



Your Guide to a Successful
Professional Conference



Attending FUTURE—or any professional conference—is an incredible opportunity to grow your skill set, make valuable connections and gain inspiration that supports you in your career.

As a student, large conferences might be new to you. It’s natural to have questions or feel overwhelmed.

This guide offers steps to help you easily adapt to this unfamiliar environment and make your first (and second and third...) conference an awesome experience.



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Before your conference starts

Spend a little time learning more about everything the conference offers, specifically:

- ☐ **Review the schedule**

Identify sessions, speakers and networking events you don't want to miss.

- ☐ **Scan the Expo Hall**

Note which residency programs and organizations you want to meet.

- ☐ **Look through the FAQs**

Get all your questions answered on our FAQ webpage.

- ☐ **Check in with your peers**

You may travel alone, but you'll get to know peers once you're at the conference. At FUTURE, you can also chat with other attendees in the AAFP Events mobile app.

- ☐ **Make reservations for your free time**

Take advantage of your trip to Kansas City by making restaurant reservations or saving info for museums, shops and other local places you want to hit up.

Sketch out your goals for the conference

Think through what you want to see in advance. Make your goals **SMART**—**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-bound. Instead of "network with professionals," you could "connect with at least five residency programs in the Expo Hall."

Have a larger goal? **Break it down into smaller ones.** For example, if your goal is to find your ideal residency program, identify programs you want to meet in the Expo Hall and save Match-related sessions in our app.

Be adaptable! Stay open to unexpected opportunities from meeting new people or finding topics that really speak to you. Goal setting is important, but a last-minute schedule change could make a big difference in your career path.



Make a packing list for your essentials

Bring all your essentials to make it stress-free, so you don't use your limited time to shop for what you need. Here's a list to get you started:



ID & confirmation email

Having what you need right when you arrive ensures a smooth check-in and full access to the conference. Make sure you have these two items ready for a smooth check-in process. You'll then receive your FUTURE badge, which allows you full access to the conference.



Quick note-taking tools

Think pens, highlighters, notebooks, sticky notes for marking pages, etc.



Tech

You'll want to have chargers handy for your phone, laptop and/or tablet. FUTURE has charging stations around the venue too.



Clothing for all occasions

There's no formal dress code for FUTURE. You'll want nice, comfortable clothes that fit your goals—business casual if you prefer. Session rooms are often chilly, so it's a good idea to bring a long-sleeve item.



You'll also want comfortable shoes

Expect to do some walking in the convention center and around town in your free time.



Personal care items

Conference days are usually packed. Throw in hand sanitizer, tissue, gum, pain relievers, lip balm—anything you like to have within your reach.



What can I expect on-site?

Conferences are an excellent time to build lasting connections that support your career. Many family physicians have shared they've stayed in touch with people they met at FUTURE.

Get ready to make connections!

Make the most of your interactions:

- **Prepare an elevator pitch.** Jot down how you'll introduce yourself, what your future goals are and what you're interested in learning.
- **Approach and engage with fellow attendees.** It may feel intimidating to start a conversation, but it's a valuable opportunity to learn from others who know what you're going through.
- **Break the ice with simple questions.** Finding mutual interests creates meaningful conversations and deeper connections.
- **Listen actively.** Ask questions and offer feedback to show your engagement. Others want to hear what you have to say; just be careful not to interrupt or dominate the conversation.
- **Participate in group discussions.** Actively contribute, share insights and ask questions. These smaller group interactions can lead to more in-depth conversations and connections. And other attendees know they're not alone!
- **Respect time limits.** If someone seems busy or engaged in another conversation, like after a session ends, look for a time to connect later. Presenters usually offer up their contact information in their session, or you can find it in the event app.
- **Feeling a little nervous?** That's normal! Networking is about building relationships, so be yourself, show genuine interest in others and approach conversations with an open mind. With practice, you'll become more comfortable and confident.

