

7th Biennial Conference on Community Research and Action:

Final Report and Recommendations

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Preliminary Report Submitted: September 30, 1999

Final Report Submitted: June 8, 2000

Reprinted: March 2, 2011

7th Biennial Conference on Community Research and Action: Final Report and Recommendations

The 7th Biennial Conference on Community Research and Action took place from June 9 - 12, 1999 in New Haven, Connecticut. A total of 590 individuals registered for the conference, which included over 250 program events, inclusive of presentations, poster sessions, interest group meetings, mentoring breakfasts, and plenary sessions. The conference began at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday June 9th and continued through 5:00 p.m. Saturday, June 12th, with conference events held in Linsly-Chittenden Hall on the Yale University Campus and at the Omni New Haven Hotel at Yale. Total expenses of the conference were \$101,335 with total revenues of \$111,692; yielding net revenues to SCRA of \$10,357.

A preliminary report of conference operations was submitted September 30, 1999. This final report covers the following major areas of conference activity: planning and infrastructure; program; logistics; and finances. Recommendations for the next biennial are included when appropriate. The approximate time line for carrying out various conference activities is embedded in each section below.

Conference Planning and Infrastructure

Committees and Workgroups

The conference was coordinated by a local planning committee and a national planning committee. The SCRA President-Elect and the local planning committee chair served as co-chairs of the national committee and of the conference. Regular input to the national committee was provided by the SCRA Executive Committee through the President-Elect.

As part of submitting a proposal to host the conference, the local committee had made preliminary arrangements with Yale University Conference Services for assistance in securing university facilities and local hotels. Written commitments to Yale Conference Services and local hotels were made about 12 months prior to the conference.

After several planning meetings from October - December 1998 with a core group of local planning committee members and Yale Conference Services, the local committee began meeting in full on a monthly basis beginning in February 1998, approximately 16 months prior to the conference. By June 1998, several work groups were formed that met once or twice a month and reported on their progress to the overall group. Workgroups included the following: conference call, registration, and printing; food and entertainment; housing and disability access issues; logo design; continuing education issues; and fund-raising. Budget matters, keynote speakers, and the conference program and schedule were managed by the local chair and discussed in the overall group. Four months prior to the conference (March 1999) the local committee met every other week, and one month prior to the conference the local committee met twice per week.

The national committee began meeting through monthly conference calls and email also beginning in February 1998. The charge of the national committee was to provide direct input into planning the conference as well as to review and discuss the work of the local committee. Although the national committee served mostly in an advisory capacity, on numerous occasions the views of the national committee were persuasive in having the local committee rethink a proposed plan of action. The national committee received a copy of all local committee minutes that were prepared monthly, and local committee minutes included a section on discussions held by the national committee.

Collaboration with Yale Conference Services

A critical component of the conference planning process was contracting with Yale Conference Services to provide administrative support and technical assistance regarding conference planning. YCS had considerable previous experience planning and managing conferences and made invaluable suggestions concerning conference particulars, such as: the number of hotel rooms and campus housing units needed for conference; the types of meals and snacks to make available to attendees; the number of classrooms needed for sessions; possible sites and caterers for the banquet; how to prepare the Call for Programs and the Registration Form to include essential information about travel arrangements, housing, meals, and deadlines; possible vendors for renting equipment and furniture; and arranging for audio-visual needs. In addition, YCS created the database for registration of participants and staffed the registration desk during the 3 ½ days of the conference. Finally, and of critical importance, YCS paid bills in advance (with the expectation that conference fees and contributions would cover costs) and negotiated contracts with vendors on behalf of the local committee.

The cost for these services was \$6 per person, for a total of about \$3,600. In addition, YCS received a portion of the \$7 per day fee charged to the budget by Yale for the use of campus facilities during the conference, a total which amounted to just over \$14,000.

Overall, YCS provided the logistical infrastructure for the conference. This enabled the local committee to give more attention to the program and focus on details that would make the conference uniquely suited to the SCRA membership. Contracting with Yale Conference Services was the single best decision we made in planning the conference.

Conference Theme and Logo Design

Deciding on a conference theme was an important early task for the local and national committees. The conference theme -- *Ideas to Action * Action to Ideas* -- originated in the local committee and was revised by national committee. Based on these early discussions, four subthemes were also identified: interdisciplinary collaboration, multicultural approaches, partnerships with indigenous community groups, and impact on public policy. Finalizing the theme and subthemes involved an iterative process of feedback and revision between the local and national committees that took about six weeks. The process of creating a shared vision for the conference that was exemplified by the conference theme simplified many subsequent decisions involving speakers, events, and

proposal reviews, and also helped the members of the local and national committees, respectively, come together as a group.

After selecting a theme, the local committee sought a graphic artist to construct a logo for the conference. This was recommended by organizers of the 6th Biennial and was strongly endorsed by the local and national committees. We worked closely with two graphic artists who submitted logo designs, and then selected the logo that ultimately was used on the cover of the conference registration form, the program, and conference website. Before selecting the logo, the local committee received feedback from representatives of the national committee which improved the final product. The cost for logo services, including preparation of a disk-ready copy for printing and t-shirt sales, was \$1,000.

