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Planning ahead

It may be possible to leave buying holiday gifts until the last minute, but it might not be prudent to procrastinate when shopping for conferences and workshops. This is especially true for postdocs and graduate students, and doubly so for those choosing their first meeting. Two factors make it important to plan ahead: availability and funding.

Availability, or getting in, may be relatively easy for larger society-based conferences — but such meetings can be the least beneficial to younger scientists. Although many will feature career workshops or talks, access to plenary speakers is often difficult as they tend to get mobbed after their presentations.

At smaller conferences, it is easier to network with a senior scientist whose work meshes with your own career — although these meetings usually have a restricted number of places. And the chance to learn key skills at workshops can be pivotal early in your career — but many of the most popular workshops are inevitably oversubscribed. The best way to guarantee a slot is to research the options in our Events Directory published in this issue, making your choice and registering straight away.

Making sure someone pays or reimburses you before or after you register is another matter entirely. If you are presenting a poster or a talk but aren't funded, talk to your principal investigator. If they can't pay, your department may have money. Some professional societies also offer travel grants, as do some funding bodies. Sometimes you have to be a confirmed participant in a workshop before you can apply for the funds; other schemes award funds on a first-come, first-served basis.

Whatever the case, as with Christmas shopping, it pays to plan ahead — and to be armed with a credit card to pay the bills.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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