LISTS, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING: ORGANIZING AN EFFECTIVE AMCBT MEETING

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Advanced planning, teamwork and good food are the key elements in running an effective professional meeting. Making long lists, setting deadlines and putting yourself in the place of the meeting participant are important parts of getting organized to host a meeting of your peers at your campus. The goal of the meeting is to foster an environment that promotes effective communication between professional biology teachers. This environment must be made as convenient as possible for the participants. It must be an environment that is easy to prepare for, to get to, to get around in, to communicate in and to relax in. The participants should have everything laid out for them early, by both mail and email, and also in their registration packets when they arrive. Thus, their anxiety and frustration will be minimized and their teaching ideas and classrooms concerns can be focused upon clearly.

This paper may present timelines and details that will help future local arrangement committees prepare for the annual AMCBT meeting.

Laying the Groundwork Before the February Steering Committee Meeting

Dates for the meeting should be picked two years in advance if possible. A typical meeting starts Thursday night at 6 pm and ends on Saturday about 3 pm. A weekend should be picked that the football team is away. This will ensure that activities associated with the game do not interfere with meeting plans and participants. This weekend should not be too early in the semester either. The 1996 meeting was held Sept. 19-21 which for some people was only two weeks into the fall semester. A weekend between the 3rd weekend in September and the first weekend in November will avoid weather-related travel problems of winter and can take advantage of the beautiful fall colors in many midwest cities.

Once dates are picked, the rooms in the buildings where the banquet and other meals will be served should be reserved at least one year in advance. Adequate space for a maximum of 120 people to attend the banquet should be reserved. Usually about 50 - 70 people eat breakfast on Friday morning and about 70 - 90 have brunch on Saturday. These rooms should be able to handle speakers and receptions or have adjacent rooms that can be used for these purposes. Also, one other conference room should be reserved for executive board, editorial board and steering committee meetings. This room should hold 20 people comfortably. Audio-visual equipment like microphones, podiums, overheads, slide projectors and possibly LCD overhead plates that can be connected to a computer should be available and workable in these rooms. It is best if the same rooms or two rooms that are adjacent to each other can be used for many if not all of the group gatherings. Even if the initial registration is held here, the participants have a familiar place from which to start and to which to return. This gives a central operating site for the meeting and immediately puts the participants in a familiar situation. It is best also if this site is used only by AMCBT for the entire length of the meeting which avoids frustration and promotes group bonding.

Sometime in the fall semester one year before the meeting, the permission of the college president, academic dean, and other college administrators should be sought to hold an AMCBT meeting on campus on the chosen dates. After they have approved, a campus-wide news release should be sent to all administrative offices, food service, and faculty newsletter describing the meeting, its dates, the estimated number of people attending and a brief description of the purpose of AMCBT. Making your whole campus aware of this meeting will avoid conflicts, generate interest and foster cooperation at the site.

Also at this time, the local arrangements chair should put together a campus and city profile that can be used in Bioscene and the AMCBT web site to attract people to the meeting. This statement should include facts and unique characteristics of
the college as well as the city and surrounding environment. It should include travel information like airline connections and driving times and directions from major cities. It should give the reader a taste of the area and invite them to come and see it for themselves. This profile should be submitted to the Bioscene editor and the AMCBT web page web master by November 1.

The program chair and the local arrangements chair should work together during December and January preceding the Steering Committee meeting to rough out a tentative meeting schedule with times and rooms included. The program chair should work out the timing and session leaders for the meeting while the local arrangements chair plans where the sessions and activities will occur. Email and FAX communication are essential in this process. The local arrangements chair must select 2 major meeting sites. One site where meals and the banquet will be held has been described previously. The other site is the sessions site. It is best if this site is in one building only. It must include 5 or 6 classrooms for sessions, 1 or 2 computer labs, a central gathering area close to the classrooms with chairs, and a classroom or open area for exhibitors and posters. One other classroom or conference room should be available as a security room for session leaders to store computers, valuables or as a place to prepare or store refreshments.

Classrooms should seat up to 30 people comfortably and each should have an overhead projector and screen. Two standby overhead projectors should be available as well. Several of the classrooms should be laboratories where participants sit at tables rather than individual desks. These rooms should be clean with all laboratory clutter stored. Slide projectors, LCD overhead projection plates and 1 or 2 portable Mac and PC computers on carts should be available for session leaders as well. Quick access to a copy machine is another consideration to include in selecting a good session meeting site.