Development of a Preliminary Conference Schedule and Program

Conference length

Before designing the actual conference program, we found it necessary to create a preliminary conference program and schedule that could be used to provide a framework for scheduling plenary sessions, posters, and presentations. Initially, we planned to host a three-day conference beginning with a poster session at 6:00 p.m. Wednesday and ending with a conference closing event by 1:00 p.m. Saturday. However, as conference details became clearer, it became apparent that if we wanted to schedule three plenary events -- a keynote address on Thursday morning to open the conference, some plenary event which acknowledged Seymour Sarason and his seminal work in the field, and Irwin Sandler's distinguished contribution address -- we would need to extend the conference until 5:00 p.m. Saturday afternoon.

In addition to planning the three plenary sessions, the local and national committees decided that the conference would host two poster sessions, on Wednesday and Thursday evening, respectively, and a banquet with entertainment on Thursday night. The Thursday banquet was a popular custom from previous biennials that most everyone wanted to continue.

Creating a master schedule of non-poster sessions

A critical issue in creating the preliminary schedule was deciding on the number of concurrent non-poster sessions to schedule. Both the 5th & 6th Biennial Conferences scheduled up to eight concurrent program sessions. Depending on the number of proposals we would receive, we decided initially on scheduling no more than eight events concurrently. Furthermore, we decided to try to ensure that similar topics were not scheduled at the same time. However, after receiving a larger number of proposals than we anticipated, it became apparent that we needed either to reschedule a large number of excellent proposals as posters or to schedule more concurrent sessions. We decided on the latter, and still had to reschedule about 40 non-poster submissions as posters. The result was that, on average, about 12 sessions were scheduled concurrently, inclusive of resource fairs/exhibits (which usually do not require a large commitment of time from attendees). Since we expected a 20 - 40 percent drop off in attendance by Saturday, we scheduled fewer than 12 concurrent sessions on that day and slightly more than that on some of the other days. (The increase in the number of concurrent sessions was possible because we knew that the

facility in which the sessions would be held had up to 14 rooms available, with a minimum seating capacity [for non-exhibit spaces] of about 40 per room.)

Across the three days, we established five, 90-minute slots; two, 75-minute slots; and five, 60-minute slots (with 15 minute breaks between sessions). This framework allowed for maximum flexibility in accommodating individual requests for longer (i.e., 3-hour) time slots and for assigning shorter slots to presentations with 1-3 presenters. Thus, we could accommodate 3-hour, 2 ½-hour, and 2-hour sessions (and various combinations in between), so that longer and more participatory formats could be scheduled. Overall, this allowed for about 120-140 time slots available across the three days, inclusive of double sessions for proposals requesting more than the available 90 minutes. These slots represented the total pool of available times to schedule accepted presentations, and did not include plenary sessions, lunch times, early morning meetings, poster sessions, and evening events.

Finally, creating the preliminary schedule helped us to conceptualize the “flow” of the conference, and to identify potential trouble spots in scheduling. It quickly became apparent that we needed to schedule plenary events at the beginning or end of the day. This would minimize the 10-minute walk between the Omni Hotel (where plenary events would be held) and Linsly-Chittenden (LC) Hall (where concurrent sessions would take place). We also realized that we needed to schedule the early morning interest group meetings at the Omni so as to minimize the time it would take to get to morning plenary events scheduled immediately following these.

Conference Program

Conference Call, Mailings, and Announcements

Distribution

The Conference Call for Programs was sent out through bulk mail about 2 months before proposals were due. Since bulk mail may take a few weeks to arrive, most who were sent the Call received it by the middle of October (for a December 7th due date). Almost 3300 individuals from APA Divisions 27, 37, & 45, and members of the Society for Prevention Research (SPR) received the Call. Labels were obtained at no cost from SCRA, APA Division 27, and SPR; and purchased from APA for Divisions 37 & 45. In addition, about 1000 Calls were also sent to chairs and selected faculty in psychology & social work departments in New England, professionals at Connecticut agencies, and local agencies. The Call was also printed in *The Community Psychologist* (TCP) in its Fall issue, which was received in late October/early November. Finally, announcements about the Call were posted on the SCRA list serve and other public interest or prevention list serves (e.g., Community Development Society; SPR).

One issue that we did not anticipate was logistical issues around mailings. Only after obtaining the mailing lists from SCRA and Division 27 did we learn that these lists were not the same. At the time of the conference, individuals on the APA membership list were faculty or professionals, whereas the SCRA lists we were sent were students and or independent members that did not

belong to APA. Although this discrepancy ultimately turned out to be a minor issue, it resulted in some confusion as we requested and obtained the mailing lists.

Another issue that also did not pose a significant problem, but was considered later than we would have liked, was the need to purchase a pre-printed Bulk Postage label for mailing the Call and a pre-printed First Class postage label for mailing the Registration Form. Since the Registration form was mailed to about one-third the number of individuals as were mailed the Call, first class postage was affordable and allowed for quicker receipt of materials.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

Although our group, like previous conference committees, sent out Calls to Divisions 37 & 45, I'm not sure the conference actually registered individuals from Divisions 37 & 45 who were not already part of SCRA. Eliminating these Divisions from this initial mailing would simplify it and substantially reduce its expense. However, we would recommend expanding announcements about the conference on relevant list serves and websites.

Because of some unanticipated production delays at TCP which delayed mailing the issue that included the Call, we decided not to rely on TCP as the primary forum with which to inform SCRA members about the conference. As a result, we decided to mail the registration forms directly to SCRA members in February as well as have them printed in TCP. This turned out fine because TCP's production schedule did not coincide well with when members needed to receive conference materials. The deadline for submissions for the Winter issue came before final decisions about the program were made, and the deadline for the Spring issue came after the conference registration form needed to be sent out. If the committee would like TCP to be the primary vehicle for transmitting information about the conference, then planning for the conference should be done in collaboration with the TCP editor so that production schedules for the conference and TCP are better coordinated.

