

GUIDELINES FOR ORGANIZING A BIEN CONGRESS

The secret to successful BIEN Congress organisation is good planning and meticulous attention to detail. If you aren't a 'detail' person, think about hiring a professional conference organiser or set up a Congress planning checklist.

Below are some things to remember and think about as you are planning and organising your BIEN Congress.

Create a Congress Organizing Committee

Organise the local organizing committee as soon as possible. Include as many people as you need to organise all the responsibilities. Delegate responsibility to people who can attend to accommodation, transportation, food, and programme design. Plan to assign the important duties to trustworthy colleagues in order to make the best of your BIEN Congress. Consider that you will need to have several people on the committee who are resident near the congress venue. The experience of past congress organisers is that the work falls heavily on them. Also consider appointing a family and child-care representative who will have responsibility for organising child-care and ensuring family friendly facilities are available. You may also consider that gender balance in the local organising committee is important.

Theme for Congress

Decide on your topic and theme, and have it approved by the BIEN Executive Committee (EC). Most BIEN Congresses have a primary theme relevant to the times and several sub-themes or streams. The theme gives the presenters guidance on the issues that would be relevant to present. Once you have the topic and theme nailed down, you can begin to plan the rest.

Date and number of days

Pick a date and length of time for the Congress. Be sure to consider other large academic Conferences that might be going on at the same time. In addition, take careful consideration of academic holidays. It is best at an early stage to consult the EC on this. Traditionally, the International BIEN Congress has been three days long (two and-a-half-days for sessions and a half-day for BIEN meetings) plus an additional one-day 'host-nation' conference that focuses on host nation issues and has sessions in the local language(s). But this format can be changed. The congress organisers need to consider that the BIEN meetings need to be allocated for in terms of room bookings, accommodation, and so on. So they should be regarded as part of the congress organising.

Call for Papers

Write a Call for Papers (CFP) to get people interested in attending. The CFP should include your theme, the nature of your BIEN Congress, the location, date and any registration fees. This basic information should be enough to get people to your BIEN Congress as spectators and presenters. The CFP should be released about a year before the Congress.

Seeking Funding and Sponsorship

The host organisation should seek funding to pay for the cost of hosting the Congress. This should be actively done at a local and international level by the conference organiser and the local organising committee at an early stage. It is generally expected that organizers will have secured some funding *before* making a bid to host a conference, but this might not always be possible. It is the local organizing committee's responsibility to raise funds for the conference, but the EC will help to identify possible funders.

Invitation to Featured speakers

In consultation with the EC the local organizing committee should send out invitations to prominent and respected individuals from a range of countries to speak at the Congress. These can/may include government officials associated with regional and in-country programmes.

Some basic criteria for inviting Featured/Key Speakers

- Competence on the Theme
- Budget available to cover the persons costs for travel and accommodation
- Gender Balance
- Global Spread
- Big Name drawing capacity

Decide on bursaries to be made available

Some Congresses have provided bursaries for accommodation and meals for students and others from NGO's etc. The BIEN EC will try to help raise funds for this purpose.

Child-care as a priority

Delegates often wish to bring spouses or partners as accompanying members, and sometimes will need to bring their children. This means that the congress committee early on should organise to make provision for child-care facilities at the congress. It is encouraged that the committee use some donations to subsidize the cost of this, but it is also acceptable to charge a part-fee or the full fee to users of this service if donations fall short. The local committee may want to consult the EC about this.

Accommodation

Conference organisers should at a minimum identify hotels in different budget ranges near to the congress venue, and where possible try to organise bloc fee reductions with said venues and/or investigate whether facilities in student-type accommodation within University campuses or other similar institutional congress facilities can be made available. The organisers should especially pay attention to the practical facility of those bringing children in terms of the location of the accommodation near the congress site and the childcare facility.

