prizes from the model railroad industry as well as some general prizes for the ladies. Businesses within the NER area as well as larger nationally known businesses are good prospects. Tell them you will be happy to list them as donors in the convention program.

The prizes are displayed in a prominent but securable area along with a container for each prize for the tickets to be deposited. Many times this area has been the Hospitality Room. Tickets are usually sold to the attendees for \$5.00 for three feet of tickets. Be sure that each roll of tickets is a different color, as duplicate tickets of the same color have been issued at previous conventions causing great difficulty. Tickets are drawn and a list of winning tickets is posted during the banquet so the winners can pick up their prizes after the banquet. The outline for this list should be made ahead of time, so that only the numbers will have to be added after they are drawn. Always remember to acknowledge each donated item with a thank you letter so that future donation requests may also be honored.

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Open Layouts Program

Generally, on Thursday and/or Friday evenings there are open home or club layouts within a reasonable distance from the hotel. It is recommended that the layouts need to be at a reasonable state of development and be able to handle groups of six to nine visitors at a time. A layout guide with maps will need to be produced. See Appendix B “NER Convention – Layout Map Package Standards”. These standards should be followed so that there is consistency from one convention to the next to make it easier for people to understand. Maps should be test driven just prior to the convention ensure area construction has not altered the route.

Generally on Sunday afternoon there are additional layouts open for the members to visit on the way home. If possible this should include the Friday night pikes for those who could not make it then. For the Sunday afternoon pikes, the travel radius is really unlimited as only those within the easy reach of a members return route are normally attempted by that member. A 50 mile radius is practical, but don't be constrained by it.

A large area map indicating the layouts should be displayed in the lobby and or hospitality room to attract people's interest and give them a better idea of how to plan their journeys both local and homeward bound. This should be a state map with suitable circles, arrows, and color photographs.

Layout tour signs are required. To ensure that they are easy to see at night, they should be made from 8½"x 11" stock, preferably in a bright color and with NER in large block letters. Be sure to make them weather proof in case it rains.

Modular Model Railroads

Some conventions have included local modular groups as part of the entertainment at the hotel. If you would like to include one or more in your program, you will have to determine that before you begin negotiating with the hotel. Any space requested after the contract is signed will probably be prohibitively expensive. Consider where you would locate them so that their modules and equipment can be secured if it will be there for multiple days.

Outside Activities

NER conventions should include activities outside the hotel to allow people to get out and see local rail related assets. These activities can be tours of rail facilities, industries served by rail, rail preservation museums, or railroad fan trips. Bus transportation is normally used and because the cost has risen dramatically in recent years, careful consideration of the total cost per person must be evaluated. Contact the NER Convention Committee regarding your plans and to determine feasible pricing.

Bus transportation to and from the venue will be necessary in most cases. Short runs can be done with school buses. Longer runs, not to exceed 1 hour, should use long haul buses with toilet facilities. Vans may be an option in certain circumstances. Discuss and understand what the options are for cancelling or adding vehicles. Make sure any agreements are spelled out in the contract. **Only the NERCC, or representative, can approve and sign the contracts.** Train and bus transportation will require substantial deposits which you will have to coordinate with the NER Convention Treasurer.

For any tour or trip on Saturday, everyone must be back at the hotel no later than 5:00PM, to give people ample time to prepare for the banquet.

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Rail & Prototype Tours

Most conventions provide at least one, if not two or more tours of rail facilities or rail served industries. Although it has become more difficult to tour major railroad facilities, smaller railroads are sometimes easier to gain access to. Since we plan our conventions one or two years in advance, the person you first discuss your plans with may not be in the same position at the time of the convention. For this reason it always best to get any commitment documented in writing from someone of authority in the administration office of the business you are dealing with. The presence of railroad personnel to explain the facility and answer questions is most desirable. The local committee should provide a least one staff person per bus on these tours.

Railroad Fan Trip

A number of areas around the NER have short line or tourist railroads close by that can offer rail trips. There are a number of things to consider when planning a railroad fan trip. If you are chartering a train, you will need to determine the cost of the train, transportation between the hotel and train and meals if any. Bussing people to the train and back to the hotel is logistically easier, so no one is late or gets lost, but it has become increasingly expensive. If the train ride is long, the cost of the idle time for the busses and drivers is a factor. If people car pool, it must be well coordinated to ensure everyone gets to the train in time and there is enough parking available. Plan these trips to break even at 100 persons. You should allocate at least four local convention staff people for this event to collect tickets, count people, etc.

If the trip straddles lunch time, box lunches are your best bet. If a restaurant is used at a layover point, it might be hard to ensure everyone gets served and back to the train before it leaves. You will need to consider coolers for the lunches and beverages and bags/containers for trash disposal. These are things to discuss with the railroad during initial negotiations. Coordinate an event like this closely with the NER Convention Treasurer and NERCC.

Trip Publicity

Since there is usually a large financial outlay for outside trips, the need for accurate and early promotional publicity is crucial. Publicity can be put on the web site ASAP and it should be ready for the COUPLER two issues prior to the convention. Work with the Coupler Editor and the NER Convention Committee to determine due dates.

Convention Financial Matters and Reporting

Keep accurate records of all the expenses of your local committee as they are incurred. You will have to work closely with the NER Convention Treasurer at the conclusion of the convention to accurately report the convention expenses. Prices change constantly, so we will not attempt to recommend them here. You will be required to provide a cost accounting balance report at the end of the convention. Obtain a sample from the NER Convention Treasurer so that you will have an idea of what you need to do. The local Convention Chairman can draw up to \$500.00 in expense money ahead of time if absolutely necessary and with well documented justification. The NER Convention Treasurer will need all receipts to ensure full reimbursement.

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Insurance

Insurance for the convention is automatically covered by the NMRA. There is no application or notification required. If the location of the event or events requires a Certificate of Insurance, contact the NER Convention Treasurer who will arrange for it. The NMRA requires these requests to be sent to **headquarters 30 days prior to the event**, so contact the NER Convention Treasurer **at least seven weeks prior to the event** to make your requirements known. There is a \$25.00 charge for each certificate request, but multiple certificate requests can be made on one request form for a single \$25.00 administration charge. Reimbursement for this fee can be submitted to the NER Convention Treasurer as part of the regular convention expenses.

Revision History

10/2016	23	Added this revision history
	1	Added language in the last sentence of the last paragraph stating that this "... is a suggested procedure..."
	2	Added "generally" in 2 places in the Date and Hours paragraphs
	2	Added pointer to the NER Roster in Section 4.0 for names and contact information for convention committee members
	2,3	Deleted names and replaced with convention committee titles
	3	Deleted "happy to help ..." sentences
	10	Added "at least" in 7 places in the Key Dates paragraphs
	10,11,17	Changed days and times that the model contest room is open
	12	Changed "below \$100" to "below \$125"
	14	Added "other formats have been used efficiently ..." under the Printing paragraph
	17	Added language at the end of the Auctions paragraph to clarify the profit sharing of auction proceeds
	17	Changed language for money handling to be the same as for auctions
	20	Added "it is recommended" to "layouts need to be at a reasonable stage of development..." and deleted the language stating that the NER would provide layout tour signs
	22	Added language stating the cost of obtaining a Certificate of insurance from NMRA HQ may be submitted to the NER as a valid convention expense