
2009 NSDL Annual Meeting: Summary of Survey Results

Prepared by the 2009 Annual Meeting Planning Committee

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Introduction

This report summarizes the results of the end-of-meeting survey for the 2009 NSDL Annual Meeting (AM), along with an analysis and comparison to previous meetings. Participant comments were discussed with the Annual Meeting Planning Committee, which led to a set of recommendations for planning future meetings.

Methodology

The 2009 NSDL Annual Meeting, “From Digital Libraries to Cyberlearning”, was held at the Marriot at Metro Center Hotel in Washington, DC from November 17 to 19. Following the meeting, attendees were surveyed about their meeting experience. The questions used in the 2009 survey were closely based on the survey used in years 2006 to 2008, except where sessions were no longer included in the schedule (e.g. the second poster session). The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool. The survey URL was published in the AM program, and three email reminders were sent to attendees from November 30 to December 17.

A total of 92 attendees responded, with 80 completing the entire set of questions. Approximately 175 participants attended the meeting creating a response rate of 52.7% (2008=42.5%; 2007=29.4%; 2006=56.6%; 2005=45.0%). The responses included 215 unstructured comments, and 23 people provided contact information for follow-up interactions.

Findings and Analysis

The overall meeting rating was 4.32/5.00, up from 2008 and higher than most previous years (2008=4.09; 2007=4.66; 2006=3.99; 2005=3.97). Table 1 provides rating for various meeting experiences from 2006 to 2009. Respondents ranked items from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The rank of each category by year appears on the right side, and the average rating of each category appears on the left. The following sections provide detailed results from specific questions of the survey and a section of recommendations conclude the report.

2009	2008	2007	2006	Survey Category	2009	2008	2007	2006
4.78	4.60	4.86	4.52	Meeting support staff	1	1	1	1
4.46	4.29	4.52	4.01	Share / Find new ideas	2	6	6	8
4.44	4.45	4.57	4.18	Poster session & reception	3	3	5	4
4.33	4.04	4.49	4.1	Interact with NSDL staff	4	10	8	6
4.32	4.09	4.66	3.99	OVERALL MEETING EXPERIENCE	5	9	3	9
4.32	3.98	4.24	3.9	Find new collaborators	6	11	10	11
4.32	4.41	4.58	4.48	Online registration	7	4	4	2
4.32	4.20	4.44	3.91	Proposal submission, review & acceptance	8	8	9	10
4.26	4.48	4.69	NA	Timely email updates & reminders	9	2	2	NA
4.22	--	--	4.24	Closing session	10	--	--	3
4.18	4.33	4.51	4.02	Information about meeting on website	11	5	7	7
4.17	3.90	4.51	4.12	Discuss NSDL community issues	12	12	7	5
4.13	4.29	4.49	3.88	Information about travel & lodging	13	7	8	12
4.02	3.80	3.47	3.84	Opening plenary session: NSF update	14	13	13	13
4.02	3.61	--	--	Plenary sessions: RC & TNS updates	15	14	--	--
3.85	3.27	3.94	**	Interact with attendees not funded through NSDL	16	16	12	**
3.71	3.44	4.11	3.77	Interact with NSF staff	17	15	11	14
3.58	--	--	3.72	Opening keynote (Cyberlearning panel)	18	--	--	15

Table 1. Average rating and rank of Annual Meeting experiences, 2006-2009

** Item was included for the first time in 2007

-- Item not included in survey

Survey Section 1: Project Information

The 2009 meeting began with the opening plenary sessions and poster reception on November 17, followed by a day and a half of presentations on November 18-19. Of the 91 respondents who answered this question, 75 attended on Tuesday, 89 on Wednesday and 79 on Thursday. This pattern of attendance (highest on the second day) is similar to years past; although the first day attendance for 2009 appears lower than usual.

A majority of respondents (46%) reported affiliation with a current project, while 34% described their affiliation as with both a current and past project. Past projects and those with no NSDL involvement compromised just 10% each. Past project participation has remained steady over prior years in spite of travel support being made available to former Principal Investigators. Unaffiliated participants were up over last year (2009 = 9.8% and 2008 = 4%).

Of the 88 respondents who reported their funding sources and NSDL affiliations, the Pathways track represented 38.6% of attendees, followed by Services (35.2%), Collections (14.8%) and Research (12.5%). Other respondents identified NSDL core functions including Core Integration (10.2%), Technical

Network Services (9.1%) and the Resource Center (4.5%). The remaining responses indicated they were part of NSDL but not funded (4.5%) or were not part of NSDL (4.5%). Because respondents could check more than one funding source, the categories are not discrete and the total percentages exceed 100%.