Set the Congress fee

In consultation with the EC, set the fee for attending the conference. Sometimes organizers choose to have a lower fee for attendees from the host country. This fee will help defray some of the costs of the conference, but it cannot be counted on as a major source of funding. It simply does not raise enough funding. Also, please note that you will not be able to charge a fee for invited speakers or for people who have been promised free admittance: for instance, there might be people such as the winner of the Essay Prize at the previous conference. Plan to include in your fees the cost of lunch, tea and coffee breaks as this adds to better interaction and communication between Congress attendees, and reduces time and cost for individuals to find food.

Reserve Rooms at Congress Venue

The local organizing committee needs to secure a venue for the entire Congress including all sessions and meetings. Think about what types of rooms may be necessary such as rooms for plenary sessions, parallel sessions, exhibits, breaks, receptions, the BIEN General Assembly meeting, and conference headquarters and registration. To keep Congress costs down try to use venues at universities that could potentially be free with the help of an academic from that institution.

Set up a website and inform the BIEN Newsletter

The local organising committee should set up a website/webpage to host all the information associated with the Congress. This should as a minimum include the programme, buttons to sign up and pay registration fees, email address for communication. Fast replies (within a day or two) regarding queries should be a priority. The website should host all the papers being presented so congress attendees can download and have access to them electronically.

Advertising

Advertise your BIEN Congress through university publications and resources within your field of study and across disciplines. Seek out listservs, discussion forums and other venues that will bring your BIEN Congress to the attention of your peers. Also consider asking professional organizations to post a notice on their website.

Little things that matter

Catering for vegetarians, water jugs and glasses for delegates and presenters, seat comfort, adequate breaks, good air-conditioning/heating, no distracting noises during the session presentation etc.

Organise a Social Event

This can take any form the organising committee chooses. It could range from being be a cheese and wine to just a venue where participants pay their own way.

Everyone loves gifts

Co-ordinate with local craftspeople or non-governmental organisations to design a conference bag/ badge etc. You may be able to get some sponsors to provide samples such as tourist information or bottles of water.

Day of Congress

Gather your team on BIEN Congress day. Consider having everyone associated with the BIEN Congress organization wear matching colours or matching name tags so they are easily recognizable. Have organizers stationed throughout your BIEN Congress venue to help attendees. Have an administration desk where delegates can go for assistance

Powerpoint and video presentations

Many speakers and paper presenters will wish to show a powerpoint or other presentation. It will be important to ensure that laptops, projectors and screens are available in rooms used for plenary and paper sessions; that they are working; that nobody needs passwords in order to use the laptops; and that there are competent people on hand to sort out problems without delay. If presenters are given the option of sending their powerpoint presentations before the event then it needs to be somebody's responsibility to ensure that the necessary files are loaded onto the correct computers.

Plan for Contingencies

Expect some problems throughout the duration of the BIEN Congress, and do your best in handling them. You may have presenters that don't show or irate travellers who aren't satisfied with their lodgings. However, if you plan ahead, keep a cool head and ask for help where it is needed, you will leave a lasting and positive impression on BIEN Congress attendees and your colleagues.

Work with the BIEN EC

Stay in close touch with the BIEN EC at all stages. We all want to make a good congress and we will work together. People on or connected to the EC have experience in conference organisation and fund raising, and they will be willing to help and give advice.

Timeline/Gant Chart

Set up your timeline early in the organising process and present this at a BIEN Executive Committee meeting eighteen months to one year before the Congress. Necessary events at every BIEN Congress:

Every BIEN Congress has the following events: a preliminary meeting between the EC and LOC; a two-part General Assembly (GA) of the membership of BIEN, GA workshops for members of BIEN to work out issues being addressed at the GA, and an affiliates' roundtable where BIEN's affiliates report on their recent activities to each other and to the Congress as a whole.

Preliminary EC-LOC meeting

Although the EC and the LOC are in close contact throughout the planning period we find that it is useful for the EC and LOC to have a joint small-group meeting the night before the Congress begins. Usually 10 or 15 people attend this meeting. Most of the EC will be there, and it is useful to set up a way for those who cannot be present to attend by Skype.

