

ASA Member Survey Results: Annual Meeting Submission and Site Selection Processes

In fall 2019, current and recent ASA members were invited to respond to a survey to help Council better understand member perspectives regarding Annual Meeting submission and site selection processes. The ideas presented in the survey came from Council discussions and the work of the [ASA Task Force on Membership](#). The response rate was 19.2 percent, with 3,181 respondents.

Based on the results of the survey, Council decided to change the Annual Meeting submission process for 2021 and 2022 to accept extended abstracts or full papers. Presenters will be expected to submit a full paper to the session organizer one month in advance of the meeting.

The survey results also led Council to reaffirm ASA's [statement on fair labor practices](#) and its commitment to including extent of unionization and fair labor practices at facilities to be used for meeting space and guest rooms as one of the nine criteria used for site selection¹. Council also reaffirmed its commitment to considering a broad range of Annual Meeting sites, including second and third tier cities.

Submission Processes

The survey asked members to indicate their preferences regarding two features of the submission process for the Annual Meeting: submission length and the review system. For each of these items, there are potential trade-offs to consider when determining preferences. Those trade-offs were described in the survey as follows:

Annual Meeting Submissions

One of the ideas that had the support of many people from whom the Task Force on Membership collected data is to change our Annual Meeting submission requirement from a full paper (15-35 pages) to an extended abstract (approximately 3 pages). This would make it easier to submit work for the meeting, and it would allow participants to present and get feedback on their work at earlier stages of a project.

Moving to extended abstract submissions may have less predictable consequences, as well. For example, a shorter submission requirement may increase the number of submissions received, leading to a lower acceptance rate. This could have consequences for sociologists who receive funding support for conference participation only if they are on the program. If there are years when we could obtain additional meeting space and mitigate the effect on the acceptance rate by expanding the number of sessions, would sessions be more sparsely attended or would the meeting be more robust? If less work is required for a submission, would the likelihood of presenters failing to appear at the meeting increase?

In light of these potential trade-offs, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

ASA should require extended abstracts rather than full papers for Annual Meeting submissions.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

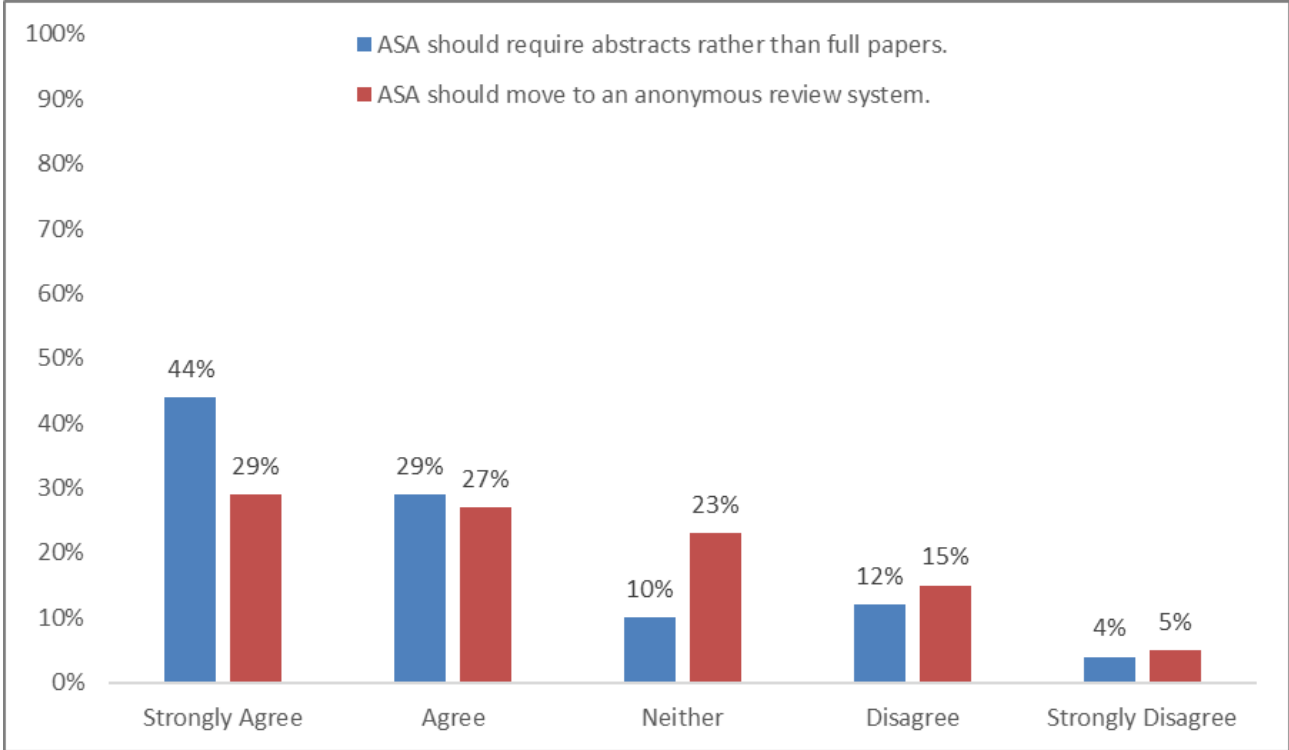
A second idea that arose in the data from the Task Force on Membership is moving from our current submission system, where the identities of both the author and session organizer are known to each other, to an anonymous process. In an anonymous process, anonymized submissions would be read by evaluators known only to the organizer, and the organizer would use these evaluations to put together the session. This may provide some confidence that reputational biases are not factoring into the assessment. This process would require substantially more volunteer labor, with ASA members serving as evaluators.

