

best practice paper:

# guidelines for organising design conferences

**Icograda. Leading creatively.**

Icograda is the world body for professional communication design. It is a non-profit, non-partisan, member-based network of independent organisations and stakeholders working within the multidisciplinary scope of communication design and expanded media. Founded in 1963, Icograda actively promotes the value of design practice, thinking, education, research and policy, representing more than 200 organisations in 67 countries and regions globally.

As a partner of the International Design Alliance (IDA), Icograda's members believe in interdisciplinary collaboration and the effectiveness of a collective voice to represent the design industry.

**Contact:**

Brenda Sanderson,  
Managing Director  
E: [bsanderson@icograda.org](mailto:bsanderson@icograda.org)  
T: +1 514 448 4949 x 226

.

## Contents

<b>4</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6. Programme and speakers</b>
		6.1	Opening address
<b>5</b>	<b>1. Conference elements</b>	6.2	Keynote address
	1.1 Format and scope	6.3	Opening reception
<b>6</b>	<b>2. Committee roles and responsibilities</b>	6.4	Speaker remuneration
	2.1 Executive Organising Committee	6.5	Speaker invitations
	2.2 Organising Committee	<b>12</b>	6.6 Speaker agreements
<b>7</b>	2.3 PCO	6.7	Technical support
<b>8</b>	<b>3. Financing</b>	6.8	Session chairpersons
	3.1 Core elements	6.9	Cancellations
	3.2 Secondary elements	<b>13</b>	6.10 Speakers schedule and briefing
	3.3 Cashflow projections	6.11	Closing session/reception
<b>8</b>	<b>4. Location and venue</b>	6.12	Programme changes
	4.1 Selection criteria	6.13	Informal proceedings
	4.2 Conference venue	<b>14</b>	<b>7. Conference marketing</b>
<b>9</b>	4.3 Catering	7.1	Conference website
<b>10</b>	4.4 Accommodation	7.2	Conference designer
	4.5 Transportation	<b>14</b>	<b>8. Icograda endorsement</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>5. Registration/public areas</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Addendum 1: Sample project management checklist</b>
	5.1 Registration desk	<b>16</b>	<b>Addendum 2: Sample website</b>
	5.2 Registration package		
	5.3 Message board		

## Introduction

This document is provided as a guideline for design conference organisers to assist in planning events.

There are varied approaches to developing a design conference, which can be a single or multi-faceted event addressing leading themes, thinking and trends.

A conference can be local, regional or international cultural and business event, offering professional development and networking opportunities for designers, entrepreneurs, faculty, researchers, design and visual communication students, journalists, as well as anyone interested in the impact of design and communication on our society, economy and culture.

A conference is a reflection of the Organiser. It is an important channel for how the Organiser is and will be perceived by attendees, partners and the general public.

Meticulous planning and project management are essential for the Organiser to meet its strategic objectives.

These guidelines are intended as a general reference. For specific criteria related to hosting an organising Icograda events, please consult with the Secretariat.

## 1. Conference elements

There are no set rules as to the content of a conference. It will depend on the strategic objective of the Organiser and the theme chosen.

A successful conference will usually combine at least two of the following elements:

- Targeted programming for a specific audience
- Specialised seminars or workshops
- A formal or informal meeting of the Organiser's members
- A media conference
- Design exhibitions
- A design trade fair
- Social events

The conference schedule should be confirmed at least six months in advance, to allow sufficient time for organisation and for the participants to plan their schedules accordingly.

### 1.1 *Format and scope*

The conference may be a single or multi-day format. It can be a new undertaking or build on an established event. It is important to establish whether the conference will have a local, regional or international character.

For a conference to be called “international”, it must include speakers from at least two of these seven regions of the world (North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa, Western Asia, Asia, Oceania.)

For a conference to be called “regional”, it must include speakers from at least three countries of that region.

In support of the conference theme, speakers present topics that may be theoretical or practical, addressing design's role in society and business.

The format of the conference may combine presentations with panel sessions and should include the opportunity for audience interaction through question and answer or workshop formats.

Education conferences normally incorporate invited presentations, peer-reviewed papers advancing international design education dialogue and best practices, and student workshops.

