

Guide for First Time Attendees

Folk Alliance International is a 28-year-old federal charity and **ONE** of the things it does is product an annual conference, awards show, music camp, and fair in February. It has been held in over 15 cites all over North America.

The conference is unlike most other music industry events you will attend. It is a professional showcase and networking event, but it is also a community gathering, a family reunion of sorts for those who play and present folk music in all its variants (world, roots, old-time, blues, bluegrass, celtic, songwriters, etc).

The 5-day event requires preparation, a multi-year approach, and an investment of time and money. Below is a brief overview of some tips and ideas to assist you in getting ready for your inaugural FAI adventure.

- 1. Determine your goals for attending FAI**
- 2. Come with a plan and agenda to attain those goals**
- 3. Attend the daytime events (not just the late night shows) with a great attitude and pace yourself**
- 4. Make your follow-up as thorough as your pre-planning**

Decide what your agenda and goals are for attending FAI.

Questions to ask yourself...

1. Why are you attending this year?
2. What do you hope to achieve? (be specific)
3. Who are you planning to meet to achieve these goals?
4. What daytime events will you attend?

There are tons of resources available to you to start strategizing how to best meet your goals during the event. Read www.folk.org thoroughly. Posted there you will find a plethora of information such as:

- 1. Conference delegate list:**

Available online once registered, you should scan this to see who is coming, and what they do. Identify people you want or need to meet. Look up their websites and drop them a note (email, handwritten, phone call...whatever is your best method) and invite them for a coffee or to meet in person at the event. Shy? Invite them to your showcase or workshop. Make sure to attend theirs as well. Folk Alliance is a great communal event where people reciprocate enthusiasm for each other and share knowledge/support.

- 2. The APP**

Download it now:

Get familiar with how to use it, how to tag favorite events and showcases to create your own schedule.

3. Schedules:

Review the schedule and map (available online in advance of the conference). Read the workshop descriptions, exhibitor list, and special event listings before attending the event. You'll have a print version in your bag when you register onsite.

The program is a great resource for the event and year-round.

Make a schedule of what you want to attend (ideally you do this in advance) making a pre-schedule for yourself of panels, showcases, and vendors that you would like to see becomes extremely useful. It makes the 18+ hours a day of programming much less overwhelming. Remind yourself to pace yourself along the way. It is really easy for lack of words to 'be a kid in a candy shop' at FAI. There are so many talented people, informative speakers, great smiles, and educational efforts that one can forget to sleep and hydrate. A little pre-planning can go a long way. Pre-check the schedules and make yourself a loose outline of things you will want to check out at the conference. Also, check out a map of the grounds. It makes it easier when arriving to find your way around. All are available at www.folk.org under the conference and camp sections.

3. Forums: FAI offers several options for communication amongst its members and conference delegates.

Check out the private showcase forum (for finding opportunities to play private showcases): <https://folkalliance.site-ym.com/forums/Topics.aspx?forum=189375>

First-Timer Forum on the FAI website:

<https://folkalliance.site-ym.com/forums/Topics.aspx?forum=192905>

Check out FAI facebook to share ideas, thoughts, video, etc.:

<https://www.facebook.com/folkalliance>

Review the conference program in advance of the conference:

http://issuu.com/folkallianceinternational/docs/2016_fai_program_book

4. First Timers' Orientation:

A first timer orientation is available at the event. Ask questions and listen to other's questions.

New Vernacular/Jargon

You will hear a new world of conference colloquialisms and jargon during your time at FAI. The following is a quickie guide to keeping up. Don't fear what you don't know. Just ask someone. Ask any of the volunteers you will see sporting

the Volunteer shirt while on shift, the FAI registration desk, or your fellow attendee. All are useful guides.

Official Showcases: These are juried showcases that have been selected to play the official slots at the conference. They take place in the main ballrooms and meeting rooms of the hotels. The submission processes for these slots takes place July-Sept and are selected by end of October.

Private (Guerilla) Showcases: Often referred to as the pulse of the conference, these are a fun time. Individuals, organizations (labels, agencies, associations) and others program these showcases. Hotel rooms on floors 5, 6, & 7 of the Westin are rented and set up as showcasing rooms. Their styles and looks are as various as the imagination allows them to be. It is a great time for artist to showcase their talents while industry and community roam through the event.

Do not be shy. Visit the rooms, they are set up to invite you in to hear the talent they have programmed and many offer hospitality. If you are showcasing, do not worry if a person does not stay in your room for the whole set. It is about quality not quantity of visitors. It is customary for people to wander in and out. If you are a spectator, we recommend not exiting until the end of a song to assist the performer in staying focused. The showcases run in the evenings from 10:30pm-the early hours of the morning. At any given point, one can walk the halls and hear up to 90 performers working simultaneously. Things to remember on these floors: act responsibly, use your indoor voices, For more information on how to host a showcase room or play one, visit www.folk.org and check out the private showcase section.

Tote Bag Stuffing Party: It is just what it sounds like. It is the first official event of the FAI conference where attendees volunteer to assist in stuffing all of the conference tote bags with swag. Not sure about it? Need some convincing? This event allows first time attendees to meet new people and fellow conference goers. It is an extremely relaxed atmosphere where you have the opportunity to introduce yourself and make a new ally before the organized chaos begins on Wednesday.

