



Annual Symposium Task Force Report: Executive Summary

June 2021

Summary

Since 2005, the percent of STP members attending the Society of Toxicology Pathology (STP) Annual Symposium (AS) has been gradually decreasing resulting in increased meeting revenue deficits. While strategies to increase STP membership have been successful, the percent of members attending the AS has steadily declined from a high of 37% in 2005 to a low of 19% in 2019. This suggests that the Annual Symposium may not be meeting the needs of its members or their employers. In 2019, the Executive Committee established the Annual Symposium Task Force (ASTF) to investigate the root causes of attendance attrition, as well as to take an overarching look at the AS to identify ways in which it could better meet membership needs.

The ASTF, chaired by Paul Snyder, was comprised of 15 members* representing a diverse range of the STP membership. Specifically, the ASTF was asked to identify 1) aspects of the AS that could be changed, modernized, or modified to improve membership value, 2) tactics that could improve AS attendance, and 3) strategies to reduce AS expenses without diminishing the educational and networking experience for attendees.

The ASTF report provides specific recommendations on the three main aspects of the development, organization, and delivery of the AS: venue selection, topics and agenda, and revenue and expenses. This abridged version of the ASTF report includes a summary of the key background information and recommendations.

Venue Selection

The STP is a small to medium-sized organization with AS attendance between 300-500 people. Identifying venues with adequate, but not excessive, meeting space in cities that are easily accessible and have local attractions are key to ensuring a successful meeting. Attendance at the AS has typically been higher when located in larger cities, such as Boston, Washington, and Chicago. This is likely the result of venue accessibility, a variety of local activities and attractions, access to public transportation, and proximity to membership.

A financial consideration related to the venue that has emerged in recent years has been a steady decrease in the number of individuals staying at the contracted (official STP) hotel, as attendees are choosing alternate hotels or are using short-term rental options (e.g., Airbnb). Because of this, the STP has had to reduce the hotel room block numbers to prevent or decrease attrition costs (incurred when we do not utilize the contracted room block); this decrease reduces STP's negotiating strength on venue costs and amenities such as meeting rooms.

ASTF Recommendations:

- Establish a regional rotation but consider identifying a limited number of repeating sites/cities per region that fulfill the STP needs and will allow for maximizing the STP's chances for successful AS.
- Consider a "scatterplot" of member locations to optimize "local" STP member attendance.
- Offer 1 or 2-day registrations to attract more "local" scientists.
- Select sites that are desirable to attendees offering easy access, public transportation, etc.
- Select venues located near family-oriented attractions.

Topics and Agenda

The ASTF stressed that the primary objective of the AS is to deliver current science-based and regulatory-related content to the membership. The ASTF supports the continuation of a "theme-based" education agenda. Although significant effort is put into identifying topics and presentations that are intended to be interesting to the majority of the membership, inclusion of parallel sessions may increase meeting attendance by broadening the of appeal of the agenda to individuals in different job types. Advances in virtual platforms can further enhance the value of the AS.

ASTF Recommendations:

- Have a focused agenda that allows for greater person-to-person interactions
- Consider one or two concurrent sessions
- Consider delivering some symposium content virtually
- Expand/modify the format of the presentations to enhance the educational benefits to attendees as a "hybrid" format
- Consider newer formats including multiple speakers, "lightning" talks, e-posters, e-presentations, etc.
- Encouraging presenters to utilize currently available technologies for enhancing dissemination of information

Revenue and Expenses

To improve the appeal of the STP AS, consideration of both the member and the member's employer should be taken into consideration. In addition to the AS topics and content, reducing the cost of meeting attendance could enhance the value proposition. Reduction in the duration of the meeting would reduce expenses not only for the attendees, but also to the STP through decreased expenses related to management company stafftime, room and board, security, A/V equipment, and A/V staff time.

ASTF Recommendations:

- Reduce the duration of the in-person component of the AS, ideally to 4 days
- Utilize virtual platforms for amenable components of the AS

* Task Force Members: Amy Brix (2006 STP Symposium Co-chair), Alix Dieterly (student), Mark Hoenerhoff (EC liaison), Rebecca Kohnken (early career STP member), George Parker (2021 STP Symposium Co-chair), Richard Peterson (past-treasurer), Jim Popp (STP past-president, scientific interest), Anne Ryan (STP past-president, scientific interests), Aaron Sargeant (current treasurer), Bill Siska (early career STP member, clinical pathology), Heather Tillman (Biomedical interests and ACVP experiences); AIM Staff: Maureen Bayley, April Brewer, and Tierre Miller.