Don't shy away from learning opportunities

You've spent years studying and learning, so you're already in the right mindset. But a conference is a good time to think creatively about your schedule. You may find some unlikely sessions that really changes things for you.

- **Choose sessions strategically.** Review the conference schedule in advance and save sessions that resonate with your interests and goals. Consider attending a session or two outside your main interests too. This could change your perspective.
- **Diversify your schedule.** Explore a mix of session types and formats, such as keynotes, panel discussions, workshops and interactive sessions. Variety can provide different perspectives and learning experiences.

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- **Try various note-taking techniques:** This is definitely a personal preference. You might like to use your laptop or tablet. Or record sessions using your phone to transcribe later. If you like to do things by hand, you could use mind mapping, sketching or traditional notetaking.
 - **Use highlighters or colored pens/pencils.** Use color to emphasize key points in your notes.
 - **Draw diagrams, charts or graphs.** Annotate them with additional details or explanations.
 - **Use sticky tabs.** Mark important pages in your notebook or program guide.

Tips for managing conference overwhelm

We've all been there—feeling overwhelmed when we're out of our comfort zone. Large conferences can intimidate even the most experienced professional. Consider these strategies for a more enjoyable conference.

- **Create a personalized schedule.** Attending every session and event is impossible. Prioritize things that align with your goals and interests. Focus on quality over quantity.
- **Allow buffer time between sessions.** Take time to digest information and prepare for the next session. Take a quick walk outside. Grab some caffeine. Explore the Expo Hall or chat with someone you just met.
- **Avoid information overload.** If you try to capture every piece of information in a session, you'll miss other important points. Prioritize what's relevant and worthy of being noted. Review your notes at the end of each day to reinforce learning.
- **Spontaneous is good too!** Maybe someone recommended a session they loved, but you didn't have on your schedule. Impromptu session choices or unexpected conversations can really energize you.
- **Take care of yourself.** Get enough sleep, eat full meals (we have fun food trucks at FUTURE) and take time to enjoy your time at the conference.

Prep for FUTURE residency program visits

What should you expect when you visit a program's booth? You'll see the friendly faces of program representatives. They're typically current staff, residents and faculty, including program directors—the same people you'll meet during interviews. But these interactions are much more casual.

It's normal to chat with a program for 30 minutes or stop by multiple times. Just allow yourself enough time to have meaningful conversations with the programs that interest you. They're getting to know you too.

You can find a full list of residency programs at FUTURE in the AAFP Events app. It's a good idea to note where to find the programs you're interested in talking to.

Three steps to get you ready:

1. You're probably already thinking about what you want out of a residency program—write it down for easy reference.
2. Jot down the questions you need to ask to find your perfect fit.
3. Look at the Expo Hall map and list out the residency programs you want to meet.

Looking to make a good impression immediately? Bring a positive attitude and curiosity.

Make a plan for after the conference

This phase is just as important as the conference. It can solidify what you learned and help you build on the connections you made.

How to stay energized when you return home

- **Follow up when the conference is still fresh.** It's easy to dive right back into normal life! Carve out time to talk with your new connections via email or LinkedIn and discuss future ways to collaborate.
- **Note your most meaningful takeaways.** Review your notes from the conference. Consolidate key insights, action items and additional thoughts or reflections. This will help reinforce your learning and make it easier to reference later.
- **Share your experience.** The energy you felt at the conference could inspire your colleagues, team members or professional networks. Consider using social media to create a post, story, reel and/or blog post highlighting what mattered to you. @futurefamilymed on Instagram, X and Facebook! On TikTok? Find us @the_aafp.

There are no strict rules for attending a conference like FUTURE. They offer flexibility so you can build the experience that works for your career path, whether you want to focus on a specific topic or networking is your thing. Walking away with even one “wow” moment is meaningful.

We're excited about your FUTURE in medicine!





aafp.org/events/FUTURE