

14th Biennial Conference on Community Research & Action Final Report and Recommendations

2013 Biennial Planning Committee:

Etiony Aldarondo
Mera Boulus
Adam Clarke
Dina Elias-Rodas
Scot Evans
Varzi Jeanbaptiste
Laura Kohn-Wood
Guerda Nicolas
Isaac Prilleltensky
Anna Wheatley

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The 14th Biennial Conference on Community Research and Action took place from June 26-29, 2013 in Coral Gables, Florida at the University of Miami. After a day of preconference events on Wednesday, June 26, the conference ran for a full 3 days – Thursday through Saturday. The conference program featured 107 symposia, 85 roundtable discussions, 11 town meetings, 27 workshops, and 4 keynote addresses. 165 posters were divided into two poster sessions. 954 authors were listed in the program, of which ___ were listed as presenters. The overall conference revenue was \$131,155. Conference expenses totaled \$133,154.19, leaving SCRA with a net expense of \$1,999.19.

CONFERENCE PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Committees and Workgroups

A local planning committee consisted of faculty, staff, and graduate students of the University of Miami School of Education and Human Development. The local planning committee met regularly and made the majority of decisions on the conference program and logistics. AMC Source, conference planners and SCRA's association management company, was also involved in coordinating certain items for the conference, though decision-making was still largely in the hands of the planning committee.

The planning committee was divided into smaller 'subcommittees' that appointed certain members to organize various aspects of the conference – the program, food, logistics, technology, etc. While all decisions ultimately came back for full group discussion, this delegation made things more efficient.

In some cases regarding budgeting, the local planning committee consulted with SCRA President Jean Hill and the Executive Committee to get approval on costs.

AMC Source

When the University of Miami agreed to host the 2013 Biennial Conference, the local planning committee was asked to organize the conference with the assistance of AMC Source, SCRA's association management company. AMC Source had previously helped with the 2011 conference, but in a limited capacity – managing solely the registration system.

Throughout the planning process, it became more apparent that the planning committee was undertaking a disproportionate amount of work compared to AMC. AMC had organized the Friday evening banquet and was overseeing the development of the registration system (more on this in a later section). Looking at

the budget, the planning committee did not feel they were getting appropriate value from AMC for what they were being paid, and thus requested that AMC take over the responsibilities for ordering food and arranging shuttles to/from the conference. These responsibilities were managed, though matters of food and transportation will be addressed later in this report.

For issues that were handled primarily by AMC Source (food, transportation, registration), this report will focus mostly on outcomes – for a more detailed assessment of the planning process for these issues, additional feedback should be obtained from AMC.

Conference Theme

Local planning committee chose the theme of “Communal Thriving: Pursuing Meaning, Justice, and Well-Being.” This theme guided decisions regarding the conference program, specifically the keynote speakers.

Development of a Preliminary Conference Schedule and Program

The maximum size of the conference was determined by requesting 18-22 individual rooms through the University of Miami Registrar. Once these spaces were secured, a basic framework of the program was built that would attempt to limit the number of concurrent sessions to 15-17. These sessions were structured around large sessions such as three keynote speakers and two poster sessions.

Session lengths of 60, 90, and 120 minutes were roughly similar to those at the 2011 conference. Since the online submission system did not provide submitters with the option to request session lengths, these were generally assigned based on the type of session, through exceptions were made based on the number of presenters in each session. Roundtable discussions were generally 60 minutes, symposia and town hall meetings were 90 minutes, and workshops were 2 hours.

An important point moving forward for future Biennials is to consider capping the number of sessions accepted. More than 95% of session proposals were accepted this year, and given the large number of sessions overall, this led to a very full program – as many as 18 concurrent sessions during some parts of the conference. This resulted in low attendance for many sessions. Capping the total number of sessions could alleviate this problem, but risks hurting overall conference attendance (and egos).

