2008 Mid-Year Workshop-Survey Results

Workshop Stats:
The Colorado Department of Transportation hosted the workshop. A total of 127 people attended. Percentage of in-state attendees was 43% and out-of-state was 57%. The ratio of consultant to government representatives was about 11:9. There were seven people from resource agencies. Results of a survey to attendees are summarized below.

Sessions
Theme (12)
Relevance (12)
Informative (12)
Breadth of Topics (12)
Association to Theme (11)
Value to your work (11)
Speakers (12)

Transportation Tours
Enjoyable experience (9)
Walk/Bus to Location (9)
Informative (9)
Relevance to Committees (9)
History of Location (9)

Conference Banquet
Enjoyable (9)
Food (9)
Setting (9)
Conducive to Networking (9)

Special Research Session
Informative (8)
Relevance to Transportation (8)
Setting (8)
Value to your work (7)
Speakers (6)

Hotel/Conference Rooms
Courteous (11)
Service (11)
Downtown Location (11)
Accommodations (10)
Conference Rooms (11)
Getting to and from (11)

Summarized Comments:
Well organized and helpful. Session on “public health” did not seem to fit. Overall good mix of speakers and topics. A little too much on climate change. Format should be more meeting like with more interaction and working together to accomplish a set goal.

Summarized Comments:
Tours were good, well organized and relevant. Excellent presentations by local staff. One tour seemed better than the other.

Summarized Comments:
Great venue and food was good. Drinks were pricey. Museum setting was nice. Meal presentation was very good. One of the most enjoyable network events at a summer meeting. Almost too nice.

Summarized Comments:
More of a need to do this at other meetings but this one may have been too ambitious.

Summarized Comments:
Accommodations were marginal. No hot water at one point. Really liked the hotel and accommodations. Free bus passes to and from airport was nice. Guest rooms were too cold. Location was good and staff outstanding. Accommodations were great. Business meeting room was too small.

Overall Comments:
Registration was pricey. Charging speakers created a negative image. Hosts did an outstanding job—making people feel welcome and accommodating schedule changes on tours. Downtown location was great—could walk anywhere. Consultant displays could have been better.
Lessons Learned/Adjustments/Observations

1. Timely Decisions/Team Commitment
Three committees were involved in the workshop. Each committee had a different history and perspective. While this strengthened the overall subject matter of the workshop, each committee tended toward familiar ground when considering planning elements of the workshop (e.g., tour locations). At times members were hard to reach—making meeting scheduling difficult and sometimes leading to late decisions. Occasionally, decisions made early in the process were never really accepted by all participants in the discussion (e.g., should speakers be charged a registration fee). While no “right” or “wrong” decisions were made, the committees could have performed better had more time been taken up front regarding roles and responsibilities, and participants in the planning meetings thoroughly discussed areas of apparent disagreement, openly committing to the groups’ decisions.

2. Going Our Own Ways
While the three committees found much common ground, the committees occasionally acted as separate entities to the detriment of the group. This came apparent when committees “opted” for separate tours and in rare instances gave conflicting advice to speakers and attendees. While this in almost all cases worked smoothly, on rare occasions it caused discord among the committees’ workshop planners. Recommend that process points should be openly agreed to and frequently policed by the committee chairs in particular.

3. Funding
Committees differed on their financial capacity to support the workshop. However, committees acted as equal members. Acting as equal members helped the committees work more cohesively. Occasionally, individual planning members did not fully consider the financial risk or cost when entering into certain decisions. Recommend that planning groups “defer” financial risk decisions to those who hold the risk.

On a different but related subject, the host found it difficult to set up an account at a bank (or similar organization). While this has been a reoccurring issue, it has been successfully resolved each time. Recommend either establishing one central account or asking for the account to be set up much earlier in the workshop planning process.

4. Guest Program
Very few guests accompanied attendees at this workshop—lower than previous events. Informal discussions highlighted that a more substantive program or organized set of events for guests would have brought more guests to the workshop and perhaps a couple more workshop attendees. The cost of such a program both in the sense of financial obligation and time to assemble is relatively small and could be informal and scaleable. Recommend that future mid-year workshops strongly consider implementing a guest program on some scale.

5. Estimate of Attendance
Estimating the attendance at a workshop—particularly at the very early stages—is one of the most difficult things facing the workshop planning committee. There is a general tendency to overestimate. This meeting was no exception. Compounding the problem were high gas prices and travel restrictions invoked by a number of agencies and firms. While there doesn’t appear to be a way to better estimate attendance, caution should be taken by any planning group when estimating the number of attendees especially where they estimate attendance at the higher end of the scale. Planning commitments based on estimated numbers should be negotiated with an “escape clause”, if possible, allowing downsizing with no penalty from hotels or other service providers.

6. Other Factors
Two other factors worth mentioning are that the contributions of the host are significant and the resources needed (in people hours) should not be underestimated; and beware of the “cost of business” (e.g., fees for processing credit cards). Small fees can quickly add up to big numbers.