



**Feedback & Suggestions**  
**from attendees of the**  
**YAPC::NA 2011 Perl Conference**

# 1 Introduction

This document includes many fragments from comments that were received from attendees of the YAPC::NA 2011 Perl Conference during a survey taken after the conference had completed. Each survey provided the attendee with the ability to provide suggestions for future events and feedback on the 2011 event.

It should be borne in mind while reading this report, that everyone's time and effort in putting on the conference was given freely. All the organisers have full time jobs and we are fortunate enough that they have partners and family who were willing to put up with losing them for several days and nights over the previous year, while they organised the conference for the benefit of the Perl community. A big thank you to everyone involved.

## 2 Suggestions and Feedback

### 2.1 Rating the Conference

#### Would you like to expand on any strong views?

- A lot of people drove to attend, which was made possible by Asheville's nicely central location.
- A lot of the talks that were most interesting to me were all bunched together on Tuesday, and I had to miss about half of them. On other days, there were stretches where there were only mildly interesting talks. That might just be me though.
- As a manager for a company sending a whole team, it would have been MUCH better if I could have somehow paid for my whole team in one go.
- Best conference dinner ever! ( Ohio kinda sucked as I'm a vegetarian and got stuck eating loads of couscous! )
- Better communication via the wiki would have been appreciated. I missed the ad-hoc Sunday welcome dinner which was only announced on the discussion list.
- Didn't really know many BOFs or Social Events were happening. Felt a bit disconnected compared to previous conferences. Also the web site has a bug for very old users who have to reset their password to log in.
- Gee am I ever sick of web framework talks! They're much of a muchness, and I don't care whose is biggest. Data manipulation, distributed systems, useful utilities, yes. Enough with the survey talks about stupid web frameworks, etc. If next year is YAWFC, I won't be coming.
- Having this conference at a self-contained hotel complex meant that housing costs were much higher than at other YAPCs. The lack of a dormitory option excluded a number of attendees whose income is only at the student level. It has always been a hallmark of YAPC that it be priced at a level accessible to students. The conference itself was, but not the housing.
- I enjoyed the venue a lot. It was nice to stay in a "resort" type atmosphere that seemed to be almost complete used by YAPC. The lap swimming pool was also nice.
- I felt the positivity movement that Larry started w/ And Matt (sort of) ended with is very important for the community.
- I really had a fantastic time. This was my first YAPC and I'll definitely be attending more of them in the future.
- It was a mistake not to provide snacks. Organizers were a bit unorganized. Schedules needed to be more available. Speaker water should have been provided. VIP event needed better organization.
- It would be neat if you could email us a detailed itinerary for events like the dinner the night before. My coworker knew where it was, but I didn't.
- It would have been nice if maybe there was a map of the venue included on the site that could be viewed before the event. That way it could be reviewed beforehand to help reduce that initial "Oh crap, where do I go?" feeling during the first few days.
- It would have been nice if the hotel was more within walking distance of restaurants and shops. But as the hotel was providing breakfast and had a restaurant, it wasn't too onerous.
- Listing breakfast on the schedule, then not including breakfast was confusing. Since work is paying, I didn't really care the breakfast was not included. Wireless internet was inadequate.
- Meeting people, coffee breaks and some good talks are enough for me.
- More social opportunities please. This means: - Better food (any food!) and drinks between sessions giving people an excuse to mingle. - Some social event every night of the conference (the "newbie" thing ended early).