<p><i>Recommendation:</i> Future Biennial hosts should weigh the positive and negative effects of reducing the total number of sessions, as well as the length of individual sessions.</p>

Call for Proposals

The Call for Proposals was published via the SCRA website and members were notified via emails to the member database. It was also distributed to local community organizations that work with the University of Miami School of Education and Human Development to solicit additional proposals.

The Call specified five session types – Poster, Roundtable discussion, Symposium, Town Meeting, and Workshop. These are fairly standard session types that had been used in previous Biennials.

Abstract and Presentation Guidelines

As noted in the previous section, the session types were carried over from previous Biennials and are fairly standard. There was some confusion about how to distinguish a town meeting from a symposium, but this question and many others were addressed in an FAQs section on the Biennial website.

There was no strict limit on the number of presentations on which someone could be included. This generally did not cause an issue, as most attendees elect to present in one or two sessions. Some members who are particularly active at the Biennial were involved in as many as seven or eight presentations, which results in many conflicts when scheduling. It is recommended that future Conferences impose a reasonable limit on the number of sessions in which someone can present (excluding poster sessions, business meetings, and plenaries).

In the online submission system, submitters were not given an option of requesting a certain amount of time for their session. This ultimately resulted in a somewhat arbitrary allocation of time for sessions. The general rule was that roundtable discussions would be 60 minutes (later reduced to 50 to allow for travel time), symposia and town meetings were allocated 90 minutes (later 80 minutes), and workshops 2 hours (later 1 hour 50 minutes). A few exceptions were made for roundtable discussions with a large number of presenters or symposia with only a few authors. Future submission systems should have pre-determined rules for allocating time to sessions and allow submitters to submit a reason if they wish to have more/less time. Erring on the side of less time would also be recommended, as it makes scheduling more manageable.

Something that the 2013 Biennial did not provide that would be useful in the future is the ability for individuals to find proposals on similar topics and request to join their proposal. Occasionally these discussions are fostered via the listserv, but some individuals (particularly students or early-career faculty) might not have access to these options. We recommend setting up part of the online submission system or biennial website to have a “forum” that allows people to post their abstracts and discuss potential joint proposals.

Recommendation: Limiting the number of sessions in which an author can present would alleviate conflicts while scheduling. Proposals should include a requested session length if it deviates from the pre-determined lengths. Finally, we recommend implementing an easy, intuitive system for submitters to locate proposals on similar topics so that they might be linked or combined.

Online Abstract Submission and Management

Proposals were submitted via the All-Academic online system. This was the same software used by the 2011 Biennial Conference. There were many benefits of using this online system, including:

- An entirely paperless submission system
- The ability to get real-time, detailed reports on the amount and types of session proposals, including detailed information on each author
- A reasonably simple search system to find specific sessions that needed changes after being accepted (removing a presenter, adding a discussant, etc.)
- A scheduling system that automatically alerts the user of any potential conflicts

There were also some negative aspects of All-Academic. The aforementioned scheduling system was not as useful for editing. As the conference program evolved and changes had to be made, the scheduling system forced the user to completely remove the session from the program and reschedule it, rather than offering the ability to simply edit it. This is not an issue on a small, case-by-case basis, but for large scale changes to the program it became quite cumbersome. This led to delays in finalizing the conference program and resulted in it being posted to the website much later than the planning committee had hoped.

Another concern was the fact that the system was simply not very intuitive and user-friendly. A few people struggled to determine that they could use their SCRA membership login to access the system, which then resulted in double (or even triple) accounts by some people, which made it impossible to properly determine conflicts during scheduling. The system did not make it easy for users to save their progress on their submission and return later, meaning lots of people complained about having to enter their work two or three times.

Recommendation: If SCRA wishes to proceed with All-Academic, work with them to re-design the system, fixing some of the issues mentioned above and throughout this report. Overall, the system needs to be less formulaic, more intuitive.

