# State/Regional Forums

Resource Guide

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# I.Introduction

WealthCounsel actively encourages members to create and participate in effective membership forums. In an effort to help our members set up and sustain a forum in their state or region, we have assembled a resource guide containing the best practices and ideas for organizing and running a successful forum compiled from the experiences of prior and existing forums. With the help of forum leaders and participants, we expect this handbook to continue to evolve and improve. If there is anything that can be added to help you, or if you have ideas for starting or sustaining a forum, please let us know!

All questions or comments regarding state/regional forums should be directed to Jenny Ellingson, WealthCounsel State/Regional Forum Program Coordinator:

Email: jenny.ellingson@wealthcounsel.com. Phone: 1-888-659-4069, Ext. 825.

# II.CLE

### A.Applications

To qualify a presentation for CLE credit, all states require a completed application form, timed agenda, and speaker biographies. Click **here** for a list of state bar associations and contact information. If a state's bar association requires additional documentation or information, the requirements will be stated in the bar's CLE application.

Each state has a different filing date, but the typical range is 30 – 60 days prior to the program. It is better to get them in as early as possible.

### **B.**Filing Attendance

Each state has a different deadline for submitting attendees' names for CLE credit, but most states' deadlines are 15 - 30 days following the conference. Some states also require a specific form or protocol when filing. Check with your state bar association for its reporting policies.

### C.Certificates of Attendance

The certificates must have the following:

- Name of attendee
- Name of session(s), date and time presented
- Name(s) of presenter(s)
- Name and address of WealthCounsel, LLC
- Name of hotel, city and state where the course was presented
- Signature of person applying for and maintaining CLE

### D.Sign-In Sheets

The sign-in sheets need to have the following:

- Typed name of attendee
- Space for signature of attendee
- Date and Title of course at the top
- Space for state's name and state bar number
- Space for sign-in and sign-out

### E. Advertising Course Approval

Course approval can be displayed on promotional material as being “applied for” or "pending" and listing the states in which CLE credit has been applied for. If the course has been approved for CLE credit before promotional materials are printed, the materials should indicate how many hours have been approved and the name of the approving jurisdiction.

## III. Forum Bank Accounts

While there are other ways to collect and manage forum dues, it seems like the most common method is to establish a not-for-profit organization to manage the forum's affairs, and appoint a treasurer from among the forum participants to manage receipts, deposits, and disbursements.

After the forum's leadership is selected and a treasurer is designated, the forum should formally organize the non-profit entity in their jurisdiction. Once the forum's corporate entity is established, the leadership (or the treasurer) should obtain a Tax Identification number for the forum. Then the forum should establish a bank account to receive deposits and from which disbursements will be made. (We suggest that the forum open the account at an institution that does not charge a fee and does not require a minimum account balance. In addition, if the account is non-interest bearing the forum can avoid filing an income tax return each year.)

## IV. Listserv Communication

WealthCounsel has established and will continue to maintain State/Regional Listservs to facilitate communication among the forum members.

### A. Active State/Regional Listservs

To view a list of active State/Regional Listservs, please click here. To subscribe to an active Listserv, send an email to support@wealthcounsel.com and request your Listserv subscriptions. Be sure to provide the following information:

1. Your WealthCounsel login email address;
2. The email address you want to use for your subscriptions;
3. The Listservs you want to subscribe to; and
4. Your complete contact information.

### B. New State/Regional Listservs

State and Regional Listservs are provided as a member service. All costs associated with the set up and technical maintenance of the listserv is covered by WealthCounsel. If you would like to start a State/Regional Forum in an area that does not have an active Listserv, please contact Jenny Ellingson by email: jenny.ellingson@wealthcounsel.com. Jenny will work with WealthCounsel’s IT Department to initiate the listserv.

## V. Live Meeting

Geography can be a major deterrent for large states and regions to hold forum meetings on a regular basis. Travel and meeting costs can often prevent forums from meeting as often as they would like. Solution – Virtual Conferencing!

