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San Francisco, CA ■ February 23-26, 2011

FINAL REPORT
Executive Summary

Northern California and Nevada Medical Library Group (NCNMLG)
&
Medical Library Group of Southern California & Arizona (MLGSCA)

Joint Meeting 2011

Submitted by Meeting Tri-Chairs:

Ysabel Bertolucci, Kaiser Permanente, Oakland
Michelle Henley, Saint Francis Memorial Hospital, San Francisco
Marcus Banks, Samuel Merritt University, Oakland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview:

The 2011 NCNMLG/MLGSCA joint meeting took place from February 23-26, 2011 at the Parc55 Hotel in San Francisco. The meeting was February 24 & 25, with the other two days devoted to CE courses. Overall, there were 165 registered attendees. About 60% came from the NCNMLG region, 35% from the MLGSCA region and 5% from areas outside of these membership regions (including 1 attendee from Guam)

Plenary speakers included chef & author Laura Stec (Cool Cuisine - Feed Your Body, Mind, and Planet), Karen Schneider, Director of Cushing Library (Change Management and the Sustainable Library) and David Irby, PhD (From Flexner to the Future: Recommendations of the Carnegie Reports of 1910 and 2010). There were updates from NLM and the RML, as well as a report from MLA President Ruth Holst. 20 contributed papers and 14 poster presentations rounded out the meeting.

Exhibits were held on one day only. 21 library & related product vendors paid to exhibit. A table was also donated to sell artwork, with proceeds going to support the Zimbabwe Artists Project. The New England Journal of Medicine, MD Consult (Elsevier) and Rittenhouse Book Distributors were leading sponsors. Funding was also provided by St Mary's Reno and Springer.

Scheduled social and networking activities included an opening reception Wednesday night, as well as 2 guided library tours (Mechanics' Institute and San Francisco Public Library). Dine-Arounds took place after meeting activities on Thursday.

Key Successes:

Overall, the meeting venue, the Parc55 Hotel, was well received by attendees. It was in a very convenient location, easily accessible to local and regional public transit. The hotel staff provided exemplary service, the meeting rooms were well maintained, and hotel sleeping rooms were high quality. Room rate of \$189 was also exceptional given other similar properties in the area and the fact that Internet service was included in the rate. Attendees raved about the food and beverage offerings. As the expected room commitment for the meeting was met (175 nights), we were not required to pay for unsold rooms.

For the first time, a plan for discounted student registration was implemented. Students could register for one day for \$50, or 2 days for \$75, plus 2 hours of volunteer time on site at the meeting. This helped to increase student registrations and provide a pool of student volunteers. The early bird registration price was \$225 for both days, \$125 for one day only, but was extended up to a week before the meeting to encourage late registrants to attend. The registration process mostly ran smoothly, particularly for those registering online with their credit card via Acteva.

Main Issues/Problem Areas:

Although the hotel was exceptional, a minimum of \$40K in food and beverages was required, not including service fees (21%) and sales tax, to avoid facility use charges. A/V services were incurred separately and cost about \$10K. Because NCNMLG had not established hotel credit in the past, nor had an active credit card, total estimated charges had to be paid in advance of the meeting. A check for approximately \$66K had to be requested from the treasurer and mailed to the Parc55 about 2 weeks before the meeting. A bill for an additional \$1800 came after the meeting, mainly for (unexpected) charges for a hosted bar. In the end, NCNMLG paid the Parc55 almost \$68K to host the meeting.

Throughout the planning process, it was apparent that many of the committees lacked enough volunteers. A call for committee chairs was sent in February 2010. In April, further pleas were sent, while some previously committed chairs had to back out for personal reasons (e.g., the previous meeting tri-chair). The president at the time committed to taking on the tri-chair role, but was unable to find others to participate. In particular, Publicity, Registration and CE would have benefited from additional members. It would also have been helpful to have a 4th meeting chair (as was done at 2010 Joint Meeting in Glendale).

Although the meeting website worked well with very few issues, there was a delay in getting the website ready for registration. A major issue was that the main NCNMLG website was poorly managed and had been in need of an update for some time. A search for alternatives ensued (e.g., creating a separate blog), but in the end, the tri-chairs had to ask the executive committee to consider paying someone to design a site due to lack of time of the Website committee. The site was ultimately created for free by an NCNMLG member, and hosted on a new server, however the delay could have been avoided if an adequate association Website had been available from the start.

Registration mostly ran smoothly, but there was not a process in place to confirm paper registrations and track mailed checks, so several registrants had to individually follow up on these issues. The Acteva registration site was seldom problematic, but customer support was difficult to reach. Communication between the Registration, Plenary, CE and Exhibits/Sponsorship committees was lacking, so it wasn't always clear which non registered attendees (Plenary speakers, CE instructors, MLA officers, etc) would also be attending the meeting. This meant that some speakers showed up without a badge or packet at the registration desk.

Recommendations for Future Meetings:

Overall, hosting meetings of this size and length are increasingly difficult. With an estimated 150-200 attendees from the two chapters, the group is too small to have our meeting at a conference hall, but too big for a smaller venue (e.g., boutique hotel or dedicated meeting room facility). This means we typically must host the meeting at moderate size hotel where food minimums are the norm. This can be quite expensive, especially when ancillary charges (like AV costs) are incurred. Although registrations for the 2011 meeting were higher than expected (estimated around 150), NCNMLG still lost about \$16K. With less than 25 vendors participating, exhibitor fees did little to add to the revenue.

It is also difficult to get chairs for the planning committee, particularly when they may not have enough volunteers to support them. Many of our members are retiring and/or discontinuing their professional activities, or simply do not have time given added career and personal responsibilities. And given the current economy (which may hold for several more years), many members have limited funding for professional meetings and often must choose between attending a chapter meeting or MLA annual. This means attendee numbers will likely remain steady, with revenue unlikely to keep NCNMLG from losing money on meetings going forward.

Because of the amount of work involved in a joint meeting, the tri-chairs recommend a better assessment of volunteer needs prior to planning. At least three meeting chairs are needed who can commit 18 months to planning and chairing the meeting. If one chair is the primary contact for the hotel, that chair either needs to do that exclusively, or enlist the support of another planning committee member. That chair should also manage all sub-committees related to hotel arrangements (registration, hospitality, facilities). There should also be a Finance chair exclusive to the meeting (not the chapter treasurer nor a meeting chair), as the chapter treasurer cannot always devote time to managing chapter and meeting expenses simultaneously. The Finance chair should be responsible for any subcommittees where honorariums or expense reimbursements are provided (Plenary, CE). Most planning committees need at least two members (many need three), including the chair. At least one of these members should be an established association member who can provide a history of past meeting arrangements and guidance for less experienced members.

The tri-chairs also recommend that before hosting another joint meeting, both NCNMLG & MLGSCA examine the possibility of 1) hosting shorter, individual chapter meetings where both chapter's members would be invited (e.g., a one day educational conference with no exhibitors) and/or 2) locating the meeting at a conference center or local library, with hotel arrangements for out of area attendees made separately. As networking seems to be a primary interest of the members, it may be wise to hold several smaller educational/networking opportunities throughout the year, rather than one large event. If neither of these options is feasible, NCNMLG & MLGSCA should consider raising the registration fee so that it actually covers the costs for food and other facility charges per attendee.