In light of this context, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

ASA should move to a system of anonymous review for Annual Meeting submissions.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The distribution of responses to these questions is shown below.



Almost 3 in 4 respondents (73 percent) strongly agree or agree that ASA should accept abstracts for the Annual Meeting. Support for moving to an anonymous review system is less strong, with a slight majority (56 percent) strongly agreeing or agreeing with this change. Further, qualitative comments reflect significant concern about the amount of member labor an anonymous review system would require.

Based on the results of the survey, Council decided to change the Annual Meeting submission process for 2021 and 2022 to accept extended abstracts (3 to 5 pages) or full papers (15 to 35

pages). Presenters will be expected to submit a full paper to the session organizer one month in advance of the meeting. Council will revisit this new process prior to the 2023 submission opening. Council also decided to retain the current review process, with the possibility of reconsidering this again in the future.

Site Selection

The part of the survey focused on site selection used conjoint analysis, a common method used in market research to determine how customers value the various features that make up an individual product or service. It allows us to understand the relative desirability of competing characteristics of an Annual Meeting for our members.

The text from the survey follows:

Annual Meeting Location

Given the size of the ASA Annual Meeting (typically 5,000-6,000 people), we have to sign contracts for meeting facilities (hotels and convention centers) many years in advance, and we are now considering sites for 2027 and beyond.

We currently have a site selection policy that considers a number of factors, including labor practices at facilities, city characteristics, and room rates, among several others. The ways in which these factors intersect with one another can often be complicated, and this is where we need your help. In particular, we would like to understand your preferences when it comes to trade-offs among these three factors.

Below, you will be presented with eight pairs of hypothetical Annual Meeting packages. We ask you to choose the one that characterizes a meeting you would be more likely to attend; you may also indicate that you would not attend either meeting. Please note that some of the packages that appear are clearly unrealistic (e.g., a fully unionized facility in a Tier 1 city for \$175/night). Nevertheless, we ask you to please respond as though all options are feasible.

Please refer to the following definitions to inform your choices.

