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Letter to Camille Riley regarding the SEAALL Annual Meeting, May 15, 1991

Cherry Thomas

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May 15, 1991

Ms. Camille Riley
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Morgantown, West Virginia 26506

Dear Cam:

Tim Coggins asked me to send you my thoughts concerning our hosting of the 1991 SEAALL Annual Meeting and Institute. I am also sending you a copy of a letter I received from Wes Cochran about the annual meeting (held in Oxford) prior to the one we hosted. The timeline that Wes mentions is great if you can make it work. We did not have anything so formal as that but did have a series of deadlines that had to be met. The timing of our meeting was so different from the usual, that the dates he mentions did not apply at all. You need to plan around the dates for the newsletter announcement, mail-outs (with registration material), printers (for programs), reservations of rooms, and any special events. Attendees always wait until the very last minute to register, so be prepared for some registrations the week (and day) of the conference. A $5.00 late fee was too low to deter late registration. One word of warning, much of the work cannot be done until close to the time of the meeting, so do not burn yourself out planning too far in advance.

NEWSLETTER ANNOUNCEMENT: Decide how the meeting will be advertised and whether or not there will be a separate mailing. The information we included in the Newsletter was not intended to be used as registration but was mostly for firm librarians who needed information early about the meeting, so that they could get approval for the expenditure of funds. The final version that appeared in the newsletter was incorrect because of "editing" that was not approved by us.

REGISTRATION: Our continuing studies handled most of our registration, and they had specific information that they required to be included in the registration packets. Establish a system of reimbursement for those who do not or cannot attend after having paid. There should be a cut off date after which no refunds are granted. Some people will want to bring spouses, a fee should be
established for them. We invited Law School and Library School faculty and Main Library librarians to attend. Should registration be free to these people? What about library students? What about law students? Our law school co-sponsored an opening reception (with Ebsco); and all of the above people were invited. I think this was very successful and was very good PR for SEAALL and for the Law School.

MAIL-OUTS: One unexpected event was that the program people wanted to send "packets" to not only SEAALL members but also to the Atlanta chapter members as well. Many Atlanta firm librarians attend SEAALL conferences but are not members of SEAALL. Keep accurate records of postage; otherwise, your school will end up picking up the tab. We sent out many packets to people who said they did not receive them. They were either sent too early and were misplaced, or the mail system really went awry. One decision to be made is what information do the conferees need and when do they need it? Clear maps should get to the conferees early, so that they can plan their transportation. Information about tours, etc. should get to the conferees early. The airlines were not much help in planning. If Charleston is small, as Tuscaloosa is, smaller commuter planes will be necessary to reach the meeting. Avoid trying to arrange transportation from a major airport if possible. We did that for an Institute we hosted in 1988 (to and from Birmingham); and it was a big headache.

SPEAKERS: Plan in advance what should be reimbursed, who should be reimbursed, and how it is to be done. Coordinate speakers expenses through the Program Chair. Avoid dealing with individual members of the program committee where possible. We deposited vendor support money into a university account and paid expenses from it. It was necessary to have a written contract (a letter in which the speaker had agreed to a certain amount), social security number, and original receipts (not copies). Urge your program chairman to "nail down" the speakers and to restrict the number of speakers if at all possible. Last minute changes make it necessary to change the printed program (if there is one), room and space requirements, and name plaques and tags. Keep the time limits for any dinner or keynote speakers short. Find out well in advance who should get registration fees waived. (For instance, is it waived for moderators or "facilitator"?)

WEATHER: Be prepared for rain during this time of year.

Planning is difficult because you will not know until the very last minute how many will attend. We had approximately 100 paying conferees. The number of conferees affects the number of lodging rooms to set aside, overflow lodging, number and size of meeting rooms; and, in Tuscaloosa, there were a limited number of establishments that could accommodate the number of conferees at a dinner or special event.

I am also sending a copy of the final accounting of expenses.
I know this letter is somewhat disorganized, but I have written about what stands out in my mind. I would be happy to talk to you anytime you want to know how we handled or did not handle a situation.

Sincerely yours,

Cherry Thomas
Director & Assistant Professor of Law

CLT/da

Enc: Letter
Expense Recap

c: Tim Coggins
   Ed Edmonds/FYI-SEAALL Handbook
   Robin Mills