SCE Guide to Conference Organizers

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This document lays out some standard procedures for organization of the annual SCE conference, gleaned from the collective wisdom of prior organizers. These procedures are not mandatory, but an organizer planning to diverge from them is urged to discuss the issues on the SCE-AC list prior to taking a decision that would deviate from these guidelines. This document should be revised to include the alternate course of action, when appropriate.

General:

1. The overriding goal of the Society in its hosting of its annual conference is to establish and maintain high standards. Within reason, the Society is prepared to sacrifice on the size of the conference in favor of the overall quality.
2. The annual conference is expected to be held between early-June and late-July, and should include 2-1/2 to 3 days of sessions and activities. The dates should be chosen, given local arrangements constraints, to take advantage of standard policies regarding discount airfares. In the US, this includes a Saturday stay-over.
3. The officers and AC of the Society should seek to identify the conference organizer two years in advance of the conference, ideally allowing the announcement of the conference_(t+2) location to be made at conference_(t).

Long before the Conference:

1. The organizers should check carefully for schedule conflicts with other conferences and other academic activities before finalizing the conference dates.
2. The local organizer of the conference is in charge of local arrangements, and chooses and heads a local organizing committee (LOC). The LOC is responsible for all aspects of the conference other than those otherwise indicated in this document.
3. Either an academic locale or a commercial (e.g., hotel) venue is acceptable for the conference with a mild preference for academic environments for reasons of cost. The locale should be selected and booked well in advance, typically more than a year ahead.
4. The LOC are entitled to use professional event co-ordinators, chosen at arm's length, to assist with any or all aspects of organizing the conference, provided that costs are reasonable. Consult with previous organizers on how to proceed.
5. Ideally, the LOC should arrange for group bookings of hotels at an early date. (In large North American cities, hotel arrangements are generally required well over a year in advance.) Centrally organized accommodations facilitate interchange between participants and reduce the incidence of participants arriving late to sessions.
6. Similar to hotel arrangements, organizing the conference dinner is something that should be done well in advance. Choosing a dinner speaker is an important (but not strictly mandatory) aspect of planning the dinner. That said, the dinner speaker should understand that he or she is to speak for a short period of time and to an audience of varied backgrounds and tastes. The dinner is an added fee event.

7. Some thought should be given to areas for coffee breaks and perhaps pastries and coffee for breakfast. The goal here is to maximize the opportunities for informal interaction between conferees.
8. The LOC should undergo reasonable efforts to find financial support for the conference from local businesses, universities and associated societies, journals, academic publishers, software companies, local governments and any other source. Financial support reduces the cost, which is particularly important for junior members of the Society, and builds connections with the broader community. It is generally easy to sell sponsorships of specific events, particularly plenary lectures, but also special sessions, lunches and receptions. That said, successful fundraising should not be thought of as a necessary condition for hosting the conference.
9. The conference generally has (a) a welcoming reception, often arranged around registration the afternoon or early evening the day before the start of the conference (this is a good thing to do in conjunction with pre-registration in order to reduce crowding on the first morning of the conference); (b) at least one official reception on the afternoon of the first day of the conference (this often where the executive of the Society says hello and the LOC takes their bows); (c) three lunches; (d) six to nine coffee breaks, and (e) perhaps pastries and coffee for breakfast. As above, some thought should be given to the optimal location of coffee breaks to maximize informal interaction.
10. Each participant is automatically charged $10 for dues to the Society.
11. The conference should be planned and budgeted to be financially self-supporting, while paying due consideration to keeping registration fees low, particularly for graduate students and junior members of the Society.

Nine months ahead:

12. The program committee (PC) should selected by the LOC in consultation with the AC. The PC should include individuals representing the various SIGs within the Society, as well as a broad set of members with geographical and topical diversity. Due care should be taken to ensure that the number of PC members by specialty is sufficient to handle the likely volume of submissions by topic. PC members should be made aware of the need to follow a strict timetable in the six months prior to the conference, and should only be called upon to serve if they are available during that interval
13. Plenary speakers should be chosen according to their academic standing in the field their field on the grounds that the quality of the plenary speakers is of marquee value for attracting quality submissions. Consistent with this view, all due regard should be taken to ensure that plenary speakers are chosen well IN advance of the conference, and preferably before the Call for Papers. Plenary speakers should be chosen in part for their willingness to participate in the entire conference (i.e. they should interact with the participants and not just give their talk and leave). Generally speaking, there is one plenary lecture per day of the conference. Generally speaking, as a group, they should represent the broad interests of the Society.
14. The LOC should establish a conference website at least a month prior to the issuance of the CfP and update the website on a regular basis. The conference web site should have link to the Society's web site.
15. The Call for Papers (CfP) should circulate at least eight months prior to the conference date. Take steps to ensure wide and frequent dissemination of the CfP. The deadline for submission of an abstract (or better a paper) should be at least five months prior to the conference date. Use of electronic submission (via means such as ConferenceMaker) is strongly encouraged.

