



THE **ACCESS** NETWORK

Recommendations for Access Assemblies

submitted to

The Access Network Core Organizers

by

2016 Access Assembly Task Force

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Task Force Recommendations

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TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Members of the Task Force are thankful for the opportunity to serve the Network by composing this documentation for the planning of future Assemblies. For additional questions or clarifications, please contact any of the Task Force members below.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to support The Access Network (hereafter “Access”) to embody its core principle of “empower[ing] students to take ownership of their education”¹ during the planning and implementation of the Annual Access Assembly (hereafter “the Assembly”). To this end, we make recommendations to persons in charge of planning the Assembly, including Core Organizers, Assembly Fellows, Network Fellows, and Site Leaders. We emphasize that our recommendations are not requirements; we envision that persons in charge of planning future Assemblies will use these recommendations as guidelines, not rules..

The motivation for this document is a conflict that arose during the inaugural Assembly, held at Arizona State University from May 25–27, 2016. The nature of this conflict was twofold. First, some Assembly Fellows felt that the agenda for the Assembly did not reflect their authentic contributions. In the absence of a clear plan for conflict resolution during the Assembly, the response to this conflict made some Assembly attendees feel excluded, especially Site Leaders who were neither Assembly Fellows, Network Fellows, nor Core Organizers. Second, some Assembly attendees reported experiencing microaggressions during the Assembly. These reports focused on the behavior of people (like ASU faculty and/or staff) whose affiliation with the network was unclear and whose participation in the Assembly was unexpected.

On May 27, 2016, a majority subset of Assembly attendees reached consensus that a Task Force should be created to reflect on, and learn from, feedback from the Assembly. A Task Force was created, and the authors of this document were members of the Task Force. This document represents the culmination of our process of reflecting on, and learning from, the inaugural Assembly. To write this report, we drew on our own experiences during the Assembly as well as the anonymous Assembly feedback collected by Inverness (both the raw data and the synthesis compiled by Inverness).²

In making these recommendations, we have tried to center the Access principle of student ownership while recognizing that funding agencies, host universities, and other institutions external to Access may impose constraints on Core Organizers that conflict with this core principle of the network.

ASSEMBLY GOALS

The purpose of this section is to outline our recommendations for the goals of the Assembly as were developed from the survey feedback from the 2016 Assembly. We recommend five major goals: (i) disseminate and share information about each site; (ii) provide an think-tank for new ideas within the network and within individual sites; (iii) foster interpersonal connections across sites; (iv) strengthen site leaders’ program leadership skills; and (v) define new goals for the network, if needed.

Disseminate and share information about each site

Each site should introduce their programs and goals. New and proposed sites should introduce their goals and methods. At the beginning of the 2016 Assembly, each site shared information about their program to

¹ *The Access Network: Supporting Retention and Representation in Physics through an Alliance of Campus-Based Diversity Programs*, Proposal to NSF (2015).

² *Highlights from the Access Assembly Survey*, Evaluation Report by Inverness Research (2016).

the rest of the Network. We recommend keeping this aspect of the Assembly. Furthermore, throughout the Assembly each site should have a chance to share more detailed information about their specific services. This could include:

1. Workshops and/or programs
2. Updates and news
3. Events or services unique to that individual site
4. Novelties to existing programs
5. Unsuccessful strategies

This point was the most valued by attendees from the 2016 Assembly. There should be more time allotted for this section to accommodate this interest. In addition, this would likely call for more involvement from site leaders to prepare material to present.

Provide a think-tank for new ideas within the network and within individual sites

On the final day of the Assembly, there was an unplanned period where site leaders got together to discuss new ideas from other sites. This period of time allowed for site leaders to share new ideas they'd gained from the Assembly and discuss ways to implement them at their respective sites. Though not originally in the agenda, many attendees found this time valuable. A structured time for sites to meet individually and reflect on what they can take away and implement would likely again prove valuable in future Assemblies.

Foster interpersonal connections across sites

Many attendees of the 2016 Assembly appreciated the opportunities for networking and relationship development with those from other sites. This allowed them to learn about other programs and develop friendships with a diverse group of people. As a Network, interpersonal connections are key to the function of Access, and activities dedicated to this goal could be focused on:

1. Strengthening the sense of a larger community in the Network
2. Team building
3. Establishing trusted connections

These outcomes may very well be byproducts of other activities that are planned, but should be kept in mind as Assembly planning develops.

Strengthen site leaders' program leadership skills

The 2016 Assembly had a few workshops that allowed for attendees to develop leadership skills. Several attendees expressed wanting more of this during the Assembly. This can be an opportunity for site leaders to share what they do at their own institution and allow for other sites to see aspects of programs in action. This is helpful for dissemination of ideas and leadership skill development, both for presenters and attendees. Recommendations for the Assembly in regards to leadership skill development include:

1. Have workshops that increase awareness about issues in education
2. Do training for given topics or circumstances

These activities can be general or examples of trainings and workshops done at other sites. Through these activities, presenters are able to develop presentation skills and attendees are able to see leadership in action while learning about things they can bring back to their site.

