

# GUIDE TO: ORGANIZING AN MRKH CONFERENCE

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MRKH Foundation you™

## STEP 1: CONNECT WITH A LOCAL MRKH SPECIALIST

You'll need a doctor to partner with who can attend and act as a resource at the conference, but also to help you spread the word to MRKH women. Doctors will have MRKH patients and know other doctors with MRKH patients. You don't realize how many MRKH women are actually living right in your own city until your doctor starts connecting you to them! (My doctor also had connections with Queen's University and we were able to secure our venue for free thanks to her – all we did was book classrooms near each other in a university buildings.)

## STEP 2: DRAFT UP AN AGENDA

The first thing you're going to want to do, is decide what kind of event you're holding and what it involves. I specifically say 'draft an agenda' because if you're like me, this will be tweaked and rearranged a million times up until a month or two before the event. BUT it is a key component in helping you accomplish everything you'll need to do. After all, if you don't know what is going on at the event, how can you plan for it? Start with the basics. Make a list of what activities you plan to have at the conference and how much time you'll allow for each. Also take into consideration the time it'll take to transition from each one (usually 10-15 minutes). From there, you can put them in an order that makes sense and you'll be able to see how long your event needs to be to accommodate everything.

Here's an example of some things to think about including in your conference agenda:

- Registration time: it will take a solid 30 minutes to allow guests to arrive, register and find a seat before the event officially begins.
- Opening Remarks: at the beginning of the conference, set aside several minutes to welcome everyone, let them know where the restrooms are and other housekeeping items, and potentially go over what's in store for the day. (Usually takes 5-15 minutes)
- Ice Breakers: these are fun little games or exercises to get everybody to know one another and helps make things less awkward in the beginning. (20-40 minutes)
- Speech by an MRKH Specialist Doctor (could be anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour) These talks typically go over the medical basics of MRKH and give everyone a basic to detailed understanding of the syndrome.
- Speeches by people affected by MRKH and/or family members/partners. These can be anywhere from 10-30 minutes. I don't recommend going more than 30 minutes, as by then people start shuffling in their seats. And don't forget to leave an extra 5 or so minutes between speakers to set up technology, if needed.
- Breakout Sessions: these can be educational, creative, or anything you want them to be! By having multiple sessions, guests can choose which ones they want to go to. These are typically 20 minutes to an hour long depending on the subject matter.
- Support Groups (These never seem long enough! Do at least one hour, but no more than 2.) Also think about splitting people up to be with specific groups. For example: people with MRKH, Family Members, Significant Others, or even more specifically, you could assign people with MRKH to groups based on age as a way to group together MRKH women in different phases of their lives. Ex. People with MRKH ages 13-18, 18-25, 26+.
- Lunch time! Give people at least one hour to mingle and get a bite to eat.

## STEP 3: PICK A DATE, VENUE AND TIME

Be mindful of the date/time of year. Think about when people will be available and willingly able to travel. Also give yourself at least 6-12 months of planning time. (I did my first one in 5 months, but everyone said I was crazy. Don't be crazy.) Next, you'll need a time frame. Choose when you want your event to start and when you want it to end. Now that you've drafted an agenda this should be easy. Conferences are typically a pretty full day. My conference registration starts at 9:30am, with the event beginning at 10am and going until 5pm.

When it comes to the venue, you're going to want to think about your needs/wants for how the event should look. How many rooms do you need? If there are breakout sessions happening at the same time, you're going to need at least 2-3. Find a venue that makes sense: are the rooms you need near each other, is there access to bathrooms, parking? Is it accessible? Once you find a venue that fits your needs, start asking questions that will help you later on in conference planning:

- Is there wifi? If so, can you get access to it?
- Can you come in the evening before or a few hours before the event to do set up? Also ensure you book your time at the venue at least 1 hour past when the event ends to allow for tear down time.
- Where should people park?
- What furniture is provided in the rooms and is there the ability to move it around to better fit your needs/set up?
- What A/V equipment is available (microphones, screens, projectors, smart boards, etc.)
- Is food allowed to be brought in? (Sometimes venues have catering in-house and require you use their catering. This can get expensive.)



**KINGSTON**  
**MRKH Conference**  
**28 | 09 | 2019**

Botterell Hall (18 Stuart St., Kingston ON)  
10:00am-5:00pm

- Support groups
- Breakout Sessions
- Q&A panel of MRKH Specialists
- Free spa treatments
- Door Prizes
- Pizza lunch

**REGISTER: [bit.ly/kingstonmrkhconference](http://bit.ly/kingstonmrkhconference)**

MRKH women, parents, friends & family encouraged to attend!



