

A FIELD GUIDE FOR CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS

The 5 E's of *Experience Design*

*People come for the content.
They come back for the connections.*

Turn your conference into a community, in 5 phases.

Great conferences don't happen by accident. They're designed. When you intentionally shape how attendees feel at every stage, from the first email to the drive home, they stop being spectators and become a community.

- 01 Excitement**
- 02 Entry**
- 03 Engagement**
- 04 Exit**
- 05 Extension**

BY BAHAA CHMAIT

I use the 5 E framework to design TEDx events, flash mobs, train car pop-up experiences, tech summits, conferences and more.

Includes your one-page experience design worksheet.

THE QUICK VERSION

The 5 E's at a glance

Find your why. Ask “why” five times until you hit the real reason your conference exists. Pick the feeling. Decide how you want attendees to feel, then design every E to deliver it.

Stage / Goal	They feel	Try this
1. Excitement Build anticipation before they arrive	Curious	Attendee testimonials & speaker hype video, countdown content
2. Entry Set the tone in the first 60 seconds	Welcomed	Lobby countdown, clapping tunnel, hobby or superpower name tags
3. Engagement Create real connection	Connected	Icebreaker before the first keynote, flash mob, sticky note wall at breaks
4. Exit End with momentum, not a fizzle	Energized	Table reflections, live drawing prompts, one-word takeaways
5. Extension Carry the afterglow forward	Belonging	Playlist, photo album, hashtag highlights, a ritual for their desk

3 things to remember

The experience starts with your marketing, not when they walk in the door.

Connection before content. Run an icebreaker before your first keynote.

When learning is fun, it sticks. That's how you build year-over-year retention.

BEFORE WE START

Make the whole *experience matter.*

Think about some leading brands and their success.

Savannah Bananas

Baseball had a time and engagement problem. Fans called it too slow, not exciting enough, and left early. The Savannah Bananas flipped the script with a two-hour time limit and made fans part of the game. Now fans show up hours early for a pregame party with music, dancing, and player appearances. Because when an experience is that good, people don't just want to watch. They want in.

[Explore the Savannah Bananas' fan experience](#)

Disneyland

Theme parks had a waiting problem. Lines are boring. Disney flipped the script by making the wait part of the show. Themed queues, pre-shows, and interactive surprises start the adventure before the ride does. Because when the wait is part of the experience, people don't mind waiting.

[See an example of Disneyland's themed arrival experience](#)

Be bold. Think different. Create an experience people keep talking about long after the event is over.

START HERE / STEP 1

Begin with the *end in mind.*

Before you design the experience, define why you’re gathering and who it’s for.

If you’d like help nailing down your why, try the 5 Whys exercise. It helps you dive deeper than the surface-level answer.

Step 1: Find Your Why

Ask “why” five times until you hit the real reason your conference exists.

Here’s mine.

Why?	Because...
Why icebreakers + energizers?	I want people to connect.
Why does that matter to you?	I grew up lonely, without community. I never want anyone to feel that way. At a conference, you can be surrounded by hundreds of people and still feel alone.
Why don't you want anyone to feel that way?	Loneliness feels terrible. When I belong, I'm more creative, happier, and kinder. Connected attendees feel the same: they participate more in breakouts and share keynote takeaways with the people around them.
Why does that matter to you?	Contributing to something bigger than myself gives me purpose. More joy and connection means happier attendees, and happy attendees come back next year.
Why does that matter to you?	When others rise, we all rise. Creating belonging for others creates it for me too. In just a few days, we stop being attendees and become a community with a shared experience. That's what engagement looks like in the room, and what drives retention year after year.

Your turn: Start with “Why does this conference exist?”

START HERE / STEP 2

Pick the feeling first.

Then design every E to deliver it.

Step into your attendees' shoes. What emotional arc do you want to take them on, from the first email to the drive home?

Stage	They feel	They think
Excitement	Curious	"I can't wait for this."
Entry	Welcomed	"Oh, this is gonna be different than what I'm used to."
Engagement	Connected	"I'm part of something here."
Exit	Energized	"I don't want this to end."
Extension	Belonging	"I'm coming back next year."

Your turn: What do you want them to feel? Think about it through their perspective.

Use the experience design worksheet at the end of this guide. Start with your why, then plan what attendees feel, what they think, and your ideas for each of the five stages.

THE 5 E'S / 01

Excitement

What it is: Generate anticipation before attendees arrive.

How it works: Build momentum before the conference even starts. Create curiosity + buzz.

Pro tip: Many event producers believe the experience starts the moment attendees walk in the door, but it actually started the moment they engaged with your marketing and learned about the event.

Tip for conference organizers: Whether it's an annual conference or your first one, you need to tell them about the content, the speakers, show them people connecting, having fun, and all the basic stuff. But people don't want to just come to an event. They want to experience something that was worth their time. Time is the most valuable nonrenewable resource we have.

Show them the experience!