While most conferences take place as face-to-face meetings, with technology available, it is possible to organise a conference in a virtual environment today, where speakers and attendees interact through the Internet. In general, these guidelines will apply to both types of conferences.

## 2. Committee roles and responsibilities

Organising a conference is a significant undertaking. Clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities is crucial for successful collaboration between all entities involved. It is recommended that there is a clear distinction between honorary roles and working positions related to the conference from the outset of planning.

An Organising Committee should be established first. Committee members usually volunteer their time and expertise. This committee will determine whether organising the conference should be supported by contracting a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO). The professional project management skills and industry experience of a PCO are recommended unless the Organiser has event management staff to oversee the conference.

If the conference is a large event, it is recommended to break up the responsibilities of the Organising Committee into several working committees. These typically include a programme committee, finance and sponsorship committee, marketing committee, social committee.

When the conference includes more than three elements, an Executive Organising Committee (EOC) is recommended, in addition to the Organising Committee and PCO. The EOC is responsible for coordination between the Organising Committee and the PCO on all operational matters, oversees and approves all actions, in addition to the responsibilities outlined below.

### 2.1 *Executive Organising Committee*

- Overall project management
- Coordinating the Organising Committee and PCO activities
- Relationships with government stakeholders and collaborating institutions
- Budget development and fundraising (ie: corporate partnerships and securing government financial assistance)
- Theme, programme, and speaker approvals
- Approval of visual identity and all marketing materials

### 2.2 *Organising Committee*

- Theme and programme development
- Identifying speakers and issuing invitations
- Budget management
- Development of sponsorship database
- Marketing and communications, including media partnerships
- Visual identity and development of all marketing materials
- Exhibition organisation and management

- Social event organisation and management
- Event logistics
- Registration and relationship with delegates
- Managing relationships with sponsors and trade fair exhibitors
- Negotiations with and contracting the venues and hotels
- On-site logistics management

### 2.3 PCO

Although the scope of services may vary, these roles and responsibilities are frequently assigned to a contracted PCO:

- Budget management
- Development of sponsorship database
- Securing corporate sponsors
- Negotiations with and contracting the venues and hotels
- Managing relationships with sponsors and trade fair exhibitors
- Registration and relationship with delegates
- On-site logistics management

### 3. Financing

Budget development and financial management are key to planning a conference. The overall budget can be broken up into two components.

#### 3.1 Core elements

Budget for the essential elements of the conference, such as the main conference, members' meeting, trade fair etc., managed by Organising Committee and approved by the EOC.

These elements are usually financed based on the anticipated delegate revenues, corporate sponsorship and trade fair revenue.

#### 3.2 Secondary elements

Elements such as exhibitions and social events that will be executed only if the necessary funds can be secured for their costs.

Secondary elements are frequently separately ticketed from the core conference elements in order to identify the revenue generated to finance their organisation.

#### 3.3 Cashflow projections

In addition to a detailed budget, a cashflow projection should be developed, with revenue sources and expenses indicated over the project timeline.

### 4. Location and conference venue

Care should be given to choosing a conference location and venue.

A conventions centre, public or private auditorium, or education institution may all be appropriate depending on your targeted audience.

#### 4.1 Selection criteria

Consideration should be given to these criteria:

- International airport access,
- Good air, sea, rail and road connections,
- Standard of conference facilities,
- Range of accommodations (ie. hotels, guesthouses, hostels)
- Cultural interest and scenic beauty
- Security and political stability
- Health services and access to medical care
- Entertainment

## 4.2 *Conference venue*

### 4.2.1. *Seating arrangements*

Theatre style seating is preferred by most conference delegates.

Working sessions and seminars may be arranged around conference tables.

### 4.2.2. *Microphones*

Where conference facilities are not available with microphones in front of each delegate, a number should be strategically placed throughout the audience or be made available by attendants. Alternatively written questions could be submitted, which has the benefit of allowing session chairpersons the opportunity to select a variety of relevant questions from the audience.

### 4.2.3 *Internet access*

Venues with the Internet access (ideally wireless) are preferred.

### 4.2.4 *Translation*

If the conference is regional or international, appropriate simultaneous interpretation should be provided for all main sessions, where this facility is practical and where there is a group of over 100 delegates in a particular language requesting translation.

