SHOT Conference Access Proposal
June 1 2022

INTRODUCTION

SHOT plans to return to in-person conferences after two years of pandemic operations that have also been a time of internal work to acknowledge racism in the field and support greater diversity of scholarship in conferences and publications. These paired and related phenomena warrant greater consideration of the formats available for conference gatherings. The Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) committee asserts the need to establish accessibility protocols in line with SHOT's commitments to diversity.

The proposal outlines two main forms of accessibility planning: supporting online or hybrid formats as a part of all conferences, and establishing access protocols for conference planning on a long-term basis.

Some key terms/concepts:

CAPTIONING – Captioning makes virtual programming accessible for a number of different audiences, and can also be provided via a separate screen in an in-person setup. There are two kinds of captioning:

- **Live Captioning** (aka CART – Communication Access Real-Time Transcription)
    - produced by a licensed professional who types live captions either into a virtual session or an in-person screen/monitor.
    - Considered "gold standard" for deaf/hard of hearing access and is superior to automatically generated captions (see below)
    - Can be "pre-loaded" with technical terms and correct name, place spellings for specialized audiences (if speakers share a script or list of terms in advance).
    - Costs around $200/hr (variable – can also sometimes be negotiated in bulk and some sites may have preferred vendors with discounts)
    - Many vendors that supply CART also have ASL (American Sign Language) services (depending on vendor)

- **Auto-captions or AI Captions** are generated by software built into various platforms or apps (online: Zoom, Teams, etc; or on individual devices via apps such as Otter.ai, Ava).
    - Usually free with premium subscriptions to video platforms, but require guidelines such as knowing when/how to turn them on.
    - Pros: work well for many audiences, e.g.. those who prefer to read along for attention/hearing/cognition reasons, non-native English speakers, people with poor internet connections, etc.

- Cons: Not a replacement for Live Captioning for deaf/hard of hearing audiences. Does not distinguish between speakers; performs poorly for speakers with non-standard English accents, for non-English names, and using technical terms.

Flexibility: The proposal includes approaches that will be **fixed** (such as online broadcasting of Plenary talks) as well as **flexible** (on-demand captioning or options for virtual presentation) given that access needs are often unpredictable and may need to change after schedules are set due to participants' individual travel and health calculations, especially given increased global variation in approaches to COVID protections.

Other Access protocols – include planning processes such as clear communication of access services, enhanced signage and site information, guidelines for panels, extra time built-in to conference scheduling, and more.

1. Online / In-person / Hybrid options

Recognizing the benefits of virtual programming for multiple audiences (people with disabilities/health concerns in a pandemic, scholars with limited or no institutional funding, international travel barriers), SHOT should maintain *some* online options for all conferences.

Approaches may include:
A. **Fully hybrid key events** such as keynotes, plenaries, select/sponsored panels, planned/announced in advance
   - "Fully hybrid" = live online broadcasting with on-camera or text-based audience participation option
   - Generally this is not feasible for the full conference without lots of labor, equipment, and high quality internet to run concurrent virtual sessions. Thus REDI suggests prioritizing hybrid access to featured events/panels
   - Also offers opportunity to make key events publicly available online (live or via a later recording)

B. **On-demand access.** Whether virtual or in-person, always budget for panels or participants to request Live Captioning or ASL services.
   - Process and deadlines must be clear and consistent across communications

C. **Online conference day(s)** – series of panels that are presented and broadcast online
   - Panels indicate an interest in this format at time of application
   - Depending on interest and planning capacity, this could be contiguous with in-person conference days or a period of time before/after (e.g. ASEH online conference 2 weeks after in-person conference)
   - Another option is biennial fully online conferences / biennial in-person (but would still need virtual options)

D. Flexibility in panel participation
- o Panels have the option to have up to 50% of presenters online (pre-recorded video is likely best for this)
- o individual panels could opt for more hybrid engagement if comfortable

E. Access protocols for all programming
- o All virtual programming should have a clearly identified approach to access. Examples: Automatic captioning available in all online programming, with Live Captioning or ASL available by request; all sessions recorded and available for a given time period after the conference
- o Communications should be clear about what form of access will be available at all events (example: labels/color codes on the conference schedule; reduces need to ask about each panel's format)
- o Registration includes access requests (not via extra/additional forms) for captioning, ASL, image description, talk scripts, etc. Clear protocols for who will respond to/track these requests.

2. Conference Access Commitments & Resources

A. Conference Content
- a. CFPs include disability-related examples for annual themes
- b. SHOT diversity statements include disability-inclusive language

B. (Future) Conference Organizing Plans
- a. Local Organizing Committee (LOC) must provide access plan (ability to respond to onsite, virtual access requests; availability of accessible venues)
- b. LOC provides onsite access coordinator (SHOT might assist with support/budget – need to clarify what this would be like)
- c. LOC coordinates with venues to assure accessibility to main venues, options for rooms, dining, etc
- d. Conference info includes key contacts: accessibility coordinator for conference, accessibility contacts from venue, local disability orgs/vendors
- e. Communications include access info for virtual and in-person events

C. Access Request Process
- a. CFP includes information about access availability & timelines
- b. Clear process of request (options, timeline) after panel acceptance
- c. Registration includes access requests for all attendees

D. Conference Access Budget – All conferences should include funds for access services/staff. See samples attached.

SAMPLE ACCESS BUDGETS for SHOT NOLA 2022 - samples
Note: budgets assume that SHOT already has reliable wi-fi & basic conference tech support.
Conference committees should explore access options/contacts with onsite venue and online
platform.

Budget: $10K
Deliverable: *A few* hybrid sessions of synchronous conference
On-demand CART or ASL for onsite program
+ 1 day all-online conference program (e.g. 1 day before, 1 day after, or 1 week after)
Access supplies & support on demand

Category	Item	Cost
Live Captioning	Opening Plenary (2hrs)	$400
Live Captioning	3 Plenary/starred sessions (90 min ea)	$900
Live Captioning	On-demand (up to 5 panels)	$1500
Live Captioning	Full Day – 8 2-hour sessions x 2 concurrent tracks	$3200
Staff	2 Access coordinators (4 days @ $250/day)	$2000
Tech Support	Conference platform add-ons (**not sure of the cost of this)	$1500
Supplies	Cords/dongles	$200
Supplies	USB microphones (3)	$300
Supplies	Misc (signage, etc)	$200

Budget level: $6K
Deliverable: *A few* hybrid sessions of synchronous conference
On-demand CART or ASL for onsite program
Access supplies & support on demand

Category	Item	Cost
CART Captioning	Opening Plenary (2hrs)	$400
CART Captioning	3 Plenary/starred sessions (90 min ea)	$900
CART Captioning	On-demand (up to 5 panels)	$1500
Staff	2 Access coordinators (3 days @ $250/day)	$1500
Tech Support	Conference platform add-ons (**not sure of the cost of this)	$1000

Supplies	Cords/dongles	$200
Supplies	USB microphones (3)	$300
Supplies	Misc (signage, etc)	$200