Mount Vernon Conference (1783)

George Washington helped solve an immediate problem of the Confederation when he hosted a meeting of Virginia and Maryland delegates to settle disputes over fishing rights and navigation improvements on the Potomac River.

The conference demonstrated the weakness of the Confederation in settling disputes between states.

Annapolis Conference (1786)

James Madison arranged for the Virginia legislature to call a meeting of all thirteen states in Annapolis, Maryland. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss interstate commerce. The meeting failed because delegates from only five states came.

However, it was agreed to meet in Philadelphia in May of 1787 to address “such defects as may be discovered to exist” in the Articles of Confederation—and to find ways “to render the Constitution of the Federal Government adequate to the exigencies [urgent needs] of the Union.”

The Question Is: What or Who Gave the People at the Annapolis Conference to Power to Call For a National Convention?

The Answer Is: They went back to the arguments listed in the Declaration of Independence, especially:

“That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness...”

The Constitutional Convention (1787)

The National Congress, meeting in New York City, reluctantly agreed to the Annapolis proposal.

It called for a Federal Convention in Philadelphia on May 14, 1787, but carefully stated that the meeting was “for the sole...purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation.”

Shay’s Rebellion (1786-1787)

In Massachusetts, debt-ridden farmers hurt by inflation couldn’t meet payments on their farm mortgages. Rather than go to debtors’ prison and/or lose their farms to creditors suing them in court to foreclose (claim the property as payment of the debt), a group of farmers, led by Daniel Shays, took up arms against the courts.