### A.Live Meeting

WealthCounsel has the capability to host virtual meetings through a program called Live Meeting. Live Meeting is a web conferencing service that allows you to collaborate with team members, view, and edit documents in real-time, and share presentations without traveling or reserving a conference room. As a Live Meeting Organizer, WealthCounsel can schedule and provide access to online meetings with remote participants. It is the responsibility of the forums to conduct the meeting and provide content.

If you are interested in learning more about how Live Meeting can be used at your next forum meeting, contact Jenny Ellingson at jenny.ellingson@wealthcounsel.com.

## VI.Meeting Planning

A meeting for five to 100 people takes just as much time and effort as planning for hundreds. But the little touches that might go unnoticed by a large group are readily appreciated by a smaller group. Since a minor mistake can become a major problem, it is important to be precise in all of your planning.

### A.Money

Before you do anything else, determine your budget. Establishing expectations and limitations early in the planning process helps other variables fall into place – site selection, catering options, and meeting style all depend on resources available. Here's a list of items to consider:

- Transportation
- Facility Rental
- Equipment Rental
- Accommodation
- Catering
- Entertainment

You will also need to budget for Speaker and CLE fees. It's not a bad idea to leave a little room in your budget for those unforeseen expenses that always seem to pop up along the way. Some forums plan their financial budget "meeting by meeting" and others plan a set amount of monthly/quarterly "dues" upon which decisions are then made.

### B.Choosing a Date

Have at least two dates in mind: a "preferred" date and an alternative "just-in-case" date. That way, when you start checking out available facilities, you'll be able to choose the best option based on the number of people who can attend. Alternate dates also mean you can negotiate for better prices.

Consider the weekend. Many companies take advantage of discounted fares available with a Saturday night stay over. If cost is a major concern, reduce costs by planning your meeting around a weekend.

When choosing a date for the meeting, it's important to remember to account for holidays: traditional, postal, and corporate. Also, find out when religious holidays fall. After you have chosen your ideal dates, consider the geographic location that works best for your attendees. (Of course, be watchful of accidentally scheduling your forum's meeting the same weekend as "the big game.")

### C.Location

Off site or on site? Carefully weigh the options. While holding a meeting on site may seem like the best cost-savings option, on-site meetings at offices have plenty of productivity-distractions. Meeting attendees are more likely to run back to their offices to check e-mail, voice mail, and inboxes. The flow of group thought is more easily disrupted. Subtle influences like office politics and "organizational baggage" may be hanging in the air, affecting attendees' attitudes. People are refreshed at off site locations and able to truly focus on the agenda. Upfront facility expenses are frequently recovered in increased productivity.

On the other hand, if a member's office provides an ideal conference room setting, an agreement on professional etiquette, such as all cell phones disabled, can help provide the focus you need and deserve. Finally, if you notify Jenny Ellingson by emailing her at jenny.ellingson@wealthcounsel.com after you've selected a date and location, she will post the information on the state/regional forum website calendar on the WealthCounsel website.

### D.Meeting Equipment

Productive meetings often require more than four walls, a few chairs, and a couple of flip charts. Meeting attendees will likely bring laptops to access and present computer-based information. Consider providing a means of projecting computer-based information for presenting. Attendees will need a means to capture notes and ideas generated in the meeting. A speedy Internet connection is becoming standard. Will videoconferencing tools be required?

### E.Murphy's Law of Meetings

Undoubtedly, things will go wrong. With so many variables and logistics, some aspects are simply beyond your control. The hotel is overbooked, the caterers don't show up, the main presenter gets re-routed through South America – the important thing is to keep your cool. Reduce headaches by building flexibility into the agenda. Prepare yourself for bumps so that you can calmly address circumstances as they present themselves.

### F.What to Consider

Everyone has their own styles and preferences, and the meeting organizer should strive to satisfy attendees' needs. But some things are basic to every meeting.

