AAPOR News: September 2012

Welcome to your September issue of AAPOR News offering timely and important association updates along with interesting news from the public opinion and survey research community.

This issue includes a letter from President Paul J. Lavrakas, a recap of the 2012 WAPOR Conference in Hong Kong, information on AAPOR's 2013 Annual Conference and more.

Letter from the President

This month, AAPOR Executive Council members and our staff met in-person for two days with our top priority being our 2013 budget. As you may know, the annual budget for AAPOR has grown to more than $1.3 million. The biggest portion of our annual revenue and annual expenses is associated with our annual conference.

AAPOR's unrestricted reserves, which total approximately $1 million, are very healthy for an organization of our size. AAPOR has ended the last two years with significant surpluses, adding to our cash reserves, and we are projected to end 2012 with a surplus as well. Thanks to AAPOR members, including our recent councils, and to our AAPOR staff at the Sherwood Group, we have what appears to be strong financial foundation.

But from my perspective as a member of Council for four of the past five years, AAPOR has several critical finance-related issues looming that need to be confronted sooner rather than later if we are going to accomplish what I believe we want to accomplish. These financial issues include:

- How much time is reasonable to expect volunteer members of AAPOR – including members of Council and our myriad volunteers not on Council -- to commit to AAPOR on a regular basis?
  - Consistent with our strong ethos of volunteerism, many Council members are averaging 8-10 hours a week “working” for AAPOR and more than one of us is often putting in upwards of twice that amount.
- What is the size of the paid staff AAPOR needs to accomplish its goals?
  - Currently AAPOR is paying for the equivalent of three and one-third (3.37) fulltime employees, which equates to 28 percent of our 2012 budgeted expenses.
- How much longer can (and should) AAPOR go without increasing its membership dues and conference registration fee, at least for our mid- to upper-income members?
  - Dues were last raised in 2006 and conference registration was last increased in 2009.
- What untapped opportunities exist to generate significant new revenue for AAPOR on an annual basis?
  - Many of our members are looking ahead to estate planning, but we know essentially nothing about whether they are considering bequests to AAPOR in their planning.
Thanks to its members, AAPOR has many great ideas that deserve implementation, but lacks adequate funding to do so. These suggestions include:

- Expanding distance education opportunities by offering more free professional development opportunities to members, free webinars for members, and adding regional short courses possibly in conjunction with annual AAPOR chapter meetings;
- Increasing AAPOR’s visibility, stature and opportunities for membership recruitment with our organizational presence at other professional conferences;
- Providing more discounted room rates for AAPOR conference attendees and travel money for our student members;
- Increasing the number of awards offered by AAPOR and providing more funding to enhance their stature;
- Providing the funds needed for our Heritage Committee to capture AAPOR’s history from those senior members who helped make that history, while these members are still with us; and expanding AAPOR's archives at the University of Chicago;
- Doing more to “publish” and widely disseminate our Task Force reports to better serve the research industries we represent;
- Establishing a “early career” grant program to provide seed money for new research programs;
- Funding other original research to help close knowledge gaps on topics that matter most to members (e.g., when will a nonprobability sample lead to the same inferences as a probability sample in a survey of otherwise equal quality); and
- Ensuring the establishment and ongoing success of our Transparency Initiative.

This list only scratches the surface of what AAPOR could do with much more ample funding than is now available.

Some would say that AAPOR doesn’t need to expand the services it provides its members and the research industries it serves. But I disagree.

To my mind, we are among a very small number of professional organizations whose members (a) know how to identify reliable and valid approaches to improving the quality of public opinion research and many other forms of social research, and (b) have the will to do so, were the funding available. It is not that we are at all short on the intellectual capital—just short on the funding that is needed to make more of our good ideas a reality.

And some may ask why does AAPOR need to address these matters in 2012 – can we not wait a few more years? My answer is that time already has run away from us (and isn't going to stop to await us catching up), with many research methods of questionable reliability and validity being too readily embraced by overly cost-conscious (“pennywise and pound foolish”) clients and survey sponsors.

To help address these matters, at our August meeting last month, AAPOR Executive Council established a Financial Oversight Committee (FOC) to advise council about our short- and long-term financial wellbeing. The mission of the FOC is to:

- Advise council on the current and future financial health of AAPOR in light of the short- and long-term goals of our organization, including our Strategic Plan goals (the FOC would have no enforcement authority of its own);
- Review and comment on all financial policies each year by monitoring (a) the progress made by the Secretariat and AAPOR staff at Sherwood on our annual budget, (b) AAPOR’s Endowment Committee, (c) AAPOR’s Investment Committee, and (d) any other finance-related committees and policies that may exist in the future; and
- Help bring a creative and energetic vision to AAPOR about how to substantially increase our financial resources.

The financial objectives that the FOC will attempt to help maximize include:
Growing AAPOR’s annual revenue to provide AAPOR Executive Council with more annual funding to allocate to mission-based activities.