Proposal Reviews

The program was built after a two-step review process. First, a request for volunteer reviewers was made via the SCRA email listserv. In total 120 people volunteered to review proposals through the All-Academic online system, though only 110 were ultimately needed. Each reviewer was assigned proposals for 3-4 sessions and 1-2 posters. The online system did not allow proposals to be automatically assigned at random. Proposals were manually assigned to reviewers, though without following any specific formula or guidelines except for each reviewer receiving 4-6 reviews total. This resulted in each proposal having at least two external reviews. Since our reviewer base was predominantly people who would be attending and presenting at the Biennial, there was the issue of creating a truly blind review process. One benefit of the online system was that it did not allow a reviewer to be assigned a proposal in which he/she would be participating. Reviews were only able to see the abstracts of each proposal; the authors' names were removed.

Reviewers were generally able to use the online system without any issue. They were asked to grade each proposal on 5 different categories – Significance to field, Congruence with SCRA Principles, Quality of Scholarship/Methods, Substantive Contribution, Congruence to Conference Theme – and their recommendation for accepting or rejecting the proposal. These were mostly the same as the categories used in the 2011 Biennial review process, but the “congruence to conference theme” category was added. Reviewers were allowed to type in comments, but most did not. This could be because of the many categories in which they were asked to assess the proposal. Future hosts might be better served to just request an overall 1-5 grade on the proposal and encourage the reviewer to provide actual commentary.

After the external review process, each proposal was also reviewed by a member of the Program Subcommittee. Proposals were accepted based on the opinion of the external reviews, though the final decision was made by the Program Subcommittee. The results of the external review process, combined with an individual assessment of all submissions by the Program Subcommittee resulted in more than 95% of proposals being accepted.

Recommendation: *If future conferences continue to use the All-Academic software, consider requesting that they include a feature that randomly assigns reviews automatically. The reviewer forms also may warrant changes – the planning committee suggests simplifying it to a 1-5 scale and requiring some reviewer comments.*

Keynote Speakers and Invited Addresses

The local planning committee determined early in the planning process that it wanted to invite speakers that not fit the conference theme, but also promoted diversity and equality. For that reason, the committee approached Michelle Fine and

Niki Harré to speak. The committee also wanted a local voice in the conference, so Alison Austin, a community-organizer from Miami's Liberty City, was invited to speak at the banquet event.

The Planning Committee received an email from an SCRA member recommending Dr. Leonard Jason as a potential keynote speaker, given the recent publication of his book *Principles of Social Change*. The planning committee agreed that there was an availability to have a keynote speaker on each day of the conference, so he was also invited.

Scheduling the keynote speakers was fairly straightforward – each day of the program would center around a keynote address. Michelle Fine was chosen to be the speaker at the opening event on Thursday night. Leonard Jason and Niki Harré were asked to present Friday and Saturday, respectively.

After most of the schedule had been planned, the Planning Committee was informed that the 2013 SCRA Distinguished Contribution Award recipients for Practice (Kien Lee) and Theory and Research (Geoff Nelson) would be giving speeches at the Biennial. Given the schedule was already quite full, the only place to include them was on Saturday afternoon, directly after Niki Harré's talk.

Feedback from the keynote speakers was overwhelmingly positive. Many people remarked that Michelle Fine's talk was their highlight of the conference. Unfortunately, by the Saturday afternoon, many conference attendees had already left Miami, so attendance for Niki Harré and the award recipients was lower than anticipated.

Recommendation: *Future conferences should plan ahead in the program for the talks given by the award recipients. The planning committee also does not recommend scheduling a keynote speaker on the final day of the conference as the attendance is likely to be much lower.*

The Program

The majority of the physical program was conveniently generated by the All-Academic software. One report generated the file with a "calendar" format that showed the sessions organized by time and room number, while another generated all of the sessions with all accompanying information (time, place, authors, abstracts).

The front pages of the program were an opportunity to provide useful information to attendees, as well as sell advertisements to sponsors (Springer, Pacifica Institute). How much this information (shuttle times, campus maps, etc.) was used by

attendees is unknown – at best, it answered many questions; at worst, it served as a viable reference guide for volunteers at the registration desk.

