

Concerns and explanatory information about LASA

by Milagros Pereyra, Executive Director of LASA, and Gerardo Otero, President of LASA

In response to several concerns expressed by the membership in different media about the organization of the congresses, costs, membership, administrative and financial management of LASA, we would like to explain the following points.

CONCERN	EXPLANATORY INFORMATION
<p>It is possible to hold the congress in mid-sized cities (e.g., Columbus, Detroit, Richmond, Raleigh, etc.); it would be less expensive.</p>	<p>Medium-sized cities do not have sufficient infrastructure (e.g., number of meeting rooms) for a congress of the size of the LASA congresses.</p>
<p>In the sections many people think that the congresses should be in the universities, which is the Latin American and European model. Many people are impressed by the luxury of LASA and the hotels.</p>	<p>LASA has 3 congress models: 1) hotel, 2) university, 3) convention center.</p> <p>The congress venues are selected depending on the infrastructure of each city. In most Latin American cities, for example, we must opt for the university or convention center model. But there are other costs such as transportation, personnel, use of classrooms, etc.</p> <p>The “hotel” model is generally used in the United States and Canada because of the benefits they offer: they are huge yet luxurious and provide free meeting rooms. Result: it is much cheaper to hold the LASA congress in a huge hotel in the USA or Canada.</p>
<p>LASA has money.</p>	<p>LASA has an endowment fund for the use of travel grants and to support special projects (LASA-Ford Special Projects), as well as a reserve equivalent to 1 year’s worth of budget (required by U.S. tax law –the country in which LASA was founded– and therefore operates under those parameters) to be used in case of emergency or to cover losses. Detailed information on LASA’s finances can be read here. LASA’s financial statements can be found here.</p> <p>In short, LASA has its backup fund, but it is tied up for legally specific uses. Without the congressional registration and membership income, LASA would have to cease to exist.</p>

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<p>LASA seeks and makes a profit. Where does it stay? Who benefits? LASA operates more as an academic enterprise than as a nonprofit association.</p>	<p>Membership and registration revenues are used to defray the expenses of the congress and its operations.</p> <p>LASA is a nonprofit organization operating as such under the laws of the United States (501c3).</p>
<p>LASA is increasingly unequal. That of those who will be able to travel in person and have money, and that of those who will have to stay or “make do” with the virtual. Therefore, those who will attend only the virtual should pay less because otherwise, “on top of that”, they are subsidizing those who attend in person – which increases inequality (i.e., it favors those who live in the U.S., have access to vaccines, funds or financing for academic travel, etc.).</p>	<p>The cost of implementing a hybrid congress (in person and virtual at the same time) is higher than a congress only in person. That is, having a congress of 6,000 people in person is cheaper than having 3,000 participants in person and 3,000 in virtual mode. However, LASA considers that the virtual mode allows the inclusion of members who for different reasons cannot attend in person.</p> <p>The biggest cost item is the audio-visual equipment and internet required to facilitate remote virtual participation. LASA tries to balance the cost so that it is equitable for those who can participate in person and for those who participate remotely, who will have the opportunity to access virtually everything the congress has to offer –except the social activities.</p>
<p>There are two (or three) LASAs. That of academics funded by institutions and that of students, non-funded researchers, etc.</p>	<p>LASA is diverse by nature and that is one of the aspects that makes LASA a very valuable organization for academics, students, and researchers without academic affiliation. LASA is one of the few associations that offers travel grants precisely to help non-funded researchers.</p>
<p>LASA is funded by the U.S. (U.S. government). The Executive Committee (or LASA management, or both) is funded by the U.S. government.</p>	<p>Neither LASA nor the Executive Council members and management receive any government funding. LASA is self-sustaining and relies primarily on its income from membership (35%), congress (52%), and other (13%). LASA occasionally receives untied funding (grants) from private foundations or government. Elected members of the Executive Council receive no compensation for their service. They pay membership and congress registration fees in addition to making voluntary donations like any other LASA member. The officers of the LASA Secretariat receive an annual salary and benefits as LASA employees (8 full-time and 6 part-time). Their compensation is competitive and consistent with the market.</p>

