

Planning for NOU meetings

Locations for NOU meetings are determined by the board of directors. The meetings are distributed around the state so members can experience different birding areas in Nebraska, and the workload of organizing meetings can be shared by more people.

Spring meetings are held the third full weekend in May (weekends that include both Saturday and Sunday). Fall meetings are scheduled usually for the third weekend in September. Registration is generally higher in spring (50 to 90) than fall (30 to 50).

A typical meeting begins on Friday evening with attendees gathering for dinner around 6:00 p.m. The evening program begins around 7:00. It is hosted by the NOU president and vice president and features an invited speaker. Afterwards, the NOU board of directors conducts the board meeting. After breakfast on Saturday, members receive their sack lunches and divide up to go on field trips. Trips usually depart by 7:00 a.m. or so. Dinner is scheduled around 6:00, followed by another evening program with an invited speaker and the president's announcements. Sunday morning begins breakfast, and field trips that return in time for lunch around 12:00 noon. After lunch, the group compiles a list of species seen, and the meeting is called to a close and members head home.

To hold down registration costs and to make planning easier, variations to the above template can be made. Friday dinner could be eliminated by having members be responsible for their own meal before arriving for the Friday night program. A speaker on Friday night could be eliminated as well, but members do need to gather together that evening so announcements can be given pertaining to field trips, times of meals and speakers, and other NOU business. Members could also be asked to get their own breakfasts the next two mornings if that meal is not readily available, or given the option of taking care of some of their own meals. These are just examples; other alterations to the template are also possible.

Basic needs for all meetings are sleeping rooms, a meeting room, food service, a program and field-trip leaders. Venues that have the first three of these essentials make for easier planning, and members find it simpler than having to drive to separate locations for different events. Larger hotels usually have all three, as do some camps and parks.

1) Sleeping rooms

Hotels/Motels: Check several in the area to see what prices are being offered and what the availability is. Sometimes a motel will give cheaper rates if a block of rooms can be set aside, and if meals/meeting room can be part of the package.

Camps: These are likely cheaper than motels, but are harder to find, may be too rustic for some members, may not provide the convenience/amenities of motels (private bath, for example), and may not have the space needed for meetings. But some will forego amenities for the advantage of staying in a bird-rich location. NOU has held meetings at Camp Calvin Crest near Fremont, Camp Carol Joy Holling near Ashland, Camp Norwesca near Chadron, and at the YMCA camp at Scottsbluff.

Parks/wildlife areas: Not as many to choose from but they can be cheaper and more scenic. And they are convenient for members who have mobility problems or cannot walk great distances: They can bird right at the meeting site. Past NOU meetings have been held at Halsey National Forest and Ponca State Park.

2) Meeting room

Size: A private room is best, and large enough to accommodate all the registrants (a room that can hold 100 people would suffice). Be careful that the seating arrangement is good for both a meal and a program; the ability to see the screen from all tables is important.

Equipment: The NOU does not have its own audio/visual equipment, although the board will consider a proposal to buy a projector at the spring 2010 meeting in Chadron; if that proposal doesn't carry and if the venue that is hosting the meeting does not have any equipment, then either the speakers will have to bring their own or an attending member(s) will have to be found who can bring what is needed. Extra tables set up in the room are nice for door prizes, handouts, meetings, and maps.

Security: Room should be able to be locked up in case supplies need to be stored inside.

3) Food

As stated earlier, two evening meals (Friday/Saturday), two breakfasts (Saturday/Sunday), and sack lunches (Saturday and maybe Sunday) are typically scheduled, although reducing the number of meals offered can help keep down costs. Some motels have their own restaurants. Other restaurants/caterers can be checked for better prices. Buffets are nice as they have a variety of food, are quick, and people can get what they want on their own. Motels with complimentary breakfasts help attendees save money. Resist package-deal offers, such as those many camps want to sell; our members want flexibility and won't pay for meals they don't intend to consume.

4) Logistics

Businesses will often require a contract to be signed that establishes a minimum number of NOU guests that will be attending. No contract should be signed unless it is carefully reviewed by the NOU treasurer, vice president and president. The contract should promise only the minimum number of people the business will allow.