Labor Practices at Hotels and Convention Centers

There are four categories of labor practices at the hotel and convention center facilities that characterize potential meeting locations:

- Fully unionized: all non-managerial employees are part of a union.
- Partially unionized: employees in certain facility areas are unionized and others are not (e.g., loading dock workers are unionized while restaurant servers are not).
- Not unionized, have articulated fair labor practices: employees are not unionized; the facilities have articulated practices to protect workers, such as grievance procedures and access to benefits.
- Not unionized, do not have articulated fair labor practices: employees are not unionized; the facilities do not have articulated practices in place to protect workers.

City Characteristics

Cities are typically classified according to tiers, and we consider four tiers for our meetings:

- Tier 1 city: world-class; has a very wide range of dining and entertainment options; sleeping rooms will be in 1 or 2 hotels (e.g., San Francisco, New York).
- Tier 2 city: large; has ample dining and entertainment options; sleeping rooms will be in 2 or 3 hotels (e.g., Philadelphia, San Antonio).
- Tier 3 city: mid-sized; has sufficient dining and entertainment options; sleeping rooms will be in 3 or 4 hotels (e.g., Denver, Indianapolis).
- Tier 4 city: small; has more limited dining and entertainment options; sleeping rooms will be in 4 or 5 hotels (e.g., Sacramento, Milwaukee).

Conjoint analysis produces *part-worth utilities*—measures of relative desirability or worth. The higher the utility, the more desirable the characteristic is for choosing a product. The utility distributions for each variable in the survey follow. The utilities are adjusted so that the least preferred characteristic within each variable is given a value of 0. The larger the difference between the most and least preferred characteristic within a variable, the more important that variable is in influencing the decision of which product to choose. This difference is used to compute the relative importance for each of the three variables, which is shown in the last column.

| Variable | Level | Utility | Relative Importance |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| City Characteristics | Tier 1 | 6.8 | 44.6% |
| | Tier 2 | 5.2 | |
| | Tier 3 | 3.6 | |
| | Tier 4 | 0 | |
| Room Rate | \$325 | 0 | 38.1% |
| | \$275 | 3 | |
| | \$225 | 4.5 | |
| | \$175 | 5.8 | |
| Labor Practices | Fully unionized | 1.8 | 17.3% |
| | Partially unionized | 1.9 | |
| | Fair labor articulated | 1.4 | |
| | Fair labor not articulated | 0 | |

Of the three variables in the survey, city characteristics are most influential on respondents’ decisions. Respondents find Tier 1 cities more desirable than Tier 2 cities, which are more desirable than Tier 3 cities. Respondents find Tier 4 cities least desirable, and those cities would be unlikely to easily meet our logistical needs in any case. Room rate is a close second in influence to city characteristics, and there is a strong preference to have lower rates. Of the three variables, labor practices have the least influence on decision-making. When deciding whether to attend a meeting, respondents do not differentiate much between locations that are fully unionized and partially unionized, and they have a slightly lower preference for facilities that are not unionized but with articulated fair labor practices (referred to as “fair labor” in the discussion below). Facilities that are non-unionized and have no articulated commitment to fair labor are least desirable to respondents, and ASA would not go to such properties in any case. These patterns were similar across professional role, differential access to travel funding, and highest degree offered in faculty respondents’ departments.

To more deeply understand the results, we used a market simulator which allows us to predict member preferences for different Annual Meeting packages. Following are results from several simulations. Collectively, these simulations illustrate the preferences expressed in the part-worth utility measures.