## 4.3 *Catering*

### 4.3.1 *Lunches*

Lunch should be arranged at the conference venue or no further than a 5-10 minute walk from the location.

Buffets or lunch boxes with a variety of choices allow for vegetarian and other dietary considerations, as well as samples of local cuisine.

Up to two hours should be allowed for lunch and networking.

### 4.3.2 *Breaks*

When the conference includes full day programming, breaks per should be included in the morning and afternoon sessions, including coffee/tea, juices and a light snack such as biscuits, muffins or pastries.

### 4.3.3 *Welcome reception/closing event*

A wine and cheese or a cocktail are appropriate social events. When offered, a seated dinner gala is frequently a separate ticket from the conference.

#### 4.4 *Accommodation*

Whenever possible, accommodation for the majority of the participants should be arranged in not more than three or four hotels. A preferred budget accommodation should be recommended: hostel, student dorms, or economy hotel.

It is ideal to have a preferred hotel connected to or within walking distance of the conference venue to minimise the need for organised transportation.

#### 4.5 *Transportation*

Where the conference venue and accommodations are not within walking distance of each other, consideration should be given to providing shuttle service from the main hotels to the conference venue in the morning and at the end of each day's programming.

Where transportation cannot be arranged, clear information on getting to the conference venue from the preferred hotels should be provided to all delegates in order to help them plan their participation in the conference.

### 5. Registration/public areas

#### 5.1 *Registration desk*

The main venue of the conference should have these facilities:

- Registration Desk
- Information Desk (multi-lingual if the conference is regional or international)
- Currency exchange facilities
- Convenience store on-site or in close proximity

#### 5.2 *Registration package*

Each registered participant should receive:

- Up-to-date programme and timetable,
- Event badge stating name, country, identification (whether the individual is a participant, delegate, observer, organiser, speaker, media, etc.)
- Invitations to organised functions,
- Appropriate local maps and guide books.

#### 5.3 *Message board*

A notice/message board should be positioned in the main public area of the venue where any changes of programme, news items, etc. as well as personal messages for participants and delegates can be displayed.

## 6. Programme and speakers

Conference programmes vary widely, but there are general protocols that should be observed.

### 6.1 *Opening address*

An opening address from the Organiser, government officials and key presenting sponsors. Speeches should be kept to brief remarks.

### 6.2 *Keynote address*

The keynote address should be delivered by the highest profile invited speaker, following the opening address.

### 6.3 *Opening reception*

A “getting to know you” reception on the first evening ensures delegates have the opportunity to meet and mingle.

### 6.4 *Speaker remuneration*

Speakers invited to give presentations should be remunerated with return economy airfare, accommodation in a good hotel and invitations to special events taking place during the conference.

Additional speaker fees are a matter for negotiation and should be managed as a budget item.

Speakers are normally offered a complimentary conference registration.

### 6.5 *Speaker invitations*

Speaker invitations should include a proposed topic linked to the conference theme and objectives.

An invitation letter should give the background of the Organiser, its vision and mission and explain the theme and scope of the conference. A deadline for replies should be included in the letter.

Specify whether the Organiser will arrange travel (including visas for international speakers where applicable) or if these arrangements will be the responsibility of the invited speakers.

Where the Organiser will arrange travel, details should be confirmed no less than two months in advance of the conference and tickets issued to speakers no less than one month before the conference.

Ensure contact information, including postal address, e-mail, telephone and fax contacts are accurate.

## 6.6 *Speaker agreements*

Written agreements should be signed with speakers once they have confirmed participation. The agreement should consist of the formal acknowledgement of the participation of the speaker, a list of benefits the speaker will receive from the Organiser (such as flight and travel arrangements, accommodation, transportation, meals, social programme, logistical support, technical support, dedicated host and information packs).

Permission for the Organiser to record and distribute presentations should be secured from each speaker. Copyright should including the Organiser's right to publish conference proceedings and presentations, be addressed in the agreement signed.

There should a list of the speaker's obligations to the Organiser, such as session details (date, venue, time, duration, theme, language and format description) and materials to be provided by the speaker (biography, portrait, work samples, abstract and manuscript of paper, etc.).