Because of the growth of the Biennial Conference over the years and the large number of sessions each conference is now allowing, the size of the program has swelled. The large jump in accepted presentations from 2011 to 2013 caused the printed program to grow by approximately 100 pages, resulting in much higher printing costs.

For that reason, and for the ongoing effort to be an environmentally conscious organization, the Planning Committee developed an intuitive mobile application through the company Guidebook. The app contained all of the program information, campus maps, links to local restaurants, etc., all in a user-friendly way. The planning committee believes this was a worthwhile investment that will only become more relevant in the future as more people embrace the capability of their mobile devices.

Recommendation: *Printed programs are ultimately very costly and are detrimental to the environment. It is a 250+ page document that serves little, if any, use after the conference concludes. The Planning Committee recommends that future hosts make requesting a printed copy of the program an additional charge during registration. This will offset some of the inflated printing costs and also serve as a reminder to attendees to consider a more “green” alternative during the conference.*

Advertising

In another effort to be more environmentally friendly, the planning committee had hoped to limit the amount of paper advertising at the conference. For this reason we requested that any potential sponsor provide a digital version of their advertisement for inclusion in the printed program and mobile app. While some sponsors did adhere to this, many attendees brought flyers from their respective institutions and asked to leave them at the registration tables.

In the future, it should be made clear that any group or institution that wishes to advertise at the Biennial should do so by requesting to be included in the printed program for a small donation. This would not only serve to be a tidier alternative with less waste, but it would also provide a small revenue stream to SCRA.

CONFERENCE LOGISTICS

Registration

When the local planning committee and AMC Source met in November 2012, it was confirmed that AMC would completely handle the registration system – its development, management, and support. They would also staff check-in and manage onsite registrations at the conference.

The original goal was to have registration go live shortly after presenters were informed of their acceptance to the program, which was February 27. Unfortunately, registration did not go live until approximately a month later, on March 28.

The original email to AMC for how the planning committee envisioned the registration page was sent on February 7. A response was received on February 20, indicating which of the requests were possible given the constraints of their software. On February 28, the planning committee sent final clarification to AMC of their expectations, which ultimately resulted in a registration page very similar to the 2011 conference. It was not until March 18 that the planning committee received its first link to test the registration. After some more tweaks, registration went live on March 28.

Pre-Registration

The vast majority of attendees pre-registered for the Biennial (556 of 597 total registrations). Registration categories were mostly carried over from the 2011 conference, though additional categories were made for faculty and students from local universities, in an attempt to encourage local participation. Similarly, the registration fees were the same as the 2011 conference, which are listed below. Transactions could be made either via credit card or check.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Early / Late Fee</u>
Student SCRA Members	\$125 / \$135
Professional SCRA Members	\$320 / \$370
Student Non-Members	\$145 / \$155
Professional Non-Members	\$360 / \$410
International Professionals	\$160 / \$185
International Students	\$60 / \$80
Student One-Day	\$100
Professional One-Day	\$175

On-Site Registration

In total, 41 people registered onsite. Onsite registration allowed people to register for the duration of the conference (at the late registration prices) or pay for just one day.

Attendance

	Pre-Registered	On-Site	TOTAL
Professional SCRA Member	155	2	157
Student SCRA Member	133	4	137
Professional Non-Member	59	6	65

Student Non-Member	86	11	97
International Professional	39	5	44
International Student	28	-	28
Professional One-Day	18	5	23
Student One-Day	18	8	26
Student Volunteer	20	-	20
TOTAL	556	41	597

International Attendees

One of the most important aspects to the local planning committee was to develop a conference that would attract international scholars. The result was 72 total international attendees (not including Canada), nearly 12% of the total conference attendance. These attendees were from Australia, the Bahamas, Egypt, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

Hotels

Because there is a significant number of hotels within a few miles of the University of Miami campus, none of which had enough rooms to host all ~600 conference attendees, the planning committee elected to not designate an official conference hotel. A list of nearby hotels, including hotels that would be serviced by a shuttle at the beginning/end of each day of the conference, was posted on the Biennial website. Attendees were invited to shop for the best available rate at hotels in their price range.

