



**Project Report**  
**Convention & Meeting Room Review**

**Prepared for:**  
**Polk County Board of Supervisors**  
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**Submitted by:**  
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## Introduction

ERA was engaged by the Polk County Board of Supervisors to develop a series of case studies that highlight meeting room layout trends among convention centers and meeting facilities in Midwestern cities. The centers reviewed for this report include:

- Qwest Center; Omaha, Nebraska
- Monona Terrace; Madison, Wisconsin
- RiverCentre; St. Paul, Minnesota
- Minneapolis Convention Center; Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Indiana Convention Center; Indianapolis, Indiana
- Overland Park Convention Center; Overland Park, Kansas
- Century II Convention Center; Wichita, Kansas
- Marriott Coralville Hotel & Conference Center; Coralville, Iowa
- KI Convention Center; Green Bay, Wisconsin

The convention centers reviewed above were chosen because they are located in medium- to large-sized Midwestern cities that can accommodate large meetings or trade shows. The average convention center above has about 55,000 square feet of meeting space, with about 24,000 square feet of that represented by the largest ballroom. In most of these facilities, there is meeting space as well as exhibit space. Exhibit space is excluded from this analysis: it is defined as concrete-floor space with lower-level furnishings and higher ceiling heights. Meeting space has carpets; furnishings for banquets, lecture, or desk/table setups; wall coverings; and softer accent lighting.

## Ballrooms

Ballrooms are large meeting rooms that are often divisible in two, three, or four smaller rooms; they are adjacent to a full-service kitchen for banquets. They can often be set up in one of four ways: banquet (round) tables for meals; lecture-style seating; “classroom” style tables for note taking, in rows or in a U-shape; or compatible with 10 foot-by-10 foot booths. The largest ballroom among the convention centers in our sample set is in Indianapolis, at 33,335 square feet. Ballrooms in Wichita and Omaha are over 30,000 square feet, while those in St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Overland Park are about 25,000 square feet. In banquet style seating, ballrooms can accommodate one guest per approximately 15 square feet. Therefore, a 25,000 square foot ballroom can accommodate about 1,600 guests in banquet style, while a 30,000 square foot room can accommodate about 2,000 guests in this arrangement. Banquet seating is generally in “rounds” of ten, with ten guests at a table. A good rule of thumb for theater style seating is ten to twelve square feet per participant. Among the

convention centers we studied, the largest ballroom represents about 42 percent of the total meeting room space in the center. The table below summarizes ballroom information.

**Table 1. Ballroom Attributes**

	Total Meeting & Ballroom Space (excludes pre-function)	Ballrooms					
		Total Contiguous in Largest Ballroom	Ballroom divisible _____ times	Smallest ballroom division	Junior Ballroom size	Junior Ballroom divisible _____ times	Smallest Jr. Ballroom Division
<b>Qwest Center</b> ; Omaha, Nebraska	63,926	30,996	2 or 3	9,702	10,880	4	2,720
<b>Monona Terrace</b> ; Madison, Wisconsin	25,631	13,524	4	2,940	6,840	6	1,140
<b>River Centre</b> ; St. Paul, Minnesota	45,531	27,111	8	2,946			
<b>Minneapolis Convention Center</b> ; Minneapolis, Minnesota	120,254	27,522	2	9,452			
<b>Indiana Convention Center</b> ; Indianapolis, Indiana	94,322	33,335	7	3,304	10,202	3	3,420
<b>Overland Park Convention Center</b> ; Overland Park, Kansas	40,039	24,991	4	4,232			
<b>Century II Convention Center</b> ; Wichita, Kansas	60,538	32,000	1	32,000			
<b>Marriott Coralville Hotel &amp; Conference Center</b> ; Coralville, Iowa	27,647	15,000	4	2,500	7,200	5	1250
<b>KI Convention Center</b> ; Green Bay, Wisconsin	23,958	8,024	4	2,006	9,600	3	3,200

The ceiling heights in ballrooms we examined range from 22 feet to 35 feet in the large ballrooms, while the smaller ones (Madison and Green Bay) are 16 feet. Ten-by-ten booths require about 200 square feet each, including space for guests to circulate. The ballrooms are often divisible either two or four times. The exceptions are St. Paul and Indianapolis, which can be divided into eight or seven smaller rooms, respectively. (The largest room in Wichita cannot be divided due to its unusual shape.) The smallest division among ballrooms averages 4,600 square feet (excluding Wichita). In addition to the largest ballroom, five convention centers have junior ballrooms that are one-third or one-half the size of the main ballroom. These are often divisible as well—into smaller rooms that average 2,300 square feet.

