



IOWA FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

THE VOICE OF IOWA'S FIRE FIGHTERS

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IOWA FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION HOST DEPARTMENT CONVENTION INFORMATION

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The I.F.A. Convention just seems to get bigger every year. It now draws between 2,000 – 2,500 people to a host community. In 2009 registration was actually 2,700! The campground becomes a town itself. Having that many visitors can be financially rewarding both for the host department and the town. It also creates some situations that you need to be ready for. To start with there are some things that a potential host town needs to be aware of and have available.

You need to have a campground. You need to have at least 40 – 50 acres available for camping with a minimum of 1500+ campsites of a minimum size of 15' x 40'. If you do not have a facility to begin with such as a fairground with extra area around it, this can and has been done by renting farm ground.

You need to have buildings or tents available for registration, food and the dances. For the food and dance you need a minimum of 80' x 120' and seating for 700 is required to turn over fast enough to get everyone fed in the amount of time allowed.

You need to have manpower. Minimum core of 30 – 35 people. Volunteer numbers for the days of the event may exceed 80+ people. Departments that have hosted in the past suggest that a minimum of 75 – 80 % of your department needs to be in favor of hosting the event and willing to do their part. They also need to have the support of their spouses.

Approximately 25 hotel rooms need to be available within close proximity for officers and contest officials. These need to be secured by the host department and then the IFA will take charge of dealing with the hotel and making room assignments. You should talk to the hotel and have a verbal agreement with them before you even announce that you are campaigning to host. This needs to be done prior to being selected by the IFA members. There will be towns that will get this done before you can get home from Convention. Hotel list (IFA Board Members, Past Presidents, or Contest Officials) from the IFA should be turned in by July 1st.

You need to have a good location for the contests that is level and has an adequate water supply. Remember that the IFA waterball teams like to choose North/South or East/West for set up based on wind conditions.

It is beneficial to have a golf course and bowling alley available within the community.

It's very important to have city support. The city needs to understand the situation. Talk to your mayor and city council and explain what convention is like and try to get them to understand the number of people that you are actually expecting to be there. It is hard to really comprehend until you've seen it first-hand. A good relationship with local law enforcement officials is helpful. You will also need to check with your city about whether you will be covered for the convention under their insurance. The local power company is another group that can be very helpful to you when it comes to the electrical needs of convention. Another contact should be with the Chamber or who ever represents that local business. They need to be informed on what is coming and how it may affect them. Positive or negative.

You need to have the money available to begin with. Some departments may have access to money, some may need to borrow. The reality is that except for payment of ads for the convention book, if you do one, you will not have money coming in until March/April of the year you are having convention when you start selling camp sites and merchandise at Mid-Year. You need to plan on around \$50,000 for startup money. There is now a contract between the host town and the Iowa Firefighters Association. This agreement will be approved/signed by both the host city and the IFA. Each year the electrical equipment and shower trailers will be passed to the next town for \$1800. Upgrades will be made as needed and the IFA will reimburse the host town up to \$4000 per year upon approval of provided receipts.

You will want to have a Convention Committee made up of a Convention Chairman and Co-chair and the Chairman of each individual committee. Meet regularly to make sure things are running smooth and getting done when they need to be done. At the same time, let the committees take care of what they were set up to take care of.

The IFA is responsible for the contests on Saturday and the meeting on Sunday. The host town is responsible for the parade, meals, dances, craft show, any other contests such as Women's Waterball, Co-Ed Waterball, etc. and also the golf and bowling tournaments, and any other events they wish to have such as fireworks.

You will need to set up several committees to take care of all the different areas of the convention. A suggested list would be as follows:

- Book/ Advertising
- Entertainment
- Parade
- Camping
- Golf
- Bowling
- Food
- Registration
- Finance
- Merchandise
- Contests
- Security This committee is included in Camping
- Necessities

Following is a breakdown, by committee, of some of the details to be aware of.