In early May, AMC Source approached the planning committee with the news that the Mayfair Hotel in nearby Coconut Grove was willing to provide a lower rate for conference attendees, something they were originally unwilling to provide. This information was promptly distributed and resulted in the Mayfair being the de facto conference hotel.

On-Campus Dorms

The local planning committee worked with the University of Miami's housing department to secure dorm rooms as a low-cost housing alternative for Biennial Conference attendees. These options included a private single room (\$50/night), a semi-private single room (\$42/night, shares bathroom with adjacent room), or a double room (\$27.50/night, shares room with another attendee and shares bathroom with adjacent room). UM Housing's policy did not allow for attendees to make direct reservations – the contracting entity was to supply a spreadsheet of who would be using the facilities, and then would subsequently be billed for the rooms that were used. As a result, the planning committee needed a way to solicit requests for on-campus housing and collect money.

The local planning committee approached AMC in March and requested they set up a separate registration page for on-campus housing. Attendees would specify the room type and dates, and they would pay the requisite amount. This would collect the data that Housing needed and the money that would ultimately be used to pay them.

The planning committee received a lot of pushback on this issue from AMC. They raised questions of tax liability, licensing issues, and credit card fees. Despite assurances from APA's accountant, the University of Miami's financial operations department, and UM housing, there was still hesitation from AMC to build the registration system. Ultimately, the planning committee was informed by SCRA President Jean Hill that it was too late to create a registration system, and that an alternative would be needed.

Over the next few days, the planning committee developed a very basic registration system through EventBrite, an online event software. While it was not ideal for this purpose (it is meant for single-use events, not multiple consecutive nights), it served its purpose well. In total, approximately 150 people signed up for on-campus housing.

Recommendation: *The hassle surrounding on-campus housing was perhaps the most frustrating aspect of planning the conference. There was far too much time wasted expecting a certain result from AMC Source that ultimately had to be hastily resolved by the planning committee. While the issues surrounding providing dorms for future conferences will depend on the host institution, it is recommended that there is a mutual understanding between all parties well in advance of the conference.*

Transportation

All shuttles were reserved by AMC Source through the University of Miami Parking department.

To/From Coconut Grove

Because many conference attendees were staying in hotels 3-4 miles away, the planning committee felt it was important to provide a charter bus service to/from these hotels on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Three buses collected attendees at the Mayfair Hotel in Coconut Grove (those staying at nearby hotels needed to meet at the Mayfair to catch the shuttle) each morning at 7:00 a.m. and looped continuously between the University and the hotel until 11 a.m. The same route occurred each afternoon for four hours, allowing attendees to return to their hotels.

Because there was no way to determine exactly how many attendees were staying in Coconut Grove, it was difficult to predict the number of shuttles that would be

needed. AMC Source and the planning committee settled on three (each bus fit 55 guests), which was perhaps overly safe. Because of the staggered departure times, two shuttles would likely have been sufficient, which would have saved some money.

From the planning committee's perspective, communication between the bus company and AMC Source seemed lacking. On Thursday night, after Michelle Fine's keynote speech and the subsequent reception, the last bus to Coconut Grove was scheduled to depart at 8pm. Many attendees went to the designated shuttle stop on campus at 8pm to find that it had already left. The team from AMC Source had already left campus and was unable to organize a shuttle to return to the University. Members of the planning committee drove many attendees back to their hotels, while others took taxis.

To/From Banquet

The same shuttle service was provided for guests to attend the Friday night banquet event at the Rusty Pelican restaurant. A total of five buses were reserved, with 3 departing from the University of Miami, and two departing from the Mayfair Hotel.

