

TO: SSSP Board of Directors
FROM: Alexis Bender, Chair, SSSP Accessibility Committee
RE: Committee Annual Report
DATE: 10 July 2013

This year the Accessibility Committee accomplished a number of tasks in-line with our primary goal of ensuring that the Annual Meeting is accessible to all attendees. To accomplish this, we reviewed the responses to the 2012 Annual Meeting Survey question pertaining to accessibility. These findings are summarized below. We reviewed the question about accessibility issues for inclusion in the 2013 Annual Meeting Survey, revised the memo and developed a checklist to be distributed to all Annual Meeting participants giving guidance in ensuring presentations are accessible to all, and worked with Michele Koontz to handle access requests for the 2013 meeting.

We have received requests for accommodations from three attendees. Accommodation funding is being disbursed at the 2013 Annual Meeting to provide ASL interpreters for a Deaf meeting attendee. The other two requests did not require any funding disbursements.

Changes in Communications in 2013

The Committee is pleased to report a number of initiatives in conjunction with administrative office. The committee revised the description for the comfort room to bring greater awareness to the amenity. We also revised the Accessibility Guidelines for Program Participants and created a Checklist for Program Participants, with different points for presenters and organizers. The creation of the checklist allows for quick reference to the guidelines by role and by time (before or during the Annual Meeting).

Additionally, the administrative office generated a QR code for easy mobile access to the Accessibility Guidelines in the annual meeting program to save program space while still providing detailed information for attendees. This information was also pushed to the membership via the SSSP Facebook page.

Issues Raised in the 2012 Annual Meeting Survey

Out of the 221 completed Annual Meeting surveys received, 18 (8%) included a response to the question regarding access. The feedback given was as follows:

1. A substantial number of comments were made about presenters not making their presentations accessible. Although there are guidelines in place and reminders during the process, many presenters continue to make presentations difficult for attendees with disabilities. Few presenters bring large print copies, describe images on slides, speak toward the audience, or speak loud enough for people with hearing impairments who do not use interpreters.
2. There was a mixed reaction about the physical accessibility of the conference hotel. One respondent stated there was good physical access and one 75 year old person said they had no difficulty getting back forth between ASA and SSSP. However, another respondent noted that

the door closest to the ASA hotel had stairs and another commented that the distance between the two hotels was too far and her colleague had to use a cab to move between the hotels.

3. Three positive comments were made about the availability of a comfort room. However, one person who needed it was not aware of it.
4. There were four positive comments about the gender-neutral bathrooms; however, there were also concerns that there was only one and it was difficult to navigate for person with a disability. It was also noted that the gender neutral bathroom was not always well-stocked or cleaned.
5. The fragrance free soaps and lotions were appreciated and we are happy to hear they will be returning in NYC.

Two additional comments were made about those who provided assistance to attendees. First, members of the accessibility committee volunteered their time to accompany a blind attendee to all of her desired sessions for three full days. This allowed the attendee's needs to be met without the need to expend funds. These volunteers gave up their own morning coffee time or lunch in order to meet her needs and the attendee and one survey respondent expressed gratitude. Second, it was noted that the ASL interpreters seemed to provide excellent service.

Future Action

We are pleased to see that there is a continued effort to have gender-neutral bathrooms and fragrance-free products. We appreciate the work and negotiation that can go into making those things happen and they do not go unrecognized.

There continues to be a problem with panel presenters not making their presentations accessible to all attendees. We think we have made strides in this area, but there is still a long way to go. We have held panels, distributed guidelines and checklists, and made announcements using social media. There continues to be a need for a culture shift and greater awareness within SSSP about accessible presenting.