Book/Advertising:

Previously, the host town was REQUIRED to print a convention book. This was essentially the IFA "Annual Report". The IFA paid to have the book mailed out, but the host town had to do the work of finding advertisers, printing, etc. If they did a good job, they could make money at it, if not they could break even or lose money. The IFA now puts all of our "annual report" information on a CD that is mailed out to each member department with the Mid Year mailing. This saves a LOT of money in mailing costs. It also makes the book optional for the host town. If the host towns wish to do a book as a way of promoting local businesses or as a souvenir it is up to them. The book would be a lot smaller without IFA info so it would cost less to print. The idea was if the host town still does a book, instead of mailing it out, it could be handed out at registration but some towns have still mailed it out and department mailing labels can be sent to the host town from the IFA office. Any information that the host town may still want to print in the book from the IFA can also be provided by the IFA office.

Entertainment:

This committee is in charge of obtaining refreshments and any required liquor licenses, bands for Friday and Saturday night, and any other entertainment type things your department may want to do. Most Bands will require a down payment upon signing the contract. Bands continue to cost more. Many bands will require additional production (sounds, lights). Don't forget stage minimums and costs.

It is not necessary to spend tremendous amounts of money to get bands. As long as the band plays music that keeps people there and dancing that is great. Go on your past convention experiences and what you know people attending convention like to listen to. Book early so that the band you want has the date available.

You will be setting up for the dances and arranging clean up after.

Make arrangements for announcing the awards and raffle items at the dances.

Have someone at the door checking badges and monitor the crowd.

Decide if you are going to run bar yourselves during the dances or have an outside group run the bar.

If you are interested in having fireworks, shop around early. Some companies are willing to really do all they can to get you the biggest bang for your buck so to speak when it comes to putting on a show like this.

Parade:

Sets the parade route, staging area, judges, trophies and help.

Must provide an adequate float (Room for 20 people) for the current IFA board for appropriate signage.

Keep alcohol out of the parade.

You will want to have a wagon, flatbed or something to serve as a stand for the judges and announcer and also a PA system.

You will need to line up judges and an announcer.

You will have to decide what your categories for judging are going to be.

Good idea to have some porta potties moved to the parade staging area.

Start as early as possible.

You will want to have a table set up in the registration area for parade registration.

Don't forget about contacting area bands, color guard, etc. that you may want to participate in addition to the fire department entries.

When deciding on a parade route remember that you will need to get any necessary permission for street closings.

Work with camping committee to see if there is space available at campgrounds for semis to park that are used to haul parade vehicles.

If your town usually has a parade, ask for help from people that have organized or helped with those parades. You may also be able to find an organization willing to help with barricading streets.

Awards are usually presented during a break at the dance on Saturday night.

Camping:

BE PREPARED! The campers seem to show up earlier every year. They will begin coming in on the Friday before the convention begins to camp for Labor Day weekend.

This is one of the most time consuming and labor-intensive committees. You need to be organized.

You will need to have a minimum of 1500 campsites with a minimum size of 15' x 40'. The campers with slide outs will take every bit of a site that size so that really is minimum. You will want a minimum of 30' for road width through the campgrounds. You will have to police camper location so sliders etc. do not hang over sites. It is hard to get people to move after they have a group set.

Print out a detailed map showing all camp sites and roads. This is needed at Mid-year when making reservations.

Make sure that electrical hookups are available for all campsites. Installing all of the electrical wiring is a very time-consuming job. This is probably one of the biggest jobs of the convention as far as labor. If you can get help and/or support from local power company it is very helpful.

Arrange for portable toilets and make sure that the company that you use is going to be available that week to keep them clean and also to move them as necessary for the parade and contests.

You will need to work with the security committee to make sure that there is overnight security at the front gate, come up with vehicle ID's and have a shelter at the front gate for your workers.

You will need 6 – 8 four-wheelers to escort campers to their campsites and fuel cans ready to keep them running. It is an advantage if some of these are UTV's to help with hauling items. The UTV's move around the Campground with less effort.

You will want to have approximately 15 radios, batteries and chargers at the front gate to be used by your workers. You will also want cell phones there for emergency use and an emergency contact number determined that will be published as such.

Arrange for garbage pick up during the week.

Arrange for volunteers or someone to pick up cans. It is a good idea to set up a time frame for the volunteers to pick up cans.