The meeting usually attracts about 5-10 exhibitors that each require one or two 3x8 foot tables. The exhibitor room should be near or in the refreshment area and should be located centrally to all the session rooms. This room or nearby hallways should have chairs available for participants to relax in.

The computer labs should also be in the same or adjacent buildings. It is best if there is a Mac computer lab and a PC computer lab with about 12-15 computers per lab. The computer center personnel who oversee these rooms should be notified of the planned activities and asked if they could help participants load software or test run programs prior to the meeting.

The local arrangements chair should also put together a list of 5-8 possible field trip destinations and leaders. It is best if these leaders can be local AMCBT faculty. However, personnel that manage or direct the field trip destinations can be selected as leaders, too. Local members of the Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Garden Club, or high school teachers may agree to lead field trips as well. The leaders should decide a maximum number of people per trip. In my opinion, field trips should be a maximum one way distance of 30 minutes by car. They should showcase the local environment and try to give people the opportunity to learn new things about a new ecological community or threatened environment that they have not experienced before. Having a variety of sites is essential. Trips to prairies, wetlands, rivers, woodlands, geological sites, historical sites, or gardens are examples of variety. Field trip leaders can have one or two duties. They can be responsible only for getting the group to and from the site promptly and/or they can be the local expert who involves the participants in learning about the site and its natural interactions. A researcher who uses the area as a study site or a conservation specialist who has seen the place change or stay the same over time would be valuable leaders. A teacher who has had students doing investigations at a site would be able to offer valuable insights into how to best use the land for these purposes.

Another type of field trip that has been offered in the past but is less desirable is a sightseeing trip to the major attractions in a city. I think that these are beneficial only if the group is met by a local expert who has some biological expertise and from whom they can learn something. If the lesson learned could be applied to improved student learning all the better. In my opinion the general sightseeing tours should be avoided and used only as a last resort.

A tentative meeting schedule with a campus map, a list of tentative field trips, directions to the city and the campus and some possible speaker names should be forwarded to all members of the Steering Committee 2 weeks before this group meets at the site usually in February. The local arrangements chair reserves a conference room for
this meeting. The room should seat 15 people comfortably and should have convenient access to parking and food service. The meeting usually begins at noon Saturday with lunch for all. This lunch can be catered by the campus food service. Dinner is held at a local restaurant and the meeting continues back at the conference room until 10 pm or so. The group meets Sunday morning for a continental breakfast around 9 am and finishes business by noon. It is best if the Steering Committee could stay at one or two of the hotels at which the meeting participants are going to stay to see these facilities too. Hotel phone numbers and directions must be sent to Steering Committee members prior to the meeting as well.

Steering Committee Planning Session

The major focus of the February Steering Committee Meeting at the site of the upcoming meeting is to discuss details and agree on a plan of action for the Program Chair and the Local Arrangements Chair. Timing of sessions, speakers, field trips and meals should be finalized. Participants at the regular Fall 1996 meeting enjoyed the general timing of the sessions and overall format of the meeting. One suggestion was to include 25 minutes between sessions to allow interaction between session leaders and participants as well as interaction time with the exhibitors. Another suggestion would be to have an hour for an open discussion session for anyone who would like to attend. This session would address any problems or ideas that anyone would want to present in an informal format. Food service menus should be provided to each member so that all items for the menu for the Thursday reception, Friday breakfast, Friday reception and banquet, Saturday breakfast and Saturday brunch can be chosen here.

Ideas concerning promotional materials that will be given to the meeting participants like bags, mugs, pens, mousepads, shirts, etc. should be finalized and approximate prices and funding sources discussed as well. Corporate sponsors, like publishers or equipment companies, for receptions, refreshments and speakers should be discussed.

In the past, speakers have been chosen according to the following general pattern. One speaker should focus on the teaching of biology. This speaker should be chosen by the program chair or the Steering Committee and their topic should relate to the theme of the meeting. A second speaker is chosen by the local arrangements chair and is usually a local person with some expertise in biology or in a current biologically-relevant issue. A third speaker is chosen by the Steering Committee who is more nationally known for their work in teaching or research.

The committee should also meet with a member of the computer staff to ask about specific needs and capabilities.

Finally the Steering Committee should tour the prospective rooms for the meeting. Computer capabilities should be checked. Room size, location, central meeting area, crowd control and convenience should be addressed on the tour. With these final arrangements made, the local arrangements chair then begins the process of listing needs and looking carefully at the schedule of events to create the proper environment for a successful meeting. All these arrangements or as many as possible should be placed on the AMCBT web page as soon as possible to notify people of the meeting and its schedule.