Regarding the year that their project started, of the 78 who responded, 34.6% stated their project began in 2009, and 12.8% will begin in 2010. For the other years, we see an expected drop-off of when projects started: 2008 = 34.6%; 2007 = 17.9%; and 2006 = 14.1%. Interestingly, 2005 came in at 21.8%, 2004 at 19.2%, 2003 at 20.5% and going back all the way to 2000 at 14.1%, suggesting that projects probably had multiple funding grants between 2000 and 2009.

Survey Section 2: Meeting Planning and Experience

This survey section asked respondents about their general meeting experiences as well as specific questions about meeting sessions, planning and organization, opportunities for interaction and how the meeting compared to previous years. Of the 82 attendees who answered, a majority (87.8%) rated the annual meeting as “excellent” (43.9%) or “good” (43.9%).

A high percentage of respondents praised the work of the support staff at the 2009 Annual Meeting; several comments specifically addressed the organization of the conference and work done by support staff and the planning committee. The new online registration and session proposal procedures caused problems for some attendees. Several comments also emphasized the importance of getting information about the conference earlier - although many also noted that the planning committee and support staff were on a particularly tight timeline for the 2009 meeting. Overall, of the 22 attendees who chose to add a comment, the majority was positive and praised those who planned and ran the 2009 meeting. “Good job by all involved - especially with the short time frame.”

General Meeting Sessions

In response to the usefulness of the general sessions, the evening poster session rated highest, with 45.0% selecting excellent and 36.3% responding good. The lowest rating was given to the Cyberlearning Panel (17.7% = excellent, and 32.9% = good).

As was consistently the case with attendee responses, the poster sessions rated highest of all general sessions at the 2009 NSDL meeting. There were several other large general sessions; an opening plenary at the beginning of the meeting, a Cyberlearning panel with several speakers and a final large session which focused on the work of the Ithaka project. This closing session rated second only to the poster session in terms of usefulness to attendees. One respondent commented that they liked the progression of the large meetings "very nice progression from Linda Slakey to CL panel to Kate Wittenberg - and all very informative."

While respondents liked the idea of the Cyberlearning Panel, many commented that the speaker from the National Science Foundation fell short and didn't understand the audience she was speaking to – “The speaker from NSF took all the time giving a presentation that was way below the experience and interests of the audience.” There also seemed to be consensus amongst respondents about the need for

more interaction in the general sessions; respondents wanted to see more time left for question and answer time between the speakers and the audience.

2009	2008	2007	2006	Survey Category	2009	2008	2007	2006
4.44	4.45	4.57	4.18	Poster session & reception	1	1	1	2
4.22	--	--	4.24	Closing session	2	NA	NA	1
4.02	3.80	3.47	3.84	Opening plenary session: NSF update	3	2	2	3
4.02	3.61	--	--	Plenary sessions: RC & TNS updates	4	3	NA	NA
3.58	--	--	3.72	Opening keynote (Cyberlearning panel)	5	2*	NA	4

Table 2. Average rating and rank of usefulness of the general sessions

* In 2008, the opening plenary and keynote were combined in the results.

NA: Because the opening and closing sessions have been organized differently year-to-year, some of the categories are not applicable across all years.

As in prior years, the poster session continues to be an attendee favorite, with a positive rating of 4.44 out of 5. This year, a single poster reception was held on the opening evening, but posters were on display until the last morning. Several attendees liked the posters' central location. However, one person thought that the layout was not optimal, "particularly if you were not in the food room," and one wondered if the posters could have been grouped in some way.

Organizational Support

Eighty-two respondents ranked meeting planning and organizational support (both before and during the meeting) on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). A majority (78%) of attendees said meeting support was excellent. The average rating on all categories was between good and excellent, with the questions about online information drawing slightly lower marks.

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4.78	4.60	4.86	4.52	Meeting support staff	1	1	1	1
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4.32	4.20	4.44	3.91	Proposal submission, review & acceptance	3	6	6	4
4.26	4.48	4.69	NA	Timely email updates & reminders	4	2	2	NA
4.18	4.33	4.51	4.02	Information about meeting on website	5	5	4	3
4.13	4.29	4.49	3.88	Information about travel & lodging	6	4	5	5

Table 3. Average rating and rank of meeting planning and support

Twenty two of the respondents provided comments on this section. Several of them felt that the planning and support was either good or excellent especially in light of the short time frame in which the meeting was organized. Many of the participants commented on the helpfulness of Resource Center staff and mentioned Donna Cummings by name.