The General Assembly

The first part of the GA meeting is a short (one-hour) meeting on the first day of the Congress, where we go over the agenda, take care of some preliminary items, and direct people to workshops to discuss the more contentious issues. This must be a “plenary” meeting, meaning that no other Congress events happen at the same time. It requires a room with the capacity for at least 100 people.

The second part of the GA is the last event at the Congress, and it needs to be held at the end of the afternoon, so about 17.00. It usually takes place after the official closing. It is where BIEN’s membership meets to vote on any motions before it. It may hold elections, confirm new affiliates, decide the venue of a future Congress, or deal with any other members’ motions that come before it. This event must also be a plenary with capacity of at least 100 people. We must have at least three hours available for this meeting. Hopefully, it will not take that long, but we have to keep the time available in case it does.

GA Workshops

The purpose of GA workshops is to allow time for interested people to discuss in greater depth the issues that will be decided at the second part of the GA meeting. Some of these will be organized in advance by the EC; others will be organized at the Congress in response to members’ concerns voiced during the first part of the GA meeting. The LOC does not have to help organize these events; all it needs to do is to leave one room available during parallel sessions so that we can have a workshop in that room. By “parallel sessions,” we mean that other events are happening at the same time. The room should have capacity for 20 people.

Affiliates Roundtable

Each BIEN Congress has one plenary session where all of BIEN’s affiliates that are represented at the Congress can make a short (4-minute) presentation of their activities. Networks that have applied for affiliation at the GA meeting are to make their case for affiliation at this roundtable.

A typical Timeline Plan for a Congress can look like the following:

Thirty Months (two and half years) before BIEN Congress

- Discuss with your leadership the possibility of making a bid for a BIEN Congress. Consider what venue and funding you can secure.
- Make bid at General Assembly (GA) meeting at BIEN Congress to host the next BIEN Congress to take place in two years time.
- At the GA, be prepared to answer questions on funding, choice of city and venue for the Congress.

Twenty four months (two years) before BIEN Congress

- Start working on a date and a theme. Check with BIEN Executive
- Check with BIEN affiliates so as to not overlap any major programmes or annual/biennial events.
- Start gathering together a group of core organizers.
- Gather BIEN Congress info and database files from previous Congresses.
- Many materials and ideas are available on the websites of previous hosts of BIEN Congresses

Eighteen months (one and half years) before BIEN Congress

- Decide on date and the theme of the Congress.
- Write a paragraph that explains the goals of the BIEN Congress.
- Write proposals for funding for the Congress
- Set up Congress website for registration and facility to pay fees
- Send out call for papers.
- Create database to keep track of registrations.
- Send email to the BIEN newsletter announcing the date and theme.
- Advertise the Congress online
- Create a brochure and email all BIEN affiliates and newsletter subscribers
- Create an outline for the program.
- Begin working on a budget.
- Plan meeting for BIEN EC in-country meeting

Twelve Months (One year to six months) before BIEN Congress

- Finalize budget
- Create a registration pack for use on first day of Congress
- Create a sheet of visitor's information
- Begin asking people to serve as working group leaders, chairs, and workshop leaders
- Invite local representatives (to create local news interest)
- Send regular updates to BIEN Newsletter
- Set up a website/webpage.

Four months before BIEN Congress

- Send update to BIEN Congress Newsletter
- Continue registering delegates

- Send letters of confirmation of registration and fees

Three months before BIEN Congress

- Send update to BIEN Congress Newsletter
- Finish lining up people for the programme
- Set up press conference for first day of Congress
- Produce an event schedule

Two months before BIEN Congress

- Send out update email to the BIEN newsletter
- Begin reserving additional rooms for meetings and meals
- Begin asking your members if they can host delegates
- Assign a housing coordinator to match delegates with homestays.
- Begin organizing your members to attend the BIEN Congress.