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<p>More congresses should be held in Latin America. Besides, it would be cheaper than in the U.S. (and visa problems would be avoided). This comment was heard very acutely during the congresses held in Boston and Chicago.</p>	<p>Congresses in Latin America tend to be much more expensive than in the United States. One of the main reasons is the cost of meeting space, which in the U.S. is provided free of charge in hotels, while in Latin America it is very expensive. In addition, there is the additional cost of transportation from the hotels to the university and/or the convention center that must be considered. In any case, LASA tries to meet in Latin America at least every 2-3 years despite the economic difficulty that this represents.</p>
<p>LASA does not care about young people, students, researchers who cannot pay, or researchers from countries that cannot pay.</p>	<p>LASA has implemented for some years now a dual-subsidy membership price scale: by salary and by country of residence of the researcher. Also, since 2020, LASA has been implementing progressive rates for its congress to make it more accessible and inclusive, and most of its travel grants are received by graduate students.</p>
<p>With this crisis and inequality in the region, LASA “is going to become more and more elite”. We are “going to go back to the elite era”.</p>	<p>Both universities and professional associations are part of the elites in every country, but that is not something LASA has produced. LASA simply reflects the broader society. However, the proportion of its membership based in the United States has changed significantly from 65% to 36%. This seems to indicate that LASA’s efforts to integrate members from outside the United States are proving to be successful.</p>

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<p>English speakers have more advantages in LASA than non-English speakers (there is a lot of sensitivity to the slightest document or message that is written only in English).</p>	<p>The LASA website is published in 4 languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Portuguese). All communications sent to members are produced in at least two languages (English and Spanish). When requested by a member, translations into Portuguese and French are prepared.</p>
<p>The decision-makers at LASA are white, non-indigenous, elderly.</p>	<p>The Executive Council is elected by the membership based on nominations received from the membership. Currently, LASA's president is originally from Mexico, and the previous presidents are from Ecuador and Colombia. In addition, the average age of the Executive Council members has changed significantly and, unlike previous years, the average age is 55.</p>
<p>Is it possible to hold the congress in more accessible and less expensive places? Perhaps think of places where lodging, food and transportation are cheaper. This was a serious problem in the case of the congress in Boston, and I imagine it will be a problem in San Francisco as well.</p>	<p>It is possible when the necessary meeting space is available. But the less expensive venues are far from being able to host a LASA congress. On the other hand, some venues such as Las Vegas and Orlando are less expensive and have enough space for a LASA. But according to the survey conducted in 2004 after the Las Vegas congress, most did not like the atmosphere and some gave up on LASA. Moreover, there were 25% more Latin Americans in Barcelona than in Lima, which means that people choose attractive cities and do not necessarily favor Latin America.</p>
<p>Why is it necessary to pay for membership before the panel is approved? I understand that this was established to make sure that people "make it" to the congress, but for many people this is a problem (paying a long time before the congress with no assurance that the panel will be accepted or that one will be able to travel).</p>	<p>The program committee provides a voluntary evaluation service to LASA members. Membership is required at the time of submitting the proposal because its processing involves administrative costs. The congress registration fee covers the costs of the congress itself and partially covers the general operating costs that allow the pre-organization of the congress.</p>

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<p>What are the benefits of LASA membership? This question is vital in a world with so many organizations and congresses. With so much access to information, it is important to better explain these benefits. Many people don't see LASA beyond the congress, but membership is annual.</p>	<p>The benefits of LASA membership can be read here. This page is being revised and will soon have additional information to better explain the benefits. Briefly, benefits include: access to scholarly resources (e.g., Project Muse, congress proceedings, Latin America Research Commons, monthly journal, etc.); savings with member discounts (e.g., reduced congress registration fees, discounted hotel and airfare to attend the congress, discounts to obtain other scholarly journals, ability to apply for travel grants and scholarships); professional development (e.g., access to LASA's online directory of members, collaboration with academics in more than 40 sections, access to job listings, etc.); visibility (e.g., participation in LASA's governance, section leadership, or membership on award committees, etc.)</p>
<p>Is it possible, in the long term, to rethink the LASA congress? Is the system we have viable?</p>	<p>It is possible and an attempt is being made to rethink LASA and the LASA congress by a commission in charge of its strategic plan. Adopting the hybrid model is one of the most important changes. The most recent strategic plan can be read here.</p>

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