Considerations from March Through August

Before the Meeting

This is the time when the local arrangements chair should organize the other local AMCBT members to divide up responsibilities. Possible individual or two person jobs include food and refreshment arrangements, field trip coordination, directional signs on campus and on roads leading to campus, AV needs, registration/receipts and computer coordination. These individuals or teams should meet monthly until August and then more frequently as the meeting looms closer.

A block of local hotel rooms should be reserved. Usually 20 rooms at one hotel and 20 rooms at another hotel have been sufficient in the past. One thing to make transport even more convenient is to have a hotel shuttle bus available for meeting participants to use between the hotel and campus.

If mugs or bags or “free stuff” are to be part of the meeting, the arrangements for these should be made here. Sponsors that might help pay for these items should be contacted but not before advice of the college development office is received. Many times they can suggest people or groups to contact that might help with this project. The college public relations department might even donate money to your cause. Ultimately, AMCBT should not pay for these
items. And many times all you have to do is ask these groups and the financial support will be there.

This is also time to narrow down the field trip list to 4 or 5 good ones, contact good potential leaders and ask for their participation.

Since the menu has been finalized, it can be discussed with the food service. Care should be given to having enough food selection for vegetarians. Also it has been very important in the past to have some kind of dessert after dinner. Whether it be cherry pie or ice cream or both, some sort of sweet ending to each meal and especially the banquet adds to the success of the whole meeting.

The local chamber of commerce can be contacted and asked if they supply name tags, name tag holders, pens, folders, visitors guides, coupon books, or any other help. Many times these items are given free to the group.

It is a good time to draw up an estimated budget for the meeting. Since the registration fee has been set at the Steering Committee meeting, one can predict from attendance at past meetings how much money will be available to pay for various expenses. The major expenses include food service, field trip transportation, speakers fees, hotels and travel, printing costs and any reservation fees. The AMCBT Executive Secretary can furnish the local arrangements chair with money to cover costs before the meeting. The Executive Secretary can also furnish past meeting attendance records as well.

Exhibitors should be contacted by phone first and asked for their participation. The exhibitor fee is $50. If they agree an exhibitor registration form should be sent to them to confirm their projected presence at the meeting. This form contains space for their name, phone number, product description, display needs and space as well as your address to which they can send their exhibitor fee.

Potential speakers should be contacted and asked for their participation. Each of the three speakers should be chosen and the specific topic of their talk should be finalized with an abstract forwarded to the program chair by July 1. Hotel arrangements for each of the speakers should be made by the local arrangements chair.

The contents of the registration folder that will be given to each participant at the beginning of the meeting can also be outlined and copies made. Sometimes the admissions office has folders that are given to prospective students. This office may be a good source of free folders for your meeting. The following list of materials should be included inside the registration folder:

1) a campus map with parking areas and buildings to be used during the meeting clearly marked.
2) a local visitors guide with city map from the chamber of commerce
3) host college facts and degree summaries from the admissions office
4) host biology department summary brochure
5) a pen or pencil
6) a receipt on college letterhead that shows which fees were paid by whom and when. This receipt can also carry personalized information like which field trip or workshop the person is scheduled for. This will be used by the participant upon their return to their campus to get reimbursed for attending the meeting.
7) a final program schedule
8) a copy of all abstracts from all the sessions
9) a meeting evaluation form
10) a form to suggest ideas or offer involvement in next year’s meeting
11) a list of local places to eat with addresses for the open lunch period on Friday.

Some of these can be added early to folders while some can be added only the day before the meeting.

Another form that must be available is the recorder form which is filled out by one participant in each session. The recorder form includes the session leader’s name, date, number of people in attendance, summary of session topic, comments of recorder, and blank lines for the address of a dean or administrator of the session leader. These forms are returned to the local arrangements chair or the AMCBT secretary so that letters of recognition/participation can be sent to the home campus of each session leader.

Activities One Month Before the Meeting
Each of the speakers should be contacted once more to make sure they have what they need and if they have any questions. A meeting schedule should be forwarded to them and they should be encouraged to participate in any or all of the meeting if they can.
Student helpers should be recruited to operate the registration desk, to help set up tables or poster boards or to be general assistants that can help people get set up before each of the sessions. Biology, education or science education majors have been used successfully in the past.

Once a semi-final program has been received, individual room schedules can be printed that list times, sessions and session leaders for the whole meeting in that room.