May want to sell ice at the gate.

Good idea to make it a rule to not allow 4 wheelers to be brought in. Any motorized vehicle after dark must have lights.

Work with parade committee to see if there is space available for parking semis used to haul parade vehicles.

Develop a plan for marking the camping areas (painting or mowing) and putting up signs for each town's area. Mark sites out 2 weeks in advance and scalp them down.

Determine a system for selling spots in advance, determining who has paid or not, accommodations for late arrivals, a plan to deal with early arrivals, set the fee for camping and also a per night fee for anyone arriving before Wednesday.

Reserve approximately 25 hotel rooms for IFA officials. Administrative Assistant will then deal with hotel as far as assigning rooms, etc.

It will be mandatory to inspect golf carts for proper head and tail lights and current insurance before granting access to the camping area. The lights are needed for the safety of everyone and the proof of insurance is required by Iowa Code.

Golf – 4 person best shot Thursday and Friday

Secure a golf course.

Set up tournament, line up golf carts if not included with golf course agreement, make sure there is plenty of help. If doing raffles, etc. make plans for that. Line up trophies and present during dance.

Good organization is important to keep things running. It's pretty common for people with late tee times to miss the Friday night meal. You need to have a good starter to keep on time, but they should also be personable. Need people helping to watch where golfers balls end up.

Last few years the average number of golfers is 600. Usually running 2 groups of 4 teeing off at 12 minute intervals. 54 carts.

FD members who golf in tournaments or folks from the local courses who host tournaments will be an asset here.

Bowling Tournament:

Secure a bowling alley.

Thursday and Friday with number of bowlers past several years running from 300 to almost 400.

3 hour shifts allow time for bowling, cleaning, paperwork and alleviate overlapping and crowding.

Present trophies at dance.

Food:

You must be ready to serve more than 2000 (these numbers seem to be getting smaller. Especially on Saturday evening.) people in 2-1/2 hours. **Make sure the caterer that you find is experienced with that size of group.** This isn't the time to try the new guy that is just getting started. Saturday especially, people are really pressed for time. Contests sometimes run late and everyone is in a rush to get to the parade line-up.

You may be able to get pork producers or beef producers involved with the meat part of the meal and use caterer for the rest of the meal. There again, make sure they know exactly what is going to be involved as far as number of meals and time frame. Some groups are up to that and some aren't.

You will need seating for at least 700 people. That allows for approximately 3 complete groups with 30 – 45 minutes per group.

Meals don't have to be elaborate. Those attending will want the food to be good, hot food hot, cold food cold and lines to move quickly.

You will need to have people to punch name tags, people to clean tables, people to haul trash, depending on your catering contract you may or may not need servers, and you will want others working to simply help with the flow of people.

Regular hole punches do not work well on the plastic name badges – a craft hole punch works better.

In order to turn that many people through the seating area in that amount of time it is helpful to fill the tables furthest away first and keep filling them up solid. Discourage people from "saving" seats for someone that is supposed to be joining them. This eliminates having to look for room for people to sit here and there. By the time the last tables are filling up the first ones should be emptying out and you can keep the rotation going. You will encounter people that are not happy with being told where to sit, but it really works the best that way.

You will need to work with the Entertainment committee if the area is going to be used for the dance also. There isn't a lot of time from the last ones finishing dinner until the dance starts. The band will also be needing to set up by the time dinner is ending.

This committee is also in charge of securing a place for a continental type breakfast for drill officials on Saturday a.m. close to the contest area. (Reimbursed by IFA) This doesn't need to be an actual building or anything. Just area where we can have donuts, coffee, juice available before the contests start.

You also need to arrange for donuts and coffee/juice for the Sunday a.m. business meeting.

This committee would also be in charge of arranging for food vendors to be in the area of the contests. Make sure that they understand that just because there are over 2000 people there, they do not want to have food at their booth for 2000. There will be several vendors so the crowd will be split up. Others will opt to eat at a restaurant or bar nearby. It's better to run out than be stuck with food they can't use.

Registration:

Membership in the IFA or attending as spouse/significant other of IFA member is required to register. This is another committee that the key is ORGANIZATION.