Poster Session Shuttles

Additionally, an on-campus service was provided to quickly transport guests from individual sessions to the large poster session event at the Fieldhouse at the Bank United Center. This service was provided to accommodate attendees with mobility issues, or just those who did not wish to walk in the heat. Because it used the University's on-campus shuttles, it was a relatively low cost option that was well appreciated by conference attendees.

Recommendation: *If the host institution is not located in a big city with hotels in walking distance, or in a city with quality public transportation, it is recommended that transportation is provided to a central location that is easily accessible for attendees. If possible, try to get a rough idea of where attendees will be staying, so that reservations can be made as accurately as possible.*

Food and Entertainment

For all events on-campus – breakfasts, lunches, and the Thursday afternoon reception event, food and drinks were catered by Chartwells, the University of Miami's food service provider. This proved beneficial for many reasons. Chartwells is familiar with the UM campus so it was very easy to coordinate where food was to be delivered. It also made communication very easy – all orders were placed through one contact person, and last-minute changes were not difficult to make.

All food orders for the conference were placed by AMC Source.

Breakfasts

A fairly standard continental breakfast of fruit, pastries, juice, and coffee was ordered for each morning at 7:45 a.m. Orders were placed for 400 people, accounting for the fact that not all attendees would be attending sessions at 8:00 a.m., and because the planning committee's previous experiences with Chartwells indicated that they provide plenty of food for per-person orders. Attendees appreciated the 'grab and go' nature of the breakfast, which was set up outside of the classrooms in which sessions would be held.

Lunches

Lunch required more careful execution, based on the fact that Thursday and Friday's lunches were going to be served primarily at the Fieldhouse during the Poster Sessions. Because of a full conference program, the poster sessions had to be held during lunch hours – this conflicted with the various committee and interest group meetings that requested a place to convene. As such, boxed lunches had to be delivered to two different locations – at the poster session and in the classroom building where meetings would take place.

It was difficult to plan how many lunches should be delivered to each location, and consequently, there ended up not being enough at the poster session on Thursday. It appeared that people just followed the crowds over to the poster session for lunch, not expecting for lunches to be provided in their meeting space. The extra lunches from the interest group meetings were rushed over to the Fieldhouse to account for this difference.

Expecting a higher turnout on Friday, an extra order was placed with Chartwells to have more food delivered to the Fieldhouse. Ultimately, it resulted in having extra food at the Friday poster session. Perhaps by day 2, people realized that lunch would be provided in their meeting rooms, so they went straight there.

The planning committee originally did not want to provide boxed lunches on the first two days of the conference, as it had large budget implications and went against the conference's green initiatives. However, at the urging of the SCRA executive committee, the convenience of boxed lunches outweighed those concerns. Many attendees later remarked in the post-conference survey that the boxed lunches were rather plain and uninspired and also commented on the irony of providing them while trying to dissuade the use of paper programs and other environmentally-conscious concerns.

Reception

The planning committee elected to have the opening event on Thursday, at the end of the first full day of conference activities, to allow for the highest possible attendance. The event would feature a keynote address by Michelle Fine, as well as

remarks by Donna Shalala and Isaac Prilleltensky. At the conclusion of the event, hors d'oeuvres and other refreshments were served.

These refreshments, ordered through Chartwells, were a big success. As people excited the auditorium, they were able to get a small plate of food, a drink from the bar, and begin socializing.

Chartwells' pricing for this event was reasonable, though their cost of providing alcohol was very high. As a result, the planning committee elected to purchase the wine and beer and pay a corking fee for each bottle, which was a much cheaper solution.

Banquet

The Banquet event was held at the Rusty Pelican, a well-known Miami restaurant on the water at Key Biscayne. The arrangements for the banquet were handled entirely by AMC Source. Diners had a choice of two options, a salmon dish or a vegan, gluten-free pasta.

Attendees appreciated the location of the event – on the water with a beautiful view of the Miami skyline. However, the feedback indicated that some attendees found that not only were the food choices limited, that they were uninspired and did not reflect the Miami food culture or green initiatives.