Some of the respondents felt that information about the meeting should have gone out earlier and all the information of the meeting should have been in one spot on the NSDL website for easy browsing and retrieval. Respondents felt that the registration process was somewhat confusing, having to register once for access to the site and another for the meeting. They also mentioned the high cost of hotels and suggest that the planners should pursue negotiated pricing for a few hotels. One participant felt that presenters should be informed of the acceptance of their proposals by phone as well as by follow-up message as soon as the decision is made.

Opportunities for Interaction

The scores for interaction opportunities were all up from 2008. The opportunity to share and find new ideas ranked first, as in previous years, with 55% of the 80 attendees responding to the question saying the opportunity was “excellent” and 35% answering “good.”

2009	2008	2007	2006	Survey Category	2009	2008	2007	2006
4.46	4.29	4.52	4.01	Share / Find new ideas	1	1	1	3
4.33	4.04	4.49	4.1	Interact with NSDL staff	2	3	3	2
4.32	3.98	4.24	3.9	Find new collaborators	3	4	4	4
4.17	3.90	4.51	4.12	Discuss NSDL community issues	4	2	2	1
3.85	3.27	3.94	**	Interact with attendees not funded through NSDL	5	6	6	NA
3.71	3.44	4.11	3.77	Interact with NSF staff	6	5	5	5

Table 4. Average rating and rank of opportunities to engage in activities during the meeting

As voiced by one participant: “The best part of the meeting is meeting and sharing ideas.” In close second and third were the opportunity to interact with NSDL staff and the opportunity to find new collaborators. Clearly, the Annual Meeting continues to be viewed as a success for facilitating interactions between attendees.

There is room for improvement with regards to the interactions with NSF staff as is evident from the comments we received: it “Didn't seem like there were many NSF program officers this year. Last year they attended in force and it was really good” and similarly “I was disappointed that other NSF staff were not available at conference. I was looking forward to speaking with someone who represented more of the disciplinary divisions. It is unfortunate that NSDL is so separate from the subject-specific research directorates (e.g. bio directorate).” One attendee would have preferred a more direct and transparent discussion with NSF personnel on the future of NSDL.

Another area worthy of improvement is the inclusion of newly funded NSDL researchers and those not funded through the NSDL program. It is hard for new people to break into the existing NSDL clan: “As a relative newcomer (and first time meeting attendee) it struck me as a bit of an insiders club” which is

exacerbated by the insiders not knowing the newcomers: “...the only way to know these folk (not funded through NSDL) was to have some prior knowledge”.

Comparison to Previous Meetings

In comparing the 2009 meeting to previous meetings, nine aspects were analyzed. These included meeting length, variety of sessions, opportunities for interaction (both inside and outside sessions), meeting location, the plenary sessions and poster reception. The rating scale ranged from “not as good”, “about the same”, “much better” and “N/A”. Most all aspects rated “About the same” as last year’s meeting, although variety of sessions (2009 = 3.57; 2008 = 3.22) and opportunities to interact within sessions (2009 = 3.44; 2008 = 3.26) rated higher overall than last year. Opportunities for interaction outside the sessions (2009 = 3.37; 2008 = 3.52) and the evening poster reception (2009 = 3.35; 2008 = 3.56) rated slightly lower.

From the attendee comments, it is clear that the meeting continues to be an important place for the community to interact, with 23 of 43 comments highlighting some form of interaction with colleagues as the best part of the meeting. Comments ranged from “It seemed easier to connect with people this year.” to “The opportunity to collaborate with others! It was fantastic!” In addition, attendees also appreciate the presentations and in-session discussions. Eleven provided such feedback as, “It seemed to me that the quality of discussions was at a higher level and not so much effort was needed to come to common understanding before exploring areas of mutual interest.” and “I learned about many projects - virtually all of which were new to me.” One newcomer commented, “It is the first time I am attending the annual meeting. I am very much impressed with the community feel of the gathering.”

Survey Section 3: Planning for the next Annual Meeting

This section of the survey asked questions regarding future programs, time of year, dates to avoid and ideas for future meetings. In rating the importance of various program elements, respondents rated them from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

Survey Category	2009
Poster Session	4.33
Short sessions (30 minutes to 1 hour)	4.18
Workshop-type sessions	4.00
Project updates	3.94
Lightning talks	3.59
Total respondents who answered	79
Respondents who skipped question	13

Table 5. Average rating of importance of program elements to future meetings

The poster session ranked highest (4.33), which likely reflects the level the degree of interaction occurring during this portion of the meeting, although one attendee noted that “Most of us need to have the poster session for our projects in order to be able to justify attendance.” The more lengthy sessions (short sessions, workshops and project updates) ranked higher than the lightning talks, with

one attendee commenting “Do not go back to the old model of squeezing five separate talks into a single session by reducing them all to 5 minutes long.... Lightning talks are a waste of time.”

