

AAS Annual Meeting Sites

The AAS Secretariat and Board of Directors often receive questions concerning future dates and locations of AAS annual meetings. Listed below are several of the many considerations affecting where future annual meetings are held.

Rotation

We try to maintain a loose rotating schedule between sites on each coast and in the Midwest, but in an effort to promote internationalization, also may occasionally organize a conference outside the U.S. mainland. Our current schedule of contracted cities include: Chicago (2009); Philadelphia (2010); Honolulu (2011); and Toronto (2012). Although it undoubtedly would complicate matters for the Association and the majority of our members, we also may eventually try to organize a conference in Asia.

Space

The AAS tries to hold its annual meetings at hotels (rather than convention centers) that are able to provide comfortable sleeping accommodations for a large group of conference attendees, in addition to having adequate space on-site for panels, business meetings, placement, video program, and exhibitors. Normally, we are able to negotiate favorable terms whereby the hotel provides all meeting and exhibit space gratis or at a reduced charge if we sell out a certain room block (e.g. 1,000 rooms for three nights). We have avoided using large convention centers due to the substantial extra costs involved. Convention centers typically charge organizations on a square footage basis, and usually have exclusive and very high union-based fees for set up, AV equipment, drayage, etc. Also, we believe most members prefer the convenience and ambiance of holding the meeting in a hotel setting, rather than the usually cavernous convention centers. Unfortunately, there are few hotel properties in "first-tier" cities large enough to accommodate our meeting space needs.

Our formal program has grown steadily in recent years, and the number of panels we can accept is largely determined by the physical limitations of the hotel facility where the meeting is held. We have tried to squeeze more panels into finite spaces by increasing the number of sessions each day, utilizing smaller meeting rooms, "creating" rooms in public spaces, etc. Another possibility for increasing panel slots is to lengthen the annual meeting, e.g., beginning on a Thursday morning or afternoon rather than in the evening. We are reluctant to do this however, as it would require attendees to incur the extra costs of arriving a day earlier, and most likely would adversely affect their normal teaching schedules.

The "informal" program of meetings-in-conjunction, receptions and social functions, and even panel and workshop sessions organized by affiliated groups also has grown substantially in recent years, making the demand for meeting room space and the overall schedule even tighter.

The bottom line is that the AAS annual meeting is at a somewhat "awkward" size – too large for most hotels, and yet still a bit on the small side to justify the extra costs and other drawbacks associated with convention centers. If the program and activities at the conference continue to grow however, it may eventually be necessary to move to a convention centered model.

Dates

Another factor is date availability. We try to book meetings 4–5 years in advance, and are currently committed through 2012. The AAS normally schedules its meeting for the early spring, which seems to be the most convenient time for most of our members. However, it

has become increasingly difficult to lock in desirable meeting dates with the best hotels that do not conflict with holidays or other seasonal attractions, such as the Cherry Blossom festivities in Washington.

Rates

A fourth factor is sleeping room rates. We always try to negotiate reasonable room rates for meeting attendees, but most properties in desirable locations are reluctant to lower their rates or commit themselves contractually to a rate structure four or five years in advance. Date availability, location and current market situation also affect the rates we are able to obtain. In the wake of 911 the travel industry was a buyer's market, and many hotels were offering discounted deals to attract convention business. This eventually leveled off and currently the industry is at the opposite extreme with hotels generally much less willing to negotiate reasonable rates. It remains to be seen how rising energy and fuel costs, airline cutbacks, etc. might eventually impact the industry.

Some cities are more expensive than others of course, but we try to maintain a balance from year to year. For example, room rates in New York and San Francisco are always high, with high "hidden costs" (e.g., New York charges 8.25% state tax, 13.25% room tax, \$2.00 bed tax, 19% gratuities, etc.) that add substantially to the already high rates. Other locations such as Chicago, San Diego and Atlanta have been more reasonably priced.

Attendance

Attendance at annual meetings also affects the decision process. We tend to rotate among a small group of cities because they are well attended. Boston and Washington are always the largest meetings, thus we tend to return on a fairly regular basis. We have had meetings in "non-traditional AAS" cities attractive in their own right (such as New Orleans and Atlanta), but these meetings usually are not as well attended as locales where there are large academic and/or political contingencies involved in Asian affairs.

The Board of Directors has considered scheduling a meeting in a city or area that we normally do not use, such as a location in the Southwest or Mountain states. A problem is that many of the so-called "second-tier" cities that could accommodate our space and financial requirements are not attractive due to general perceptions or images—e.g. probably not many members would jump at the chance to attend a conference in Cleveland or Detroit, no matter how attractive the meeting space or room rates might be. An example of the opposite extreme would be Seattle, which is a delightful city with plenty of restaurants, museums, scholarly resources, Asian community, etc., and is always high on the list of desirable sites. Unfortunately, none of the existing hotel facilities in Seattle are large enough to accommodate our needs, which would require us either to split panel sessions across two or more non-adjacent hotels, or book an even more expensive convention center for the meeting rooms and exhibit hall.

The challenge of course, is to book the meeting in a nice hotel with plenty of free meeting space, inexpensive room rates, in a city with many outside attractions and easy airline connections. Occasionally we are simply lucky. For years we were unable to obtain reasonable rates or suitable dates in San Francisco, even though it was high on everyone's "go to" list. A few years ago when we were trying to schedule the 2004 meeting on the west coast, the only possibilities were San Diego and Anaheim. However, when we heard that the SF Marriott had an opening in 2006 that would be both reasonably priced and fit our scheduling needs, we were quick to grab it, even though it was only two years after the San Diego meeting.

Some locations will inevitably be more appealing than others, but we hope the membership will be understanding as we try to balance the above factors in our long-term planning.