

Guidelines for organising a BIEN Congress

General Information

BIEN Congresses take place once every year in locations decided by the General Assembly, which meets every two years. Any affiliated organisation can apply to host a congress by writing to BIEN's secretary.

Organising and funding a congress is the responsibility of a Local Organising Committee (LOC), appointed by the affiliated organisation, in consultation with BIEN's Executive Committee (EC).

A representative of the LOC will serve on the EC during the preparation of the congress to liaise between LOC and EC and ensure full collaboration.

How to organise a successful congress: key tasks

The secret to successful BIEN Congress organisation is good planning and meticulous attention to detail.

Bidding for the congress

Any affiliated organisation can apply to host a congress by writing to BIEN's secretary. The application should be made two and half years before you wish to host a congress. The bid should state the theme, prospective dates and venue of the proposed congress, and some information on the logistical or funding capacities of the prospective organisers. BIEN can offer feedback to preliminary proposals before finalising your bid. The General Assembly which meets every two years votes on the winning bid.

Setting up the LOC

The winning bid should finalize its organisation by selecting the LOC, a representative to the EC, and possibly an advisory board. The LOC are the active members responsible for organising the congress. Keep the numbers between 4 to 8 to promote good team work and ensure you include expertise/experience in different aspects of congress organising (financing, logistics, promotion, program planning, etc). One person is selected to represent the LOC at the BIEN EC meetings, and to liaise with the EC for the duration of the congress preparation. An advisory board is optional but allows for the LOC to co-opt individuals and organisations that could contribute outside expertise.

Congress Date

Confirm the dates for the congress as soon as possible. Key considerations include availability of a suitable venue but also good times for participants around the world to travel and participate. As basic income is becoming more popular, the congress itself is growing and you need to decide how many days the congress will last for. Too short means you can schedule few papers, too long means most participants won't be able to participate in the whole congress. It is optional but increasingly part of BIEN tradition to include a local (half) day event, focused on promoting the local basic income debate.

Logistics

The most important logistical decision is a good venue to hold the congress that accommodates large plenary sessions as well as multiple concurrent sessions. As BIEN

congresses are becoming more popular your venue may need to accommodate up to 400 delegates. The venue should also be easily accessible for people traveling from abroad.

Logistics also includes facilitating accommodation, ideally catering for different budgets. Refreshments during the congress, including coffee breaks, lunch and perhaps even dinner arrangements, need to be arranged. Logistics may also include providing a social program such as a reception, conference dinner, or sightseeing.

Finally, logistics also involves setting up a well-designed website, a dedicated email and social media account(s), and an easy system for participant registration and processing registration fees. Think carefully about how these elements are integrated and easy to update during the conference organisation.

Budget and Funding

The LOC should make up a budget immediately after winning the bid and update the budget at each LOC meeting. Adopt a conservative approach to budgeting by including a fixed overhead margin (e.g. 10%) which accommodates unexpected but inevitable costs.

The LOC should as soon as possible identify possible sponsors or other avenues for financing the congress. Fund raising itself may have to wait till venue, dates, and some plenary speakers are fully confirmed: most funding agencies need to see some detail before deciding on your application. Prepare a proper application dossier, updated whenever new information is available.

Key expenses such as funding of keynote speakers, the venue, budget for refreshments etc should be identified and costed as soon as possible. Provisionally decide on a registration fee, ideally allowing for a subsidised fee for low-income participants.

Call for papers

A call for papers advertising the congress and requesting proposals for papers or panels should go out about a year in advance of the congress — an ideal moment is the previous BIEN congress to capture a key audience.

The Call for Papers must contain info on the theme, venue/dates and ideally already some confirmed plenary speakers, as well as a link to the website, email etc. The Call for Papers must also include the deadline for submitting a paper/panel proposal and the date by which you will announce which papers are selected.

The conference program

The first part of conference programming involves selecting speakers for the plenary sessions. These will typically include some “big names” to give your congress extra visibility but they are also an opportunity to reflect the current state of the debate or shape the identity of your congress. Plenary speakers may be selected from within the basic income community but it is also a great opportunity to invite people who are new but have an important insight to bring to the debate. When selecting speakers pay attention to gender and regional balance. Plenary speakers are typically fully reimbursed, although some may have their own funding. Watch out for inviting too many plenary speakers in advance, as each scheduled speaker means less time available for concurrent sessions.

The main part of the program consists of participants who are selected to present a paper or chair a panel in the concurrent sessions. The selection of these papers is one of the big tasks of the LOC and can take up to 4-6 weeks after the deadline for proposals has passed.

Decide in advance how many papers you can place, keeping in mind the capacity of your venue as well as how many concurrent sessions you can schedule. In general, you will get many more proposals than you can schedule, so some selection process is inevitable. The LOC should think about the procedure and establish clear criteria for selecting papers in advance: balancing considerations of quality, relevance to the basic income debate, novelty/originality of contribution, etc. Once the selection process concluded, inform those accepted or not withheld of your decision (but keep a list of possible replacement papers in case someone drops out) and ask those selected to confirm their participation.

Once the list of papers are available, start identifying topics that can be bundled in coherent panels. Papers that discuss related material should be gathered in a (series of) panel(s) to maximise opportunity for discussion. Where possible, panels that discuss similar topics and/or approaches should not be scheduled to clash with each other. It helps to identify broad topic streams and make sure panels within a stream are scheduled after each other rather than clashing with each other. Expect that papers will drop out throughout the organisation (where possible find replacement papers). This means your program is subject to changes until just weeks before the event. Sign up people to chair each panel, giving priority to those not listed as speakers to allow for maximum participation.

It is good practice to keep a master file with all info on each speaker, including name/affiliation/contact info/title of paper/assigned panel. Update this file asap when new info comes in to keep on top of the information. You will be handling information related to hundreds of speakers and participants!

Information and Promotion

It is important to promote your congress in the early stages and intensify your promotion as you get near the event. Information about all aspects of the congress — including accommodation or travel information — must be provided in an easily accessible manner and regularly updated.

Design a logo that can be used as conference “brand”. Advertise the conference date/venue, call for papers and provisional/final program on your dedicated conference website and social media. Use BIEN resources, such as BI News or regularly updating BIEN affiliates and asking them to post your information on their own websites and/or mailing lists. Once you have a list of speakers and registered participants, use regular mailers to update your participants of relevant information.

Closer to the conference you need to think about involving printed press and other mainstream media — gather lists of journalists or news outlets you can contact and invite them to attend.

Promotion takes up a lot of time so it is a good idea to have one or two dedicated people in your LOC entirely focused on promoting the congress. Ideally these are people with extensive social media experience and perhaps even some design skills.

Still to be added: a timeline

Thank you to Jürgen De Wispelaere for preparing these new congress guidelines.