



ASIA PACIFIC AUTISM CONFERENCE

CONFERENCE PROTOCOL

This document governs the relationship between the Australian Advisory Board on Autism (AABA) and organisations appointed to host the Asia Pacific Autism Conference (APAC) on AABA's behalf.

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This document is to be read in conjunction with the relevant APAC Expression of Interest documentation.

Contents

1. Ownership and Purpose..... 3

2. AABA's Strategic Framework 4

3. Governance and Oversight 5

 3.1 Reporting and Communication 5

 3.2 Recognition and Visibility..... 6

4. Relationship Between AABA and the Host..... 6

5. Conference Design 7

 5.1 Accessibility and Inclusion 7

6. Financial Considerations 8

7. Selection of Conference Host..... 9

 7.1 Expression of Interest Process 9

 7.2 Selection Timeline 10

 7.3 Evaluation Criteria and Weighting..... 10

8. Previous Conference Locations..... 12

Appendix A: Planning Guide for Host Organisers..... 13

1. Ownership and Purpose

The Asia Pacific Autism Conference (APAC) is owned by the Australian Advisory Board on Autism (AABA). AABA may appoint a member organisation or other suitable organisation through a competitive expression of interest process to host and deliver the conference on AABA's behalf.

The Host Organisation (referred to throughout as 'the Host') is responsible for conference delivery, while AABA retains responsibility for strategic oversight, the reputation of the conference, its legacy and alignment with APAC's objectives.

APAC exists to advance autism knowledge, practice, inclusion and collaboration across the Asia-Pacific region. It is the region's premier forum for autistic people, families, researchers, clinicians, educators, service providers, policy makers and government representatives to share knowledge, celebrate innovation and build the relationships that support quality of life outcomes for autistic people.

In hosting APAC, organisations are expected to support not only the successful delivery of the conference, but also the strategic objectives of AABA, including sector leadership, accessibility, government engagement, regional collaboration and the enhancement of AABA's reputation and visibility throughout the Asia-Pacific.

Following the expression of interest process managed by AABA, the Board determines which organisation will be awarded hosting rights for a future conference. The appointment will generally be made two to three years prior to the conference to enable effective planning and delivery.

2. AABA's Strategic Framework

AABA's strategic objectives are central to the purpose and direction of every APAC conference. The Host is expected to demonstrate a genuine commitment to these objectives throughout the planning and delivery of the conference, and to actively support AABA in advancing them.

AABA's strategic objectives for APAC are:

Sector Leadership	Strengthening AABA's voice and influence across the autism sector in Australia and throughout the Asia-Pacific region, including through government relations and policy engagement.
Regional Collaboration	Deepening relationships and knowledge exchange across autism organisations, researchers, communities and sector partners throughout the Asia-Pacific.
Accessibility and Inclusion	Ensuring APAC is genuinely accessible and inclusive for autistic people, their families and all members of the autism community, regardless of background or support needs.
Knowledge Advancement	Advancing evidence-informed practice, lived experience leadership and innovation in autism research, policy and service delivery.
Reputation and Legacy	Protecting and enhancing AABA's reputation as the trusted steward of APAC, and delivering a lasting positive legacy for each host city, organisation and community.
Community Engagement	Actively engaging autistic people, families and the broader autism community in all aspects of conference planning, programming and delivery.

These objectives inform the selection criteria for the expression of interest process, the terms of the Host Agreement and AABA's ongoing engagement with the Host throughout the planning and delivery of the conference. Hosts are encouraged to reference these objectives in all strategic planning documents and program development activities.

3. Governance and Oversight

AABA retains strategic oversight of APAC throughout the planning and delivery period. The Host takes full operational responsibility for conference management and delivery, while working collaboratively with AABA on all matters of strategic significance.

