

Financial Realities of Planning the 2010 Joint Meeting

Concerns about Joint Meeting finances arose during the MLGSCA Business Meeting and AC Meetings held on January 28, 2010. The quad-chairs are therefore providing the following background information about the meeting planning process and financial outcomes:

- 1) No Final Report was available from the Las Vegas Joint Meeting to guide us in any aspect of the conference, including the most important estimates of room block and food commitments.
- 2) The “Goldilocks” effect: Our group is just a bit too big to hold the conference in boutique hotels, and way too small to interest the larger hotels. We only received two bids for the conference that suited our date needs and room rate. These were from the Renaissance Glendale Resort and Spa, and the Chapparal Suites Hotel in Scottsdale, Arizona. We would have been embarrassed to hold the conference at the Chapparal Suites. The conference dates for Arizona are also limited due to the popularity of baseball Spring Training which increases hotel rates starting in February.
- 3) Our “Application for Credit” with the hotel was denied because MLGSCA does not have a strong enough credit history. We had to send the hotel a deposit in December. Additionally we had to make an estimated final payment to the hotel 10 days before the conference (with a 15% overage estimate), instead of being able to pay the final bill 30 days post-conference. This means we wait for the hotel to reimburse us post-conference for any overpayment. It also results in loss of interest in the Vanguard account. We were also surprised to find that the hotel does not review credit applications until 45 days before an event.
- 4) Our budget was based on 175 people attending the conference, scaled back from the original 200. Only 125 attended.
- 5) Folks love being able to register for the conference by credit card using Acteva. However Acteva charges us a 10% fee on these transactions. There were also quite a few people who changed their registration options resulting in additional fees we had to pay Acteva.
- 6) Hotels charge hefty service fees. The fee at the Renaissance was 22%. There is a 9.5% city sales tax on top of the service fee. The service fees are standard hotel charges and cannot be negotiated.
- 7) Sponsorships, which were plentiful in the past, are hard to come by now. Our largest amount for sponsorship was for \$1,500 from NEJM. Most amounts were for \$250.
- 8) The Advisory Council agreed to subsidize this meeting to encourage attendance during bad economic times. This meant keeping the conference rate below \$200, and the cost of continuing education classes low. The conference rate was all-inclusive to further entice attendees. Quote from the AC Budget Meeting of 7/24/09:

“Ellen needs to know if we want to go forward? Yes.

We can decide later where the funds will come from. Stipulation is that we will seriously evaluate joint meetings in the future. Any suggestions can be e-mailed to Ellen or other chairs.”

JM2010 registration activity was presented and included as a handout at the November 20, 2009 Business Meeting.

- 9) At the MLGSCA Business Meeting on January 28, 2010, Ms Aaronson cited a figure of \$75,000 which had already been paid to the hotel. Unfortunately this number shocked listeners who did not understand points 1 through 8 above, and the rest of the message was lost. The rest of the message was that we were still receiving funds from registration, continuing education courses, exhibitors, sponsors and advertisements. We do have additional expenses to be paid such as speaker and instructor fees and expenses, and program printing costs. We are awaiting reimbursement from the hotel for the previously mentioned overpayment.
- 10) Numerous steps were taken to reduce conference costs. These included:
- a. Using a conference planner at no cost to us. Mr John Vanella negotiated with the hotel on many issues including reducing our food commitment, and cutting our AV quote from \$26,000 to approximately \$16,000.
 - b. Selecting the lowest priced food and beverage items for our events. This included omitting the boxes from the traditional “boxed lunches” for the Round Tables which reduced the cost by \$1 per person.
 - c. Selecting speakers whose fees were low or who did not charge us to speak.
 - d. Omitting conference bags
 - e. Convincing 32 exhibitors to attend in a down economy, then further convincing them to donate raffle items
- 11) Recommendations for future meetings:
- a. The Advisory Council must discuss how often to hold these meetings and explore barriers to attendance. Work with other Chapters, and MLA, to address these issues
 - b. Explore other times to hold the meeting; hotel rates are extremely low in Phoenix during the off season of June, July and August.
 - c. Raise meeting registration and continuing education fees to a level which recoups expenses
 - d. Do not offer an all-inclusive meeting rate; charge for food and drink at a level which recoups expenses
 - e. Raise exhibitor fees to a level which recoups expenses
 - f. Maintain a good credit history for the group; this meeting should help. The hotel required a five year history.
 - g. Obtain an institutional credit card which would help develop a credit history and provide greater payment flexibility
 - h. Possibly merging financially with NCNMLG to share cost of future meetings
- 12) Conclusion: The Advisory Council agreed to subsidize the 2010 Joint Meeting as a gesture of good will towards members and a nod to the tough economic times we all face. The quad-chairs were instructed to go forward with the meeting and keep the all-inclusive conference rate below \$200. The quad-chairs and planning committee members delivered an incredible meeting at the lowest cost possible. We fulfilled our charge.
- 13) Final numbers will be available at the next MLGSCA Business Meeting.

Ellen Aaronson Rebecca Birr Judy Bube Kathy Zeblisky