

Long Range Planning Committee Report
June 2006

Summary of the 2006 Post-ARO MidWinter Meeting Questionnaire.

Location was still a hot topic for the membership this year based upon the 2006 post-ARO MidWinter Meeting questionnaire. It was gratifying to see that many ARO members greatly appreciated the efforts that were made to 'rescue' the meeting after the hurricane-related devastation to New Orleans. Many in our membership expressed that they were pleasantly surprised with Baltimore as a venue and congratulated the ARO leadership and administration for putting together such a good meeting despite all of the issues that had to be resolved. There were a number of comments on the success of the meeting, the superior and friendly service at the hotel, the ample space at the poster sessions, the beautiful harbor location, and the excellent local restaurants. This year 64% of the 453 respondents rated the meeting place in the outstanding and excellent categories, slightly better than the 2005 rating of New Orleans (58%), and clearly an improvement from the 2004 ranking of Daytona Beach (20%). Nevertheless, there is still a fairly vocal contingency in the membership that expressed a strong interest in a beach location and/or warmer climate in a family-friendly environment. In addition to a renewed interest in Florida locations, some members suggested a west coast location, along with some expressing interest in New Mexico and Arizona. A specific suggestion made by one member was the Gaylord Palms Conference Center in Orlando. A recurring argument for a warm climate venue is that it fosters a casual atmosphere for impromptu scientific interactions outside the formal conference format.

Despite the high approval rating of the meeting location, our membership did, however, identify a number of areas that could be substantially improved. In addition to the cold weather, the biggest concern was the extremely poor acoustics in the seminar rooms. In some cases members noted that the captioning service helped both hearing and hearing-impaired attendees alike to understand the lecture content. Nevertheless, the interactions between speaker and audience were hampered by the inability to communicate due to the poor acoustics. This is obviously an important concern that must be assessed before each ARO meeting held in a new venue. Toward this end, some members suggested smaller rooms for the Podium Sessions.

This year the membership ranked the overall meeting scientific content in the outstanding and excellent categories as 74%. The scientific content in the Poster Sessions received by far the highest ranking at 75% (outstanding / excellent categories) and this session, in particular, received many laudatory comments. This is obviously where the meeting is at its best as judged by the membership. The scientific content in Symposia was ranked by 54% of the respondents in the outstanding/excellent categories, while the Podium Session and Presidential Lecture was ranked 48% and 38%, respectively, in these same categories. There were a number of issues brought up in the comments with regard to these events. Some people suggested that the talks in Podium Sessions should emphasize new findings over published data. Increasing participation from young investigators, students, and post docs was also suggested. Some respondents also wanted Symposia on

the 'latest and greatest' in a particular area, rather than what was perceived as an overview. A few comments addressed the issue of encouraging increased participation in Symposia from speakers in areas outside of the auditory field, a topic that was discussed and supported by Council in its ARO 2006 meeting.

With regard to the special forums, there seems to be less overall interest from our respondents: the NIH Workshop, Congressman Reception, and Panel on Research Funding, all received high numbers of N/A responses (81-83%). Of these events the Awards and Honors Ceremony received 30% responses in the outstanding and excellent categories, with 53% checking the N/A category. The Long Range Planning Committee will discuss at their next meeting in Denver whether specific issues should be addressed to improve the visibility or format of the special forums.

There were a number of interesting comments made by our membership with regards to improving future meetings. Some that were mentioned more than once are listed below.

- One issue that was raised a number of times was the low number of vendors at the meeting and the fact that the vendors left the meeting early. Here are some suggestions for additional vendors to invite: Applied Biosystems, VWR, Affimetrix, Sigma, Chemicon, Stressgen, Invitrogen/Life Technologies, Clontech, Promega, BioRad, New England BioLabs, Cell Signaling Technologies.
- A list of local area restaurants was requested by a number of respondents.
- Many enjoyed the Silly Session and requested more social events for students and postdocs to introduce themselves to established investigators.
- Many members were concerned about overlapping sessions, this year the genetics and developmental sessions overlapped leaving members without relevant sessions on subsequent days.
- Many suggested ending the meeting earlier because the Thursday morning Podium and Poster Sessions are so poorly attended.

We thank the membership for their individual responses to the questionnaire and for their thoughtful comments. We encourage all members to become more active in ARO and to contact me or any of the members of the Long Range Planning Committee with additional suggestions.

Robin L. Davis, Chair
Long Range Planning Committee