

The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and
Secular Student Societies

A Guide to Hosting Regional Conventions

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A guide to hosting regional mini-conventions

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What is a mini-convention?

Every year the AHS has a national London-based convention, with speakers and workshops, mostly for the benefit of committees. We think this style of event is very important, and that there is potential for high attendance at regional mini-conventions, which would help local groups to build relationships and for people to pass on their knowledge to each other more directly. We also envisage them as a way to get new people involved, and to build the confidence of people through workshops and networking. The main benefit of mini-conventions over the national one is that it will be cheap and easy to get to them. It should be a small investment for a big gain - we hope that most people should be able to spend around £15 on the whole day at most, and to feel that it will be trivially easy to get to the convention, being an hour on the train maximum.

What to do beforehand

Decide on a University and a date

Regional Officers have a region which often contains multiple universities. Deciding on a suitable university to host the regional convention is crucial in the planning and development stages. This should be the first thing that you do. The committee of the society at the university you have chosen will help with the planning, running, management and cost of the event, so it is vital to have them on board as early as possible. Deciding on a date is an obvious starter too. Without the date any speaker you invite will not be able to commit there often limited time.

Booking a speaker

The first thing that needs to be done is to book a speaker (or multiple speakers). Speakers will often be busy, so in general you will need to contact them a couple of months in advance. You will want to choose your speaker based on your funds (the AHS can cover a reasonable amount

of speaker expenses), the number of people you anticipate being there (you can advertise the talk separately from the convention) and the venues available to you.

Invite people/societies

The mini-conventions serve two main purposes: to bring together local groups and to help individuals who want to run a society understand what this involves. Before your convention you will need to contact as many existing groups as you have nearby, but also it is in the spirit of regional conventions to seek out people who are at a university which does not yet have a group, in order for them to feel more confident in setting up their society, or getting involved with the community and movement. The AHS will put you in touch with people who have already expressed an interest in starting a society near you and write to university newspapers and unions in order to try and make contact with other people who might wish to come along, so you should work with your RDO or the Head of Membership and Secretary to organise this.

It is really useful to meet up with local groups dedicated to a rational, naturalist worldview. They can help with ideas for speakers and events or even collaborate with you to put on bigger events. Every town and city has a different mix of groups, but there are some groups who are more likely than not to be present in your area:

- [The British Humanist Association](#)
- [The National Secular Society](#)
- [Skeptics in the Pub](#)
- [Science Café](#)
- [Sea of Faith](#)
- [Girl Geek Dinners](#)
- [Geek Pop](#) (Based online, but good for ideas for geeky acts IRL)

Make sure you have the emergency contact details for your speakers. After the event, a small gift, such as a bottle of wine or box of chocolates, is nice way to show your appreciation to your speakers.

MUST READ:

The event is an AHS event and this must be reflected in all output. Calling the event the AHS Hogwarts Freethought Convention is **acceptable**. Calling it *Hogwarts Freethought Convention* is **not**. *If your event does not reflect the AHS, the Executive will ask you to rectify this.*

The Executive also want to remind you to only get funding from the AHS. Regional Conventions are only one day long and they need not be funded by multiple organisations. It is an AHS event and as such the AHS will support it.

Tell people how to get there

Once people have said they will attend, you should be able to reply with a nice piece of prose, and more importantly, a detailed itinerary, with times and places marked as best you can. Include maps of the campus, and also of the city. You will need to instruct people on buses and trains, if possible with local ticket prices, and how to get to the venue from the stations. This will

only need to be a short document as most people will be quite local, but do be thorough. The AHS can't really help you with this part - you are of course the ones hosting!

Booking Venues

You will need to book either one or two rooms, depending on the scale of the event you are looking at. You will probably need a theatre for a speaker, but if there are only ~30 people expected you would be fine with a regular teaching room. You will need a normal room with tables and chairs for the workshops, possibly 2 for larger conventions. Booking rooms will be left entirely to host societies, but the AHS can cover some costs for these too.

Plan food/drink

For a half-day event people will expect a coffee break. You should probably find a few kettles and have cups and tea and instant coffee etc. Juice and water are also good. Biscuits and home made brownies and baked goods are also great, but Sainsburys will do! Make sure you have enough for the expected attendees.

Plan Workshops

This is probably the key focus of the conventions. There is a list of workshops on our website, but you may also want to design your own, depending on what you think your society does well. You can also rip off our current titles and put something together - the AHS will aid you with the content. The AHS will probably be able to find some people to run workshops if you don't feel like you have anyone who is qualified. We suggest 3-4 workshops of 30-45minutes, which you can choose to run in parallel with each other or with other activities.

Other activities

Some people won't want to do anything academic, so you can provide other things to do. You could run a practice debate, have a "design your own religion" competition (the AHS can provide the outline for this), run a discussion, do arts and crafts, or just have a tea party.

Merch

At the event you may want to give out merchandise and leaflets. The AHS can provide you with some things, such as badges and pamphlets, and when (either you or us) contacts groups such as skeptics in the pub who may wish to attend it would be a good idea to ask if they want to send any leaflets for you to give out.

General money stuff

You will need to budget this event very carefully. The AHS is willing to spend some money on these conventions, but it would be a good idea to try to recuperate any costs. Charging £3 for a talk can cover the speaker's expenses if you get a decent number of people. Charging a little just for the day may also make money, but equally may put people off if it is too much. You may also consider having a donations bucket next to the drink and cake, which can be very profitable at big talks. The AHS will work with you to make sure that your expenses are reasonable and you are making back what you can. You can be sure that your society will not end up out of pocket, but you will have to provide receipts etc. in order to be reimbursed.

Running the event

Have the itinerary branded into your minds, and make sure there are hard copies for at least half of the attendees (you could probably make these just plain A5 or A6, nothing flashy). There will hopefully be some AHS people to hand at your event, and you should try to make sure that your committee is there and that there are other helpful presidents running around. The key thing is to make sure all your minions know what they have to do and when, and that attendees never have to wait around.

Someone will need to be “in charge” and direct people around. You may want to have someone directing people to the lecture theatre if it is not easy to find, You could also put up signs. If you are charging entry you will need someone to take the money (which will require a float). If the food and drink has a suggested donation you will need to monitor that too.

Final Comments

If you have any problems making decisions, need advice or even want to have a Skype meeting with your RDO/the Head of Membership/the Exec, we will go out of our way to meet your needs. The AHS is really committed to running these events, and although you will have to do the leg work with room bookings, buying food and telling people how to get there, we are able to do all the stuff which is not specific to your university - e.g. putting together workshops, finding speakers, printing itineraries and inviting people. You can do as much or as little of these things as you like, and if you feel we are asking too much then just tell us and we'll start to pull our weight!