Content

As the enclosed Call for Programs indicates, the Call included instructions for preparing program submissions and a program submission cover sheet. The instructions invited submissions with specific formats, provided detailed proposal guidelines, and included information about the conference site and fees. The Call also summarized the conference theme and subthemes. Finally, the Call also included a general overview of basic logistical information about conference site, including travel arrangements, lodging, and fees. The Call also included email addresses for the two conference co-chairs (Maton & Tebes) to handle any inquiries about the conference. This was critical because at least 100 such inquiries were received.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

Decisions made about the initial Call set into motion issues that impacted program reviews and conference scheduling. Here are several specific recommendations to improve the Call.

1. We recommend that the Call be revised so that for **each** submission, submitters indicate who the chair, moderator, discussant, or presenter is. The manner in which it was included in the Cover Sheet for the most recent (and the 6th) conference left it too vague. In many instances, we simply did not know if the author listed for a given paper/presentation was the presenter, discussant, moderator, or chair. These should be indicated for each presentation.
2. Submitters should be asked to provide the address, telephone number, and email address for each author listed for a given presentation. The current form only requests address/phone/mail information from the submitting author. This is insufficient for several reasons. First, as indicated in #1 above, being able to contact authors directly to ask about their submission would have been helpful. Second, the names/affiliations of several dozen authors were misspelled or incorrect which we learned only after we posted the program on the website and the authors contacted us directly to tell us. Third, about one week before the conference registration deadline, we had yet to receive registrations from about 150 authors listed in the program. We assumed that they would come, but since they hadn't registered, we weren't sure. Being able to contact them directly by email would have been extremely helpful. (We were able to get in touch with about half of this group by contacting the submitting authors, but this was very labor intensive). Finally, contact information for each author might have been helpful so that we could reach them to confirm their submission. In several instances, authors had not been fully informed that they were included in a submission, and a postcard or email sent as confirmation would have identified this issue earlier.
3. The number of papers/presentations to be included on the Program Cover Sheet should be increased. We used the information on the Call as our guide for establishing a conference program database. However, when the program committee began reviewing proposals, it became evident that submitters added several papers (and authors) to their written proposal that were not included on the Program Cover Sheet. This resulted in scheduling conflicts in the program that were discovered only as the program was being finalized because authors were not always included in the database who should have been. The committee should consider simply doing away with the form altogether in favor of having submitters answer specific detailed questions that include all the information needed.
4. Not included in the Call, but which should have been, was information about AV needs. Although authors usually included this in their program submission, it would have been easier for us to track if it was requested directly. Our committee addressed this by contacting each of the submitters about 6 weeks prior to the conference to confirm their A/V request.

Keynote Speakers and Invited Addresses

Both the national and local committees created lists of prospective speakers to invite for the keynote address. Initially, there was some consideration of having two keynote sessions, but given the interest in have a plenary session with Seymour Sarason and Irwin Sandler's distinguished address, we decided on a single keynote to open the conference. Both committees

expressed a strong preference for having a person of color and/or a woman provide the keynote, and to select someone outside of the SCRA who exemplified the conference theme. Based on a recommendation from a member of the national committee, we were able to have Frances Moore Lappe and Paul Martin DuBois from the Center for Living Democracy do the keynote at a cost of \$6,000.

Continuing Education (CE) Units

Through a co-sponsorship with the Connecticut Psychological Association (CPA), the entire conference was eligible for CE units from APA. This was also the case for the Chicago and South Carolina conferences. We opted for finding a co-sponsor because directly applying for CE credits through APA takes 12-18 months. Attendees that registered for CE credits paid \$25 dollars -- \$15 that went toward CPA costs to process their units and \$10 for local administrative expenses in processing units through CPA. A total of 7 individuals applied for CE credits.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

If we could do it over again, we would not provide CE units for the conference. Although a few members of the national committee were insistent of the need to provide CE units for attendees, only 7 out of almost 600 participants actually registered for CE units. The time and effort by the local committee to make this even possible easily required more than 250 cumulative hours. For example, one requirement to obtain CE credits is that learning objectives be developed for the conference as a whole and for each individual session offered. Since authors were not asked to create such objectives for their own proposals, the local committee had to do so for those sessions attended by participants. This became a time consuming process that, ultimately, was utilized by less than 2% of attendees. Informal discussions with those who applied for these units indicated that having the opportunity to earn them at the biennial was viewed a bonus, but not a basis for their decision to attend.

Proposal Reviews

A total of 275 proposals were received; 133 were poster presentations and 142 were symposia/roundtable discussions, town meetings, workshops, fairs/exhibits, group meetings, or innovative sessions. Authors were notified that their proposal was received about 2-3 weeks after it arrived. For only about 50 percent of submissions, authors provided a stamped and addressed envelope for notification about receipt of their proposal.

All proposals were reviewed by the approximately 30 members of the local committee (of which about one-quarter were students) in a single, 10-hour day in January. Conducting all reviews in a single day was used with success for the Chicago conference (the 5th Biennial) and highly recommended by a national committee member.

All non-poster submissions were reviewed by two reviewers as well as the conference chair. Poster submissions were rated by two reviewers. A reviewer form, developed by the local committee, was used to rate all presentations.