At convention you will need to have a building for registration. 50' x 50' is probably a minimum size. If the building can be outside of the main gate that is ideal. That will allow you to have people register before ever allowing them into the campgrounds. You need to have room for all of your computer equipment, merchandise, registration tables for golf, bowling, parade and any contests you are holding such as Women's Waterball, co-ed, old-timers, etc. You will also need to have 3 - 4 tables and space available for IFA use.

You can obtain sample forms from previous host towns as examples for registration for convention, tournaments and contests.

Registration fee is set by host town. It will need to cover payment to IFA of \$10.00 per paid registration, your meals, dances, camping, etc. IFA pays for trophies for IFA drill contests on Saturday and the Saturday a.m. drill official's breakfast. All other expenses are the responsibility of the host town. Your costs for the bowling and golf tournaments would be covered under registration fees for those events.

You can have people pay for each registration and sales separately, but if you work out a form and a system where everything is together people like the convenience of making out one check and paying for everything at once. You may consider accepting credit cards also. Sales of merchandise are sometimes higher if people can charge it.

Finance:

It may be necessary to get a loan for start-up costs. Except for money from ad sales there will not be any money coming in until you begin selling camping spots and merchandise at Mid-Year. There will be lots of expenses before that time.

Set up budgets for committees and follow up to make adjustments and make sure they are on track. No surprises.

When you get to Mid-Year and when you open up registration at Convention be prepared for a lot of cash to start rolling in and have a plan in place for taking care of it and making trips to the bank. It is a good idea to have 2 people always working together. It's easy to make a simple mistake when you're so busy and having 2 people do the math and accounting for the money can eliminate problems.

Hosting a Fire Convention requires quite a bit of capitol. There are revenues that will support the investment and with good organization, planning, and weather a few dollars can be made. Having an accountant, CPA, or someone who works in fiancé monitoring the cash flow needs and accounting would be sound planning.

Merchandise:

Don't buy too much. It is much better to run out than have a bunch leftover that you can't get rid of. Look at the reports from past conventions and stick to what has sold in the past. You will want to get bids early for convention truck. Be realistic.

Need to be ready to sell at the Mid-Year meeting. Having someone with experience in retail as the chair of this committee is helpful. Provide plenty of space and plenty of help to sell the merchandise. Have bags on hand for sold items and some type of packing for breakable items such as mugs or shot glasses.

To eliminate leftover shirts, etc., you may want to look into having an outside vendor come in and do shirts for you on the spot and have a set amount per shirt be given to you with the rest going to the vendor.

Having a system set up to ship merch is a good idea but trucks do not seem feasible anymore. Some like to order ahead and pick at registration upon arrival.

Contests:

You must be registered at convention and a member of the Iowa Firefighters Association to participate in the contests. The IFA confirms this prior to participation.

The local chairman of this committee should be someone who has participated in and is familiar with the contests.

The IFA is in charge of all the contests on Saturday but you will need to have people available to help with things.

Opening is held at 7:50 a.m. Host provides someone to give invocation. City Mayor and Chief usually give short welcome. **Contests are to start promptly at 8:00 a.m.**

Women's Waterball and any other contests you may wish to have are your responsibility.

You may want to check with someone such as a beer distributor, as Dale Lee Distributing has in the past donated trophies not only for the host contests but for the IFA contests as well. It never hurts to ask.

You need to find a suitable site for your contests as well as for the IFA contests on Saturday. You need to pick two streets, one running north and south and one running east and west, long enough to hold two water fight setups which may take two blocks each way. They need to be as level as possible. Hydrants used for the water fights must be tested to make sure that there is adequate water pressure and volume to run both contests at the same time. The IFA will check this also when they come to check things out (usually in May).

If the contests will be in a residential area you need to notify all property owners that contests will be going on. If it is in the business area the business owners need to know that the streets will be blocked off. Coordinate barricading of streets with the city. They need to be blocked off VERY early on Saturday morning. Do extensive PR work with the public so that they are aware well in advance which streets are going to be blocked off on which days and for what length of time. Planning and communication go a long ways in preventing people from being upset.