## STEP 4: BUDGET!

You'd be amazed how expenses can pile up for something like this – especially if you're planning to reimburse speakers/volunteers for hotel and travel. For my first conference, I managed to raise over \$2000, which was incredible! However, you probably don't even need this much if you do like I did and get a venue for free. I'd guess your conference could cost as low as \$1000 the first time – even lower the next year because you'll have extra supplies of a lot of stuff. But anyway, see the budget below as a reference for how much money you will need. However, if you will need to pay for space, factor in an additional \$500 to \$3000. (Note: prices are different in different places/currencies)

<b><i>Purchase</i></b>	<b><i>Cost</i></b>	<b><i>Quantity</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>
Venue (Try getting one for free!)	\$0.00	1	\$0.00
Printing & Signage	\$200		\$200
Food & Drink	\$150		\$150
Pizza	\$250		\$250
Lunch Essentials: garbage bags, plates, cutlery, napkins	\$30		\$30
Gift Cards for Speakers/Volunteers	\$10	25	\$250
Conference Supplies (pencils, mini Kleenexes, registration table essentials)	\$50		\$50
Allocated Travel/Hotel Reimbursements Fund (optional)		3-5 people	\$1,000
Extra Unexpected Expenses			\$70+
<b>ESTIMATED BASIC CONFERENCE TOTAL</b>			<b>\$2,000</b>

These are the estimations for your absolute essentials. If funding goes well enough, you may also want to consider investing in the following:

- A Travel Award for attendees coming from far distances
- Door prizes
- Merchandise (ex. T-Shirts)

### Revenue

Ways to make money at the conference include

- Registration Fee
- Sponsorships
- Donations
- Selling Merchandise

## STEP 5: FUNDRAISE!

You know how much money you need, so now how do you acquire it? You'll need to do one or both of these things: crowdfunding and/or holding a fundraiser event. I'd say start with the online crowdfunding. What I managed to raise on GoFundMe was literally ten times more than what I managed to get from a fundraiser. I never expected the results I got. So, start with a GoFundMe where you can write about and share your story. Spread this all over your social media and any MRKH groups you can find to try and get donations. You'll seriously be surprised by the generosity of not only your friends and family, but also complete strangers within the MRKH community. If you find success through this method, you may not need to hold a fundraiser event.

## STEP 6: PROMOTE YOUR EVENT!

Now that you have money in the bank and know this event can actually happen, let's get it up and ready to go! There are a few different ways to do it, so pick whichever one you're most comfortable with.

- 1) For Creative Techy People: Create your own conference website & accept registrations through it.
- 2) For Simple Folk: Eventbrite is probably the biggest event platform right now. It makes it really easy to simple upload your event – you can even accept payments, however these come with fees. One hack I've done it to avoid paying more than I have to is setting it as a FREE event, but putting a note in the description and on the tickets that it actually does cost something, just that it can be paid via E-Transfer or on the day of the conference instead of through Eventbrite.

### Registration

When people register, you should be asking for the following information:

FIRST & LAST NAME

AGE

ADDRESS

DO YOU OR DOES SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAVE MRKH? (Make sure you are not allowing people who have no connection to MRKH in)

CONTACT INFO: (phone & email)

ANY ALLERGIES/DIETARY RESTRICTIONS? (make note of these answers when deciding what is served for lunch)

Once you've got a way for people to sign up, share the heck out of it! Post it on every MRKH group you can find, send a link to all of the MRKH women and families you know with a personal message inviting them, do up a flyer or poster and send this to your MRKH Specialist so that they can give it to any MRKH patients or other doctors they know, write up a news release and send it out to the media, etc. etc.

## STEP 7: OUTREACH

All right! While you wait for Registrations to start trickling in, it's time for you to actually find the people you need to help make the conference a success. Pull out all of the connections you have and imagine how they can help you. There are four different categories of people/businesses I recommend you reach out to a handful of months before your conference.

### 1) Speakers/Breakout Session Hosts

These guys are the most important part because they are literally the content of your conference. Without them, you have NOTHING! The number of speakers you need will be obvious based on the itinerary you've drawn up.