- Not documenting that Breakfast was not covered was unacceptable. Not having something to snack on or to drink (other than coffee/tea) was not cool.
- Registration for YAPC is a big pain. Lots of steps and not totally intuitive. Should be much, much easier especially for a conference of programmers to have a better online registration system.
- Schedule: While a 10 AM start is better than an 8 AM start some other conferences experienced with, I think this was pushing it too far. Considering that the venue was in the hotel most attendees stayed at, a 9 AM start would have been better, IMO.  
Food service: The range of restaurants reachable by foot was quite limiting - specially since lunch wasn't provided, nor an option in the hotel. Many attendees will not have access to cars during the conference - this should be something to consider by the venue committee.  
Social Events: 1) The absence of a speakers party at the last day of the conference was remarkable; a break with tradition. I think a speakers party is important - specially for new or beginning speakers. We throw a VIP reception for newcomers, just for showing up, but we don't do anything for new speakers? That doesn't feel right. 2) The auction. Please, do something about it. It's boring. Even my coworker, who attended her first YAPC, and participated in the first half of the auction felt it to be incredibly boring. It robs the dinner attendees from the most important aspect: socializing.
- SNACKS
- Some assistance organizing outside-the-hotel food would have been nice.
- The 2011 venue was utterly fantastic
- The 2011 YAPC::NA website worked fine and did everything it needed to. The provision of a wiki was very nice. The interface and navigation, however, felt slightly clunky -- I found I had to hunt about a bit to locate where things were. Overall, 8.5 of 10.
- The lack of provided food, that the buffet for breakfast was not provided, was very disappointing.
- The one big minus - the conference was completely unwalkable. Not having a rental car was inconvenient at this one, and it'd probably be good to point that out in advance. (Madison looks, by contrast, very walkable.)
- While the venue location was rather hospitable, I missed the campus/walkability to eats/action. Once I realized there was a \$5 shuttlebus to town it did help.

## 2.2 Feedback

### For the Asheville organisers

Do you have any feedback you would like to give specifically to this year's organisers?

- A huge "thank you" for your time and dedication. You made this YAPC a very pleasurable experience.
- Best staff shirt ever!
- Coffee service was bad. Too late, no milk.
- Excellent job, just excellent.
- Good job all around!
- Great job Chris and Mark!
- Great job overall. Having schedules on the doors were nice, and I wish it was done on the first day. Also, announcing how to get on the wireless for those of us not staying at the hotel would've been nice.
- Great job thank you for your hard work.
- Great job! Much easier for even a shy introvert like me to meet people than at any OSCON I've been to.
- Great job. Asheville was an awesome city to visit, which was a huge plus for the conference

- overall.
- I felt like I wasn't getting enough information about the accommodations (availability of rooms) until only about a month or so before the conference. I was spoiled with the low cost of the dorms and the convenience of last year's YAPC::NA (Columbus, OH at OSU). An example was the shuttle that Heath had set up from the Columbus airport to take incoming attendees to the dorms.
  - I liked the staff t-shirt. The staff should get something that's cool and specifically for them :)
  - I've been to other non-perl conferences and YAPC was on par with the best of them. Great job to everyone involved.
  - It was all great! Everyone I talked to had nothing but great things to say, and loved the conference! Thank you!
  - It was great, thank you very much.
  - Job well done. About the only negative was the "disconnectedness" of the venue from the rest of the city. However, as a resort there wasn't much need.
  - Nice work guys!
  - Overall, good job. Biggest gripe would be the talk scheduling -- would have liked things to be organized in topic tracks more. That's a personal preference though, and maybe not the most popular way to do it...
  - Seemed to be a well balanced lecture series. Really enjoyed it.
  - Thank you for your hard work! Despite the inevitable glitches, it was a great conference, and you should be proud that you pulled it off.
  - Thanks for all your efforts. It was a well run show.
  - Thanks for all your hard work guys!
  - Thanks! The first day's schedule was pretty weak, but the food was really good (I'm a vegetarian and was quite pleased with the dinner buffet). I was pleased that tea was provided alongside coffee and the location, both the city and venue, was a great choice (though I'm not sure how Asheville managed to win, since there doesn't seem to be much of a Perl Mongers organization there). Most of you guys aren't very good auctioneers. You should go to a real auction sometime and see how it's done. Start the bidding lower so that people can feel invested in the outcome; with bids almost universally starting at \$100+ only a few people can even start bidding. It also makes the auction seem slow and stalled to have no bids for 30+ seconds while the auctioneer harangues the audience for more money. A couple of folks independently commented on it to me, and I felt the same way.
  - The amount and quality of talks seemed to be of a lower quality this year over last.
  - The t-shirt design seemed somewhat plain compared to Chicago and Houston, and yet now I'm glad to have a shirt in the bunch for when I want to wear a more modest shirt. :-) I was able to attend because the site was within driving distance (8 hours). I appreciate that there were several credible companies looking for help at the job fair. Perhaps more can be done to encourage companies with postings at jobs.perl.org to attend and discuss their opening(s).