Authors of all accepted proposals, including those invited to be revised as posters, were notified by letter of their status in February. Individuals who were offered a poster slot in lieu of a symposium or other presentation slot were given three weeks to respond to our invitation to revise their proposal as a poster.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

We did not anticipate that about one-half of all the submissions would not enclose stamped return envelopes to notify authors about receipt of the proposal. Notifying authors who did not provide envelopes was extremely time consuming, especially when we were very busy simply entering into our database the 80% of proposals that arrived on the deadline or in the week immediately following it. If we could do it again, we would notify all authors by email (see note under "Call for Programs" above).

The 7th Biennial received an unusually large proportion of non-poster submissions -- about 50% more than were submitted to the 6th Biennial Conference in South Carolina. This posed a significant scheduling problem for the conference, and delayed finalizing the list of accepted proposals because we were not sure we could accommodate the large number of non-poster submissions. Eventually, the authors of about one-third of non-poster submissions were invited to revise their proposal as a poster. This represented about twice the proportion of such invitations as was needed for South Carolina. Planners of the next conference should assume that the trend toward more non-poster submissions will continue and plan accordingly.

Authors with multiple presentations

As for the previous biennial, the Call indicated that authors were limited to "no more than two first-author presentations." Little did we realize that this did not put any restriction on the number of times a person could serve as a Discussant, Moderator, or co-author on a presentation (perhaps submitted by a student). As a result, we found numerous instances in which a person was listed on 4, 5, or 6 submissions, thus making scheduling extraordinarily difficult. As a result, a few individuals had to shuttle between two presentations or had back-to-back presentations.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

We would strongly recommend restricting the total number of submissions to four: with a limit of no more than two first-author submissions, and two additional presentations that could include any of the following: Chair, Moderator, Discussant, or co-author.

Printing the Conference Program

We contracted several printing jobs with a reliable local vendor. These included: the Call for Programs, the Registration Form, and the Conference Program. We were able to keep costs reasonable because we had a prior longstanding relationship with the printer and sizeable printing jobs to offer.

One issue that we did not anticipate was that the software our graphic artist used to create the logo was not completely compatible with our printer's software. This was not a major problem because our artist obtained compatible software which allowed the logo to be easily inserted into the relevant documents. However, had this not been done, we would have incurred a several week delay in mailing of the Registration Form.

About two months prior to the conference, one expectation that emerged from some vocal members of SCRA was to have the completed Conference Program sent to all registered participants along with the registration confirmation. This had not been done for previous conferences and was not planned (or budgeted) by the local planning committee. Such an expectation was not unreasonable, however, because programs are sometimes sent to registrants prior to the start of other conferences (e.g., APA, SRCD, etc.). Such a mailing would have had to be sent first class to ensure timely arrival and cost about \$1,000 - \$1,500. In addition, it would have included several errors because of the numerous late changes that needed to be made to the poster session schedule (that would not have made the earlier printing deadline). As a result, in consultation with the national committee, the local group decided to send an overview of the conference schedule to registered participants along with registration/housing confirmation (which also included a local map and directions). These materials also directed participants to the conference website where they could download an updated version of the entire conference program. These materials were sent by Yale Conference Services about 1 month prior to the conference upon receipt of a completed registration form. Finally, a more detailed 7-page conference overview schedule (the same one that appeared in the front of the Conference Program) was also printed in *The Community Psychologist*. SCRA members received their TCP about two weeks prior to the conference.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

We would not recommend mailing the program prior to conference -- the mailing costs are high, the production time frame is short given limited staff resources (i.e., you are unlikely to have all the updated information you need to prevent program revisions), and the potential benefits are few given most registrants access to the Internet. Rather, we recommend completing more frequent, real-time updates of the conference website so that the material there is current. We also recommend working more closely with TCP to ensure that the program overview is received somewhat earlier than was the case for the 7th Biennial. We also would recommend making it very clear to SCRA members (through conference mailings and notices in TCP) that a conference program will not be sent prior to the conference.

Conference Evaluation

The conference evaluation was carried out as a collaborative effort between Deborah Salem from Michigan State and Matthew Chinman from Yale, and their students. To our knowledge, this is the first time the evaluation has involved collaboration between someone outside of the local planning committee and a committee member. Surveys were included in the conference packet distributed to all registrants, and both quantitative and qualitative data was collected.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

The national and local committees did not adequately plan for the conference evaluation and were fortunate that Debby Salem and Matt Chinman stepped forward to be the evaluators two months prior to the conference. The respective committees for the next biennial should review this issue 6-9 months before the conference so that evaluators can be selected sooner.

Conference Logistics

Registration

Pre-Registration

Registration fees for the conference were \$210 for SCRA (non-student) members, \$100 for student members, \$245 for non-members and \$118 for student non-members. The cost for non-members included membership in SCRA and a subscription to AJCP. We also established a one-day rate of \$100 (plus \$25 for attending the Thursday dinner) to attract local professionals to the conference. Out of the 590 conference registrants, 48% were full-paying students, 47% were full paying faculty, and 5% were individuals who attended at the \$100 one-day rate.

Yale Conference Services processed all pre-registrations and on-site registrations, and provided us with a list of conference participants that was included in each registrant's packet upon arrival. In addition, YCS sent out confirmations of registration about one month before the conference along with additional materials about the program (described earlier).

As noted in the report from the previous biennial, most of the registrations came in 7-10 days before the registration deadline. This was helpful to know in allocating resources for processing registrations.

