

2008 SSSP Access Committee Meeting Agenda
Thursday, July 31, 2008

Present: Liat Ben-Moshe (chair), Angela Wadsworth (chair-elect), Kathe Lowney, Michele Koontz, Carol Brooks Gardner, Diane Gifford, Nate Johnson

I. Formal access requests:

1. An attendee emailed Michele Koontz on 4/25 ~ "For your information, months ago I had made my hotel reservations knowing I needed a roll in shower. I surely hope I do not experience what I have at other conferences. I make my reservations and then when I sign in at the conference, the room with the roll in shower is not available and given to a more prominent individual." Michele informed the attendee that the hotel has 50+ accessible sleeping rooms and that we had reserved 5 for our meeting (2 rooms with a king size bed and a roll-in shower and 3 rooms with two double beds and a roll-in shower). Michele followed up with the hotel on 4/28 and was told that the reservation was all set.

Update post meeting: The attendee above arrived at the hotel the evening after the meeting and did NOT get the room she requested. The hotel informed her that they only had a room with a king size bed, not double beds, like she requested. She came with a family member who also has a disability, so she could not accept the room with the king and a roll in bed. Liat switched rooms with her, as she also had an accessible room with double beds and the people sharing the room agreed to sleep on the roll in bed for the night. The hotel was very apologetic and deducted 50 dollars from the attendee's bill.

2. On our registration form, there is a section entitled "Accessibility Services" where registrants with disabilities may request accessibility services such as sign language interpreters, sighted guides, accessible accommodations, etc. to facilitate their full participation at the meeting. Another attendee registered on 6/29 and requested a "wheelchair accessible room, roll-in shower, seat in shower, hand rails, if only one bed in the room will need a cot or rollaway for overnight PCA to sleep." Michele has asked the hotel to confirm that his request will be honored.

In the meeting there was a discussion noting that although we follow up and are very specific about access requests, it doesn't seem to be enough to guarantee we will actually get the room we requested. This is due to the increased corporatization of hotels that buy each other and outsource their customer service elsewhere, so that the person you deal with actually does not know the hotel very well. There are other structural problems which create barriers to access.

- One way to remedy the situation is to ensure that all requests for access in future hotels will go through the executive office. Michele is very good in following up and gets to know all the key people in the conference hotel so she can ensure that requests are targeted to the right people.

We recommend that the accessibility portion of the registration form will reflect more strongly that registrants should alert us to their hotel needs.

- Another suggestion is to reward hotels who do a good job accommodating attendees' access requests.

Another access question came during the meeting via e-mail: "There seems to be some contradictions in the requests. It asks that material be presented in multiple formats, but seems to discourage the use of overheads. Handouts are encouraged, but it says alternate formats should also be provided. I am not sure what kinds of alternate formats I should provide."

- There is a need to clarify and expand the access guidelines detailed in the sheet provided to all attendees.

II. Outreach

Since we have received so few access requests in person, perhaps there is a better way to keep in touch with our attendees needs. This way we can also gage how our suggestions in the access memo are actually operationalized, and whether people follow presentation guidelines that ensure access for all.

- ***The committee decided to create a survey in which we inquire about attendee's satisfaction with accommodations and whether they feel fully included in SSSP conferences and activities.*** The survey should be administered quickly (by the end of August?) so that information is still fresh in people's minds. It will be administered as a pilot to the disability division members first, and next year, after suggested modifications, to the whole membership.

Some items we will inquire about in the survey: hotel accommodations and affordability; transportation (as it relates to the hotel or conference locale); access in the sessions (room for wheelchairs; narration of visual data; handouts in alternate formats etc.); accessibility of the tours provided; banquets

III. Future conference and ensuring access

In the last committee meeting (2007) we suggested touring all the sites for future conferences with an eye for true accessibility for attendees. What we meant by this statement, is that often the rooms that are shown or the layout which is described or advertised are very different then the lived experience of using them. For instance, in last years conference at the Roosevelt Hotel the wheelchair lifts worked only half the time... so just the fact that they are there and the hotel can proclaim accessibility, does not mean it will be usable for wheelchair users in real time. What we suggested as a result at the 2007 meeting was to move from notions of compliance (with ADA for example) to notions of beyond compliance. What matters is how user friendly the spaces are for people with disabilities and other attendees, NOT how compliant the hotels are with existing laws. (if people are interested in the concept of beyond compliance check out my colleagues website at <http://bccs.syr.edu/>)