**[editor's note: A great idea for a potential resource for job fair participants]**

- The wireless could have been better. There should have been more of an effort put toward looking for Breakfast or Snack sponsors. The lack of snack food was one of my largest complaints.

**[editor's note: breakfast and snacks can be an expensive addition to what the organisers have already accounted for. They are nice to have if sponsorship is enough to cover them. Getting sponsorship is often extremely hard, particularly within the current economic climate. Note that other conferences do not necessarily offer these and have never suffered because of it]**

- Very well done. Thank you. My first YAPC was a terrific experience. Have been wanting to

- attend one of these for years, and I was not disappointed.
- Wifi was very irregular this year. I know that is a common issue, but it seemed worse this time.
  - Wonderful job. Thanks for a great time!
  - You did a great job!
  - You did great. Thank you.
  - You guys did a great job, thank you. Everything ran on time and ran smoothly. Schedules were widely distributed, easy to find, and, on at least two occasions, physically handed to me. The closest thing to a glitch that I saw the entire time was the batteries on a speaker's mic went dead -- and within ten minutes an organizer was there to replace them and turn "glitch" into "triumph". Go Team Organizers!
  - You guys did a wonderful job and put together an amazing event. I really admired the emphasis that was put on the newcomers and beginners by encouraging them to socialize and network with others. As a newcomer myself (to YAPC, that is), I now have such a renewed sense of confidence and I feel honoured to be a part of such a special group of people.
  - You guys did an awesome job! Even the mic mistake for my talk was awesome ... hehe.
  - You seem to have done a great job, thank you for the awesome conference!!
  - ZOMG AWESOME CONFERENCE

## For future organisers

Do you have any suggestions for improvement (please give examples where possible)?

- 1) The absence of a speakers party at the last day of the conference was remarkable; a break with tradition. I think a speakers party is important - specially for new or beginning speakers. We throw a VIP reception for newcomers, just for showing up, but we don't do anything for new speakers? That doesn't feel right.

**[editor's note: A speakers party is typically only something organised if time, venue and funding are available. As a speaker you are already getting some exposure for yourself and/or your project, and free entry to the conference. Demanding a speakers party as well seems a little ungrateful.]**

- 2) The auction. Please, do something about it. It's boring. Even my coworker, who attended her first YAPC, and participated in the first half of the auction felt it to be incredibly boring. It robs the dinner attendees from the most important aspect: socializing. See also Ricardo's recent blog post.
- Beer pubs within walking distance.
- Better wi-fi.
- Continue to take notes from past organizers and don't forget to breathe!
- Double-check that scheduled speakers have arrived and registered, and re-schedule their events if they don't make it. Provide as many power-strips for laptops as humanly possible. I would be willing to pay for sodas (including diet) as an alternative to coffee. Consider switching to a silent auction rather than interrupting the banquet for the auction. Include directions to off-site lunch locations in the conference package.
- fr33 b33r!
- Hold conference in less isolated area.
- I believe that YAPC really belongs with the students. Not only is YAPC for the "regulars" but it is also a grass roots effort to try and bring in a younger audience.
- I can imagine how difficult it must be to organize something like YAPC. My only suggestion would be to communicate better with prospective attendees. This basically means

posting to the YAPC mailing list(s) more often and updating the front page of the ACT-powered site with current information. On 5/20/2011, I had told organizer Chris Prather: "I'm suddenly finding myself in panic-mode since I've invested in plane tickets, but I've got no where to stay. X( I really hope that I can find a room and roommate by the end of today so that I don't have to stress about it anymore." He did e-mail the list soon after to let everyone know the status of room availability. It all worked out fine in the end.