This banquet was particularly expensive, based on its' location and the natural high-cost of doing business in Miami. In an attempt to defray some of these costs, and to get an accurate count of attendees for the banquet, attendees were charged an additional \$20 during pre-registration if they chose to attend. During the conference, many people came to the front desk to see if they could pay to attend the banquet. Unfortunately, because AMC had given the Rusty Pelican a fixed number, we had to turn to place many people on a waiting list or turn them away.

Food Trucks

In an effort to feature some local Miami businesses, the local planning committee invited a number of Miami food trucks to come to campus on Saturday to offer a diverse selection of options for attendees. Invitations were sent out to approximately 20 trucks, and about 10 trucks came.

This was ideal because it came at virtually no cost to the conference, except for a few hundred dollars to block off the road where the trucks would park. Unfortunately, because of the full schedule, the time allocated for lunch on Saturday was progressively shorted until there was only about an hour. Ideally, people would have had more time to look around and purchase things at different trucks.

Recommendation: Food costs were among the largest expenses incurred in the planning and execution of this Biennial. These costs could always be reduced if future sites only provide lunch on one day of the conference, as the planning committee had originally predicted, or limit the breakfast options. Consider having at least one meal where local businesses are featured, whether it is the banquet dinner or otherwise. This allows attendees to possibly experience a different type of food and culture.

Mentoring

The planning committee was informed that SCRA member Gloria Levine would be overseeing the mentoring program for the 2013 Biennial. Gloria has coordinated the Biennial's mentoring program for the past five conferences and thus had an expectation for how things would go. She approached the planning committee early on with a list of needs and appeared upset when the conference logistics interfered with her plan for the mentoring program.

The addition of fellow SCRA member Victoria Chien as a liaison between Gloria, the local planning committee, and the executive committee was very helpful. Victoria was very organized and happy to coordinate with all parties to make the mentoring program run as smoothly as possible.

Recommendation: It would make more sense if the conference hosts coordinated the mentoring program. That way, the mentoring events can be incorporated into the program, rather than essentially running parallel to it. This would be beneficial for many reasons – it would likely increase the participation in the mentoring events while also adding a sense of fluidity between it and the rest of the conference program.

Poster Sessions

Because of the number of quality poster proposals received (165 in total), the planning committee elected to host two poster sessions (with ~80 posters each), to allow a more comfortable atmosphere for presenters and attendees. The original plan was to hold the poster sessions on Thursday and Friday lunchtime in the University Center ballrooms on campus. This space is reasonably close to the Memorial Building, where most sessions were held. Unfortunately, that space had been reserved in advance of the conference, so alternate plans had to be made.

After considering other options (including an outdoor event, using multiple small classrooms), the planning committee chose to host the sessions at the Fieldhouse, the on-campus multipurpose facility. It was further away, but it was an excellent space that provided enough space for posters while also having tables and chairs for lunch. The sessions were 90 minutes long, ample time for people to socialize and eat lunch before interacting with the poster presenters.

Staffing

During the conference, the registration desk served as the main point of reference for attendees. AMC Source had 2-3 staff members at the registration desk throughout the conference, handling on-site registration as well as managing the food orders that had been placed. Approximately 20 students who had registered as volunteers (and received a discounted registration fee) also worked at the registration area, the mentoring help desk, or at the various events (keynotes, poster session) occurring throughout the conference. In addition, all local planning committee members were present throughout the conference to help coordinate and manage any issues that arose. The planning committee and volunteers wore distinct orange t-shirts that made them easily identifiable to those needing assistance.

Recommendation: Continue offering a discounted registration fee for volunteers willing to work at least 4-8 hours throughout the conference. If possible, try to always have at least one person familiar with the campus area at the registration area to provide directions.

CONFERENCE EVALUATION RESULTS

Following the conclusion of the conference, a survey was sent out to conference attendees via email. There were 310 total responses, accounting for 52% of all attendees.