## Meeting Rooms

While ballroom layouts are fairly consistent, meeting rooms that are separate from ballrooms are less consistent. The number of meeting rooms outside the main ballrooms ranges from seven in Coralville to 87 in Minneapolis—by far the largest number of rooms. The total space reserved for such rooms ranges from 3,680 square feet in Madison to almost 100,000 square feet in Minneapolis.

The size of each meeting room is somewhat more consistent. The weighted average of all meeting rooms is 1,219. This is highly influenced by the average Minneapolis room, which is just 1,065 square feet. Omaha, St. Paul, Indianapolis, Wichita, and Overland Park average between 1,200 to 1,900 square feet. Therefore, the “sweet spot” of breakout meeting rooms is about 1,500 square feet. ERA notes that smaller convention centers in Green Bay and Coralville have smaller meeting room breakout sizes in general. Breakout meeting space tends to be about 40 percent of the total size of the meeting facilities, with Minneapolis the standout exception: 77 percent of the total at the Minneapolis Convention Center are breakout rooms.

The layout of these meeting rooms also varies across venues. In Minneapolis, most meeting rooms are in blocks of four to ten rooms each, which can be combined to form one large room. Across the Mississippi, the St. Paul meeting rooms are fixed in size and cannot be combined. Most cases are like Omaha, however: the meeting rooms tend to be in blocks of two to four rooms each, although there are some that are fixed. Four convention centers also have “boardrooms” or conference rooms, which tend to be between 400 and 750 square feet each.

**Table 2. Meeting Room Attributes**

	Total Meeting & Ballroom Space (excludes pre-function)	Total Meeting Space (excluding ballrooms)	Meeting Rooms			
			Number of non-ballroom meeting rooms	Average non-ballroom meeting room size	Number of board rooms	Average Boardroom Size
<b>Qwest Center;</b> Omaha, Nebraska	63,926	22,044	12	1,837	0	
<b>Monona Terrace;</b> Madison, Wisconsin	25,631	3,680	8	460	3	529
<b>River Centre;</b> St. Paul, Minnesota	45,531	18,420	15	1,228	0	
<b>Minneapolis Convention Center;</b> Minneapolis, Minnesota	120,254	92,655	87	1,065	0	
<b>Indiana Convention Center;</b> Indianapolis, Indiana	94,322	49,266	34	1,449	2	747
<b>Overland Park Convention Center;</b> Overland Park, Kansas	40,039	15,048	8	1,881	0	
<b>Century II Convention Center;</b> Wichita, Kansas	60,538	28,538	17	1,656	1	378
<b>Marriott Coralville Hotel &amp; Conference Center;</b> Coralville, Iowa	27,647	3,947	7	658	3	500
<b>KI Convention Center;</b> Green Bay, Wisconsin	23,958	6,336	9	704	0	

## Hotel Meeting Space

Most convention centers have attached convention center hotels, often publicly owned and developed in concert with the convention center. These hotels are almost always a national brand hotel like Hyatt Regency, Marriott, or Hilton—always full service. In the case of Indianapolis, there are several full service hotels attached to the convention center via skywalk, but none have an official relationship with the convention center. In St. Paul and Minneapolis, there are no official convention center hotels.