- I think more social activities would be a good thing. It seems that the people at YAPC enjoy evening activities/eating meals together but no one knows what anyone else is doing. Possibly listing people's contact information on the schedule for impromptu evening activities would help?
- I think that at the auction, some of the participants were maybe a little too aggressive about donating money. Personally, I would have loved to donate - though I felt I played my part with the \$100 entrance fee - but I'm a student with very low funds and some of the organizers made it seem like "you're a bad person and a thief if you don't give us money." Just a little bit. I think there are other ways of encouraging people to give - for instance, offering some sort of advantage to donaters that non-donaters don't get - rather than tugging on their emotions. I also think that maybe there should be a group picture taken that could be purchased for a small < \$10 fee. Maybe we could do something similar to what was done at the auction where we voted for the logo on next year's t-shirt. Instead of the t-shirt logo, we could vote on a quote or phrase that would go on the group picture. If you vote, you get it for free because that means you donated but if you didn't, it costs ~ \$10. \$20 tops. I think that's a great idea.
- I would like to see a schedule with pricing for additional training sooner. In Ohio, I stayed Thursday and Friday for the extra training sessions, which I thought were terrific. I am fortunate to be able to get \$work to pay for this, but I have to know some details in advance to justify it. I did not take any additional training this year as nothing showed up on the web site until quite late.
- I'd like to make the counter-argument that having YAPC at an out-of-the-way place was a draw. I thought the venue was perfect for what was needed.
- It seems the existing documentation on YAPC (<http://tpf.googlecode.com/svn/trunk/yapc/YAPC.pm>) could be enhanced. The current documentation is rather dense, making it very easy to forget things. Usually it is the "small" things forgotten. For example at this YAPC NA, coffee service was not available (until we asked about it), nor were ample power connectors/strips in place. I recommend: 1) ensuring the existing documentation is sufficiently accurate; and 2) creating a checklist that can be used by the organizers to verify they have all the essentials

**[editor's note: the documentation referenced above is now obsolete. Please see the book Perl Jam (<http://perljam.info>) for up-to-date information on how to organise a conference.]**

- It would be a good idea to double-check in the morning that the speakers of all talks for that day checked in. Had we had known that the Dancer talker was not going to show up a few minutes earlier, people could have moved to other talks sooner.
- It would be great if ACT could be improved to allow ad-hoc groups to place their own BOFs on the main schedule, instead of just relying on everyone just \*knowing\* to look on the wiki.
- Keep people together. Well done this year with the beer events.
- Keep up the good work that Dahut.pm has done. They have set a high bar for 2012.
- Look guys, verify your talks before committing to list on the schedule. We're paying for the talks and content of the talk. The socialization and everything else is an added bonus. It's really annoying to enter a talk and then discover the person is a no show. Other than that, everything was awesome.

- Maybe have a list of recommended bars/restaurants for the area.
- Must have lower-cost dormitory options as part of the housing.
- None that I can think of
- Not providing power throughout the halls is a big mistake for a technical conference. Making the hallway outside the lecture halls hospitable for people in between talks, or when sitting a session out, etc. is a great idea. There needs to be a comfortable area to gather and sit \*close\* to the halls. At YAPC::NA 2011, there was one (maybe 2) smaller rooms available for our use, but they were not particularly comfortable, and were at the other end of the facility. That means it isn't convenient to sit in small groups in between talks, etc. without isolating yourself.
- Not sure if this is the place to submit this - but I noticed all the talks were recorded on video - are there plans to make the talks available online so that you can see them again or see ones that you missed?