Additional expectations of the speaker (orientation meetings, media interviews etc.) should be clearly stated.

## 6.7 *Technical support*

Provisions should be made for speakers to test presentations with the technician prior to presenting.

If there is simultaneous translation, speakers should provide presentations in advance. Arrangements should be made for speakers to meet with the translator for their session in advance to review any technical aspects of the content and address any questions.

A *Presentation Requirements* form from each speaker will allow the Organiser to plan for audio visual equipment.

## 6.8 *Session Chairpersons*

Appoint individuals to chair different sessions of the conference and facilitate discussions. When appointing session chairs it is important to ensure that they have a working knowledge of the topic under discussion.

Chairpersons are usually offered free registration and invited to selected functions.

## 6.9 *Cancellations*

Provision should be made for the inevitable cancellations of speakers and chair persons. A short list of alternates should be developed at the same time as the main speakers list.

### ***6.10 Speakers schedule and briefing***

There should not be more than six speakers per day, each speaking for not more than 40 minutes. When briefing speakers, a description of the audience should be provided.

### ***6.11 Closing session/reception***

A closing session or reception on the last day of the conference is a good opportunity to wrap up proceedings in a friendly tone and acknowledge participants and speakers for their contribution.

### ***6.12 Programme changes***

Programme changes should be announced at the beginning of each day and posted on the Message Board.

### ***6.13 Informal proceedings***

In planning the programme, allow time for:

- Informal get-togethers of participants
- General discussions/seminars in which everyone may participate
- Question and answer sessions after each major presentation
- Visits to studios, sightseeing, shopping, etc.

## 7. Conference Marketing

A marketing plan should include strategies to promote the conference to member contacts, staff, faculty and students, and other interested bodies.

### 7.1 *Conference website*

The website with full information should be established several months prior to the conference.

Details should be firm so that delegates booking early do not find on arrival that the programme has radically changed.

The conference website should publish all costs, i.e. registration fee, accommodations, group travel rates.

### 7.2 *Conference designer*

The Organiser should appoint a designer or design team to work closely with the Organising Committee and PCO (if applicable).

## 8. Icograda Endorsement

Icograda Endorsement is an excellent opportunity to enhance the visibility of the conference, spread the announcements internationally and market the event through Icograda channels.

Each Icograda Member in good standing may apply for one free endorsement per year, provided that the event meets Icograda's Endorsement criteria.

Non-members must pay the applicable Endorsement fee. Icograda Members pay the Endorsement fee for each endorsement after the first one in any calendar year.

## ADDENDUM 1: Sample project management checklist

### *Phase 1 - Programme for core events and speakers*

- Create programme and sessions
- Confirm dates and book main venue
- Apply for Icograda Endorsement, if applicable
- Create marketing narrative and presentation for the Event
- Invite and confirm Speakers
- Confirm dates
- Confirm main theme and branding
- Finalise Sponsorship and Media Proposal
- Finalise Project Management Plan including timeline for each phase

### *Phase 2 - Marketing (Internet Marketing, Sponsorship/Media Proposals)*

- Launch website, finalise online presentation
- Announce website and event
- Approach potential corporate and media partners
- Secure at least one sponsor and 3 media partners
- Finalise PDF brochure for delegates for electronic distribution
- Create online ads (banners)
- Finalise marketing campaign – print and start distributing brochures and personal invitations
- Create a marketing database
- Launch media campaign (ads online and in magazines)

### *Phase 3 - Final logistics for all elements*

- Registration Opens
- Finalise logistics for all events, including venues, accommodation and transportation
- Open online registration
- Secure sponsors and international/regional/local media partners
- Finalise marketing campaign – how many brochures to print, where to send, who to invite personally

### *Phase 4 - Marketing*

- Finalise hardcopy brochures, posters, etc. with logos of confirmed partners
- Send hardcopy brochures, posters to invited guests and institutions
- Continue to secure more corporate partners and media partners
- Ads in media partners and eNewsletters should reach the market

### *Phase 5 - Event execution*

- On-site coordination
- Registration and information desk
- Coordinate all events
- Set up most convenient communication tool with delegates

ADDENDUM 2: Sample conference website