IFA will mark out contest sites on Wednesday night and you will want to have someone from your department with them to help.

Things that will need to be available:

80 – 100 sandbags

4 cement trucks, gravel trucks, city trucks or the like to use for anchors

2 wagons with roofs of some type or throw racks with tarps to be used for clerks and announcers

Each wagon needs to have a table (6') and several chairs

Access to electricity for each of the wagon setups

Small table and chair at each contest site is helpful

3 pumpers (2 plus a backup) and workers to operate

Enough hose to run from the pumpers to the wyes

A couple gators

Several people available to help with setting up, tearing down and anything that needs to be done

You will want to make sure that you have porta potties at the contest locations

Make sure that you have someone lined up to ensure that everything is cleaned up after the contests. Most people are good about cleaning up after themselves, but you don't want property owners to be upset after the contests.

Work with food committee to make sure that there are food vendors in the contest area.

Security:

This committee will work closely with the camping committee in securing radios, 4-wheelers, etc. for use by workers.

You will want to make sure that the main gate is manned at all times probably from Tuesday evening until Sunday afternoon. You may want to have people available to man the gate earlier than that if you start getting many campers in before that. It seems that they come earlier each year.

You will want to work with the camping committee on a plan for handling early campers as registration won't be open until Wednesday.

Security requires a lot of manpower to cover all of the shifts since someone needs to be at the gate 24/7.

You will want to have an emergency plan in place for severe weather or some other type of emergency.

May want to have vehicle ID's to hang on rear view mirror as well as checking badges of all entering.

IFA requires different colored wrist bands for under aged attendees

Necessities:

This is kind of a catch-all committee that would work with camping also.

Need to have several dumpsters for trash that is collected. Remember to locate dumpsters away from where people will be located due to the bugs that will be attracted.

You need 100 or more 55 gallon trash barrels placed throughout the campgrounds and at contest sites. The barrels in place and labeled for CANS should have a cover to allow on can sized objects. This is for the safety and security of the Scouts or whatever group is collecting the garbage and recycling the cans.

Arrange for garbage pick-up.

100 or more porta potties. You will want some at the contest site as well as the campground. The company you use needs to keep them clean and be available to move them if you need them moved. Check with camping if anyone has a request for handicapped accessible one to be located near their campsite.

Previous towns have been selling in the neighborhood of 900 20# bags of ice at the front gate.

Line up boy scouts or someone to collect cans and pick-up trash and they keep the cans. That can be a great money maker for them.

Arrange cleaning times for the shower trailers and any other restroom or shower facilities at the campgrounds. Check at least twice daily. Early morning (5:AM) work very good.

Have shower trailers set up by a professional and make sure you have LP available for the heater.

Miscellaneous:

This committee can take care of things like a craft show, raffle items, "goody bags", etc.

Helpful to have someone taking care of the craft show that has been involved with craft shows before. May even want to just let a women's church group or someone like that arrange and take care of it. In the past, admission for convention attendees has been free w/ name badge and a charge (donation) for admission for general public. Vendors need to have sales tax permits.

It's getting harder to find items for "goody bags". Start early. This stuff requires a lot of storage area also.

Raffle items – make a budget for items you purchase – you may have some items donated by local businesses but you don't want to spend too much for purchased items and lose money on the raffle.

Coupon book - local Chamber of Commerce or merchants may be interested in putting together some type of a coupon book that can be put in the bags. Receipt raffle is a neat idea where convention attendees sign all receipts from local businesses during the week and enter them in a drawing at the registration booth for a nice raffle prize. Totaling the receipts gives you an idea of the kind of money generated for the local businesses which can be helpful information for potential host towns.

Odds and Ends: This also can be considered the Admin Committee. Someone needs to be in charge.

Insurance – Make sure that you are covered adequately for the whole convention, either under your city's policy or additional insurance that you may need to purchase. This will vary by city and insurance companies. Some companies may require insurance certificates for anyone associated with the catering. Additional insurance will be required for serving beer and liquor. Need to make sure the IFA is also listed as an "also insured" on the policy. You will need to contact your agent early so the members activities are covered as well as the merchandise that is acquired for sale.