**[editor's note: Videos will hopefully appear on the Presenting Perl site (<http://presentingperl.org>) in the near future.]**

- Okay, so, everyone evidently grouses about the auction every year. It's a good and useful thing but I think it could benefit from having a single EmCee to keep the event moving forward, cover transitions from item to item, etc.
- Please plan to offer both coffee AND sodas during talk breaks!
- Possibly a bigger job fair? But really everything was great!
- Provide an opportunity for all the attendees in some sort of a hands on workshop (maybe pair programming) 1-1.5 hrs, example: create a workshop each day at some time on a particular subject which is on a particular subject (say event driven ) and there are experts on the subject who interact with the participants and get them started on the topic run small examples. Generally at YAPC's the known people get together and discuss particular topics and newbies and introverts find it difficult to take advantage of this , so by providing some ways of randomly grouping together people the newbies get a chance to interact with the experts and people get more out of YAPC's
- Send out more newsletters to attendees, speakers; especially in the week up to, and during the event. Schedule talks of the same length in the talk slots as much as possible.
- Start & end each day with a plenary session to communicate BOF's and other happenings
- Tea water should not be served in containers that were previously used for coffee. Tea should be served at all times when coffee is served. The air walls between rooms didn't do a good job of blocking sound, which could be distracting.
- The auction just has to go. It's somewhat entertaining, but I'd rather be talking with people than sitting in silence watching people jumping up and down on stage and not learning things. I appreciate the idea of getting everyone together, and I get the money is important but it's BORING. How about this: Silent auction on all items but the one "big item" where there's no physical item (e.g. colour of tshirts.) This is live auctioned at the meal, where people put money into "pots" for the winning suggestion BUT once your money is in the pot you have to pay it if you win or lose. Quick, simple, raises money, brings everyone together. Please provide a lunch plan that keeps people together! Please provide coffee and water at breaks - preferably muffins. Please provide some sort of breakfast! Raise the ticket price if you need to, or get each things sponsored. Please provide water for the speakers. Please have someone running each room (timings, introducing speakers.) Please have someone on hallway patrol (even if they're attending the hallway track) that can make sure people stay quiet directly outside the rooms and the doors are closed.
- The Job Fair and hang-out spaces were isolated from the main venue. Most job vendors had it right---camp in the main drag. But Linode was off by itself and staffed by lonely geeks. It was sad. ¡MOAR COFFEE! "Perl" needs to be on the conference T-Shirts. Pre-conference events should encourage people to disperse into the local population center while wearing

Perl shirts. Word of mouth in Asheville could have brought more locals into the event. Holding conferences where there are no (known) Perl people might be outreach in itself if we can get the message out. Perhaps local advertisement might help.

- This is for all the speakers. I love that the conference is laid back and resembles a class or family reunion, but with a lot more people you actually like. However, the language is over the top and unprofessional. I would like to teach my son Perl when he gets a little older and would consider bringing him to one of these, but not unless we can clean it up and act like adults.
- Try to get the BOF and pre-arrival schedule stuff posted publicly sooner. Not knowing details with confidence until the day of (in this case until a few minutes before time to leave) can present logistical challenges for those of us not staying at the event location.

## Summation

Thank you to all the attendees who completed their surveys. These comments and suggestions have been passed to the organisers, both to the current and next year's hosts. They are also used to help supplement thoughts and suggestions for the book "Perl Jam – how to organise a conference and live to tell the tale" (<http://perljam.info>).

Thank you too, to all the organisers and their staff for putting on the event. Without their efforts the conference wouldn't have taken place.

While there are always common factors that receive complaints within the surveys, it is worth noting that while the organisers may have taken great pains to negotiate sponsorship or technical support, it is sometimes beyond their resources to provide everything that you expect of a conference.

At its heart the conference is about bring people together to discuss a common interest. In our case this is Perl and all the many projects that it has inspired. It is also about bringing new people into the community and providing a supportive and inspirational event to which they will return and/or encourage others to attend. Anything additional that organisers can provide for attendees is a bonus.

If you are interested in running a YAPC::NA event in the future, read the book to get a feel what is involved, talk to previous organisers or read previous proposals online. See if you can possibly organise a small technical event or even a Perl Workshop to give you some experience. If you do submit a proposal to host a future YAPC, don't feel too disheartened if you don't get the chance to host straight away, you can always submit again the following year.