The Host will appoint a nominated AABA Director or delegate as a member of the Conference Organising Committee. The AABA representative will participate in strategic discussions relating to:

- Program and theme development
- Stakeholder engagement, including government and sector partnerships
- Accessibility and inclusion planning
- Government relations and policy engagement
- Sponsorship and partnership opportunities
- Conference outcomes and legacy

The costs associated with an AABA Director attending Conference Organising Committee meetings are met by AABA.

Host Agreement

The successful Host will be required to enter into a formal Host Agreement with AABA prior to commencement of planning activities. The Host Agreement will set out the rights and obligations of each party, including governance arrangements, financial obligations (including the hosting fee payable to AABA), reporting requirements, intellectual property, branding and dispute resolution.

3.1 Reporting and Communication

The Host will provide formal progress reports to AABA at agreed milestones throughout the planning and delivery of the conference. Reports will include information on:

- Program and theme development
- Keynote, plenary and invited speakers
- Sponsorship and partnership activities
- Budgeting and registration pricing
- Accessibility planning progress
- Minutes of Organising Committee meetings
- Registration and marketing activity
- Emerging risks and mitigation strategies
- Post-conference survey and outcomes reports
- Recommendations and handover information for future Conference Organising Committees

The Host may also be invited to provide updates at AABA meetings where appropriate.

While responsibility for conference programming rests with the Host, AABA will be consulted on key program themes, keynote priorities and strategic content to ensure alignment with contemporary autism research, practice, lived experience and policy priorities.

3.2 Recognition and Visibility

As owner of APAC, AABA will be appropriately recognised throughout all phases of conference planning, promotion and delivery. This recognition will include:

- Representation at opening and closing ceremonies, welcome addresses and other conference activities
- A prominent presence within the conference exhibition and networking area
- Opportunities to showcase sector leadership, collaborative initiatives and emerging priorities across the autism sector, such as an AABA hosted plenary session.
- Clear and visible placement of AABA branding on all electronic and printed conference promotional materials.

The logos of both AABA and the Host are to be included on all materials produced for the conference, whether electronic or printed. The Conference Handbook will include a welcome note from both the Chair of the Conference Organising Committee and the Chair of AABA.

4. Relationship Between AABA and the Host

The ongoing ownership of the conference rests with AABA. The Host takes full responsibility for the management, leadership and delivery of the conference and must have the capability to manage all operational, financial, legal and reputational risks associated with hosting a major international conference.

AABA seeks to ensure that APAC conferences are successful, sustainable and generate positive outcomes for the Host, delegates, sponsors and the broader autism community. AABA will provide strategic support, guidance and promotion to assist the Host in delivering a successful conference. However, responsibility for operational management and financial administration of the conference remains with the Host.

An agreed hosting fee is paid to AABA in recognition of its contribution to the conference's success. The hosting fee is subject to review by the Board in advance of the selection process for each subsequent conference.

Principle of Collaboration

The relationship between AABA and the Host is founded on mutual respect, transparency and a shared commitment to the autism community. AABA and the Host will work together in good faith throughout the planning and delivery of the conference, with open communication and early escalation of any emerging issues or concerns.

5. Conference Design

APAC is intended for autistic people and their families, practitioners, researchers, educators, service providers, policy makers, government representatives and others with an interest in advancing knowledge and outcomes for autistic people.

The purpose of APAC is to:

- Advance knowledge, research and evidence-informed practice
- Promote the inclusion, accessibility and participation of autistic people and their families
- Share innovation and emerging developments across the Asia-Pacific
- Foster collaboration and networking across the autism community
- Support engagement between autistic people, families, researchers, practitioners, policy makers and government representatives
- Strengthen understanding of autism-related issues in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region

The conference is typically held over three days. To support participation by families, at least one day of the conference must be held over a weekend.

The Host is responsible for developing a diverse and balanced program, including keynote, plenary, workshop and oral presentation sessions. A Call for Papers should be published approximately twelve months before the conference, with approximately five months allowed for abstract submissions.