Among the remaining cities, the average number of rooms is 322. With the exception of Green Bay and Coralville, these hotels also have their own meeting facilities in addition to those of the convention center. (Coralville is a unique case because the region's convention center is part of the hotel.) These can be used independently of convention center activity or as spillover or complementary space. The configurations vary. The Sheraton in Overland Park and the Hilton in Omaha each have over 25,000 square feet of dedicated meeting space with large ballrooms. The Wichita Hyatt has 15,000 square feet of total space, but a 10,000 square foot ballroom is included in the total. The Hilton in Madison has limited space—just 2,228 square feet, half of which is in a ballroom.

While Green Bay's Hotel Sierra is not among the most popular brands for a convention center, it is a national chain that carves out a niche for high level of service—a high quality alternative to the somewhat predictable full-service hotels that typically accompany a convention center.

**Table 3. Attached Hotel Attributes**

	<u>Hotel</u>			
	Brand	Rooms	Total Meeting Space	Largest Meeting Room
<b>Qwest Center;</b> Omaha, Nebraska	Hilton	450	30,000	18,626
<b>Monona Terrace;</b> Madison, Wisconsin	Hilton	240	2,228	1,288
<b>River Centre;</b> St. Paul, Minnesota	No official convention center hotel			
<b>Minneapolis Convention Center;</b> Minneapolis, Minnesota				
<b>Indiana Convention Center;</b> Indianapolis, Indiana				
<b>Overland Park Convention Center;</b> Overland Park, Kansas	Sheraton	412	25,000	10,801
<b>Century II Convention Center;</b> Wichita, Kansas	Hyatt	303	15,780	10,164
<b>Marriott Coralville Hotel &amp; Conference Center;</b> Coralville, Iowa	Marriott	286	No additional meeting space	
<b>KI Convention Center;</b> Green Bay, Wisconsin	Hotel Sierra	241		

## Pre-Function, Multimedia & Other

Pre-function space is a development trend among newer convention centers: it is designed to accommodate the “meetings in between meetings,” casual gatherings of meeting participants during their spare time. Such space usually includes modern designs like natural light, high ceilings, and generous open space; it sometimes includes cocktail tables and other places to have informal small meetings. Omaha and Overland Park have 40,000 square feet of pre-function space; in Overland Park, this includes an art gallery. Minneapolis has 34,000 square feet. While Madison has just 16,000 square feet, this compares to a smaller facility size. It also has 68,000 square feet of outdoor pre-function space on the roof with panoramic skyline views. The addition to the Indianapolis convention center is expected to have generous pre-function space.

Several convention centers also have theaters or lecture halls that ERA has not included in the attribute tables in previous sections. These are often billed as “multimedia” lecture halls that have a variety of audio, video, and internet capabilities.

- The multimedia lecture hall in Madison holds 320 participants in 5,540 square feet. It is well designed and has rich appointments, making for a comfortable, modern environment. It also boasts satellite capabilities for closed-circuit broadcasts from anywhere in the world.
- In St. Paul, the Wilkins Auditorium is a performance hall that hosts concerts but can also host multimedia meeting events. It boasts 44,000 square feet, including four 3,000-square-foot studios.
- The auditorium in Minneapolis is the most unique of all. It is divided into a main auditorium and two auxiliary auditoriums. The two auxiliary rooms can be combined with the main room to create one auditorium that seats 3,433. However, each of the two smaller rooms (seating for 428 each) can be walled off and the floors rotated 180 degrees to create three separate auditoriums.
- Green Bay has a 1,000 sq. ft. auditorium and Wichita has a concert hall that seats 2,178.

## Other Notes

The St. Paul RiverCentre is attached to the Xcel Energy Center, a 20,000-seat arena home to a National Hockey League tenant, the Minnesota Wild. The Indiana Convention Center is now attached to the new Lucas Oil Stadium, home of the National Football League Indianapolis Colts. The convention center is slated for a major expansion to open in 2010. The Qwest Center in Omaha includes an 18,000-seat arena, which hosts college basketball, college hockey, and special events including concerts.