On-Site Registration

In addition to pre-registration, YCS also staffed the conference registration desk with assistance from local committee members. We decided to establish a conference registration desk in the large foyer of the Omni Hotel just outside where the plenary and poster sessions were held so as to maximize the number of people who would have access to it. The registration desk was part of a larger Conference Information Center that was organized in a square with tables all around that included: on-site registration, information referral, SCRA publications and related matter from publishers, materials for the silent auction, t-shirts for sale, and a sign-up for the 50:50 raffle. Nearby were additional tables for publications as well as a Message Board for registrants to leave messages for each other.

Despite listing on the Registration Form the times when registration would be open, several individuals arrived during the early afternoon of the first day of the conference (registration officially began at 4:30 p.m.) and were annoyed at not being able to register. This also came up for individuals who arrived at the registration desk after a late flight (e.g., about 9:00 p.m.) only to find it closed.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

Although there were many advantages of having YCS take care of all registrations, we regret not having a clearer arrangement with them about gaining access to the registration database they created. A few weeks after the conference, YCS relocated to another campus location. This significantly disrupted their operation and delayed our receiving database information about new SCRA members from the conference for about two months. This was much longer than we had anticipated and past the time that new members should have received their initial newsletter and other materials. Although we received partial information about registrants (without addresses) prior to the conference, we should have insisted on receiving a disk or electronic copy of all materials so that we could have processed this information in a more timely manner ourselves after the conference.

Housing

Three types of housing accommodations were made available to conference participants: the Omni Hotel (an upscale hotel at \$115 per night), the Holiday Inn (a moderate hotel at \$75 per night) and the Yale dorms (spartan furnishings without air conditioning at \$28 per night). Both the Omni and the dorms were at the site of conference events; the Holiday Inn was about three blocks away. The Omni and the Holiday Inn rates included an on-site continental breakfast for conference attendees. (This was negotiated to reduce the overall registration fee by about \$5 per person. Continental breakfast was also supplied at the site of conference events each morning for those staying in the dorms or for local registrants.)

A total of 127 rooms were reserved at the Omni, 75 at the Holiday Inn, and 151 at the dorms. All of the dorm rooms were single occupancy, but several hotel rooms were booked as doubles for partners, spouses, or students who decided to double up. We estimate that about 150 individuals at the conference were local, and that about 100 individuals either doubled up in hotels or stayed with local friends. Since more than 80 rooms were reserved at the Omni, conference facilities there were provided at no additional charge.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

We were informed about three weeks before the conference that the Yale Housing Office closes at 8:30 p.m. and would not be able to let people into their dorm room until the next morning. Late arrivals would have to stay in a nearby hotel for the night (or with friends) until they could pick up their key in the morning. Since this was obviously unacceptable, we tried to negotiate with Yale Housing several alternatives to this policy, but were unsuccessful. To address this

issue, prior to the conference, we contacted as many individuals as we could who were registered to stay in the dorms to inform them that they needed to pick up their keys by 8:30 p.m. We also posted this information on the SCRA list serve. Then, during the conference, we set up an on-call team from the local committee that, each night, picked up keys at Yale Housing for those guests who had not yet signed in. Late arriving guests were then instructed by note to go to the campus police (next door) to have an on-call member paged so that the guest could be let them into the room. We recommend that the next local planning committee check into any policies regarding late arriving dorm guests.

Travel & Transportation

Considerable detailed information about travel to the conference was provided in both the Conference Call and Registration Form. This was necessary because New Haven is not directly served by major jet carriers. Individuals who wish to land at Tweed New Haven airport must change to a smaller jet from several eastern seaboard cities. Direct flights are available, however, to Hartford (1 hour away), Providence (1 ½ hours away), and New York (2 hours away). Individuals must then take ground transportation at a cost of about \$25 each way to New Haven. Most out of town registrants chose direct flights to one of the nearby cities and then took ground transportation to New Haven. Yale Travel Services was made available to book flights for attendees.

A major consideration in planning was ensuring the proximity of conference events. For the most part, all conference events took place within a two-block radius that was easily accessible by foot or wheelchair. The only event scheduled that was further than that was the Thursday night banquet at the Yale Peabody Museum, which was about a one mile walk from conference facilities. As insurance against rain, we rented three buses (one of which fully accessible) to transport attendees from the Peabody to all three conference housing sites.

Accessibility of Conference Events

Due to concerns raised regarding disability access at the previous biennial conferences, issues of access were a primary consideration in all aspects of conference planning. The national committee included two members with considerable expertise in the area of disability access, and the local committee recruited the Director of the Yale Resource Office on Disabilities to be an ad hoc committee member. (This person had formerly served as the Disability Officer for the City of New Haven, and thus, was very familiar with access issues in New Haven as well.)

Prior to signing a contractual agreement with the Omni Hotel and the Holiday Inn, several local committee members completed a walking tour of each hotel as well as Linsly-Chittenden Hall, with the Director of the Yale Resource Office on Disabilities and a local volunteer whose disability required the use of a wheelchair. This enabled the committee to determine which spaces (e.g., bedrooms, restrooms, elevators, doorways, foyers, classrooms, hallways, etc.) actually met the ADA code, and which presented a barrier to access. In several instances, the group discovered

that facilities that they were told “met code” actually did not, or were not properly designed to permit full access even though they technically met code.

Overall, there were more than almost two dozen instances in which conference events were redirected or redesigned to ensure full access for individuals who used a wheelchair or who had mobility problems. Some examples are provided below.