All Members of AABA are to receive a 30% discount on exhibition booth fees. Satchel inserts for the next host organisation are to be included in delegate information at no charge.

5.1 Accessibility and Inclusion

APAC must be designed and delivered as an accessible, welcoming and inclusive conference that enables the full and meaningful participation of autistic people and all attendees. Accessibility and inclusion must be embedded across all aspects of conference planning, delivery and evaluation.

The Host is required to develop a comprehensive Accessibility and Inclusion Plan and provide it to AABA for review prior to the conference launch. The plan must demonstrate how barriers to participation have been identified and addressed through universal design principles, environmental adjustments, accessible communication strategies, and individualised supports. At a minimum, the plan must address:

1. Physical accessibility of the venue, including clear and accessible wayfinding.
2. Provision of reduced sensory load spaces and other environmental adjustments that support a range of sensory needs.
3. Auslan interpretation for all plenary and keynote sessions.
4. Live captioning for all major conference sessions.

5. Accessible conference communications and materials, including Easy Read versions of key conference information.
6. Processes for identifying and responding to individual accessibility requirements during registration, including communication, dietary, mobility, sensory and support needs.
7. Appropriate spaces and supports for autistic delegates, including fit-for-purpose quiet and retreat spaces.
8. Accessibility, inclusion and autism-informed training for venue staff, volunteers and conference personnel prior to the conference.
9. Meaningful involvement of autistic people and families in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of the conference.
10. Mechanisms for participants to seek accessibility supports before and during the conference, and to provide feedback on their experience.

6. Financial Considerations

The Host is solely responsible for the financial management, planning and delivery of the conference. The Host may manage these functions internally or engage a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) to support conference delivery. Whether delivered directly by the Host or through a contracted Professional Conference Organiser (PCO), the Host remains responsible and accountable for all financial and operational aspects of the conference, including:

- Planning, coordination and delivery of all opening, closing, plenary and breakout sessions, and any associated meetings or special interest group activities.
- Securing and managing suitable venue/s, accommodation, catering and hospitality arrangements.
- Provision of all secretariat, registration, technical and audio-visual and event management arrangements.
- Planning and delivery of social events, excursions and professional networking activities.
- Development, production and distribution of all conference marketing, promotional and delegate materials.
- Identification, procurement and management of sponsorship, exhibition and trade display opportunities and associated stakeholder relationships.
- Implementation of the approved Accessibility and Inclusion Plan, including the provision of environmental adjustments, reduced sensory load spaces, quiet and retreat areas, and other supports required to facilitate meaningful participation by autistic delegates and other attendees.

Registration fees must be developed that are contemporary and reflect a differentiated scale, including:

- Full professional registration
- Concession rates
 - Autistic individuals
 - Families and Carers

- Modest discount for AABA member organisation staff delegates
- Single-day registration options
- Early bird registration (minimum three-month early bird period recommended)

All registration fees must include GST (for Australian conferences). The Conference Organising Committee is responsible for the final budget and the determination of registration fees.

The Host is encouraged to seek government funding from relevant state and federal departments, including disability, education and health portfolios, and to identify private sector sponsorship, philanthropic support and partnership opportunities as early as possible in the planning process.

7. Selection of Conference Host

An expression of interest process is open to interested organisations and AABA will undertake a selection process based on weighted selection criteria. The EOI process will typically commence two to three years in advance of the next conference. Both Australian and international organisations are eligible to apply.

7.1 Expression of Interest Process

The expression of interest process is administered by AABA and involves the following stages:

1. Release of the APAC Expression of Interest documentation to eligible organisations
2. An optional briefing session for prospective applicants
3. Submission of completed EOI applications by the advertised closing date
4. Assessment of submissions by an AABA evaluation panel against the published weighted criteria
5. Shortlisting of preferred candidates and invitation to present their proposal to the AABA Board
6. Evaluation panel recommendation to the AABA Board, including preferred host and any conditions or considerations.
7. Final determination by the AABA Board
8. Notification of all applicants and announcement of the successful Host
9. Negotiation and execution of the Host Agreement

AABA reserves the right to accept or reject any application, to request clarification or additional information from any applicant, and to amend, extend or withdraw the EOI process at any time.