Define new goals for the network, if needed

The goals of the Access Network are outlined in the initial grant proposal. However, as the Access Network grows, goals may need to be modified or changed. The Assembly acts as an avenue for discussion and consensus for the Network's overall goals and how to achieve them. Further, this allows for members from each Access site to have a say in the redefined goals of the Access Network.

ASSEMBLY ASPECTS TO PRESERVE

Various aspects of the Assembly were well-received and we recommend preserving them. They are presented and described below.

Site introductions

At the beginning of the Assembly, each site gave a presentation about their site and programs. This set a foundation for the Assembly, and allowed all attendees to know about sites and know right away who they may want to collaborate with and talk to during the Assembly. This was an important preface to the Assembly events and we recommend that this is preserved.

Networking opportunities

The networking aspect of the Assembly had two facets: Collaborating with other sites, and Getting to know each other. These are described below in their respective order.

Attendees liked being able to meet together to learn more about programs and workshops hosted by other sites. This allowed attendees the ability to make connections to grow and improve their current programs. Time specifically allotted for these kinds of discussions would be helpful for the sites. (There was limited time for discussion about collaboration.)

Attendees enjoyed opportunities to meet each other that were purely social (and did not revolve around programmatic activities). We recommend maintaining these types of social opportunities and potentially expanding this time to foster more community building between sites and within the network.

Student-led sessions

Attendees liked seeing students lead sessions during the Assembly. However, several wished there was more of this. We recommend allotting more time for student-led sessions and workshops during the Assembly.

Rotating workshops

Attendees enjoyed rotating workshops during the Assembly, as it allowed them to be a part of multiple discussions. One thing to consider is that workshop assignments were made prior to the Assembly. Several attendees reported wishing they had the opportunity to change which groups they were in at the

Assembly. We recommend keeping rotating workshops in the Assembly agenda, providing the opportunity to switch.

Inclusive food

Many attendees had dietary restrictions which were well-accommodated during the Assembly. We recommend that dietary restrictions are considered while planning meals.

CLARIFYING PROCESS

The team of people planning the Assembly consists of *Assembly Fellows (AFs)* and one or more *Core Organizers (COs)*. AFs are Site Leaders, typically students. Many COs are also Site Leaders, and most COs are no longer students. Because the AFs and COs are part of a team whose members (a) have different levels of power in educational settings and (b) are spread across the country, deliberate effort must be spent establishing cooperative planning processes and building supportive relationships among the AFs and COs.

Cooperatively establish logistics of Assembly planning meetings

The logistical structure of Assembly planning meetings should be determined as soon as possible. We recommend that those involved in planning the Assembly initially use email and online scheduling tools to set up an initial “business” meeting, which may last about 2 hours. The primary objective of this meeting is to establish the logistical structure for subsequent meetings.

We recommend that the CO facilitate the initial meeting since they are the most likely to be familiar with the details of Assembly, the broader context of Access, and the individual people on the planning team. In future meetings, the CO should engage in a way that aligns with the logistical structure determined by the planning team. To help guide the initial “business” meeting, we have compiled a list of questions that the Assembly planning team could use to help clarify the logistics of their future work.

1. How will our group communicate?
 - a. What platform will we use for future meetings (e.g., Skype, Zoom, Hangouts)?
 - b. How often will we meet, and for how long?
 - c. When will we meet, and who will be able to attend?
2. How will meetings be run?
 - a. How will our group reach consensus (e.g., RYG cards, thumbs up/down/sideways)?
 - b. How will we assign roles during meetings (e.g., facilitation, note taking, time keeper)?
 - c. How will we delegate tasks to be completed between meetings?
3. How will we communicate between meetings?
 - a. How can we support inter-site communication?
 - b. How can AFs contact the Assembly CO?
 - c. How can AFs contact other COs?
 - d. How can the planning team communicate with, and gather ideas from, the network?
4. How will we keep track of meeting notes, homework, and agendas for future meetings?

Foster a supportive team rapport

Supportive team rapport can be fostered by deliberate efforts to build relationships among those working on the Assembly.

While there are many ways to build relationships, in-person meetings between members of the planning team may be particularly effective, especially early on during the planning process. Unfortunately, this option is also expensive. If the planning team would like to meet in person, there are at least two potential funding mechanisms: (i) a site could choose to use network funds for inter-site travel to fund a trip for their local AF to meet with other AFs; (ii) AFs could consider a reduction in pay in order to cover some of the cost of an in-person meeting.