It was therefore **decided** that one of the ways to ensure full accessibility is to tour the hotel with an accessibility expert or gain information from a local CIL (center for independent living) or other local disability organization. Liat has contacted local organizations in Chicago, where the 2011 meeting will be held and sent any pertinent information to the organizing committee (specifically to Michele and Tom). Michele included the information that was received from Robin Jones, Director of the DBTAC-

Great Lakes ADA Center, University of Illinois at Chicago in the spreadsheet that was distributed to the Board of Directors. (The Board ultimately selected The Blackstone, A Renaissance Hotel as our 2011 conference hotel.)

- Since this practice seems useful to the board in making final decisions about hotel selection, **it was decided to continue seeking out the help of local CIL's in gathering information for future conference locations.**

IV. Awards and Personal assistance

We were contacted by the Lee Student Support fund as they had a student applying that requested increased travel support because they needed their personal assistant to attend the meeting. The committee decided to honor the request for the additional costs but to limit the award to travel costs as was done for all other applicants. This issue was presented at the board meeting. The Lee committee asked the board to develop a policy in this regard. The board seemed more eager to wait for the committee's input next year before commenting on this issue.

- **The committee will research what other professional organizations or academic associations are doing in regards to requests for personal assistants. After seeing what other policies are out there, the 2009 committee will develop more specific recommendations in this issue and convey them to the board.**

V. Collaboration with the disability division

This was discussed both in the access meeting and the disability division meeting (see their notes for more details). Some ideas that were suggested:

- **Integrate access concerns and tips in the division newsletter**
- **Utilize the web space of the disability division** to inform presenters on access issues, as well as inform future attendees on our work (for instance by putting in links to UID principles, books, articles etc.)
- This discussion raised the need to educate the SSSP constituency on how to make their presentations more accessible and inclusive to diverse audiences. It was therefore decided to:
 1. **Co-sponsor a workshop titled something like "how to create a better presentation"** and in it to incorporate the principles of Universal Instructional Design, as well as other presentation tips. This workshop will be suggested as a session for the 2009 SSSP conference.
 2. **Contact organizers of sessions once the program had been announced and relay to them the importance of making their session accessible for all.** We will work on an agreed letter and wording, and this can be sent via a mass e-mail by the executive office when the program is finalized. This is especially important next year, as the board decided to have an LCD projector and an overhead projector in all meeting rooms, which means that people will utilize it much more. Hence there is an increased need in making sure presenters know how to make visual material more accessible.
 3. Sessions sponsored by the disability division should become a model for exemplary conference access. We will educate the SSSP constituency by role modeling best practices in these sessions.

VI. Budget

There was a lively discussion of how best to allocate our funds (which are currently 200\$). Some ideas that came up:

- **Co-sponsor sessions** (like the one about ensuing access in presentations)
- **To leave the pool of money as is** so we can contribute it to any access requests that come up and can't be covered by the SSSP general access fund (which is separate from the committee's fund)
- **Create a 'Beyond Compliance' award.** This award will be given to a person (staff, presenter, organizer) or entity (such as an organization, hotel or hotel staff) that went beyond the written guidelines to ensure the full inclusion of people with disability in that year's conference. Rewarding personnel or hotels for a job well done will also give us some leverage in dealing with future entities (such as hotels) that will get an extra incentive for being accessible and inclusive. The award will most likely be a plaque, not a cash prize.

There was much enthusiasm about his idea, although in the limited time of the meeting we could not address all issues of making it operational (Who chooses? Based on which criterion? Who nominates?). This item was tabled for future discussion via e-mail or in next year's meeting. If decided that this is an idea we wish to pursue, we should probably notify the board at the next annual meeting.

Other items discussed:

The committee requested to avoid session overlap between us (the access committee meeting) and the disability division's sessions, since it is the same people who generally attend both. We understand that this request can't always be accommodated (especially as the division grows, which will be a great thing!)

Respectfully submitted by Liat Ben-Moshe