#### 1.Two – Three Day Events

For a two- to three-day event, look for facilities close to the airport or office – ideally no more than two hours away. No one wants to spend much of the first day traveling, arriving tired or hassled, and then anticipating the same return trip on the last day of the meeting.

#### 2.One Day Events

For an all-day meeting, don't choose a resort. It is very frustrating to see a wonderful golf course, beach, or spa and know that you will never get to enjoy them. But if the agenda includes free time for attendees to spend time together at play, a downtown hotel might not be the wisest choice. Decide how the time will be spent, and then determine the type of facility to match your needs.

#### 3.Conference Centers

Check out the conference centers, resorts, and hotels in the area. Each facility will have its own characteristics, but all will be able to provide for your basic needs. Some can provide recreational activities and fellowship opportunities on-site, or the staff might be able to recommend other facilities available to your group.

#### 4.Site Accessibility

Is the site easily accessible by car or plane? Is the location affected by the weather at the time you have chosen?

## 5.Compare/Contrast

Call a few possible sites and make a list of the amenities, availability of dates, room rates, and general information. Just by looking at the list and matching it to your needs, you can easily choose the right site.

## 6.Negotiate

Negotiate for some additions to your event, if possible. Ask if the facility will give you a complimentary guest or hospitality room based on the total number of rooms you book. Some facilities will negotiate their listed prices if you book during a particular time or on special days of the week. You may want to change your dates to get those favorable rates. If a facility cannot change its room rates, it might be able to arrange for other things at a reduced rate or even free — such as airport transportation, an upgraded menu, better rooms, gifts for each attendee, or even receptions (usually the food, not beverages). Have an accurate list of all extra charges as part of your negotiations, such as your meeting room, audiovisual, bellhops, housekeepers, service charges, taxes, parking.

## 7.Site Inspection

If possible, plan a site inspection to give you a feeling for the facility and its staff. It is always a good idea to look the place over yourself. If that is difficult, ask for the names of some recent clients to contact. Be sure to ask about the little things.

First impressions count. During your pre-event visit, keep your eyes open. Does it look the way that it did in the brochure? Are the grounds neat? Were the directions correct? Do the front-desk personnel, wait staff, housekeepers, and others smile and greet you? Are the public rest rooms clean? Are the sales and marketing people organized and ready to visit with you? Look at the sleeping and meeting rooms that you will be using. Make sure they show you the ones you will really be using, not just an example of similar rooms!

## 8.Work With One Contact

Work with only one person as your contact, if possible. If you will be working with more than one person, ask that they all meet with you at the same time. Make detailed notes of everything you have discussed, and send a copy to every person you will be working with. Try to do it as soon as you return to the office and before they have filled out any contracts.

## 9.Contract Review

When you receive the contract, make sure that all arrangements match what you have planned. Find out about check-in and check-out times. Are they flexible? Do they match your travel plans? Can they make rooms available for early arrivals? What rate will they quote for those coming a day early or staying later?

## 10.Final Dates & Billing

Establish final dates for guarantees of rooms and meal functions. Finally, ask about billing procedures. Can you pay by check or credit card? Will they bill you later? How much later? What goes on the master account? Can they give you copies of the daily charges for each event? Be sure to provide the facility with a written list of those who are authorized to charge on the master account.

## VII.Sample Agendas

Forum agendas are widely diverse, as are their meeting frequencies and duration. Some forums meet quarterly, semiannually, or yearly. Meetings can be half-day, full day, or even multi-day events. It is important to get feedback from your forum members regarding meeting frequency and agenda topics. Click here to view a variety of 2008 forum agendas.

## VIII.WealthCounsel Member Forum Support Program

To help state/regional forums build momentum, WealthCounsel will provide one-time financial and programming assistance to new and existing state/regional forums. Qualification for the WealthCounsel financial and programming assistance is conditioned on the state/regional forum satisfying all of the requirements of the Member Forum Support program.