Simulation #1

In this first simulation, we look at packages across three tiers. Tier 1 is paired with full unionization, Tier 2 with partial unionization, and Tier 3 with fair labor. Price points decrease by a single \$50 increment from one tier to the next. If given a choice between these three packages, it is predicted that 57% would prefer the partially unionized Tier 2 city at \$275/night. Full unionization

and a higher tiered city do not outweigh a very high price.

| | | | |
|--------|---------------------|-------------|-----|
| Tier 1 | Fully Unionized | \$325/night | 12% |
| Tier 2 | Partially Unionized | \$275/night | 57% |
| Tier 3 | Fair Labor | \$225/night | 31% |

Simulation #2

In this next simulation, the three packages are the same as in simulation #1 except the price point for the Tier 3 fair labor location is reduced by an additional \$50 increment. You'll see this prompts a significant shift in preferences toward the lower priced Tier 3 city. With these package options, it is predicted that 63% would prefer the Tier 3 city with fair labor at \$175/night. While respondents prefer high tiered cities and greater unionization, there is a point at which that preference is offset by significantly lower price.

| | | | |
|--------|---------------------|-------------|-----|
| Tier 1 | Fully Unionized | \$325/night | 6% |
| Tier 2 | Partially Unionized | \$275/night | 31% |
| Tier 3 | Fair Labor | \$175/night | 63% |

Simulation #3

What is unclear from the previous simulations is whether these decisions are primarily based on preference for tier or are more closely related to labor practices. This next simulation seeks to address that question. In this case, the packages are the same as in simulation #2, with the exception that the Tier 3 option is now partially unionized. You will see below that the percentage that would prefer the third package increases from 63% in simulation #2 (with fair labor practices) to 73% in simulation #3 (with partial unionization), demonstrating that respondents would opt for greater unionization if they can do so in a context with lower price.

| | | | |
|--------|---------------------|-------------|-----|
| Tier 1 | Fully Unionized | \$325/night | 4% |
| Tier 2 | Partially Unionized | \$275/night | 22% |
| Tier 3 | Partially Unionized | \$175/night | 73% |

Simulation #4

This simulation is similar to simulation #1, but it adjusts the prices for the Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities down, showing that lower price points for higher tier cities would be desirable.

| | | | |
|--------|---------------------|-------------|-----|
| Tier 1 | Fully Unionized | \$275/night | 38% |
| Tier 2 | Partially Unionized | \$225/night | 42% |
| Tier 3 | Fair Labor | \$175/night | 19% |

Simulation #5

For this last simulation, we hold tier constant and use the same labor practice and room rate pairs as seen in simulation #4. When tier is held constant, a much larger share of members would prefer a room rate of \$175 in facilities with non-unionized fair labor practices than a room rate of \$225 in partially unionized facilities or a room rate of \$275 in fully unionized facilities. Again, this reflects a stronger concern about cost considerations than labor practices. Comparable simulations for tiers 1 and 3 (not shown) show similar patterns.

| | | | |
|--------|---------------------|-------------|-----|
| Tier 2 | Fully Unionized | \$275/night | 6% |
| Tier 2 | Partially Unionized | \$225/night | 29% |
| Tier 2 | Fair Labor | \$175/night | 65% |

Together, the analyses demonstrate that decisions to attend an Annual Meeting are most influenced by city characteristics and price. There is a preference for Tier 1 (and, to a slightly lesser degree, Tier 2) cities over Tier 3 cities, but only to a price-point. In addition, although respondents find fully and partially unionized facilities slightly more desirable than non-unionized facilities with fair labor practices, those differences do not drive preferences for locations when faced with cost and city trade-offs.

Based on these results, Council reaffirmed ASA’s [statement on fair labor practices](#) and reaffirmed its commitment to including extent of unionization and fair labor practices at facilities to be used for meeting space and guest rooms as one of the nine criteria used for site selection. Council also reaffirmed its commitment to considering a broad range of Annual Meeting sites, including second and third tier cities.

¹ Other criteria include: attractiveness of city and facility packages, especially room rates; environmental sustainability; air access/service and local transportation services; restaurant proximity and diversity; geographic rotation; sites where attendees are afforded legal protection from discrimination on the basis of age, race, socioeconomic status and socioeconomic origins, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, health conditions, political affiliation, marital status, domestic status, or parental status; meeting space flow - flexibility, accessibility, and as compact as possible; and preferred meeting dates.