- In language reviewed by the Director of the Resource Office, the Registration Form stated: “If you have a disability and require any accommodations for conference housing or the use of conference facilities, please contact...” This enabled the local committee to track and address the specific needs of individuals with disabilities who required assistance. (The form also included a query regarding dietary restrictions.)
- When the local committee discovered that Linsly-Chittenden (LC) Hall had two half floors that were only reachable through the use of five stairs or engaging a loud and conspicuous motorized transport ramp to move from one level to another, they reassigned rooms for conference events. For example, the committee scheduled no sessions on these floors and discouraged their use by curious attendees by blocking entrance to them with food or beverage stations.
- No box lunches were distributed in the basement level foyer at LC, despite its easy egress to the quadrangle outside, because any individual in a wheelchair would have had to use a narrow elevator twice simply to pick up lunch before going out to eat.
- Program sessions which focused on disability issues as well as meetings of the Disability Interest Group were scheduled in a central first-floor location with easy access to entrances and restrooms. In addition, additional loose chairs were removed from specific rooms in which these sessions were held to ensure easier access for individuals with mobility problems or for anyone using a wheelchair.
- Additional rooms were reserved for poster sessions to ensure that any individual in a wheelchair or someone with mobility problems could maneuver around each poster.
- The Yale dorms selected for use were those that were in closest proximity to conference events and also those which housed a significant number of conference attendees who did not have identified accessibility needs.
- Although no one requested it, the local committee identified several local bus companies that were prepared to transport individuals with disabilities that limited their mobility to conference events. The close proximity of these events coupled with the lack of a specific request for this service made it unnecessary.
- The local committee prepared a one-page list of accessible restaurants that was added to the list of local restaurants prepared by YCS included in the conference packet.
- Based on recommendations from disability representatives on both the national and local committees, the local committee identified two of its members as troubleshooting experts to address problems with access that emerged once the conference began. This became necessary in one instance in which a housing arrangement was reported as unsatisfactory.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

We strongly urge the next conference planning committee to continue to give the highest

priority to accessibility issues. In addition to those actions and recommendations discussed above, the committee recommends the use of the handbook, *A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings*, provided by the local chair of the 6th Biennial Conference. With continued focus on this issue, SCRA will ensure that its major conference is fully accessible to all individuals.

Food and Entertainment

The initial poster session on Wednesday night at the Omni Hotel was accompanied by a variety of fine cheeses, fresh-cut vegetables, and crackers as well as refreshments. A cash bar was available for both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Soft drinks, juice, and selzer were subsidized by the conference at \$1 per non-alcoholic drink. This was deemed necessary because the Omni charged \$2.25 for a juice, soda, or selzer, a price the local committee felt was too expensive for students. Food and drinks at this initial session cost about \$6 per person.

As noted earlier (in Housing), the conference provided continental breakfast each morning at the Omni Hotel and the Holiday Inn. Continental breakfast was served beginning at 7:00 a.m. to coincide with the beginning of the mentoring breakfasts, and included the following selection: danish, muffin, coffee, and juice. (Bagels were ordered only once because they cost an extra \$1/day, or about \$400 more.) Coffee and tea was served each day at about 10:30 a.m. during a break. The cost for lunch was about \$5 per person and for coffee/tea service about \$2 per person.

Box luncheons with refreshments were provided around noon on Thursday and Friday, and participants were encouraged to go outside into a grass quadrangle to eat. The weather was very nice and things turned out about as good as could be expected. If there had been rain, participants would have been asked to use Linsly-Chittenden Hall or any other open classroom in the quadrangle. The cost for each box lunch was about \$8. About 3:00 p.m. each day, cookies and cold refreshments were provided during a break at a cost of about \$4 per person.

On Thursday night there was a conference banquet at the Yale Peabody Museum. The Peabody is one of oldest and most renowned natural history museums in the U.S. Guests were able to view all three floors of the museum to see the rocks and dinosaurs, and enjoy food which emphasized a local flavor -- New England lobster bisque, chicken and rice, New Haven pizza. Entertainment was provided by the local Gospel troupe, Salt & Pepper. Participants could walk the one mile to the Peabody from the conference facilities or get a ride from any of the three buses rented for the night. During the banquet, dissertation awards and student scholarships to the conference were announced. The total cost of the caterer, chair and table rentals, entertainment, buses, and use of the museum totaled about \$25 per person. Dinner on Friday was "on your own."

Lastly, as noted earlier (in Accessibility), a list of local restaurants with reviews was prepared by Yale Conference Services and was included in the conference packet. A supplement, prepared by the local committee, was also added which identified which local restaurants were accessible.

Audiovisual Needs

Electronic equipment

We arranged with Yale Audio-Visual to have an overhead projector in every room in which a conference event was scheduled. In addition, approximately six weeks before the conference, we contacted everyone who indicated in their proposal that they had audiovisual needs beyond an overhead projector and asked them to confirm their audiovisual needs within two weeks. Presenters had a wide variety of needs, the most common being a slide projector; although several individuals requested the use of LCD projectors, laptop computers with Internet access, flip charts, easels, markers, tape, and tables for displays. Several requests involved specific requirements for the room size, layout, and/or seating. In most instances, we were able to honor participants' requests; Linsly-Chittenden Hall had just been renovated to include modem access in all classrooms and LCD projectors could be set up by Yale AV. We had to deny requests in a few instances because individuals arrived without telling us earlier that they needed an LCD projector.