The decision of AABA is final and no correspondence will be entered into regarding the outcome of the selection process.

7.2 Selection Timeline

The following table sets out the indicative selection timeline. Actual dates will be confirmed in the relevant EOI documentation.

Milestone	Timing (indicative)
EOI released	Approximately 3 years prior to conference
EOI briefing session (if required)	Within 4 weeks of EOI release
EOI submission deadline	Confirmed in EOI documentation
Evaluation panel assessment	Within 6 weeks of submission deadline
Shortlisted applicants notified	Within 8 weeks of submission deadline
Applicant presentations to AABA Board	Within 10 weeks of submission deadline
Host organisation notified	Within 12 weeks of submission deadline
Host Agreement executed	Within 4 weeks of announcement

7.3 Evaluation Criteria and Weighting

Submissions will be assessed by an AABA evaluation panel against the following weighted criteria. The weighting reflects AABA's strategic priorities and is designed to identify the organisation best placed to host APAC in a manner consistent with AABA's objectives and the conference's regional significance.

Criterion	Weight	Assessment Descriptors
1. Alignment with AABA's Strategic Objectives and Asia-Pacific Leadership	25%	- Demonstrates a clear and detailed understanding of AABA's strategic priorities - Articulates compelling, evidence-based plans for advancing AABA's sector leadership objectives - Shows existing or well-developed relationships with AABA, Australian autism organisations and Asia-Pacific autism networks - Identifies concrete strategies to enhance AABA's visibility and regional influence through the conference - Demonstrates commitment to conference legacy consistent with AABA's long-term objectives
2. Organisational Capability	30%	- Demonstrated track record in delivering major conferences or events of comparable scale and complexity - Appropriate governance structures, experienced leadership and adequate resourcing - Robust project management processes and capacity to manage a multi-year planning timeline - Evidence of successful financial and operational management of large-scale events - Credible preliminary budget with realistic revenue and expenditure projections

Criterion	Weight	Assessment Descriptors
		- Evidence of financial reserves or risk mitigation strategies to ensure conference viability - Identification of sponsorship, government funding and partnership opportunities - Comprehensive risk management framework and appropriate insurance arrangements
3. Accessibility and Inclusion	20%	- Comprehensive and credible accessibility plan addressing physical, sensory and communication needs - Evidence of meaningful consultation with autistic people, families and disability communities - Commitment to Auslan interpretation, captioning, easy read materials and sensory-friendly spaces - Demonstrated organisational culture and values aligned with disability inclusion
4. Venue and City Suitability	10%	- Suitable venue with adequate capacity for plenary, breakout, exhibition and social functions - Physical accessibility of venue and surrounding precinct - Quality and accessibility of local accommodation, transport and visitor infrastructure - Demonstrated appeal of the proposed city as a conference destination
5. Asia-Pacific Regional Engagement Strategy	10%	- Clear and credible strategy for engaging autism organisations and communities across the Asia-Pacific region - Existing regional partnerships or networks that would strengthen international participation - Demonstrated capacity to attract and support international delegates and speakers
6. Stakeholder Endorsement and Community Support	5%	- Letters of support from relevant government, tourism, sector and community stakeholders - Evidence of broad community engagement and enthusiasm for hosting the conference
Total	100%	

8. Previous Conference Locations

The following table records the history of APAC conferences from the inaugural event in 1997 to the present.