### A.Financial Assistance

WealthCounsel will provide $1,000 for each state or regional forum (up to one state forum per state). Each forum's leaders are responsible for submitting pre-approved expense receipts to WC for reimbursement. Forums may use the financial assistance to build momentum toward projects defined by the forums' member-appointed leadership, to organize and conduct forum meetings, fund educational offerings for the forum or for other related expenses associated with conducting the business of the state/regional forum.

### B.Programming Assistance

WealthCounsel employed Lew Dymond, of Dymond Consulting, Inc. (DCI), to provide up to 30 hours of programming time to facilitate additional programming of state/regional-specified changes to WealthCounsel's HotDocs-based software programs. Dymond Consulting, Inc. will bill the state/regional forums directly, at $150/hour, for all programming time that exceeds the initial 30 hours.

Forums are encouraged to take advantage of specialized programming assistance to guide jurisdictional practice preference changes to WealthDocs for WealthCounsel members. Practice preference items, such as ancillary documents not specifically set forth in state statutes, "preferred" language that members believe represent better practices in their jurisdiction, alternative assembly choices, etc. will qualify for WealthCounsel's Member Forum Support program. (Of course, WealthCounsel will continue to program state *statutorily-required* provisions as a feature of membership.)

### C.Requirements for Participation in the Member Forum Support Program

To qualify for participation in the support program, a state/regional forum must be comprised of 10 WealthCounsel members or 20% of the members within that state or region, whichever is greater. The number of members in a state or region will be determined by the number of members who are licensed in the state or region as identified on WealthCounsel's online member directory.

WealthCounsel encourages state/regional forums to be open to WealthCounsel members and nonmembers alike. To qualify for participation in WealthCounsel's Member Forum Support program, the forum must be comprised of a majority of WealthCounsel members.

At each forum's initial meeting the participants must identify one or more leaders who will be responsible for conducting all future meetings, establishing meeting agendas, and coordinating with WealthCounsel's staff to receive the benefit of the Member Forum Support program assistance. To qualify for participation in the Member Forum Support program, all forum activities must be available to all WealthCounsel members.

Any state/regional forum activity, including software programming, which are paid at least in part by the WealthCounsel Member Forum Support program will be made available to all WealthCounsel members.

## D.Getting Started with the Member Forum Support Program

Each state/regional forum will appoint one or more leaders to manage the forum's organization and operations. The forum's leadership will schedule all forum meetings and be responsible for all organizational matters, including contracting with meeting space providers, preparing handout materials, managing forum funds, etc.

The forum's leadership will provide WealthCounsel with a list of the forum participants and a brief description of the forum's planned activities for the calendar year.

WealthCounsel will add all scheduled state/regional forum meetings to the WealthCounsel forum calendar, and will upload meeting agendas and meeting handouts and presentation materials as requested by the forum's leadership.

The forum's leadership will contact WealthCounsel and indicate that the forum intends to participate in the Support Program, and will identify a representative from the forum to submit claims against the Member Forum's Support program financial assistance account. WealthCounsel will provide the forum leader with a Reimbursement Expenses form to fill out. All claims must be pre-approved by and submitted to Jenny Ellingson, WealthCounsel State/Regional Forum Program Coordinator.

In addition to the requirements spelled out above in Section D, forums who would like to apply for the 30 hours of Programming Assistance must follow these steps:

1. Form a committee of at least 3 forum members.
2. Appoint a chairman who will have sole responsibility to communicate with DCI. This person will have final authority when DCI has questions about how documents are to be programmed.
3. Compile an initial list of documents that will be included in the project. Samples of each document should be included.
4. Schedule an initial conference with DCI to refine the programming project.
5. Create a master document for each template to be included in the project.
6. Committee chairman submits the master templates to DCI.
7. DCI will then work directly with the committee chairman to complete the programming of the custom templates.