

ASAP Annual National Training Conference

Why Does ASAP Choose “Touristy” Locations like New Orleans and Anaheim for Training Programs? It Sounds like a Boondoggle and it Makes it Tough to get Funding!

The ASAP Board of Directors is keenly aware that the city selection can have the appearance of a boondoggle for those who do not fully understand the costs associated with training conference planning. The short answer is that many times these types of locations offer the best venue deals and have lower overall per diem costs for the traveler. By taking advantage of the deals, ASAP rolls the savings back into the overall costs so that tuition/fees remain below market value. ASAP members have the opportunity to register for this 3-day program for as low as \$1,150. Other education providers charge more for one-day events and do not offer the array of instructors or other functions that help lower the attendees per diem costs.

Simply put, to think of the ASAP training conference as a boondoggle, wherever it is held, is a misconception.

The Facts Behind ASAP Training Programs

For the first 11 years of the National Training Conference (NTC), gaming cities or “resort type” cities were avoided due to the appearance of being a boondoggle. However, it did not go unnoticed that many federal, state and local government agencies were meeting in gaming cities simply because it was cost-effective.

The NTC offers over 40 educational sessions over three FULL days. Each day has four or five tracks of concurrent sessions. It is a lot of information for the attendees to absorb, and at the end of the day, they are more than ready for a deserved break. As a matter of record, the educational sessions at ASAP programs are very well-attended throughout the ENTIRE event. ASAP attendees constantly prove to be very dedicated to their education and appreciative of the opportunity to meet and learn with their peers. This has been the standard for ASAP training whether they are in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Kansas City, Las Vegas or New Orleans.

For all of the hurdles involved with planning ASAP training events (see below), the entire ASAP staff is sure of one thing. It is a pleasure and an honor to work with so many dedicated access professionals. We admire your commitment to education and professionalism and enjoy working with each and every one of you!

The Facts Behind ASAP Meeting Site Selection

ASAP is a non-profit, educational, professional membership Society. It is not a government agency. Therefore, ASAP does not qualify for discounted rates and relaxed

letters of agreement that are afforded to government entities. Hotels and conference centers do business with ASAP on a contract basis and these contracts have incentives and penalties. Due to the expansive meeting requirements for the NTC, ASAP is usually very limited in its site choices.

1) ASAP requires hotels to honor the federal government per diem rate, or less if possible. Many hotels will not even bid on ASAP business because they do not want to give up so many sleeping rooms at the per diem rate. Quite frankly, they can afford to wait for a “better piece of business.” Some hotels make counter offers that would require ASAP to meet on the weekend or over major holidays.

2) Many hotels will not consider committing to a government per diem more than one year out. This is why you rarely see the training dates and sites announced early. We know it is frustrating for agencies trying to budget and plan training, but the circumstances are dictated by the market and are beyond our control.

3) The NTC requires a lot of meeting space which means that ASAP needs hotels that are geared to “large group meeting” business. Typically, these hotels service a different clientele and usually have a choice of more profitable business.

4) All hotels require ASAP to guarantee a certain number of sleeping rooms. If ASAP fails to meet this number, then financial penalties are invoked. Often, meeting room rental costs are waived based on the number of sleeping rooms used. If ASAP fails to meet that number, then in addition to attrition penalties, meeting room costs can be assessed. **This is why ASAP has a policy of increased tuition for those who choose to stay at a different hotel than the ASAP contracted hotel. We must protect our room block for the benefit of all.**

5) ASAP tries to meet in cities that are airline hubs or offer convenient connections.

6) These cities tend to offer varied and more affordable restaurant alternatives for our attendees within walking distance. This is important in the overall costs one spends in attending a training program.

7) Virtually all hotels require ASAP to meet a minimum of food and beverage (F&B) revenue. For the NTC and depending upon the city, this amount is usually somewhere between \$55,000 and \$125,000. Since the hotels have to provide the federal government per diem sleeping room rate, they offset this loss in revenue by the food and beverage amounts. This is why ASAP provides some lunches and coffee breaks at most of its training programs. Without a guarantee for food and beverage revenue, hotels simply will not bid on ASAP business.

8) ASAP continues to research convention and conference centers. In most cases convention centers have even more restrictive policies, including the right to bump contracted business for a more profitable piece of business. This uncertainty is simply something that ASAP cannot live with. Further, the costs at many of these centers can be

prohibitive for ASAP. Without any sleeping room revenue, the centers tend to have very high food, audio visual and meeting room costs. There are also logistical issues in negotiating and coordinating with all of the center providers (separate caterer, separate A/V company, etc.) as opposed to a hotel “one-stop-shopping” environment.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this information. We look forward to seeing you at our next ASAP NTC!