



Throughout the year, the Annual General Meeting (AGM) Program Committee receives comments and questions from members regarding conference planning. Here are some frequently asked questions, offering a behind-the-scenes look at how AGM planning decisions are made.



The Amnesty International USA Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place at the Renaissance Madison Hotel, April 19–21, 2002 in Seattle, Washington

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For updated information regarding AGM speakers, programming, preparatory documents and logistics, visit our web site at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/events/agm2002/>

What is the AGM Program Committee and its role?

The AGM is organized by a committee of activist members from each region, the National Resolutions Committee Chairperson, program advisors from volunteer leadership, local activists, and staff. Its work is supported by the Board Chair (the committee's Board Liaison) and members of the National Campus Advisory Committee. Members serve a two-year term; they select and develop AGM programming, channel views and ideas from regional members, work to promote the AGM, coordinate volunteers, and provide on-site support. The AGM Program Committee can be contacted at aiusa-agm@aiusa.org or through the AGM Program Office.

What are you doing to make the AGM inexpensive for participants?

Keeping attendee costs down has always been one of our primary concerns. Over the past several years, AGM conference registration fees have been kept level to keep overall costs low for participants. These fees do not begin to cover the basic costs of the conference (including printed materials, continental breakfasts, receptions, and coffee breaks—all free to registered guests), but instead supplement the Board approved AGM budget. The committee has worked with the Board to increase travel subsidies to the conference, now available through regional offices. Because the AGM Program Committee recognizes that travel alone can be a considerable expense for conference attendees, we make a special effort to find safe alternative housing which is more affordable than the AGM site and within walking distance. We also work with students at local universities to find free guest housing. Please contact AGM Assistant Rohini Verma (rverma@aiusa.org) for these special alternative housing options.

Why aren't AGM's held at university campuses rather than at hotels (to keep costs down)?

Over the past several years, the AGM has grown to 700-800 participants. Finding a venue large enough to accommodate groups our size is a complex task. Unfortunately, meetings of any scale are getting increasingly more expensive as a result of the growing convention market. Our best strategy is to survey the advancing costs of conference venues and look for situations that best meet the combined requirements of size, accessibility, diversity, and economy that also take into account the need to provide adequate physical, cultural, and organizational interaction with the host city. We seriously consider universities and municipal auditoriums among our many options. We've found that these venues often cannot provide the right combination of sufficient housing; meeting space (close to each other in proximity and equipped for meetings of various sizes and technical requirements); access to public web, fax, and meeting services; and value necessary for an AGM. Universities often charge for meeting space while hotels will usually offer meeting space at no cost for conferences that occupy a sufficient percentage of their guest rooms. In addition, it is

extremely difficult to find enough guest rooms on campus to accommodate such a large conference. The shifting of the AGM to April following the 1995 Board review of regional conference/AGM structures has pre-empted the use of most campuses that are still in session with dormitories occupied by students and faculty. Ground transportation costs often run higher when the campus or hotel is not on airport shuttle routes or if they lie outside the city and public transportation routes. With regard to catering, hotels and now even campuses do not permit food to be brought from outside the facility, requiring us to use their services. Another obstacle encountered on some campuses is the issue of accessibility to people with disabilities (a problem at the AGM campus site in Denton, Texas). All hotels selected for AGM's are equipped in compliance to disability access standards. Finally, many colleges and university campuses have entered the competitive conference planning market and are now recognizing hosting conferences as opportunities for fundraising. In short, campus sites have not been ruled out, but are subject to the same rigorous guidelines that any potential venue for the AGM requires. The AGM Program Committee negotiates with several types of vendors to secure sites that are best suited for holding efficient conferences, affordable for members, in prime locations (accessible to transportation, downtown attractions, and lower-priced accommodations) and good value for the organization. We look for meeting venues with the best overall rates and make a priority to find affordable lodging for all AGM participants.

How do you choose the geographic location of the conference?

The location of each AGM is chosen 2–3 years in advance, moving back and forth geographically across the United States. This allows us to bring human rights awareness to different parts of the country, recruit new members, support old and new community groups, address regional human rights issues, and vary the cost for travel for AGM attendees. We look for sites with reasonable rates, sufficient accommodations for both the conference events and attendees, and interesting local culture and opportunities for activism. After extensive site visits are conducted, the options are reviewed the AGM Program Committee. Once the Committee makes a decision, their choice is approved by the AIUSA Board of Directors and the locations are publicized.

How is AGM Program Committee diverse?

The AGM Program Committee is composed of activists from diverse communities and fields within AI committed to developing a meaningful and effective meeting for our activists.

Our diversity is represented in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, financial status, geographic location, and Amnesty roles. Committee members have participated in a wide range of AI leadership positions. Positions include: Area, Student Area, Local and Campus group coordinators, trainers for the Campaign to Stop Torture and Mandate Review, Ralph Bunch Fellow, the Board of Directors, Co-Group Members, and member of the Strategic Planning Committee member.

How do you choose the focus of the conference?

The AGM Program Committee selects a conference focus during its planning before the start of each planning cycle. The committee consults members and staff to develop key human rights issues that are of current concern to the international AI movement and the national priorities of AIUSA. Ideally, the conference focus should be relevant to Amnesty members and programs while addressing concerns that are compelling to partner communities outside AI. The focus selected by the committee is reviewed by the AIUSA Board of Directors before further development. Contact the AGM Program Committee if you have a focus you would like to see addressed at future AGM conferences.

How are panels and speakers chosen?

Each year the AGM Program Committee requests members and staff to submit ideas for AGM panels and speakers via the Monthly Mailing and on AIUSA email bursts. This year, AGM programming questionnaires were also available at regional conferences. Suggestions are compiled and the committee evaluates each suggestion based on its timeliness, relevancy to the conference focus or current AI priorities, benefit to continued activism, and resources necessary for production. The committee then ranks panels and speakers and makes recommendations that are reviewed and approved by the Board.

How are subsidies decided?

The AGM Program Committee and Board emphasize the need to make subsidies available to participants that are most in need of financial support. Our goal is to make the conference affordable for as many people as possible. Recognizing that Seattle is a great distance for many potential conference attendees to travel, the Board increased funding for subsidies to this year's conference. We looked closely at who received subsidy criteria at past conferences and revised the process for subsidy dispersion to better reflect the make-up of conference attendees. Requests for subsidy applications should be made to regional offices.