## Summary

**Table 4. Summary Table**

	Total Meeting & Ballroom Space (excludes pre-function)	Convention Center Notes	Hotel			
			Brand	Rooms	Total Meeting Space	Largest Meeting Room
<b>Qwest Center;</b> Omaha, Nebraska	63,926	Large ballroom can be in half or in thirds; junior ballroom can be in fourths in standard meeting room size; smaller meeting rooms can be combined in sets of 2 or 3	Hilton	450	30,000	18,626
<b>Monona Terrace;</b> Madison, Wisconsin	25,631	"Multimedia Lecture Hall" is 5,540-sf not included in any columns at left. 68,000-sf rooftop garden is not included but offers pre function and casual space with city views.	Hilton	240	2,228	1,288
<b>River Centre;</b> St. Paul, Minnesota	45,531	Except for those in ballroom, meeting rooms cannot be combined. No junior ballroom or boardrooms. Adjacent to Xcel arena & an auditorium with "studios"; none of that is included.	No official convention center hotel			
<b>Minneapolis Convention Center;</b> Minneapolis, Minnesota	120,254	Non-ballroom meeting rooms arranged in blocks of 4-10 rooms; most blocks in 1,000 to 1,200 sf range but some are over 4,000 sf. Adjacent auditorium seats 3,400; not included in totals				
<b>Indiana Convention Center;</b> Indianapolis, Indiana	94,322	Non-ballroom meeting rooms usually can be combined in blocks of 2-4 rooms. Planned expansion for 2010 will include 129K sf meeting space, 67K of which will be ballroom. 296K sf pre function planned.				
<b>Overland Park Convention Center;</b> Overland Park, Kansas	40,039	Most meeting rooms in 1,800-sf range; one large meeting room at 3,000 sf and a small separate one at 900 sf. Pre function space includes art gallery.	Sheraton	412	25,000	10,801
<b>Century II Convention Center;</b> Wichita, Kansas	60,538	The largest ballroom is called a "Convention Hall" and is abnormally shaped and cannot be divided into multiple smaller ballrooms.	Hyatt	303	15,780	10,164
<b>Marriott Coralville Hotel &amp; Conference Center;</b> Coralville, Iowa	27,647	Regional convention center is in this hotel, a cornerstone of the "Iowa River Landing" redevelopment.	Marriott	286	No additional meeting space	
<b>KI Convention Center;</b> Green Bay, Wisconsin	23,958	Small adjacent auditorium is 1,148 sf.	Hotel Sierra	241		

**Table 4. Summary Table (continued)**

	Ballrooms						Meeting Rooms					Total pre-function space
	Total Contiguous in Largest Ballroom	Ballroom divisible ___ times	Smallest ballroom division	Junior Ballroom size	Junior Ballroom divisible ___ times	Smallest Jr. Ballroom Division	Total Meeting Space (excluding ballrooms)	Number of non-ballroom meeting rooms	Average non-ballroom meeting room size	Number of board rooms	Average Boardroom Size	
<b>Qwest Center;</b> Omaha, Nebraska	30,996	2 or 3	9,702	10,880	4	2,720	22,044	12	1,837	0		42,500
<b>Monona Terrace;</b> Madison, Wisconsin	13,524	4	2,940	6,840	6	1,140	3,680	8	460	3	529	16,000
<b>River Centre;</b> St. Paul, Minnesota	27,111	8	2,946				18,420	15	1,228	0		5,000
<b>Minneapolis Convention Center;</b> Minneapolis, Minnesota	27,522	2	9,452				92,655	87	1,065	0		34,000
<b>Indiana Convention Center;</b> Indianapolis, Indiana	33,335	7	3,304	10,202	3	3,420	49,266	34	1,449	2	747	
<b>Overland Park Convention Center;</b> Overland Park, Kansas	24,991	4	4,232				15,048	8	1,881	0		40,000
<b>Century II Convention Center;</b> Wichita, Kansas	32,000	1	32,000				28,538	17	1,656	1	378	
<b>Marriott Coralville Hotel &amp; Conference Center;</b> Coralville, Iowa	15,000	4	2,500	7,200	5	1250	3,947	7	658	3	500	
<b>KI Convention Center;</b> Green Bay, Wisconsin	8,024	4	2,006	9,600	3	3,200	6,336	9	704	0		