Sunday Business Meeting – Food committee in charge of arranging donuts, coffee/juice but you may want to assign the rest of the arrangements to another committee. You need to have a location for up to 100. There needs to be a PA system. This needs to have a microphone located toward the back of the room and one up front with a podium. There should be a stage if possible with the podium in the center and tables for the board members on each side. There needs to be 2 tables located near the door for the credentials and proxy committees. There needs to be a table available to place hand-outs such as resolutions and financial reports on. This should be near the door also. There needs to be a table available in front near the stage where ballots can be marked and placed in the ballot boxes. Tables and chairs should be in place by 8:30 a.m. Two adding machines should be available with electrical connections available for the credentials and proxy committees and later the election judges. Coffee and rolls should be available before the meeting and during the break.

Make an over-all sign-up sheet showing who is to be working where and when. This can be used to then make an on-call list for your department in case of any calls during convention.

It's a good idea for the Host Dept. to have a meeting each morning, at the front gate works great, just to go over anything that may have come up the day before. It's a good chance for everyone to get together and discuss things. An early morning shift change at the gate is a good time. It needs to be early before everyone is busy with something else.

In 2019 a trophy for the "Convention Overall Champion" was awarded to Urbana Fire. The Host town tracked all the activities that ever FD participated in and they received points. They got a minimum for participation and received more (4,3,2,) for placing in an event. This was proposed by the IFA Board and strongly supported by Manchester Fire.

It's amazing how fast convention comes up from the time you start planning. It's a lot of work, but it can be an awesome and rewarding experience.

Prepare! Organize! Let committees take care of what they were supposed to.

Details are easy to overlook, but they can make a big difference in the success of any activity.

The very best information is always going to come from talking to the town or towns that have just hosted the last convention. Things change from year to year and they are going to be the most knowledgeable as to what has most recently worked well or not so well.

Good luck and have fun!!!

Iowa Firefighters Association Convention Contract

This contract is entered into between the Iowa Firefighters Association (IFA) and the _____ Fire Department, hosts of the _____ IFA annual convention. The contract shall be signed upon election of the host department by the members of the Association at the annual convention meeting. Elections shall be held two years prior to hosting of the convention.

The host department shall agree to abide by the following:

1. Purchase all of the convention equipment from the prior host department. Your cost will be \$_____.
2. Sell all of the convention equipment to the next host department for \$2,500 less than your purchase price. Selling price will start at \$30,000 on starting on October 1st 2023. All departments shall pay \$2500 per year they host convention.
3. Host department shall pay the Association \$10 per registered attendee. An initial payment of \$4000 will be made to the Association with a due date no later than July 1st. The remaining balance shall be paid prior to December 1st following convention.
4. Upgrade and maintain the convention equipment as needed.
5. Provide the Executive Director with receipts for all repairs before December 1st following convention.
6. Select a representative to serve on the IFA Convention Committee for a 5-year term. Terms shall begin when the host department is chosen by the members of the Association at the annual convention meeting.
7. Host department shall provide the IFA with an overall convention report detailing each committee's activities for convention i.e.: campground, registration, golf, bowling, merchandise, meals and entertainment information. This report shall be ready by the next regular IFA board meeting following convention. This information shall be available to following host departments.
8. The previous host department must have the shower trailers ready for pick up 30 days after convention. The host department must pick up no later than 60 days after the convention. Payment in full, signed title, and proof of DOT inspection must be complete at the time of transfer. Proof of transfer of title must be provided from the host department to the previous host, if proof is not provided to the previous host, the host would owe back registration plus a \$150.00 administrative fee.

The IFA shall agree to abide by the following:

1. Establish a separate account to be used for convention equipment repairs.
2. Maintain \$4000 in this account with the money coming from the convention registration fees.
3. Repay the host department up to \$4000 for repairs, replacement, or upgrades, made to the convention equipment upon presentation of receipts for such to the Executive Director.
4. Pay all convention expenses out of money received from registered attendees.
5. All regastation money will be put into a separate account for convention expenses.

Signed by:

IFA President

Date

Host Department Fire Chief

Date

Host Department Convention Chairperson

Date