Participants should be strongly encouraged to provide a downloadable full text (or the URL by which it may be accessed) prior to the conference--preferably on acceptance of their submission.

16. The organizer chairs the PC. He or she may appoint two or three co-chairs of the PC, who may or may not be involved with the LOC. The Chair of the PC, in consultation with the executive of the Society, should direct PC members on how to formulate sessions; e.g., the number of papers per session, whether or not to encourage or even accept poster sessions, the maximum number of sessions and the associated rejection rate for papers, and so on, subject to the conditions in this document and the policies of the Society.

17. PC members should, in part, be selected for, and be willing and able to, formulate pre-organized (invited) sessions of high-quality papers. More generally, invited sessions of high quality are to be strongly encouraged,. PC members are entitled to delegate the organization of invited sessions provided that the quality of the resulting sessions is maintained.

18. For contributed sessions, PC members should be instructed to select papers on the following criteria (in decreasing order of priority): (i) the likely quality of the presentation; (ii) suitability of the submission as a part of a session topic; (iii) the availability of a complete paper; (iv) the vintage of the paper (with a preference for new papers); and (iv) all else equal, the standing of the submitter (with a preference for more junior participants). The quality of the conference is to take priority over the number of sessions, provided that the financial viability of the conference is not jeopardized.

19. The previous clause notwithstanding, PC members should strongly consider rejecting papers of submitters who have a record of either withdrawing (failure to register) from CEF conferences upon acceptance of their papers, or failing to attend.

20. The graduate student paper contest is to be funded by the Society. The LOC should co-ordinate with the organizer of the student paper contest to ensure that a high-profile presentation of the award is scheduled and that local arrangements and conference pricing are amenable to the attendance of contest finalists.

Four months ahead:

21. Clear arrangements should be worked out, prior to the conference, with the editors of journals with which the Society has an affiliation. If one or more journal special issues are to be produced from the conference, the conference organizer and AC should discuss the mechanism by which submissions are to be coordinated with the journal special issue editors.

22. Decisions regarding submissions should be conveyed to the submitters no later than three months prior to the conference date -- and as early as possible in any event. Formal notification of participation is required by many submitters in order to arrange travel funding, and for many institutions these dates approach their end of financial year.

23. A preliminary program for the conference should be available electronically perhaps a month before the conference (thus, the sessions are assembled shortly before). This might seem late, but it allows for withdraws. The 2011 meeting in San Francisco had about a 25% withdraw rate after acceptances and putting sessions together relatively late avoided the issue of having to deal with this many withdraws.

24. no later than six weeks prior to the conference date, with the stated caveat that session assignments are subject to change. Participants should be encouraged to be available for the full three days of the conference to facilitate rescheduling.

25. After the papers have been accepted, conference organizers should attempt to arrange sessions so that similar sessions are held at different times.
26. The organizer should establish the audio-visual policy for the conference—e.g., whether laptops will be supplied or not, whether PowerPoint will be enabled, etc.—communicate those policies to registrants, and take steps to ensure that presentation materials are loaded well before sessions start in order to minimize delays.
27. The LOC should endeavor to provide to participants information on the availability of Internet access at the conference site on a timely basis so that participants plan accordingly.
28. The LOC should collect data on who has his or her paper accepted but declines to register and who fails to TURN up for presentations. These data are to be forwarded to the executive of the Society.
29. The details of the conference program, including paper titles, authors, authors' emails and affiliations, abstracts, and download links should be conveyed to RePEc (http://repec.org) so that a RePEc series in the Society's archive may be constructed shortly after the conference. Presenters should be encouraged to provide an up-to-date copy of their paper and/or presentation materials for the archive.