Attendee video testimonials

Speaker hype video: A quick video from the speaker about how excited they are to talk to your specific organization or city (if you can get it)

Activations: Highlight the cool, unique activations you'll have there

Countdown: Start a countdown to the event with unique content for each message you send out via email, social media, etc.

Remember: You're not showing them a checklist of things. You're showing them the experience they'll receive for the cost of that ticket.

THE 5 E'S / 02

Entry

Connect early. Connect often.

What it is: The moment people walk in sets the tone.

How it works: The first 60 seconds shape everything. Music, greeting, energy, movement.

Tip for conference organizers: Meet them with music and a warm welcome. Let them feel celebrated and think, “Oh, this is gonna be different than what I’m used to.”

Countdown: Hold them in the lobby and open the doors when the crowd builds. Start a countdown together.

Clapping tunnel: Volunteers celebrate attendees as they walk in.

Name tags (small conferences/summits): Have them write a hobby or superpower on their name tag. It makes for a great conversation starter during the event.

THE 5 E'S / 03

Engagement

What it is: The main experience where real connection happens.

How it works: Design activities that keep their attention and require people to participate together, not watch passively.

Tip for conference organizers: Motion creates emotion. Movement + music + shared purpose = connection.

Flash mobs: Shameless plug... We taught this team of 60 to perform their own [flash mob at the conference](#). It's something they'll remember forever because they did a unique thing together and the audience loved it!

Icebreaker: Connect early, connect often, and always start with connection before content. Run an icebreaker before your first keynote, and people will be more alert and engaged. Debrief the audience and hear the voices in the room. It signals that this is a participatory experience, not a passive listening one.

Break time: Create a way to share a larger conversation based on the theme of your event with a sticky note wall. Example: [See Bahaa's conference activation examples](#)

Remember: Be intentional.

THE 5 E'S / 04

Exit

What it is: The clear end to the experience. How people leave matters as much as how they arrived.

How it works: End with momentum, not a fizzle. Create a moment of reflection or celebration.

Tip for conference organizers: Don't just say "thanks for coming." Choreograph the exit. Maybe attendees do a group movement, take a selfie with someone new, or share one word about what they're taking with them. They leave energized, not drained. You want them to meet others and potentially carry that conversation into their evening or next day.

Table reflection: At their table, attendees share some of their takeaways from the day or conference. You spark connection just before you send them off for social time. This could get them saying, "Hey, let's all go to dinner," because the ice is already broken and they're primed by the talking.

Visual Conversation: 300 people had a non-verbal conversation in minutes. We created a visual conversation of everyone's learnings at a project management conference. PMI Utah.

They scanned a QR code on the screen

It opened a web browser on their phone

They drew with their finger (it's that simple)

We gave them prompts that were on theme with the conference and keynotes given that day.

Bonus tip: Add a comedian. For one client, we had a comedian playfully roast the drawings live, and the whole room was laughing. It created a shared experience of lightening the mood on the heavy topics.

THE 5 E'S / 05

Extension

“Afterglow”

What it is: How people carry the energy forward.

How it works: Give attendees a way to extend the moment beyond the event.

Tip for conference organizers: Give them a small ritual they can do at their desk, or a tip for their next meeting. Something they can implement after the event. When learning is fun, it sticks, and this is a way to build year-over-year retention.

Music playlist: Send them the conference music playlist. Here's a playlist I heard at a conference I emceed. Shout out to the AV team for sharing this one with me.

[Open the conference playlist](#)

Photos: Send them the conference photo album from your professional photographer.

Conference hashtag: Post conference, reshare people's social media posts with the event hashtag and create an afterglow vibe. Or have them share photos from the album you sent them for a prize.

YOUR NEXT CONFERENCE

Ready to design an experience *people come back for?*

Book your free 20-minute strategy call. Tell me about your event, your goals, and your attendees. Then we'll find the right fit.

Service	What you get
Experience Design Consultation	I'll teach you how to execute any of these activities, or design new ones built for your event, that you run.
Icebreakers & Energizers	Move your audience from watching to participating. 10 to 15 minute openers and post-lunch resets, designed around your conference theme.
Conference Emcee	A consistent voice and a host who keeps your people involved, connecting the opening, transitions, and closing to the reason everyone gathered.

Start with Bahaa's event inquiry page

bahaa@bahaachmait.com | 801-573-9400

Explore conference icebreakers, emcee support and flash mob experiences

People come for the content. They come back for the connections.

So what experience are you going to create that people can't stop talking about?

The 5 E's of *Experience Design*

Pick the feeling first. Then design every E to deliver it. Step into your attendees' shoes, from the first email to the drive home.

STEP 1 Why does this conference exist? Ask "why" five times until you hit the real reason.

STEP 2 How do you want attendees to feel at each stage? Fill in each row through their perspective.

STAGE	THEY FEEL	THEY THINK	MY IDEAS FOR THIS STAGE
1 Excitement Build anticipation before they arrive			
2 Entry Set the tone in the first 60 seconds			
3 Engagement Create real connection			
4 Exit End with momentum, not a fizzle			
5 Extension Carry the afterglow forward			