Year	Location	Host Organisation
1997 March	Sydney / Blue Mountains, NSW	Autism Association of NSW
1999 August	Hobart, Tasmania	Autism TAS
2001 October	Adelaide, SA	Autism SA
2002 November	Melbourne, VIC (incl. Inaugural World Autism Congress)	Autism Victoria
2004 September	Canberra, ACT	Autism Aspergers ACT
2007 March	Brisbane / Gold Coast, QLD	Autism Queensland
2009 August	Sydney, NSW	Aspect
2011 September	Perth, WA	Autism Association of WA
2013 August	Adelaide, SA	Autism SA
2015 September	Brisbane, QLD	Autism Queensland
2017 September	Sydney, NSW	Aspect
2019 July	Singapore	Autism Resource Centre
2021	Postponed due to COVID-19	
2025 November	Perth, WA	Autism Association of WA
2027 November	Adelaide, SA	Autism SA
2029	TBC	To be determined
2031	TBC	To be determined

Appendix A: Planning Guide for Host Organisers

This Planning Guide is provided as a practical resource for organisations appointed to host APAC. It draws on the accumulated experience of previous host organisations and Organising Committees. It is intended to supplement, not replace, the Conference Protocol and Host Agreement. Hosts are encouraged to adapt this guidance to their local context and to seek advice from AABA and previous hosts as needed.

A.1 First Steps

Once appointed, the host organisation should take the following initial steps as early as possible:

- Make contact with your state Convention and Marketing Bureau; they provide invaluable support in the early planning stages, including links to potential sponsors, venue recommendations and connections to Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs) and other suppliers.
- Assemble a core Organising Committee team. Key areas of responsibility include:
 - Program (keynote and invited speakers, call for papers, conference streams, abstract evaluation)
 - Staging and events (venue liaison and exhibition management)
 - Financial management
 - Communications (marketing and promotion)
 - IT and audio-visual (website, abstract management system, presentations)
- Appoint a Conference Convener with ultimate accountability for conference delivery. For most organisations, the core team should include a mix of staff and board members.
- Evaluate venue options early and make a firm booking. Do not rely on provisional holds, venues can reassign reserved dates to other clients without notice. It is advisable to book all required rooms from the outset and cancel surplus space later, rather than risk being unable to expand.
- Develop a preliminary budget and critical path. The PCO should assist with this once appointed. Establish a conservative break-even delegate number and plan incrementally, do not commit to expensive additions (opening ceremonies, catering upgrades, complimentary registrations) until registrations approach break-even. Experience suggests 600 delegates is a conservative minimum expectation.

A.2 Program Development

- Develop a Conference Theme that reflects contemporary autism priorities and aligns with AABA's strategic objectives. Share the proposed theme with AABA for feedback.
- Identify and invite Plenary Speakers early - at least 18 to 24 months before the conference. Aim for a balance of internationally regarded researchers and practitioners, lived experience leaders and engaging public speakers. Note that the general protocol is for the host to cover travel (business class return for international speakers), registration and accommodation costs. A clear speaker fee policy should be developed.
- For Symposia speakers (invited below plenary level), the standard approach is to cover accommodation and registration but not travel. Confirm this policy early.

- Issue the Call for Papers approximately twelve months before the conference. Allow approximately five months for proposal submissions. Following review, notify successful applicants and post the confirmed program approximately five months before the conference.
- Ensure each day of the conference offers something distinctive and memorable, particularly the opening session (which sets the tone) and the closing session (which should leave delegates inspired).
- Establish clear guidelines for the conference exhibition. This can be a sensitive area given the range of autism interventions and providers in the marketplace. AABA should be consulted on the exhibition policy.
- All Members of AABA receive a 30% discount on exhibition booth fees. Satchel inserts for the next host organisation are to be included in delegate information at no charge.