Relevant feedback regarding food, transportation, and other conference issues can be found under their sections in this report. The full results of the evaluations can be found in the accompanying PDF, titled "SCRA 2013 Biennial Evaluations"

CONFERENCE FINANCES

The conference generated registration revenues of \$127,655 (includes registration, banquet fees, and pre-conference workshop fees). AMC Source also negotiated sponsorship deals with Springer publishing and Pacifica institute, totaling \$3500. This brought overall conference revenue up to \$131,155.00. Conference expenses totaled \$133,154.19, leaving SCRA with a net expense of \$1,999.19.

A full breakdown of the revenues and costs can be found in the accompanying PDF, titled "SCRA 2013 Biennial Final Budget"

SUMMARY

The intention of this report is to provide future Biennial hosts with certain recommendations and food for thought. In that regard, we hope that it will be useful in organizing logistics and preventing some of the challenges that we faced.

Throughout the planning process, during the conference, and in post-conference reflections, we were faced with many difficult decisions. These decisions were a constant theme of the planning process, and it led to discussions about the direction of the Biennial moving forward.

Trade-Offs

One of the most prominent decisions in this year's conference was that of convenience versus 'Green' initiatives. We determined early on in the conference planning process that one of our goals was to be an environmentally conscious conference – limiting the use of paper (both in advertising and with the program), using local food services that promoted sustainability, and recycling whenever possible. Paper programs would only be given out to those attendees who requested them during registration.

Unfortunately, many of our 'Green' initiatives were sacrificed for the sake of convenience. Boxed lunches were the easiest and fastest way to provide food to 600 hungry attendees, but we were criticized for not being environmentally conscious in the post-conference surveys. This is a logistical hurdle that any large event has to consider, but these trade-offs also exist on a broader level in the planning process.

As the size and scope of the Biennial has grown, costs have naturally increased. It appears to have reached a tipping point with regards to food costs. This year, a significant portion of the conference budget was allocated to food – breakfasts, lunches, a reception with wine, beer, and hors d'oeuvres, and a banquet. With the number of attendees future conferences can expect, this places a significant burden on the host to find cost-effective ways of providing the level of luxury that has become expected from the conference.

Optimization

Another byproduct of the growth of the Biennial Conference is the pressure it puts on the host institution and its planning committee. These committees are generally comprised of Community Psychology faculty members who are not likely to be well-versed in conference planning. The optimal use of their abilities would be for the faculty members to focus intently on the program: assessing each session proposal for its merits, providing feedback to submitters to connect their proposals to the conference theme, or grouping sessions together creatively to develop larger interactive sessions. Asking community psychologists to determine which type of food to order, how to staff the registration area, or having them coordinate with

hotels to provide lower conference rates is not an efficient use of their talents. Having an organization that specializes in planning events of this magnitude would be a wise investment and allow faculty to focus on what they know best. While this was probably the original plan for AMC Source this year, it did not play out that way.

As it stands now, every two years the conference planners have to start completely anew in the planning process. The host institution can look at what might have been successful at previous conferences, but ultimately the peculiarities of each college campus will cause logistical issues that result in the planning committee having to start the process from scratch. We feel that this is inefficient and, as mentioned before, detracts from the ability of community psychologists to focus on the academic aspects of the program.

Permanent Location

Given these issues, along with the difficulty SCRA has in securing locations for the conference every two years, it might be more beneficial and consistent to identify one central, readily accessible location to host the conference regularly. SCRA should consider finding a city with affordable hotels, a conference center, and good public transportation. That way, any problems are easily fixed moving forward, as most of the logistics are predetermined and not subject to the unique aspects of different host institutions. After a few cycles, the structure and plan of each Biennial would be in place, and the planning committee would be able to focus on ensuring the academic quality of the conference.

Conclusion

SCRA is a fantastic organization, and its growing membership is obviously very excited to share its research and experiences every two years. The Biennial Conference is a great experience, especially for the newer SCRA members, but there is certainly room for improvement. We feel that making some bold changes to the way the conference is organized will have a positive impact not only on those who are tasked with planning it, but also to those who attend.