AV needs for the plenary sessions included wireless microphones for the two keynote speakers on Thursday, and standing microphones for the audience question and answer session with Seymour Sarason on Friday and the conference wrap-up on Saturday. A video recorder and oversized projection screen was made available at no charge for a dance session on Friday night. The cost for all AV services was about \$1300.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

One detail we overlooked in completing the Call for Programs was asking presenters to identify their AV needs in their proposal. This would have significantly reduced our workload in identifying these needs through reading the proposal and also clearly placed the onus for informing us about these needs on the presenters. We recommend asking for this information in the Call.

Another issue that we simply did not anticipate fully was the high cost of using university or hotel AV departments to staff AV needs for the conference. An especially high ticket item is the use of an LCD projector, which requires the presence of a staff person to operate. We did our best to keep AV costs to a minimum once we realized their expense, but would have benefitted from budgeting this item more accurately earlier in the planning process.

Poster Boards

One issue that was initially thought to be a minor one but which ultimately turned out to be a major headache was finding poster boards for the conference. Apparently, very few companies within a 150 mile radius of New Haven rent poster boards appropriate for use at conferences. (The cost to purchase new poster boards was prohibitive, and used ones could be found.) After several months of searching (by Omni conference staff, YCS staff, and local committee members), we found a company in Worcester, Massachusetts that rented poster boards. The company was willing to deliver the boards to New Haven and then set up and break them down before and after the conference. The boards themselves were quite large -- 4 ft' x 8 ft' -- thus allowing us to have them

used by two presenters using about a 4' ft x 4' ft space. A total of 75 posters were needed to meet conference needs (about 65 for poster sessions at the Omni Hotel and about 10 for poster cluster sessions at LC). The large number of poster boards needed was due not only to the large volume of posters scheduled on any given night (about 100 each on Wednesday and Thursday), but also because we arranged to use additional rooms to ensure easy wheelchair access to all poster sessions. Adding rooms also allowed us to create more coherent thematic clusters of posters. At \$80 each to rent, the cost of poster boards was \$6,000. Fortunately, this issue became apparent early in the planning process so that we were able to adjust the budget to accommodate such a large expense.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

We urge the next planning committee to check into this matter as soon as possible and budget accordingly. One thing we did not anticipate is that a few individuals scheduled to present their poster on the initial night encountered travel delays and could not make their scheduled poster session. We were able to accommodate their request to present on the second night because more sessions had been scheduled to open the conference, and thus, poster spaces were available the following night. If a poster session is scheduled for the initial night of the next conference, we recommend that a few more posters be scheduled for that night to accommodate individuals who request a switch to a subsequent session due to a travel delay.

Friends of SCRA award

The Friends of SCRA Award is a new honor that was presented for the first time at the 7th Biennial Conference. Based on a suggestion made several years by Mo Elias, it is bestowed on individuals whose work is in keeping with the spirit of SCRA. The award was presented to the conference keynote speakers, Frances Moore Lappe and Paul Martin Dubois. In the event that a similar award is presented at the next biennial, below is the wording and spacing of the plaque:

1st Annual Friends of SCRA Award
Given to Frances Moore Lappe and Paul Martin Dubois
of the Center for Living Democracy
in recognition of work in the best tradition
of the values, methods, and goals of
the Society for Community Research and Action
Division 27 of the American Psychological Association

June 1999

On-Site Troubleshooting Team

During the conference, an important activity by the local committee was to establish trouble-shooting teams at the site of ongoing conference events. A master schedule of all conference events was developed that was based on the overview in the front of the conference

program. However, this schedule also identified the 3-4 person team on duty for each 3 hour period, a listing of AV materials needed in each room for any given session, and any unusual things to check for a particular event (e.g., whether Omni staff had properly set up a plenary session with theater seating for 600 with a riser; instructions to set up and break down 4 round tables before and after a given session, etc.). Although it seemed a bit silly to the local committee at first, each member of the troubleshooting team was asked to carry a pocket-sized two-way radio while on duty that allowed for communication within a 2-mile radius. The radios proved to be invaluable in responding to emergent issues involving AV problems, the transfer of chairs from one room to the another as necessary, and mobilizing to avert a potential problem involving accessibility.

One activity that was quite useful was having everyone who signed up for the troubleshooting team complete a walk through of each facility two weeks prior to the conference. The purpose of the walk through was to familiarize individuals with LC and the Omni so that they could give attendees proper directions to conference sessions, rest rooms, telephones, etc. and to ensure that the additional signage created by the committee was correct.

Conference Finances

In the initial February 9, 1996 proposal to the SCRA Executive Committee, the local planning committee proposed a conference budget of \$88,900 in expenses and \$97,500 in revenues, for total net revenues to SCRA of \$8,600. The actual total expenses of the conference were \$101,335 with total revenues of \$111,692. This yielded net revenues to SCRA of \$10,357.

Financial Management

Purchasing and contracting

Purchasing and making advance payments was addressed through two mechanisms. First, Yale Conference Services negotiated with vendors and made advance payments from a university account that was set up after we committed to their services for the conference. This account was debited as needed and was charged to reconcile bills. This mechanism was instrumental in being able to backstop big ticket items that the local committee did not have the capital to purchase. Second, the chair of the local committee (Tebes) was able to charge items to an account at The Consultation Center (a collaborative venture of Yale University, the Connecticut Mental Health Center, and the non-profit Community Consultation Board, Inc.) to pay for various services (printing, mailing, supplies, etc). This was helpful when purchases needed to be made quickly. At the end of each month, The Consultation Center sent YCS a bill for these expenses and was reimbursed.