- Growing AAPOR’s cash reserves in order to allow AAPOR even greater financial security and to generate additional revenue in the form of interest, dividends, etc.
- Help AAPOR continue to achieve an annual appreciation on AAPOR investments of at least the rate of inflation, and preferably higher.
- Encourage significant support from members and others (e.g., foundations) to reach a minimum of $2 million in AAPOR endowments.

The FOC will operate for three years. During this time there will be an annual evaluation by Council to assess the value it is providing, and to possibly modify its membership. By the end of the third year, Council will decide the FOC’s future, including whether or not to have it continue.

Initially there will be 11 AAPOR members on the FOC who, in many cases, will serve a three-year term. The members will include: (a) the current members of Council’s Executive Committee (President, Vice President, Past President, Secretary-Treasurer, and Associate Secretary Treasurer); (b) the Past Secretary-Treasurer; (c) the current chair of AAPOR’s Endowment Committee; (d) the current chair of AAPOR’s Investment Committee; and (e) three “at-large” AAPOR members who have special expertise in financial matters. One of the latter will chair the FOC, and Dan Merkle of ABC News has agreed to serve as they inaugural FOC Chair. The other two inaugural FOC at-large members will be Mollyann Brodie of the Kaiser Family Foundation and Ronald Z. Szoc of ICF International. The FOC will also include two ex officio staff members – Susan Tibbitts, AAPOR’s executive director, and Andrew Massengill, AAPOR’s staff accountant – each of whom bring considerable knowledge on the financial matters affecting professional organizations.

On behalf of Council, I invite and welcome input from other AAPOR members on how to expand our annual revenue and endowments and the other issues raised above. In the coming weeks we will announce a FOC-specific email address to AAPOR members so you can share your comments directly with the committee.

Paul J. Lavrakas
AAPOR President 2012-2013
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Asking Critical Questions in Boston 2013

By Paul C. Beatty, 2013 Conference Chair

Planning is already well underway for AAPOR’s 68th Annual Conference, to be held at the Boston Seaport Hotel and Seaport World Trade Center on May 16-19, 2013.

The theme for the conference is Asking Critical Questions: Toward a Sustainable Future for Public Opinion and Social Research. Are polls and surveys sustainable as currently practiced? Clearly, they face considerable challenges.

Costs rise as it becomes more difficult to secure respondent cooperation; concerns about representativeness grow in the face of declining response rates; non-probabilistic and alternative data collection approaches abound, although it is not yet clear to what extent they meet our standards and research needs.
Yet it is also clear that data on our attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, health, economy and institutions are in greater demand than ever. Public opinion researchers face a dual challenge. On the one hand, they must continue to innovate in traditional survey methods, particularly with approaches that maximize quality while containing costs. On the other, they must continue to evaluate what new approaches do and do not contribute. Arguably, a sustainable model for our profession includes both strengthening our core methods and incorporating some new ones, although the mix remains to be worked out—critical questions remain about both aspects.

The AAPOR 2013 Annual Conference is being designed to help foster this important dialogue. It will continue evaluations of the “New Frontiers” begun at the 2012 conference in Orlando, and expand the discussion to explore sustainable visions for the future of our profession. Of course, the value of this discussion will be largely determined by the quality attendee contributions. Please check out the Call for Participation and consider submitting a proposal for a paper, methodological brief, poster, panel, or demonstration that contributes to this theme.

As usual, we also enthusiastically solicit proposals on any aspect of public opinion and social research, including substantive studies of public opinion on social, economic and political issues; the 2012 election; the impact of the media on public opinion; and methodological research on a wide range of topics, including questionnaire design, coverage, mixed-mode data collection, responsive design, and cross-national and comparative research, among others. The deadline for submissions is November 12, 2012.

We look forward to receiving proposals and hope to see you in Boston!
considered, please keep an eye on your inbox next month for the formal call for nominations for the 2013-2014 AAPOR Executive Council.

You are also welcome to contact Scott Keeter, AAPOR Past President and Chair, Nomination Committee at: skeeter@PewResearch.org.

Unprecedented Survey Methodology Diplomacy with North Korea
By Asaph Young Chun, Chair of DPRK Working Group of ASA Statistics Without Borders

The Pyongyang Summer Institute in Survey Science and Quantitative Methodology (PSI) was launched this summer in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Held June 29 through July 28 at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, the country's only private and international university, the summer institute brought together 13 scholars, including a few AAPOR colleagues, to do pro bono teaching of survey methodology and interdisciplinary research to more than 250 North Korean students. Arriving from Switzerland, Germany, Australia, Qatar, Britain and the United States, PSI faculty planted the seeds of science diplomacy with future leaders of survey methodology in North Korea.

Modeled after the 65-year-old Michigan Summer Institute, the four-week PSI courses cover applied sampling, survey research methodology and statistics. Graduate students receive training in interdisciplinary research methods, data collection methods, and computer-assisted survey data analysis with R software. Course material includes books by Bob Groves, Don Dillman and Roger Tourangeau.

