Interested in replicating the social responsibility summit?

ASAE summit model can be used by other assns

ASAE and the Center for Assn Leadership embarked on a social responsibility program nearly two years ago. Last week, after months of planning and promotion, 350 people gathered at the new Gaylord National hotel in Oxon Hill MD, and some 500 registered at 18 additional connected sites worldwide and individually connected, participated in the assn's three-day Global Summit on Social Responsibility.

The summit, led by Center CEO Susan Sarfati, CAE, was envisioned by ASAE/Center staff as the beginning of a major involvement by assns worldwide to help effect social, political and environmental change. It was the first big step to an ongoing virtual social responsibility project that began for the group more than a year ago.

Participants developed 22 projects for discussion and implementation, guided by Appreciative Inquiry creator David Cooperrider, PhD.

As the program concluded, some members wondered how they might use the process for their own and what it took to produce such an event. Co-producer Pascal Kaplan, president of education platform provider iCohere, Walnut Creek CA, described the process through which the Summit developed.

In a general session presentation at the 2007 ASAE convention in Chicago, Cooperrider discussed his "Appreciative Inquiry style of programming. This was the membership's introduction to what was to become the organization's major initiative for the next year. Cooperrider had previously met with Sarfati and Center chief learning officer Anne Blouin, CAE, to discuss his ideas, and to develop an outline of a potential social responsibility program. The plan, including an online Wall of Appreciation, was introduced first to the assn's fellows and, later, to members at the convention.

Member involvement in the initiative was promoted throughout the following year. About 800 registered worldwide in the resulting summit event.

At the beginning of the Summit, Cooperrider explained the appreciative inquiry format, and 22 discussion topics were determined from ideas presented by participants using Cooperrider's 4 Ds format - discovery, dream, design and destiny. Among the topics participants selected are clean water, free cycling, technology, public policy, partnerships, the United Nations, fundraising and aging. Trained volunteers led intense, interactive discussions on the 22 topics, which form

the basis of the ongoing ASAE & the Center social responsibility project. The list of topics is posted at www.ASAECenter.org. The program also included a presentation by Earth Institute director Jeffrey Sachs, PhD.

Participants gathered in discussion groups over the three-day event using the iCohere technology. Group leaders reported all actions at regular intervals. Action plans with specific time frames were developed.

As the Summit came to an end, Sarfati received a standing ovation from about a 100 participants remaining at the closing session at the Gaylord host site. "I am very proud of the outcomes achieved [at this program], but as we all know, this is only the beginning of something grand," she said. ASAE chairman Tom Dolan, PhD, CAE, CEO, American College of Healthcare Executives, Chicago, and Center chairman Mark Golden, CAE, CEO, National Court Reporters Assn, Vienna VA, congratulated the staff, volunteers and participants and pledged the ongoing support of both organizations. A steering committee of Summit participants as well as staff will make a recommendation to the assn's boards concerning priority initiatives.

How can assns have similar SR events?

What would it take to replicate this type of inventive, interactive, connected event for other organizations? Pascal Kaplan, iCohere president and co-producer of the summit, spoke candidly about the process.

Center CEO Susan Sarfati met Kaplan when he was a learning lab presenter at the ASAE/Center 2007 Technology Conference. After initial discussions with staff members that resulted in some exciting, far-reaching ideas, Kaplan suggested that "one way to organize and energize the full range of possibilities [in which the assn could engage in areas of sustainability and social responsibility] would be to hold an Appreciative Inquiry summit." Sarfati asked for a full proposal.

Through their OvationNet partnership, Kaplan and Cooperrider designed a project based on work they had done with World Vision and other organizations that linked face-to-face and virtual participants in real time using streaming video, streaming audio and two-way conference calling.

Kaplan, founder of graduate programs in consciousness studies and teacher of transformational studies at the John F. Kennedy U., said he and Cooperrider spent a great deal of

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time creating and refining the design of the process that married many venues for face-to-face participants and those who participated virtually. iCohere provided and managed technology for design and production of the event. The company also will oversee the ongoing project workspaces that will track and manage resulting projects.

Many others were involved in the design, development and implementation, Kaplan stressed. A volunteer design team of 70 members met in October for two days to consider content and production details. Kristin Bodiford of California-based consulting group Community Strengths assisted with training online facilitators. There were 136 fully trained AI consultants who volunteered to facilitate the process at connected locations and online. ASAE/Center's social responsibility director Chris Wood "worked day and night, seven days a week to ensure that all the pieces fit together," Kaplan said, "and CenterU's Pamela Troup's direction handled all the logistics."ASAE editorial staffer Kristin Clarke also researched and wrote the case studies. Further, connected site participants reported spending hundreds of hours of staff and volunteer time to support the project.

Asked what a similar project might cost an assn, iCohere sr. sales consultant Lance Simon said, "A rough estimate is about $250,000, but it depends on many factors. The web-based iCohere software platform to link participants worldwide does not require any special hardware or software - just regular computer hardware, an internet connection, and any kind of PC or Mac. There's no real limit to the number of people who can be connected. People in very different time zones, [can access] archives and asynchronous - always available - ways of participating."

What's next for the ASAE project?

Dolan and Golden will appoint a steering committee, with representative participants from the projects and members of the staff, to make a recommendation to the assn's boards concerning priority initiatives. The next milestones for the ASAE/Center social responsibility initiative are continued discussions at the assn's annual meeting in August and a three-day online mini-summit in early October. Project teams then will discuss successes, and identify additional resources required. Members who did not participate in the summit will be invited to join the global initiative following the October update.

Kaplan stressed that the individual projects are expected to continue indefinitely. The ASAE and Center boards will decide at their meetings in August the role that they will play in supporting this initiative in the longer term.