Final programs can be distributed to all local biology faculty and they should be invited to participate in any part of the meeting.

A team of people should walk through the meeting sites and decide what kind of directional signs are needed at various sites. Signs for individual session rooms, restrooms and exhibitor room are essential. Several large signs that can be attached to road signs leading to campus may be helpful.

Van or bus reservations for the field trips should be made through the college. If more than 12 people are scheduled for a field trip it may be easier to car pool. Buses are convenient for larger groups but may be expensive as well.

One of the biggest jobs at this time is receiving the incoming registration forms. All the information on each registration form must be recorded and lists made of who is participating in which activity. People are assigned to field trips and workshops on a first come first serve basis. Registration fees, extra guest banquet fees, van transportation fees and other fees are kept track of and listed. Name tags can be printed and registration folders prepared one week before the meeting. Registration forms and all fees should be due two weeks before the meeting so that final numbers for food service, field trips and tours can be forwarded.

Small signs can be printed for use at individual tables at Friday breakfast. These signs denote interest groups and help people meet others with similar interests.

Several refreshment breaks are usually scheduled between sessions especially on Friday afternoon. It can be the responsibility of the local arrangements chair to supply these refreshments. Try to schedule a time that day for a trip to the grocery store can be made. Pop, juice, cookies, fruit, coffee and sweets may help people through this part of the day. Sometimes the food service does not allow any food besides theirs on campus.

Be sure to recontact any session leaders that have indicated special computer needs. Encourage them to get a copy of their programs to you early to have you test them on site. This will avoid the delays due to incompatible software and hardware.

In past AMCBBT meetings several multicolored tickets have been issued to participants that give them access to each of the planned meals and activities. In my experience these tickets were never collected and seemed like a large hassle for the local arrangements chair. They were not used at Loras and all events went smoothly.

Special receipts for payment of annual AMCBBT dues should be requested from the executive secretary. Some people pay their membership dues at the meeting at registration so this situation should be planned for as well.

A disk with all the forms and meeting information should be passed to the new local arrangements chair. All suggestions and comments from this meetings and ideas for the next meeting should be passed on to the new program chair as well.

Conclusion

The reason why people return to or become active in a particular organization is because they enjoy the people they meet and appreciate the new ideas they receive at the meetings. The role of the meeting is to foster an environment for this camaraderie and communication to take place. This meeting environment must be convenient and congenial. The meals are very important times to share ideas and talk with colleagues. The information presented here should help make future AMCBBT meetings and other meetings more effective and attractive. Ultimately, this kind of meeting environment should lead to a more effective learning environment for our students.
Table 1. List of AMCBT Meeting Timelines and Duties

A. Fall Semester One Year Before the Meeting

Dates Chosen
Facility Reservations
Administrative Approval
College and City Profile
Tentative Meeting Schedule
Two Major Meeting Sites
Classrooms
Exhibitor Room/Area
Computer Labs
Field Trips
Mailing to Steering Committee

B. Steering Committee Planning Session

Promotional Materials
Menus
Speakers
Meeting Schedule
Tour of Sites on Campus

C. Spring Semester Before the Meeting

Local Planning Committee
Hotel Rooms
Sponsors
Field Trips
Menus and Food Service
Chamber of Commerce
Estimated Budget
Exhibitors
Speakers
Registration Folder Content
Recorder Forms

D. One Month Before the Meeting

Speakers
Student Helpers
Directional Signs
Room Schedules
Final Programs
Vehicle Reservations
Incoming Registration Forms/Procedure
Refreshments

1997 INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING FAIR AT LOUISVILLE, KY
DECLARATION OF INTEREST IN BECOMING A GRAND AWARD JUDGE

Formal recruitment of judges will not begin until the Fall of 1996. However, it will greatly facilitate that process if we have a bank of names of individuals who are seriously interested in being a judge.

Science Service, Inc., of Washington is the agency that conducts these international events, and they set the criteria for becoming a judge, which read as follows:

"All judges should have a Ph.D., M.D., or equivalent OR a minimum of six years related professional experience. Judges may include university faculty, industrial scientists and engineers, representatives of private and federal research centers and agencies, and medical researchers. Affiliated science fair directors, ISEF Official Party members, or elementary or secondary school teachers are not eligible to judge."

Meals for judges will be provided. However, budget restraints will not allow travel and lodging expenses. Judges are expected to be available from Monday, May 12 through Tuesday, May 13, 1997 to complete their judging assignments. For further information contact:

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