One month before BIEN Congress

- Send out an update email to BIEN newsletter.
- Send update email to all registered participants and BIEN EC
- Finish up reserving rooms for meetings and accommodation.
- Design program and registration packet.
- Keep asking your members to host delegates.

One week before BIEN Congress

- Print program and put together registration packets.
 - Load all papers sent onto website
 - Print nametags from database.
 - Match delegates with homestays before they arrive (i.e. give them each other's mobile phone numbers, etc.)
 - Email registered participants the contact number of a person who can handle last minute cancellations, changes or transportation problems
 - Arrange transportation
-

For a more complete list of things to think about as you plan your Congress see the following:

Planning

- Arrange a meeting of the people involved in the BIEN Congress Organizing Committee and define the roles they are to play
- Clarify the aims and objectives of the Congress
- Establish how arrangements have already progressed
- Draw up an activity schedule to include all tasks to be undertaken by whom, and provide timescales
- Produce events schedule which outlines the programme and all arrangements to be booked (venue, main speakers etc)
- Develop the Congress theme and preliminary programme
- Arrange regular meetings with the planning team and produce progress reports
- Meet with members of the BIEN EC at least once in the year before the Congress (to determine who to invite and to get feedback about progress made)

Accounts

- Prepare a Congress budget.
- Set appropriate delegate fees, sponsorship / exhibitor rates.
- Write proposals for funding of the Congress (Mainly for main speakers – accommodation and travel, but also for venue hire and hiring of congress organizer, if necessary)
- Negotiate fees and costs with suppliers.
- Collect registration fees, issue invoices / receipts, chase non-payers.
- Pay suppliers.
- Prepare of final set of accounts.

BIEN Congress Programme

- Set objectives (so your speakers know what you are aiming to achieve and delegate expectations can be met)
- Prepare content, days and timings for Congress programme
- Ensure you book a venue which can provide all the necessary meeting rooms and equipment to accommodate the Congress programme
- Draw up the session schedule
- Create time to visit the exhibition/site if included as part of programme

Venue and Accommodation

- Research suitable venues for the Congress and various levels of Accommodation for delegates
- Confirm and book Congress venue
- Confirm accommodation or provisional holding of hotel/B&B/college dorm/university dorm room allocations
- Liaise with venue for room set ups and layout; catering numbers, menus and timings; equipment required and signage
- Liaise with accommodation providers on latest booking situation taking note of any release dates.
- Supply venue with events schedule
- Supply venue with audio visual production schedule

Social Programme

- Prepare suitable programme of social activities for delegates and partners to include drinks receptions, BIEN Congress dinners, excursions, pre and post BIEN Congress programme
- Recommend and book appropriate venues
- Confirm all arrangements including menus, drinks and entertainment to venue
- Prepare table plans and tickets for events
- Book coaches and taxis

Meet and Greet

- Provide meet and greet service at airport, train and coach stations
- Provide hospitality desks at airports and stations
- Produce file of useful tourist and travel information for delegates
- Arrange courtesy transport to and from the BIEN Congress venue / hotels

Transport Management

- Arrange and book transport between airports, stations, event, accommodation and social events where required
- Liaison with transport company on appropriate timings, routes and pick up points
- Produce transport schedule
- Schedule for pick-up points that can be distributed and displayed for delegates
- Signage for coaches

Keynote Speakers / Presenters / Workshop Facilitators/ Sessions

- Produce event schedule to plot all activities of Congress
- Write letters of invitation to Key/Main/Plenary speakers
- Confirm speakers and outline objectives of Congress
- Request speaker biog, summary of speech and AV requirements
- Co-ordinate contents of speakers presentations
- Book audio-visual requirements
- Check all speakers have registered on days of Congress
- Arrange travel, catering and accommodation for speakers
- Produce speaker material for delegate registration packs
- Provide notes/briefings for session chairs – biographical information of speakers
- Appoint facilitators to chair sessions
- Produce session descriptions for delegate packs
- Produce Congress evaluation forms