In addition to the summer course, the PSI’s “da Vinci Grant Program” supports highly promising students committed to survey methodology with interdisciplinary research. Grant winners are paired with PSI’s international faculty who mentor them over the following year.

PSI is organized by Statistics Without Borders of the American Statistical Association (ASA) and the International Strategy and Reconciliation Foundation in partnership with Pyongyang University of Science and Technology. If you are interested in joining the 2013 PSI faculty, contact the assistant director Yena Lee, or Justin Fisher, the chair of ASA’s Statistics without Borders, or the chair of DPRK Working Group and PSI director, Asaph Young Chun. The pro bono faculty application is available at the PSI website.

Survey Statistics and Methodology Journal Being Launched by AAPOR and ASA
AAPOR and the American Statistical Association (ASA) recently announced the launch of a new interdisciplinary journal, the Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology (JSSAM). Read more

WAPOR Holds Record-Breaking Conference in Hong Kong
By Trevor Tompson
The World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR) recently gathered in Hong Kong for its 65th Annual Conference—a record-breaking event that made
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history as the first WAPOR conference ever convened in Asia. The conference was held June 14-16 at the University of Hong Kong. It was the best-attended WAPOR conference ever, with representation from 37 different countries and regions. There were a large number of first-time attendees from the Asia-Pacific region, including many new faces from China, Hong Kong and South Korea.

At the invitation of WAPOR President Tom Smith and conference organizer Robert Chung, a special AAPOR panel, “Exit Polling in the 21st Century: A Perspective from the USA,” was organized by AAPOR President Paul Lavrakas.

The session involved presentations from four AAPOR members. Mike Traugott of the University of Michigan kicked off the session with a discussion of why accurate exit polls are important to democracies. Paul prepared a presentation explaining the current methodological approaches to exit polling used in U.S. elections. Marjorie Connelly of The New York Times explained how the media use exit polling in their election coverage and provided many examples of the various ways that The Times covers exit polls. And Trevor Tompson of the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research discussed the challenges and opportunities for exit polling and how the surveys might evolve in the future.

(Unfortunately, Paul encountered travel delays that ultimately meant he wasn’t able to come to Hong Kong, so Trevor delivered Paul’s presentation on his behalf.) The session was well attended and stimulated many interesting discussions, both during the session and in casual interactions with the panelists during the rest of the three-day conference. Copies of the PowerPoint® presentations are available on the conference website.

The AAPOR organized session was part of an ongoing effort to enhance cooperation between AAPOR and WAPOR. WAPOR is planning a session at next year’s joint AAPOR and WAPOR conference in Boston.

Chapter Spotlight - MAPOR

By Michael Traugott, MAPOR President

The Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research (MAPOR) has a diverse membership consisting of active AAPOR members and many students from the graduate programs in the region who are just starting out in their careers. We provide a warm and nurturing setting at our annual conference where many make their first professional presentations. On Friday evening of the conference, the MAPOR president leads interested students at a group dinner where they have a chance to talk about their experiences with other young professionals.

Speaking of conference, the MAPOR chapter is busy organizing for this fall's 2012 conference in Chicago on November 16-17. Kristen Olsen (University of Nebraska) and Allyson Holbrook (University of Illinois-Chicago) have organized an outstanding program around the theme of "Innovations in Measuring and Understanding Public Opinion." We had a record number of submissions and the program will have more participants than ever.

At the Friday conference luncheon, we will announce a new MAPOR fellow, and Marjorie Connelly from The New York Times will present an election post-mortem. We will also announce our student paper award winners. As it has been for several years, the meeting will be held at the Avenue Hotel. If you will be in Chicago on November 16-17, we encourage you to join us at the conference.

In addition to our conference, MAPOR continues to grow and improve in other ways. We had a record-setting attendance at our 2011 meeting, with 200 paid registrants. The MAPOR membership is also up 40 percent from the same time last year.

MAPOR recently appointed a webmaster, Kumar Rao from the Nielson Company, and
he has done a complete overhaul of the website. It is now more navigable and has a cleaner look. We encourage you to visit to see what is going on with MAPOR and to view the latest copy of the MAPOR Newsletter.

ESOMAR Promoting AAPOR's Standard Definitions as Best Practice

(ESOMAR) has endorsed AAPOR's *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions as Case Code and Outcome Rates for Surveys* as best international practice in calculating response rates.

AAPOR developed the definitions, which are aligned with WAPOR and ISO policies, to help researchers all over the world including those in developing regions apply standardized terminology.

Download the definitions [here](#).

AAPOR Member News

*If you have news you would like shared in the Member News column of the newsletter, please send information to Lindsay Arends.*

If you would prefer not to receive emails from us, go [here](#).

Please send any comments about this email to [info@aapor.org](mailto:info@aapor.org).