You're going to need knowledgeable and/or established people whose story or information will benefit the attendees at your conference. Here are some ideas for you to consider when coming up with people who should speak at your conference:

- MRKH specialist
- Someone with MRKH to tell their story
- A family member or supporter of someone with MRKH (mother, sister, significant other, etc.)
- Adoption Agency Representative
- Foster Care Representative
- Infertility Expert
- Physio therapist
- Psychologist
- Sex Therapist
- Fertility Lawyer
- MRKH Organization Representative
- Someone who has gone through the adoption process
- Someone who has had a child through IVF

Another very important person you'll need to be part of your conference is an MC. This person should be very comfortable speaking in front of crowds, organized and knowledgeable about MRKH in one way or another. This person will need to be kept up-to-date on your plans with the conference so that they can feel as prepared as possible when it comes to running the conference on the day of. This person will basically be your spokesperson for the day. You do not want it to be you. Your job the day of the conference is going to be someone people can come to if they have questions and as the problem solver if things go array. You do not want to be tied down to any other commitments. (You also want to be able to enjoy the day!)

## 2) Volunteers

Conference planning and initiating takes a village! You're likely going to need at least 10 volunteers helping you out that day. Think about: event setup, registration table, technological help if there are presentations, room clean-up/transitions during the event and event tear down. The first thing I recommend is asking your immediate friends and family, or someone coming who to support someone with MRKH. The other thing to think about is having at least one person trained to help with mental health. MRKH Conferences can be very emotional and it's best to have a professional there so you don't have to be the counsellor. Social workers, psychologists, counsellors and therapists will all work for this, preferably those who are knowledgeable about MRKH. You will also need mental health staff or a someone with support group training to facilitate the support groups to keep things on track and in control.

Here's a Breakdown of the categories of volunteers you will need:

- Registration Table Attendees
- Set Up/ Tear Down Team
- Floaters (people who are available to help where needed and can attend to the other volunteers)
- Mental Health Staff (I say staff, but this could just be one person)
- Event Lead/Organizer (that's you!)

## 3) Hotels

A nice touch with conference planning is helping out-of-towners plan their trip. Many hotels offer discounted group rates when you block off a number of rooms so it's definitely worth calling around to reasonably nice, yet affordable hotels and getting quotes for this kind of thing. That way, you can tell anyone who registers that you've already found them a hotel. AND if multiple MRKH women book, they can even mingle outside of the actual conference because they'll all be in the same place!

#### 4) Sponsors

When you find kind businesses and organizations that can contribute things you need at your conference for free it is the BEST feeling. The sponsor I get every year is McDonalds (they are super generous to the community... though I also worked for them for several years). Anyway, McDonalds provides coffee, cups, sugars, creamers, stir sticks and lids for my conference. Just remember, when you reach out to sponsors, you're going to need to tell them 'what's in it for them?' Some will, but most don't just do things out of the kindness of their hearts. The easiest thing you can offer sponsors is free promotion. Brag about their donation on your social media, have them listed on your website, post their logo in a thank you portion of the conference packages, put a big poster up at the conference with all of your sponsors logos, etc. etc. You can also ask individual people to sponsor with donations. I did this my second year by asking doctors (because we all know most doctors make quite a bit of money!). I told them specific things that needed to be purchased for the conference and asked if they would sponsor an item (ex. Pizza lunch, printing expenses, package supplies, venue fee, etc.)

## STEP 8: LISTS & SCHEDULES

Honestly, at this point the biggest stuff is all over with. Now, it truly just comes down to organization and planning. I have a Word Document for everything. I have schedules and schedules and lists and tasks and everything. How do I keep things organized? Try breaking everything into sections, which will look similar to the numbers above.

1. Volunteers
2. Speakers/Professionals/Facilitators
3. Registrants

This list basically covers everyone that will be there that day. Now, the thing to think about is that everyone there that day needs to know what's going on, what their role is, etc. So, here are the lists/documents you need to draw up for each of them:

- List of contacts: you'll need one list with EVERY person involved in the conference written down with their contact information.

### VOLUNTEERS

- Volunteer Job Description (Tell them your expectations, what they'll be doing, what they should wear, etc.)
- Volunteer Schedule Overview (This list should break down all of your volunteers & their roles as well as the start and end times of their shifts.)
- Volunteer Task Sheet (These will be individualized sheets breaking down the day for each individual volunteer to be given to them as a reference sheet throughout the day of the event)

### SPEAKERS/PROFESSIONALS

- Speaker Descriptions (This is where you can just jot down who your speakers are, what they will be speaking about and what their needs are for their presentation: i.e. will they be needing a screen, sound, water, podium, microphone, etc.)
- Individual Speaker Schedules (Just like the volunteer task sheet, give your speakers a breakdown of what their day looks like)
- MC Notes/Bios

This one I'm going to need to elaborate on because when it comes to MC notes, there are key points every MC should have based off your agenda for the conference. Here are the key elements, in order, that should be on your MC Notes's sheet.

