

Make the Most of Your Conference Experience



BEFORE THE CONFERENCE: PLAN

Get Involved and Informed

- Submit an abstract to present a paper or poster.
- Submit an abstract to be a co-presenter of a roundtable with a client or prospective client. This allows you to strategize and learn real issues facing your co-presenter.
- Volunteer to participate on a panel.
- Volunteer for conference selection and review committees—this often leads to journal review and editor roles, broadening RTI's exposure.
- If involved in conference associations (e.g., American Association for Public Opinion Research, Society of Toxicology), seek a formal opportunity to host a roundtable presentation and suggest invitees.
- If RTI is an exhibitor, familiarize yourself with the activities and marketing materials that will be associated with our exhibit.
- Know which RTI staff are presenting, on what topics, and when. Be familiar with poster presentations, too.
- Contact clients and colleagues in advance to arrange meals or meetings at the event.

Enhance Your Experience with Social Media

Before, during, and after a conference, you can use LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media sites to get more out of professional conferences you attend—and even those you don't.

Listen and Follow

- Follow RTI on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter (@RTI_Intl).
- Join a LinkedIn group about the conference or topics of professional interest.
- Like the conference Facebook page to get information in your news feed.
- Read the conference blog.
- Follow the conference hashtag on Twitter for information from sessions you missed, links to blog posts about the conference, comments about your presentation, and real-time conference updates.
- Follow people who Tweet useful or interesting information.

Share and Connect

- Join in a LinkedIn group discussion.
- Comment on the official conference blog or post about the conference on other blogs.
- Retweet or share RTI posts on Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter.
- Post a status update to your LinkedIn profile or other sites where you network professionally. Tell them you're going to the conference. Include a link to the conference page on rti.org.
- Tweet about your conference experience.
- Respond to Tweets, blogs, posts, or comments made about your presentation or research.
- Attend a Tweet-up.

Know RTI's Social Media Policy

RTI's Policy & Procedure 1.28, Use of Social Media, outlines the institute's philosophy and approach to social media. It also addresses how to avoid appearing to speak on behalf of RTI and how to request that something be shared on a corporate profile.



AT THE CONFERENCE: ENGAGE

Boost Your Networking Power

Why network? Think about what you hope to achieve:

- Make some social contacts with professionally like-minded people.
- Meet leaders in a specific area to discuss research interests.
- Meet others who are wrestling with similar professional or research questions.

Plan your strategy:

- Review the conference program before you go to plan your time productively (e.g., identify what sessions you would like to attend, who you want to meet, what networking opportunities are being offered).
- Review the conference program again when you get to the conference, preferably in an open area where you can chat with other attendees.

Take Advantage of Networking Opportunities

Program Sessions—Target a speaker and introduce yourself after the session. Ask a question. Offer a business card. If the speaker is swamped with people, take note and seek out the presenter during a reception or other event.

Exhibit halls have more than just exhibits—Meet and greet exhibitors.

- Poster sessions—Find something interesting to talk about with the presenter. Poster presenters are always happy to talk about their research.
- Meet the author sessions—Authors are always happy to talk about their work.
- Demonstration sessions—Researchers are always happy to talk about their projects.
- Breakfast and breaks between sessions—Introduce yourself and mention something interesting from the last session you attended. If you recognize someone from an earlier session, chat with them about it.

Business Meetings

- Learn about opportunities with the organization, like committee membership.
- Meet the new and old council members.

Social Events

- Attend receptions, mixers, and other scheduled social events.
- Invite a small group to lunch, dinner, or drinks.

Maximize Booth Time

Be Prepared

- Greet everyone with a smile and a handshake. Booth duty can be enjoyable, and you should try to convey enthusiasm and interest to booth visitors.
- Bring your business cards to the exhibit site and set them in holders on the counter. Keep some in your pocket as well.
- Orient yourself to the literature and physical layout of the booth so you can better help our visitors.
- Keep booth tidy and organized. Literature, business cards, and RTI giveaways should be the only items on the counter tops. Store your bags and belongings inside the booth closet.
- Wear comfortable shoes with good cushioning. Exhibit floors may be carpeted, but underneath the carpet is concrete.
- Turn off your cell phone. If you must use your phone, step into the aisle and away from our booth.
- Focus your time on booth visitors. If you need to meet with coworkers or colleagues, schedule time away from the booth.
- Eat before booth duty.



When Talking with Visitors...

- Body language is important: Make eye contact and hold literature in your hands.
- Ask visitors about their interests and companies before talking about RTI's capabilities.
- Refer people looking for employment opportunities to recruiters if in attendance. If no recruiters are supporting the event, hand interested people an RTI careers card and let them know current employment opportunities are posted on RTI's website.
- Stand whenever possible. If you must rest, sit lightly on the edge of the counter so that you remain at eye level with passersby.
- Ask open-ended questions, such as "What do you know about RTI, and what can I tell you about us?" "In what projects are you currently involved?"
- Point out the signs on our literature racks that contain a URL and QR code for easy electronic access to our featured collateral. This is a great option for people who don't want paper copies.

Be Our Eyes and Ears

- Look at our competitors' exhibits and take note of those that draw you in. What are they doing that RTI isn't? What is RTI doing that our competitors aren't? What giveaways were popular? Are there innovative booth designs that we can implement in the future?

Are We Hosting a Reception?

- All attendees, RTI staff and guests, will be asked to sign in at our welcome desk.
- Remember, you are the hosts: Make sure guests are able to get food before you fill up your plates, and if food is running low near the end of the reception, let guests eat first.
- If the room is getting too crowded, RTI staff should step outside the room so we do not exceed the maximum number for the venue.
- Avoid clustering together with other RTI staff.
- Mingle and make the guests feel welcome.
- If you can connect guests to RTI staff with similar interests or backgrounds, please do so.
- Bring your business cards!



Potential Questions for Gathering Competitive Intelligence

Icebreakers

- What type of research/work do you do?
- What do you see as the biggest issues facing your [research area] today?

OR

- What do you think will be the biggest issues your [research area] will face in the next 5 to 10 years?

Select One or Two Follow-On Questions

- What do you think causes [these issues/problems]?
- Have you thought about how to solve [these issues/problems]?
- Why is it so difficult to solve [these issues/problems]?
- Who is actually addressing [these issues/problems] in your [research area]?
- Do you think any individual or group is having success in addressing [these issues/problems]?

Move Toward a Potential Collaboration or Qualify a Lead

- What difficulties do you encounter with your research?
- Which of the obstacles that you come across are your biggest sources of frustration?
- How do these difficulties impact your [research, services, delivery, etc.]?
- How do you choose the projects you pursue?
- [Who funds/How do you fund] your research?
- Do you frequently collaborate with other individuals and organizations, or have you developed alliances?
- If so, who are your regular partners/collaborators?
- Do you have an area where you need assistance or additional collaborators?

AFTER THE CONFERENCE: FOLLOW UP

- Complete your contact reports.
- E-mail introductions to RTI subject matter experts.
- Include contacts in a potential collaborator file.
- Call or e-mail contacts to continue your discussion.
- Start planning for participation at next year's conference!

More Information

MaryBeth Branigan
Senior Manager, Marketing and Conference Services
919.485.5661
branigan@rti.org

Margo Jordan
Exhibit Specialist
919.541.7383
mjordan@rti.org

RTI International
3040 E. Cornwallis Road, PO Box 12194
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2194 USA