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Conference management

With heightened security, travel over the past couple of years has become more taxing. And with tightened budgets, it has also become less affordable. So scientific travel — whether for workshops, conferences or symposia — requires greater justification. The best way to spend a shrinking travel budget is to get more from fewer events. And the best way to do that is to set yourself some goals and then do some planning.

As a journalist, when I attend scientific conferences, I try to come away with at least one short item I can use immediately (for instance, some fodder for this column), enough information for a longer feature that could run later in the year, and an idea or contact that will develop into a long-term project. I intend to travel less next year, although when I do attend events or make lab visits, I also intend to bring back a greater number of contact names. In addition, I'm planning to have a more concrete idea of future interactions with these contacts before I leave the event, and to follow up faster on the meeting after I return.

If I were a working scientist, I would make similar goals, such as sitting in on at least one session about which I know absolutely nothing, forcing myself to meet five new people outside my normal community, or trying to pick up at least one new skill. If I were a group leader, I would try to find some more potential postdocs, students and collaborators — and, perhaps, one potential multidisciplinary partner from outside my area of expertise.

What is the best way to make all of this happen? Simple: start planning now. Many courses fill up fast and are oversubscribed. And picking a conference to attend on the basis of the fairly broad names used to describe many sessions requires considerable skill. We hope that the events directory in this issue and the natureevents.com website will help you through the process.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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