Contracting was somewhat more complex. Early in planning process, the national and local committee chairs (Maton and Tebes) discussed the advantages and disadvantages who should enter into contracts for the conference. Although there was some potential liability and technical advantages of having the SCRA President sign all contracts, this seemed awkward if these contracts were not being managed directly at the national level. Our belief was that it made more

sense to have the local chair sign contracts if local entities could accept the liability for doing so. This was worked out through the local chair's joint link to Yale University and the Community Consultation Board through The Consultation Center. Furthermore, because the national chair kept the SCRA Executive Committee abreast of conference planning and decision-making, the Executive Committee could maintain its necessary oversight responsibility for the conference and any contracts that were established.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

We found that it was extremely useful in managing conference finances to be able to have a conference service be able to make advance purchases and payments. We recommend a similar arrangement be effected for the next biennial if at all possible. The additional capacity of having The Consultation Center make smaller purchases and facilitate contracting was also useful. We encourage the next committee to identify similar mechanisms to increase flexibility in making purchases and entering into contracts.

We encountered several delays in reconciling expenses for the biennial. First, it took more than 4 months to receive all the final bills from conference vendors. In several instances, these bills contained significant errors (e.g., additional charges for food that was not ordered and services that were not performed), which ultimately totaled several thousand dollars. Because of careful record keeping, we were able to have these corrected and have the incorrect charges eliminated. We strongly recommend that someone from the local committee keep detailed records of contractual requirements to ensure that any such charges are discovered when reconciling costs after the conference is over.

Conference Sponsors

Several institutions made direct monetary contributions to total \$14,000 to help sponsor the conference: a \$12,000 bundled contribution from the Yale University Department of Psychiatry and the Connecticut Mental Health Center; a \$1,000 contribution from the Fairfield University, College of Arts and Sciences; and, a \$1,000 contribution from the University of New Haven. Other institutions which provided faculty and staff resources included: The Consultation Center, Central Connecticut State University, Southern Connecticut State University, the University of Connecticut Health Center, the University of Hartford, the Yale University Division of Prevention and Community Research, the Connecticut Psychological Association, and the Connecticut Certification Board.

Fund-raising

A total of about \$4,800 was raised in various conference fund-raising events. These included an ad book, silent auction, t-shirt sales, and a 50:50 raffle. The purpose of all fund-raising activities was to support student activities at SCRA, including the distribution of 23 student scholarships of \$100 each to help offset conference costs.

Ad book

Local planning committee members solicited New Haven businesses to purchase space in an 8x11 advertisement booklet that was distributed to all conference participants. Thirty-five local restaurants, gift shops, hotels, theaters, and other establishments participated. The costs to advertise in the booklet were as follows: \$125 for a full-page ad; \$75 for a half-page ad; \$50 for a quarter-page ad; and \$30 for a business-card size ad. The booklet not only helped to raise over \$2,400 for student scholarships and other conference costs, it also provided participants with several dining, shopping, and other entertainment options during their stay in New Haven.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

The ad book required a lot of work from several committee members. On several occasions, members regretted ever having started it, but as orders for ads started to come in, we realized that the book would generate quite a bit of income for student scholarships. The next committee will need individuals who are willing to stick with this project to make it a success.

Silent auction

A few months before the conference, we announced the silent auction on the list serve and through registration confirmation materials. Because this was the first time SCRA had a silent auction, we did not receive much response initially. However, we encouraged SCRA leadership to use their persuasive powers to solicit donations. As we advertised the most recent donations, we began to receive other donations over the list serve. Donors brought their items to the conference but, in a few cases, items were sent in advance.

Bidding for the items began the second day of the conference and closed on the morning of the final day. Sheets describing the donation, the donor, and a suggested minimum bid were placed under each item at the conference registration desk. The bidding was open (i.e., people signed their names with their bids) so that others could see the current bid. Also, the local committee was encouraged to “seed” the bidding so that others would be more likely to participate (Unfortunately, this did not always work and some members had a bill to pay when the conference was over). Despite these efforts, some items were not bid upon. We announced the winning bids at lunch on the last day of the conference, and distributed a majority of the items at that time. We had to mail a few items to persons after the conference. The silent auction raised over \$1,300.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

The silent auction required quite a bit of effort from the committee member responsible for carrying it out. However, it seemed to be very well received. If the next committee decides to do it again, early publicity might generate even more donations.

T-Shirts

Approximately 225 cream colored t-shirts were ordered with the conference logo in a variety of sizes, including youth large. Shirts cost about \$8 each and were sold at \$14. A total of 165 shirts were sold for a total profit of almost \$1,000.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

We overestimated the number of t-shirts to print and recommend that if t-shirts are planned for the next biennial, a much smaller number be ordered.

50-50 Raffle

A 50:50 raffle involves a drawing in which the winner splits the overall total derived from ticket purchases with the house. The raffle for the conference required that entrants guess the correct answer to the following question: How many times has the word empowerment appeared for the last 10 years in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*? The correct answer was revealed on Saturday about noon; about \$50 was raised.

Recommended Changes for the Next Biennial Conference

The next committee needs to decide how much fund-raising they plan to do. Obviously, this event was not very lucrative, but was amusing and required very little effort.