American Society for Indexing

COMMITTEE REPORT

## Please return this report electronically no later than Tues., May 11, 2021.

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Name of Committee:Conference Planning Date: 5/12/2021

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Other Committee Members (names and email addresses). Add second sheet if necessary.

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT OF ACTIVITY SINCE: **February 1, 2021**

(Use as much space as desired.)

While it took longer than anticipated to get a full slate of speakers for the Apr 2021 conference, once the slate was established (thanks to the board for their help on this), the actual conference went well.

The class for new indexers went well although there are limitations to the online format that make an in-person class more desirable--particularly in the ability to have real-time exercises. Still, Fred offered an excellent introduction to indexing and the class was oversold.

For the main conference, spreading the six main sessions over two days worked well in lessening the Zoom fatigue. Participants were complimentary about the mix of sessions, but we will know more about the reception after the follow-up survey. Of course, we do not know how many people didn't sign up because they did not think the program was of interest.

Moderating questions and comments is helpful in keeping sessions on track. There was a good mix of questions for the speakers and helpful comments in the chat. Expecting speakers to moderate the chat window while speaking is too much on the speaker. We may want to explore using different moderators for different sessions/days just to mix things up.

We recorded one session as an experiment. No one objected but I am unconvinced that recording will be satisfying going forward. However, I will be attending the ISC/SCI virtual conference later this month and will see how their recording of sessions goes.

We used slightly longer breaks this time, which helped both with Zoom fatigue and with keeping us on schedule. The optional Happy Hour was fun for those who elected to stay (about 1/3 of attendees to start) and added to some sense of collegiality along with the break prompts for social discussion.

The software sessions had several technical difficulties, with one speaker being unable to attend at all and another having a very disrupted session. Rehearsals with both had gone well, so it is unclear what the issue was, although a heavy news day in one speaker's home country and having another speaker's session at 5 pm EST may have contributed to the issue. While these sessions were useful, they ended up being more work than anticipated for the moderator. If we continue with them, we need to get a volunteer moderator as it took too much of Gwen's paid time. The sessions were a mixed bag of usefulness, but that has been the case as well in person.

While attendance by the end was quite good I have to wonder who we are missing in attendance and what their reasons were for not attending. Is it Zoom fatigue, disinterest in the program, scheduling, the time commitment? All but the first are questions we have for in-person conferences as well.

It was hard to get speakers--surprisingly hard given there is no travel involved. Many people seem uncomfortable with speaking in the online format vs. in person. There are restrictions to the types of information/presentations that are suitable for the online format. We tried to get good instructive content but it was not easy. Interaction limitations are a binding factor.

REQUESTED BOARD ACTION:

The big question is do we return to in-person conferences in 2022 or plan for another virtual conference? There is a strong desire for in-person learning especially hands-on workshops, but the financial risks to ASI of a failed national conference are severe. Some questions to consider:

* Do we want a model with both in-person and online--say in-person in the spring and online in the fall?
* Do we have enough speakers to field that many events?
* Are we poaching content that would be better as a webinar or online learning?
* Are these online opportunities, including webinars, limiting the appeal of in-person events? Will people say why travel when I can attend at home?
* It is likely that travel and hotel costs will be on the rise--how will that affect potential attendance?
* If national conferences are not economically feasible due to attendance size and the financial risk, should we explore regionally-based, smaller (1 day) conferences in-person? While that may be less expensive for attendees, would that actually be any better for ASI financially?

Another question, regardless of format, is how to encourage people to present. I may not be the best salesperson to get people to speak, I will admit, but it is a concern that we should address. It is great to have established names present, but we need to build up the next generation of indexers as well.