Health Fair: With the assistance of MusiCares, FAI offers an extensive health fair to its attendees. Look for signs with the MusiCares logo in the conference exhibit hall. During the health fair, many services are accessible such as dental cleanings/examinations, chiropractic consultation, blood pressure checks, nutrition assessment, massage therapy, vision screening and more.

Instrument Check: As your arms grow weary and you want to catch a panel or showcase. On the main conference floor, FAI offers an instrument check daily until 10pm where you can check your stuff in similar to a coat check. Items must be picked up the same day and cannot be left overnight. A late night instrument check is available on the 6th floor while you visit private showcases. It is open 10:30pm-2am (again, no instruments may be left over night.)

REGIONS, REGIONALS (Far-west, NERFA, SERFA, SWRFA, FARM): These are regional Folk Alliance branches that are available to you throughout the year as well. Each hosts their own conference and offer a variety of resources and assistance. More info: <http://www.folk.org/?page=Regions>

Marketing yourself at the Event:

There are tons of opportunities to market your self, band, company, or organization at FAI. It of course depends what your goals are and what your budget is for marketing. There are no wrong answers in the area as long as you are prepared and courteous to your fellow attendees. A couple of good marketing tools (pricing: <https://folkalliance.site-ym.com/?page=sales>):

Exhibit Hall: FAI hosts an Exhibit Hall (Trade Show, Expo) where agents, labels, businesses and some artists rent booth space. The hall hours are Thursday-Saturday mornings. The exhibit hall is a business-to-business hub to negotiate deals and book artists what is happening in the industry/community.

Print Advertising: Program book advertising is a great resource at the conference and post conference. Registrants utilize the program book year round as source of research for individuals/organizations in the community. Various sizes are available for ad space.

Digital Advertising: Digital advertising is available on multiple screens around the conference. The digital ads are a silent rotating show seen on monitors around the main floors of the event. Recommendation for digital design: keep it simple. Catch the viewer's eyes and give them some quick information. They will be seeing it all as they roam the halls.

Tote bag inserts: Every attendee receives a conference tote filled with various promotional materials. You can for a small free place your item in the tote as well.

Other (handbills, postcards, flyers, etc.): Guerilla marketing at FAI is always fun and creative. There are no incorrect answers in this area as long as respect is shown to fellow attendees, the hotel, and the FAI organizers. Handbills/postcards are great. Small posters are great (small). When posting materials, please be aware that only painters tape is allowed at FAI (we do not want to replace any wallpaper or paint at the hotel). There are tons of designated areas for promotional materials along the main floors (table tops, coffee tables, credenzas, and such). Be mindful not to tape your poster over another poster. Have some fun with it and be reflective of your mission. Unique ideas: band-aids or breathe mints with packaging listing showcase times, a large chicken (mascot) handing out hand bills, roaming mannequins, simple and great postcards, etc. Have fun but be yourself. What makes FAI special is accessibility, creativity, and community.

Great Eye Contact and Personal Introduction: Introduce yourself to people. If you are playing a showcase, remember to tell people who you are and maybe a fun fact that will make them remember you. Go to a mix of events. Morning breakout sessions, mixers, parties, showcases, etc. are all places to meet fellow attendees. A great one is the regional meetings, attend the morning meeting for your geographic location and get to know your neighbors.

Organization: It is easy to become a collector of promotional material at FAI. There is quite a bit of material. Keep your business cards in a safe place that you collect each day. Make notes on the back of each card so you can recall the conversations you had with each person. There are a great deal of valuable interactions that you will have each day. It is nice to look back and be able to recall each of them easily. Follow up with email or written note. Conferences are a big commitment of both time and financial investment. The more preparation and work you put into before, during, and after ...you will see the benefits.

Being Healthy at FAI:

Sounds like an easy concept but pointers are always good. Often after conferences, I hear people talk about having the conference cold. It is so easy to do after being surrounded with thousands of your favorite people and running on little sleep and mainly on adrenaline. Let's curb the opportunity for illness for others and ourselves.

1. Stay hydrated. Drink lots of water.
2. You'll be shaking lots of hands... stay healthy by washing/sanitizing yours.
3. Remember to eat. Eat healthily. The host hotels are located in a great area for grabbing a quick, healthy meal. (Check out Crowne Center, the lobby cafes, coffee shop in Union Station, great specials and restaurants all around this area in a short walking distance).
4. Sleep. There is great programming from 9am-4am everyday. Decide on a good schedule that gives you a proper amount of sleep.
5. Get a few moments of exercise into your day. There are great walking trails nearby and both the Westin and Sheraton offer great exercise facilities.
6. Need a quick picker upper? ... Change your shoes!
7. Lastly, go outside. Don't forget to grab some fresh air every few hours. It is good for your health and your soul.

Overall

Enjoy your time and investment. Ask the staff or volunteers for assistance when you need us. We are happy to be here and want you to get the most out of your time in KC. Thank you joining us!