

DATE: January 10, 2019

TO: APA California Chapter Board

FROM: Hanson Hom, AICP, Vice-President Conferences

SUBJECT: Website Redesign and Conference Registration

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RECOMMENDATION

Allocate **$5,000** for the following purposes:

* + - 1. Enter into a contract with Vieth Consulting for an amount not to exceed $4,150 to perform the following services:

1. Redesign the existing conference website ($3,300); and
2. Set up an online registration program for the APA California conference ($850).
   * + 1. Provide $850 in contingency as needed for the above work.

The $3,300 for website redesign should be charged to the Chapter budget or spread out over the next eight years as a conference expense. The $850 registration set up fee should be charged to the 2019 conference.

DISCUSSION

Conference Website:

The Chapter’s existing conference website was created in 2014 by Vieth Consulting. While it was functional five years ago, much advancement in technical capabilities and design layout have occurred in this relatively short time period. Our current website lacks functionality and the content can be better organized for ease of navigation. My observation is that the site could be more user friendly and visually appealing for branding and marketing our conferences. In addition, with the goal of striving to minimize a printed conference program and other paper handouts at the conference, we need to enhance the conference website since, along with the mobile app, it will be the central source for finding complete information about our conferences.

While the redesign of the Chapter’s website is still pending, it was agreed at the Board meeting in October 2018 that the redesign of the conference website can move forward on its own to be ready for the 2019 conference. From a timing standpoint, this means the website should be launched no later than May 1, 2019, which coincides with the start of early registration. Rather than seek out a new website host, Francine Farrell and I spoke with Larry Austin at Vieth Consulting about what would be involved in redesigning our website. After several conference calls, we are satisfied that Vieth can redesign our conference website to meet our needs for a reasonable cost. Larry provided us two quotes which depend the level of design services desired: 1) $2,400 for a standard design package; and 2) $3,300 for a deluxe design package. It is difficult to determine which option is more appropriate for us until we have further discussions with Vieth to understand our website needs. Therefore, I recommend that the Board allocate up to $3,300 for redesign of the conference website, which could be reduced if our needs are not as robust as available with the deluxe package.

Registration Program:

For the 2018 conference, we contracted with APA national for online registration services. Primary reasons for going with APA were that their cost was very reasonable, and they charged a very low credit card fee of $3.00 per registration versus the more typical 3 percent per registration. Additionally, the registration would be tied directly to the APA membership base and would have the latest updates.

Unfortunately, during the configuration of APA’s online registration module, we discovered that the program could not accommodate many of the features that were desirable for our registration needs. Our registration requirements are more complex and include more registration categories and event options than conferences in other APA Chapters. The registration module could not easily accommodate our requirements. While APA did an admirable job of accommodating our needs, they acknowledged that it stretched the technical capabilities of the program. Certain features also could be not programmed, including accepting donations for the CPF Student Scholarship Fund and historic archives or accepting discount or special registration codes. The administration of the program was also difficult such as formatting the attendance list to print out conference badges and tickets. The registration reports were not well-formatted and limited customized reports were available. Additionally, we ran into a technical problem at the start of the conference when the registration program went down temporarily.

APA understood the challenges of accommodating our conference registration needs and we had a debriefing discussion with APA staff following the 2018 conference to discuss desired upgrades. We have not received a response. At the same time, an informal committee consisting of the myself, Betsy McCullough (who was involved in the selection of APA national for the 2018 registration) and our conference contractors Deene Alongi, Francine Farrell and Laura Murphy investigated other options as many companies provide similar event planning services. We explored the registration modules offered by our mobile app and website vendors and several additional recommended registration company.

We ultimately concluded that it would be beneficial to link our registration to either our website or mobile app vendor rather than bringing in a third company for conference planning. This would simplify the overall administration of our conferences and allow for better functional integration of support services. The registration services and capabilities offered by our mobile app vendor (Certain) and website host (Vieth Consulting) are comparable, but the price offered by Vieth Consulting is considerably more competitive. For this reason, the committee is recommending that we enter into a one-year contract with this company to set up and host our registration for 2019. If we are satisfied with their services, we could extend the contract annually.

We are currently paying Vieth Consulting a $250 per month for website hosting through their Memberleap platform. Memberleap actually includes the registration module so there would be with no additional fee to add this feature to our website. The only fee would be to set up our registration. They would charge us $85 per hour and indicated that the average time to set up a standard registration is 5 hours or total $425. Since our registration is more complex than typical, I recommend we allocate $850 to cover 10 hours of programming time if needed.

One of the potential benefits of Vieth is that they have designed their program for a “do-it-yourself” (DIY) approach, and they have an impressive set of training videos on their company’s website to instruct clients on how to set up registration on their own. However, they recommend that it would be more expedient to have them set up our registration initially. We agree that having their IT Specialist program our conference for the first year is the preferred approach. The cost is relatively modest and would be a wise expenditure. We can always consider the optional DIY approach in later years.