CONSIDERATIONS TO PROMOTE SAFETY FOR GUEST SPEAKERS FROM MARGINALIZED BACKGROUNDS

Individuals from all backgrounds, but especially those representing marginalized populations, who travel to speaking engagements in different regions of the state, the country, or the world have the potential to face risks that warrant consideration. Conference organizers are encouraged to be aware of any local concerns that could impact the safety or comfort of the speaker and should take proactive measures. Some possible situations could include:

- The speaker is talking about a controversial topic or a topic that has been receiving much attention in the news, school board meetings, or legislature.
- The speaker belongs to a minoritized/marginalized group.
- The speaker is arriving in the late evening.
- There is a long drive to the conference site (such as in rural areas).
- The conference is located in an area associated with crime.
- There is a presence or history of hostile groups (such as protests, signage, recent turmoil, or threats) at the conference site.
- The selected conference site is associated with past violence (e.g., a former plantation or site of institutionalization).

By assessing and planning for potential risks, host organizations can contribute to the invited speaker’s sense of security, helping them to feel supported and welcome. The recommendations offered below are not designed to be exhaustive, but they offer a starting point for organizations to consider their speaker’s individual needs, preferences, and safety. Speakers and host organizations may wish to establish a contract that addresses potential concerns and how they will be addressed or resolved.

Topics for Discussion Between the Speaker and the Host Before Establishing a Contract

- Discuss the specifics of the presentation itself:
  - Goals, rationale, and overview of the need for the presentation
  - Demographics of attendees and whether their attendance is voluntary or mandatory
  - Noteworthy matters related to the topic of presentation and social climate, both in the host organization and in the area where the conference is being held (see further considerations below).
  - How the presentation will be marketed, such as
    - the speaker’s preferences or needs for advertising their work, and
    - any potential unwanted or harmful attention this might draw to the presenter.
- Consider the cultural and historical context of the event location, and share relevant information with the speaker.
• It may be beneficial to have someone from the immediate area in which the conference is being held involved in conference planning to provide insight on issues relevant to the local community. Consider:
  ▪ Distressing or alarming factors, such as the presence of Confederate flags on travel routes or the conference being held in an area with a history of sundown towns.
  ▪ Information about locations of significant cultural importance or pride, such as areas sacred to Indigenous communities or places associated with important Civil Rights achievements.
• Plan for and agree on who will be the points of contact for the speaker and what their level of involvement will be before, during, and after the visit.
  ▪ Take steps to ensure that the point of contact is someone the speaker feels they can communicate openly with about their concerns.
  ▪ Consider issues that this point person will be responsible for
    o before arrival (e.g., troubleshooting transportation disruptions),
    o during the visit (e.g., when and where they will meet and whether they will accompany the speaker throughout the day), and
    o after departure (e.g., following up to ensure the speaker arrived home safely and handling logistics related to payment and invoices).
  ▪ Consider procedures for making the speaker feel welcome, answering questions, providing orientation and scheduling information, making introductions, and assisting with any issues.
  ▪ Establish the best mode of communication to contact the individual and whether there is a backup emergency contact.
  ▪ Organizational leaders may also wish to have the name and contact information of an emergency contact for the speaker.
• Develop and discuss an itinerary with the speaker, and provide a final copy prior to their arrival.
  ▪ Discuss and plan any other expectations, such as meeting with organization leadership, graduate students, or local dignitaries.
  ▪ Regarding meals: Discuss and communicate with the speaker about their dietary needs and restrictions, meals that are planned for them while visiting, and who will be joining them during meals.
  ▪ Regarding accessibility: Discuss and communicate with the speaker about whether a service pet, mobility limitations, augmentative communication needs (such as ASL or closed captioning), or other considerations impact their entry into and navigation of meeting spaces/events, and how to appropriately accommodate such needs.
  ▪ Clarify and communicate to the speaker when they should arrive at the presentation site or when they will be picked up (depending on event location and speaker’s travel preferences) and who will meet them (including names and titles of organization leaders and event sponsors). If needed, clarify the time of the AV check.
- Consider factors that might contribute to the speaker’s comfort upon arrival, such as providing water and a snack, and scheduling enough time to get checked into the hotel before scheduled activities begin.
- Clarify, communicate, and maintain the time and length of scheduled breaks throughout the event.

**Speaker Safety**

The safety and comfort of speakers are paramount, especially if the speaker is traveling away from home. Any time a speaker is uncomfortable with a request or arrangement by a hosting organization, they should share their concerns. There are often ways to be flexible about a priori approvals of presentation content, protecting a speaker’s intellectual work, transportation, and scheduling. Experienced presenters recommend that speakers carefully review the contract before signing, to ensure their comfort with all requirements. This can also be a good time for the speaker to advocate for their needs. If something or someone is making them uncomfortable, if they are concerned for their safety, or if they believe they are being treated unfairly, the speaker should contact the sponsoring organization representative immediately.

Developed by the Trainers of School Psychologists Social Justice Committee, the NASP Professional Growth Committee, and the NASP Social Justice Committee.