
Special board meeting called to discuss strategies to address possible hotel reservation and conference attendance shortfalls and potential penalty fees.

Ken begins the meeting at 12:30pm

The economic situation of the country and the cuts in travel budgets is clearly having an effect on our conference attendance. With six weeks to go before the conference we find ourselves with 193 registrants (we had 366 at this point for the Denver conference) and 465 booked room nights (our block is for 711 room nights). To keep our costs as low as possible and to avoid penalty fees to the hotel, we need to find creative solutions.

Hotel Reservations:
Yesterday, March 4, 2009, Elizabeth Clarke was able to negotiate with the hotel manager to drop the attrition penalty to 80% of the room block (568 room nights) rather than the earlier 90% rate. The Marriott is also willing to add members who are booking elsewhere in the city at comparable hotels at the competing rate. In addition, the manager has agreed to keep the room block open for a few days beyond March 24th, if we think more rooms will be booked later.

We need to consider two things – when to release the block of un-reserved rooms and what to do if we do not meet the 80% quota. If we release the block to the hotel (to sell to the public), then any ARLIS/NA registrants booking after we release the rooms will pay the full fee for those rooms (not the conference rate). It was felt that it is better to encourage members to book early (by March 20th). Our financial risk is too high to hold the rooms. The hotel manager did note that the rest of the hotel is not yet sold out for those dates. Though there are other events in Indianapolis that weekend (e.g., Race for the Cure), we cannot count on the hotel being able to sell the rooms. It was agreed that on March 24th we should release the 20% of rooms that ARLIS/NA is not using. Elizabeth Clarke and Sue Rawlyk will continue to negotiate with the hotel management – the hotel management wants the conference to work well and are open with their suggestions.

If we do not meet the 80% quota of room nights (568), it was agreed that ARLIS/NA should purchase the rooms that are not being sold as that cost would be significantly less than paying the penalty ($35,800). We will need to get an exact count on March 24 (or the latest possible date that the hotel is holding rooms for our conference) and purchase only the number of room nights that will meet our 80% quota. It was agreed that if necessary the rooms would be purchased on personal credit cards by Ken Soehner, Amy Lucker, and Ted Goodman; all of whom would be reimbursed by the Society.

The board discussed the options available to us as far “giving” the rooms to members or making them somehow useful to the membership. There would be too many hard feelings if we offered them at a reduced rate to latecomers. If anyone can think of a way
to distribute them to student members or retirees without causing ill will, he or she is encouraged to contact Ken with ideas. It was suggested that if we have to purchase a few room nights, that we could offer a room to Jim Neal and any other VIP or to travel award winners. The difficulty is not knowing how many rooms and which nights we would have available to offer until the last moments before the conference. We could also offer the rooms for holding meetings or one room could be held for the local chapter for volunteers who are coming each day to the conference but not necessarily staying in the city. The suggestion was made that for future conferences, members could donate rooms to first year attendees or others needing assistance.

The question of whether we could increase our Thursday night room block was raised (perhaps pulling room nights from another night), since members booking now for Thursday night are not able to get the conference rate but are having to book at the full hotel rate.

Encouraging members to register:
Ken will send out message (tomorrow, March 6, 2009) to the listserv encouraging members to register and to stay at the hotel. Amy Lucker will send out a message next week and Mari Russell the following week.

ACTION ITEM #81
The current president, incoming president and 2009 incoming president will each send out messages to the listserv encouraging members to come to the conference. Deadline: Ken Soehner: March 6; Amy Lucker: March 13; Mari Russell: March 20, 2009.

A point of clarification on the hotel commission for 2009:
The board discussed the hotel commission ($15,000) this year. It will go to Clarke Associates, Inc. We did negotiate with Clarke Associates and they agreed to sign over the commission, if Clarke Associates, Inc. did not manage the conference, but they are managing the conference, so the $15,000 will go to Clarke Associates, Inc. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that the hotel will pay a commission because not enough rooms are being sold to get the commission.

Food & Beverage / Catering Contracts:
While our contract stipulates that we hold the events at the hotel and that we use their food & beverage services, we are not contractually obligated to the amount of food. We can provide food just for the numbers we plan to feed. Closer to the time of the conference, numbers will be confirmed and we will order only what is necessary, thus keeping costs at a minimum.

Other costs:
Circle City Celebration at the IMA
Alba Fernandez-Keys noted that we can give them exact numbers the week before the event. At this point we have booked it for 400, but can reduce that. She needs to give an estimate in the next days and will reduce it to 225. As the conference nears, we can give more accurate counts.

Program printing
The program needs to be printed this year because of our contracts with advertisers. We are printing no more than 300 copies. This will be something to look at carefully for future conferences. Go Green!
Tours
It was agreed to keep all tours open – even the lightly attended ones. Rather than booking buses, we may go with vans or alternative transportation options.

Other topics of discussion:

Silent Auction
Board members are asked to think of creative ways to drum up interest in and to promote the Silent Auction. Can services (not just merchandise) be offered in the spirit of the ‘reduced’ economy?

Career Mentoring Program
Heidi Hass asks for input and creative ideas to get more mentors signed up. She has many more mentees than mentors. It was suggested that she contact Barbara Rockenbach so that a note could be added to the Society Circle invitations encouraging those members to offer their expertise and guidance, in addition to their monetary contributions.

Looking to the future:
Once we have TEI on board we will work to change the hotel contracts so that we do not face this in the future. There needs to be a way to adjust to changing economic climates. Cancelling conferences would be an unfortunate and potentially disastrous option. We also do not need to go the completely no-frills route. It was felt that there is a happy medium in what the Society can offer its members. The conference is too important an event in the annual life of the Society to be dismissed or replaced with technology.

The Boston (2010) contract will be finalized this spring. Minneapolis (2011 and a joint conference with VRA) will be different and needs to be treated differently. We should probably have a conference call with the VRA Conference Planning Group to discuss the contract. Toronto (2012) has not been finalized. The board and planning committee will need to look at the Toronto contract very closely to build in flexibility.

Meeting adjourned: 1:20 pm

Submitted:
Rebecca Price, Secretary