A.3 Financial Management

- Prepare detailed budget scenarios at conservative (e.g. 600 delegates), mid-range (e.g. 800) and optimistic (e.g. 1,000+) delegate levels. Registration fee structures should reflect different registration categories and early bird incentives.
- Seek government funding from relevant state and federal departments as early as possible. Federal disability conference funding programs (where available) typically become accessible in the year of the conference.
- Spread financial risk across sponsorship, government funding, registration revenue and other income streams.
- Engage sponsors and exhibition partners early, the most sought-after categories fill quickly. Use your state Convention and Marketing Bureau for sponsorship leads.
- Maintain comprehensive financial records throughout and prepare for post-conference reconciliation and reporting to AABA within three to six months of the conference conclusion.

A.4 Accessibility and Inclusion

- Begin accessibility and inclusion planning from the outset, do not treat it as a compliance exercise. Genuine accessibility requires early commitment and embedding across all planning decisions.
- Consult with autistic people, family members and disability advocacy groups throughout planning. Seek input on the accessibility of the proposed venue, the program format and the materials being developed.
- Book Auslan interpreters and live captioning providers early, as experienced conference interpreters and captioning providers are in high demand.
- Develop accessible conference communications and materials, including Easy Read versions of key conference information such as the program, venue maps, registration process and accessibility supports.
- Ensure the venue provides appropriate environmental adjustments including, adequate quiet and sensory-friendly spaces that are fit for purpose and that these are clearly signed and easy to find.
- Capture accessibility requirements during registration and establish processes to follow up with individual delegates where needed.
- Brief all venue staff and volunteers on autism awareness before the conference.

- Clearly communicate available accessibility features and supports before the conference and throughout the event, enabling delegates to make informed decisions about their participation.

A.5 Logistics and Operations

- It is strongly encouraged to outsource audio-visual, staging and IT/website functions to specialist providers on a competitive tender basis. Your state Convention and Marketing Bureau can provide a list of recommended suppliers.
- Once the PCO is appointed, develop a detailed Critical Path covering every task, responsibility and timeline. Review and update this regularly throughout the planning period.
- Choose a venue with capacity for at least 50% more than your break-even delegate number, and with a good mix of breakout room sizes and one high-quality plenary space.
- Address risk management comprehensively and early, spread risk as widely as possible across insurance, contract protections, financial reserves and contingency planning.

A.6 Communications and Media

- Develop a conference website and begin marketing at least 18 months before the conference. Early registration drives early revenue and helps manage financial risk.
- Prepare a media strategy, including planned media release timing, copies of selected keynote abstracts and arrangements for media interviews with plenary speakers.
- Ensure all conference branding and promotional materials include the logos of both AABA and the Host, in accordance with the Conference Protocol.
- Manage the delegate list carefully in accordance with privacy legislation, delegates must be informed of how their information will be used and must be able to opt out.

A.7 Speakers and Session Management

- Develop a Speakers' Information Kit covering presentation format guidelines, audio-visual requirements, introductory notes and session timing. Requesting presentations in a standard format (e.g. PowerPoint) lodged two or more weeks before the conference is standard practice.
- Establish a Speakers' Preparation Room at the venue where presenters can review and finalise their presentations.
- Develop a Chairpersons' Information Kit for session chairs, covering their role, session timing guidance and speaker introductions.
- Session chair roles should, where appropriate, be offered to suitably qualified representatives of member organisations, sector leaders and individuals with relevant expertise or lived experience.
- Exclusivity of keynote speakers to APAC should be secured by agreement.

A.8 Post-Conference

- Send formal letters of thanks to key participants within two weeks of the conference conclusion.
- Make Certificates of Attendance available on request. Professional development points and continuing professional education credits should be offered where appropriate.
- Complete post-conference financial reconciliation and submit outcomes reporting to AABA within three to six months of the conference conclusion.
- Meet with representatives of the next Conference Organising Committee as soon as possible after the conference to share experience, lessons learned and a copy of the complete participant list.
- Maintain all conference records in accordance with standard organisational practice, with particular attention to privacy and ATO audit requirements.
- Complete a post-conference evaluation and share findings with AABA to inform future conferences and the Protocol review process.