Sessions / Workshops - Call for Papers

- Decide on session topics
- Announce call for papers and set deadline for receipt
- Provide format for paper and abstract submission
- Confirm / reject papers submitted. Ask presenters to register
- Plot programme including timing of sessions
- Confirm AV requirements with presenters
- Produce book of abstracts
- Book poster displays

Audio Visual, Furniture and Equipment

- Decide on what equipment, furniture is required for the production and staging of the Congress, book and arrange as necessary. This includes the following:
 - Set, screen, staging, lectern
 - Projection equipment
 - Audio
 - Lighting
 - Any other visual aids
- Once AV requirements have been identified draw up an AV production schedule

Delegate Registration

- Set up online registration
- Set up dedicated e-mail addresses and send out telephone numbers
- Send out registration details and handle delegate enquires
- Acknowledge receipt of registration forms and fees paid
- Register delegate details onto database, collection of registration fees, issuing invoices / VAT receipts.
- Send out confirmation of bookings (accommodation) together with location maps and directions to the BIEN Congress venue and hotels, parking details and any other relevant information
- Produce Delegate Registration Packs, name badges etc
- Produce delegate attendee lists
- Update database with no shows and substitute delegate details in order to produce final attendees' report/list
- Reconciliation of payments received

Delegate Information

- Produce all necessary information for the BIEN Congress website and newsletter
- Produce invitation / brochure, registration forms and accompanying letter of invitation.
- Information for delegates such as maps, travel information, tourist information, shopping and restaurant guides.
- Produce delegate information packs / bags including contents and questionnaires.
- BIEN Congress proceedings.
- Book of abstracts
- Delegate attendee list with contact details

Delegate Requirements

- Liaison with all venues regarding arrangements to be made for delegates, BIEN Congress facilities, accommodation, catering, luggage, check-in, information desks, security, first aid and parking etc.
- Assist with travel arrangements.
- Gifts / give ways for delegates/ Congress bag etc.

Provision of all Necessary Equipment

- Projectors and laptops for presentations
- Posters and exhibition boards.
- Registration desk

Marketing and PR

A marketing and PR plan will need to consider the following:

- Sponsorship: Draw up sponsors proposal to identify the ways in which they will benefit from supporting the event
- Exhibitors: Produce exhibitor information pack in order to sell stand space at the BIEN Congress. Co-ordinate the organisation of exhibitors. Prepare exhibitors' information and site plan.
- Promotion of the BIEN Congress: Identify ways of promoting the BIEN Congress via various channels; websites, mailing lists, promotional literature, associations, societies and other organisations.
- PR Campaign: Draw up a media action plan together with timescales. Identify appropriate features, listings in local and national newspapers and other related press.
- Submit releases including details on the BIEN Congress and contact information.
- Advertising: Devise advertising plan to decide on the most effective ways of advertising the BIEN Congress
- Submitting a report to sponsors.

Management on Site

- Final arrangement checks with venue
- Set up BIEN Congress office
- Set up sponsors and exhibitors
- Set up registration and private check-in facilities
- Provide adequate signage (where permitted by the venue)
- Arrangements for telephone lines, faxes and Internet access
- Provision of photocopiers and other necessary equipment
- Provision for luggage storage, cloakroom, first aid facilities on site
- Handle question and answer sessions from the delegates
- Provide general information on BIEN Congress at an assigned desk
- Arrange and staff a desk to handle delegate queries and messages throughout the event
- Arrange for technical persons to assist with setting up of audio visual equipment
- Hand out evaluation forms
- Prepare Post-Congress Qualitative and Financial Report for BIEN Executive

For information about the BIEN Congress in Dublin Ireland that took place in 2008 see the following website: <http://www.basicincomeireland.com/>

Have a successful BIEN Congress and don't forget to thank your committee, volunteers and assistants.

(Sources: <http://Top7Business.com>, www.eHow.com, <http://www.iallt.org/confplan.html>)