Three themes appeared in the comments about future meetings. The first theme related to engaging NSDL’s users and involving key stakeholders in the meeting. Comments included “I think each funded project presentation should involve its key stakeholder(s), grounding the project in its value to education. I think we should involve STEM stakeholders in our panel discussions, putting context to research.” The second theme focused on a desire to feature more workshops and collaboration time, both in technical areas and supporting specific birds-of-feather topics. The last theme is related to issues of the broader NSDL, including sustainability and the need to talk about larger issues facing the program as a whole.

As far as dates for next year’s meeting, many mentioned there really isn’t a good time, but if planning a fall meeting, several asked that the committee avoid the week before Thanksgiving. Late October and early November were suggested as good options in several comments with spring generally as a time to avoid. Specific times to avoid included June (NECC) and October (ASIS&T), and other larger conferences to avoid include ASTE (January), NARST (March), NSTA (March), AERA (early May), AAAS (February) and ASTC (early October).

Recommendations

Looking back to the 2008 recommendations, the 2009 Annual Meeting planning started later than usual, due to changes in the award for funding of meeting, which limited the choice of dates and locations. While the 2008 report suggested a change to the scope, format and audience of the meeting, the 2009 planning committee decided to stay with the existing format to help streamline the meeting planning in such a short timeframe. However, the committee agrees that looking at alternatives to the usual plenary/panel opening would be useful. The 2008 report also recommended clear and regular communications about the meeting during the planning process. The launch of the Annual Meeting website was tied to changes to the general NSDL community site, and unfortunately, attendees needed to learn new processes for registration and poster submission prior to the meeting.

Prior to the 2009 meeting, the Resource Center held a new project and staff orientation for 20 participants via a web seminar providing an overview of NSDL, the Resource Center and Technical Network Services. Very few attendees filled out the survey, but of the three that did, they all “strongly agreed” that the session helped prepare them for the meeting. However, some of the survey comments suggest that a stronger effort could be made at the actual meeting to reach out to new projects. Perhaps the meeting could include something as simple as introducing the new PIs at the first group meeting and having them stand up, or, if there's a time and place, hold a brief meet-and-greet session so that newcomers can meet key resource people and each other.

Given the survey results, the committee makes the following recommendations for next year’s meeting.

1. Rework the registration process to streamline the steps required of attendees.
2. Continue the use of an online session for newcomers, to be held prior to the meeting.
3. Over the years, the plenary and keynote speakers have often drawn lower ratings. In planning for next year's meeting, the committee should look at alternatives to provide attendees a more relevant use of those time slots, perhaps including opening the meeting with a workshop format for some hands on work by the community.
4. Maintain the poster session and requiring that the posters available during the entire meeting. If possible, a goal would be to have all posters centrally located.
5. Define a better process for monitoring the time of shared sessions to ensure that speakers leave time for questions, and do not go over their allotted time.
6. Work with NSDL Program Officer to recruit more NSF staff to participate and schedule a session with time for discussion about NSF's views on NSDL and its future.
7. Find ways to improve the integration of new NSDL project staff, as well as non-funded researchers during and following the meeting.
8. Schedule opportunities to focus on planning the future of the NSDL, including sustainability and meeting the larger challenges for NSDL as whole.
9. Ensure sufficient time for the Resource Center and Technical Network Services to provide their overviews and plans, while also allowing time for Q&A.
10. Make one or two small rooms available for informal project meetings.
11. Change the time of lightning talks so they don't compete with other general sessions.

In addition, the following general issues should be addressed. As in prior years, attendees voiced a desire to reach out to teachers, and foster connections to other organizations, such as NSTA, cyberlearning.org, and the disciplinary research divisions of NSF. Various efforts have been made over the years to increase the number of stakeholders at the Annual Meeting. Yet, it is difficult to attract outside participation given the primary content and scope of the meeting, and especially difficult without funds to sponsor travel for non-project participants. The Annual Meeting has historically been a PI meeting, but in planning for next year, the committee should include discussions how to involve stakeholders and other educator groups in the process of building the NSDL, perhaps identifying opportunities at other appropriate conferences and venues where those stakeholders already participate.

Given the breadth of the NSDL community, the committee continues to face the challenge of finding dates that do not conflict with other conferences. It needs to be held after the new projects are notified about their grants, yet not run into the holidays. We suggest staying in the late October or early

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November time frame, which allows new projects to participate early in their funding. The NSDL meeting size falls between not enough people to qualify for the larger conference hotels and too many people to fit in smaller venues that lack ballroom space for the larger sessions. So, we recognize the dates are always dependent on finding an appropriate venue that meets our needs.