- Greeting/welcome everyone to conference
- MC Introduction (have the MC talk about themselves and their story up to deciding to MC the conference – this will be up to them to write, but make sure you give them an idea on how long this should be.)
- The conference's goal
- An overview of the day and breakdown of what's in the conference packages
- Description of the venue/where all of the rooms are, bathrooms, etc.
- Thank you to sponsors
- Before each speaker, the MC should introduce them with a bio previously provided by the speaker
- Closing remarks
- Remind people to fill out and hand in surveys

#### REGISTRANTS

- List of Registrants
- Conference Packages

Not all of this is necessary and it will depend on your personal preference as to what you want included in your packages, but here is a list of ideas for what can be included:

- Conference Agenda \*
- Survey\* (these are so important to get filled out so you can see how you did and what can be improved upon if you decide to hold another event)
- Information sheet about MRKH
- Information sheet about treatment options for MRKH
- MRKH Infertility information sheet
- Sponsor business cards/logos
- Mini packs of Kleenex
- One idea I received from the Beautiful You MRKH Foundation was to have an “Ask Me Anything Box” where attendees are each given a large cue card where they can write down any questions they have that they do not want to ask out loud and put into the box. At the end of the day, have the MC read out the anonymous questions and ask a panel of MRKH experts to answer them
- Breakdown of breakout sessions with descriptions
- Ice Breaker props (I've done games like Human Bingo, so the packages included BINGO sheets and pencils)
- Nametags
- Floor plan of venue
- Inspirational Quotes
- Little gifts (pens, fortune cookies, mints, stickers, etc.)
- Raffle tickets/door prize tickets

Now there are a few other lists you'll need to tackle everything about the conference.

- Room Schedules: have one breakdown of all of the rooms and their schedules and then print out individualized room schedules to tape up on the doors of the rooms
- Supplies Checklist: think about everything you're going to need at the registration desk, for your volunteers, for your food being served, for your guests, etc. Some things you'll want to make sure you bring include:
  - Garbage bags
  - Pens, pencils, sharpies, tape, scissors, highlighters, etc.
  - Plates, napkins, cutlery
  - Signs (Ex. MRKH CONFERENCE THIS WAY, REGISTRATION, ROOM SCHEDULES, ETC.)



- Kleenex
- Thank You gifts/cards for volunteers
- Cash Box

*CONFERENCE TIP: I have a lot of respect for people who volunteer their time sitting at a booth for long periods of time. One thing I've done for my volunteers is provide them with activities to make the time go by quicker. It also creates a really nice impression on the volunteers because you've taken the time to add little details that show you care. For example, I've provided volunteers with a phone charger, adult colouring books, word searches, sudoku, etc.*

## STEP 9: FINAL TOUCHES

This is it. The conference is drawing near and now it's just a matter of ensuring everything is ready to go. The two weeks before the conference is crucial. 1-2 weeks before is when you can start basing what you need by the number of registrants you have. This is when I really start checking things off the to-do list.

- Agenda is set in stone
- Purchase all supplies needed
- Have a plan for ordering lunch and how much food you need
- All volunteers are scheduled and emailed
- Thank You gifts and cards ready to go
- Cash box & float ready
- Signs & packages printed
- MC Notes complete and sent to MC

## STEP 10: THE BIG DAY

1. Make sure you're well-rested
2. Get up bright and early to give yourself lots of time for set up. It's a whole lot easier getting done early and being able to relax for an hour, than scrambling to get everything done and running late.
3. Your job in the morning is to delegate tasks to your volunteers and to make sure everyone is on the same page in regards to how the day is going to go.
4. Once the day begins, enjoy it! It will fly by. Try to be a guest, but also keep an eye on things and check on your volunteers and speakers every once in a while. If something goes wrong, you will be the person people come to. If everything is going smoothly, sit back, relax and be proud of yourself for putting on a damn good conference. One thing to keep in mind going into the conference is that **THINGS WILL GO WRONG**. You cannot possibly put on a perfect event. Go in with the expectations that crisis will happen, and be mentally prepared to stay calm and find solutions for when things do.
5. After the conference, self-check how you're feeling about everything. Find time to address your mental state of emotional and physical exhaustion and take time for yourself to unwind.