In lieu of (or in addition to) an in-person meeting, a remote meeting should be organized at the beginning of the Assembly planning process for the sole purpose of team/relationship building. One-on-one meetings between AFs may also help foster a sense of community. These can be done with group assignments, where AFs pair up and work together on a part of the Assembly planning.

We feel that it is important for each AF to feel like they have multiple people they can talk to about any problems they have with their role.

Interactions among AFs, Site Leaders, and COs

AFs are embedded within the context of a local site. Each site has a Network Fellow (NF), and many have one or more COs. We recommend that AFs are supported in interacting with their local NF and any COs that may be co-located with the AF. These interactions will help raise awareness about the Assembly within the local site, and they will facilitate transfer of ideas from the site to the Assembly planning team via the AF. In addition, for sites that have a local CO other than the CO who is on the Assembly planning team, such interactions may provide the AF with a redundant (in a good way!) communication pathway with the COs.

One way that the AFs may keep sites and COs abreast of Assembly planning updates is via blog posts on the Access website.

Clarifying roles and constraints

1. Structure of planning meetings (whether in-person or virtual) should center student voice, ideas, etc.
2. There should be some communication about institutional constraints on what the Assembly team can do (either from funding or host university); COs are likely more familiar with these constraints and can lead a discussion around them.
 - a. Attending CO meetings could help with this, too

Student voice and agency is a key principle of this organization. To ensure this principle is integrated, the nature of communication between AF and PI/COs must be clarified. Both parties have a role in ensuring the inclusion of the other. The structure of AF meetings needs to be set up such that the CO associated with the Assembly site does not direct all meetings. This not only stunts student input, but it puts undue burden and responsibility upon the CO. The host CO should be regarded as a seasoned AF by those organizing the Assembly. As such, the professional obligations of the host CO should be considered equally with the ideas and interests each other AF brings from their site. To create better communication

between the AF group and the PI/COs as a whole, it is suggested that members of the AF group (not just the host CO) attend the first portion of monthly CO meetings. Here AFs can have person-to-person discussion with the COs regarding mandates of the NSF grant with regards to the Assembly, budget constraints, and any concerns/questions either party might have.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In order to address any conflicts that may arise during the Assembly or during the planning of the Assembly, relevant persons should have a plan for conflict resolution. This is necessary to avoid any unnecessary disruption of the Assembly and to ensure conflict resolution happens as smoothly as possible.

Definition of terms

Conflict refers to a negative experience on the part of anyone affiliated with the Assembly, including planners, attendees, and on-site personnel involved with campus space or logistics. In addition:

- *Complainants* are the persons who are experiencing conflict during the Assembly.
- *Respondents* are the persons charged with listening and working with complainants towards a resolution.
- *Resolution* refers to the plan of action through which complainants and respondents cooperatively address and/or resolve the conflict.

Goals for conflict resolution

Note that many people involved in the Access Network, potentially including respondents, are mandatory reporters of harassment. Any instances of sexual, racial, or other forms of harassment must be addressed in compliance with Title IX policies of the Assembly host institution. The details of the host institution's Title IX policies should be made aware to all Assembly attendees, including and especially Respondents and anyone reporting a conflict. Any resolution should be in agreement with Title IX policies where appropriate.

A plan for responsible conflict resolution should be clearly articulated to all people affiliated with the Assembly and respondents should be clearly identified. Any respondents should be aware of the scope and limits of their role and should listen to and believe complainants, acting as their advocates when necessary. There should be multiple respondents with different identities (gender, race, academic level, etc.) which may minimize barriers to complainants reporting a conflict while also allowing for the possibility of having multiple people co-think about solutions.

We suggest that complainants follow these recommendations in the case of a conflict:

1. Complainants should be aware of what happens when they contact a respondent.
2. Complainants should be able to report a conflict in an environment and using means that maximize complainant's comfort.

3. Complainants and Respondents should cooperatively determine what level and timescale of response is necessary in order to remedy the conflict.

The Assembly agenda should include dedicated time for all participants to collectively respond to conflicts, should any arise that warrant such action during the Assembly. This is especially important for people who might be resentful of canceling planned activities to address an issue that doesn't concern them. Respondents should be prepared to document and follow-up on conflicts whose resolution can wait until after the Assembly; documented conflicts *must* be acted on in a timely fashion.

CONCLUSION

As a final statement for this document, we again emphasize that our recommendations are not requirements; we envision that persons in charge of planning future Assemblies will use these recommendations as guidelines, not rules. These recommendations were made with much deliberation and thorough consideration of both the core values of Access Network and feedback collected by Inverness from the 2016 Assembly. We did our best to offer advice that is true to the concerns of those attending the 2016 Assembly, as well as advice that is constructive in nature and relatively easy to implement.